5.3 Outcomes and benefits for visitors and community

Indicators

- Adequacy of visitor opportunities
- Threats to quality visitor experiences
- Extent visitor management objectives met
- Education and interpretive services
- Tourism
- Park visitor satisfaction
- Community satisfaction with park management
- Community benefits of parks

Context

A primary goal of the parks network is to ensure quality visitor experiences, connect people to nature and enable personal and community benefits from parks. Parks Victoria undertakes regular visitor surveys to measure visitor and community satisfaction and benefits.

The provision of park access facilities and services includes rubbish and litter removal, toilet and facility cleaning (including BBQs and picnic areas) and grass and tree management. The frequency of these services is dependent on the type of park, its agreed 'Level of Service' and the number of visitors. With finite resources, the types and extent of services and programs are targeted to parks and sites with higher expected Levels of Service.

Adequacy of visitor opportunities

Based on community surveys, the extent to which the community believes that adequate visitor opportunities are offered in Victoria's parks has been relatively constant with more than 80% of visitors believing that the adequacy of recreation opportunities is very good or good.

In relation to perceived visitor needs, park managers reported that provision of opportunities for solitude and spiritual connection, enjoyment of nature and scenery and opportunities for social interaction were the most
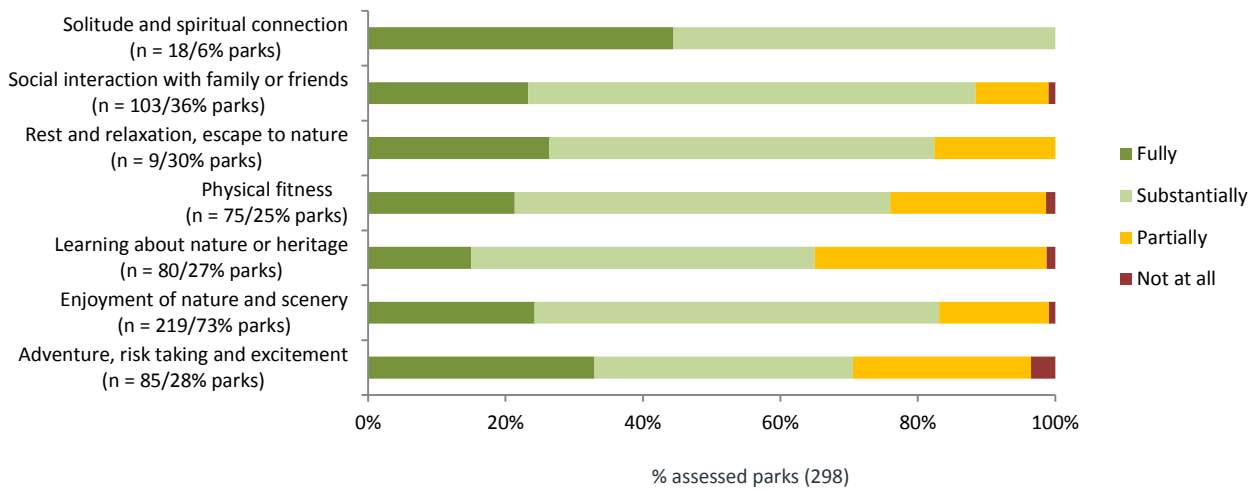
well provided , while learning about nature and heritage and opportunities for risk taking and adventure were the least well provided.

Figure 5.3.1 Percentage of community rating adequacy of recreation opportunities as very good or good
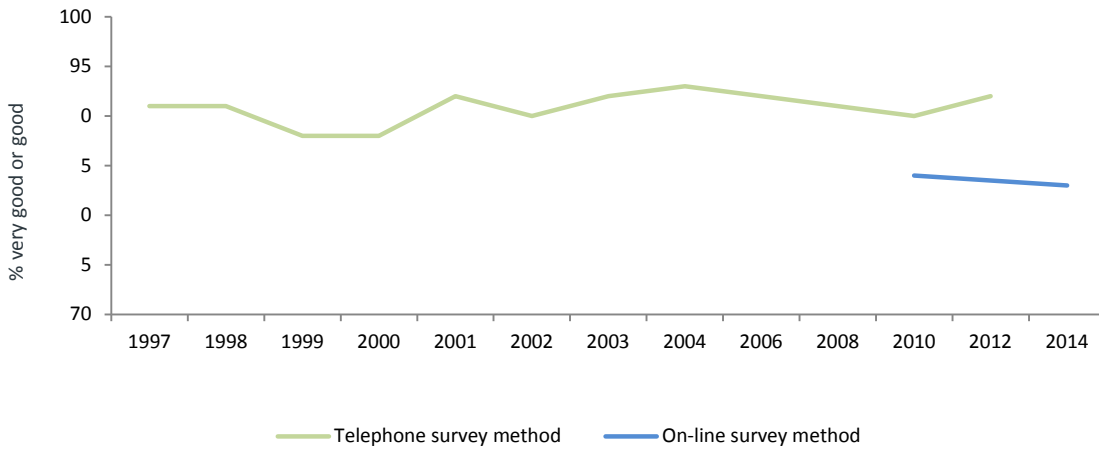
Source: Community Perception Monitor

Figure 5.3.2 Extent to which visitor needs are provided for

Threats to quality visitor experiences

Parks managers reported that some key threats to quality visitor experiences were due to a range of different factors from external/climate driven factors (extreme weather events, fire) to management and resource driven factors (inadequate maintenance of assets or facilities and servicing) to other factors such as visitor conflict and overcrowding at some sites.

