

Advice on Aspects of Public Land Use Information



PROGRESS UPDATE : RECREATION

JUNE 2021

What are we doing?

In response to [the terms of reference](#) from the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, VEAC is compiling an inventory of data on the broad range of recreational activities on Victoria's public land.

The inventory will include an assessment of the geographical coverage of data, frequency and recency of collection, method of collection, public availability, inclusion of demographic parameters, and data custodianship.

These data will inform an assessment by VEAC of the suitability of the data for Victorian government planning, reporting and decision-making and the identification of knowledge gaps.

Why is it important?

Of the major uses of public land, recreational use is the only one without statewide spatial data which policy makers can apply to its analyses of public land uses.

There are systematically acquired layers for native vegetation, forest produce, mineral extraction and licences, threatened species habitat requirements, licences and permits, and fire management. While many of these GIS layers include some mapping of recreational activities (e.g. forest recreation and DELWP's More to Explore app), they provide very little information on actual levels and patterns of use as opposed to locations and sites of facilities.

With the ongoing general reduction in commercial uses of public land (such as timber harvesting), land managers report an increase in recreational use. Recreation is now – with nature conservation – the dominant use of public land and requires appropriate data for effective management.

In [2019/20](#) more than 80 per cent of Australians (15+ years) participated in sport and/or physical activity at least once a week.

[Researchers found in 2018](#) that active recreation is a significant contributor to the Victorian economy, and a larger part of the economy than most of us realise.

Context

Broadly speaking, we define recreation as activities that people engage in for pleasure during their free time (or leisure), separate from work and the activities and commitments of daily living. Using this definition, examples of recreational activities are endless and include sports, hobbies, music, games, travel, reading, arts and crafts, and performance. New pursuits are continually emerging.

The focus of VEAC's project is recreation on public land that takes place outdoors, often in relatively natural settings. Characteristically, the activities are dependent on the environment where they take place. These kinds of recreational activities have connections and overlaps with a range of sectors including sports, tourism, education and volunteering.

The same activity can be described in different ways depending on, for example: the motivation of the participant (relaxation, education, assisting land managers); whether they have paid for instruction; travelled from interstate or overseas to participate; or whether they engage in the activity for competition, performance and entertainment, or money.

This is a dynamic area for research and analysis. Recently, [Australian sports researchers and agencies](#) have expanded the definition of 'sports' to include both organised competitive sports as previously, but also encompassing a broad range of other recreational physical activities.

For all these reasons we have not tried to settle a firm definition of recreation on public land, aiming instead to be comprehensive in our discussion of recreational activities and the data that are available for them. We will note where there may be overlaps with other sectors.

What have we done so far?

We have determined a system to document and classify data about recreation and used this to structure the inventory. We have also begun compiling publicly available information from land managers, peak bodies and other data custodians.

Are there any interim findings?

Peak recreation bodies hold valuable data on membership numbers. However, recent surveys by AusPlay indicate that for many forms of sport and active recreation, only a small number of participants are members of a relevant association. The implication is therefore that many more people participate in an activity than membership numbers indicate.

Activities which are licensed (e.g. game hunting, recreational fishing) tend to have better data on participants than those that are unlicensed and require little formal organisation (e.g. walking, road cycling). Where licence data exist, detailed location data about where participants go is often absent.

Broad population level data are available for a small number of recreational activities relevant to public land (bush walking, going to the beach) from surveys of leisure patterns or sports and physical activity.

Recreational activities with defined facilities (e.g. golf, indoor swimming) have readily available information on the number of facilities and their locations, often in GIS format. Data on participation levels for these same activities tend to be unavailable or are decentralised and less easily accessible.

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What's next?

Along with continuing to compile publicly available information, we will convene a series of expert elicitation workshops in the second half of 2021. These sessions will allow us to access data that are not publicly available, identify any gaps in our inventory and gain insights into how closely membership data matches on ground participation levels. These data will contribute to VEAC's assessment of the utility of the data for government planning, reporting and decision-making processes.

Where data gaps have been identified, VEAC will also identify priority areas that require a structured approach to future data collection.

The report containing advice to the Minister is due in December 2021.



How can I keep up to date?

To keep informed about the progress of the assessment, check the VEAC website for updates or like us on Facebook. You can also register your interest through the form on the VEAC website, or by sending an email or phoning VEAC.