Figure 5.3.3 Most commonly reported threatening processes impacting on visitor experience values (in order of frequency)

Threatening process
Inadequate maintenance of assets or facilities
Illegal activities
Extreme weather events
Visitor conflict
Inadequate park servicing
Inadequate assets or facilities
Wildfire
Visitor overcrowding
Changes to access
Weed invasion

Extent visitor management objectives met

Across the range of visitor management programs, the programs which management objectives were most achieved was visitor safety (nearly three-quarters of assessed parks) , while less than half of the assessed parks were meeting objectives for asset management and just over half were meeting objectives for interpretation and education services. Appendix 5.1 provides further detail on the extent that park servicing objectives and visitor needs met and Appendix 5.2 provides details on the extent of visitor facility objectives and needs met.

Figure 5.3.4 Extent visitor management objectives met


% assessed parks (298)
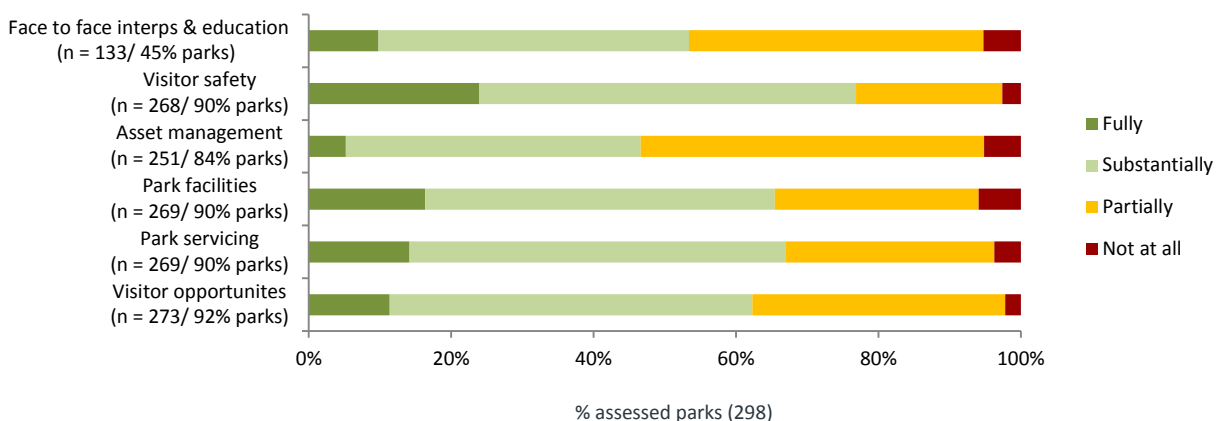
Education and interpretive services

Parks Victoria offers education and interpretation programs to increase awareness and understanding of Victoria's parks and their management. These activities range from site-based interpretive boards to informal ranger led talks and activities and more formal programs such as the Junior Ranger Program and curriculum based education services at some parks. With finite resources, the types and extent of services and programs are targeted to parks and sites with higher agreed Levels of Service. Nearly 12000 students were involved in curriculum based education programs while over 180000 participants were involved in interpretive programs such as ranger-led walks and junior ranger programs. The provision of education and interpretive services was targeted to the higher Levels of Service parks.

Visitor Program participation	2013
Education program participants	11991
Interpretation program participants	171000
Holiday program and junior ranger participants	9529 (24 parks)

**Figure 5.3.5 Extent management objectives met for interpretation and education programs**
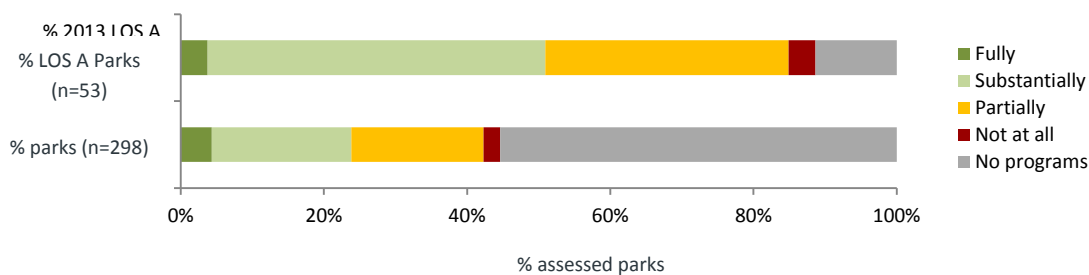
Tourism

Parks Victoria is the largest provider of nature based tourism activities in the State generating more than one billion dollars annually to the State's economy as well as generating more than 14,000 jobs many of which are located in regional Victoria. This includes support for around 350 Licensed Tour operators.

Of those parks with LTO's services provided, park managers reported that the majority are meeting management objectives. A higher proportion of LoS A parks reported that tourism objectives were being met than other parks.

Figure 5.3.6 Extent objectives met for tourism

Legend:
- ■ Fully
- ■ Substantially
- ■ Partially
- ■ Not at all

% assessed parks (n=298)
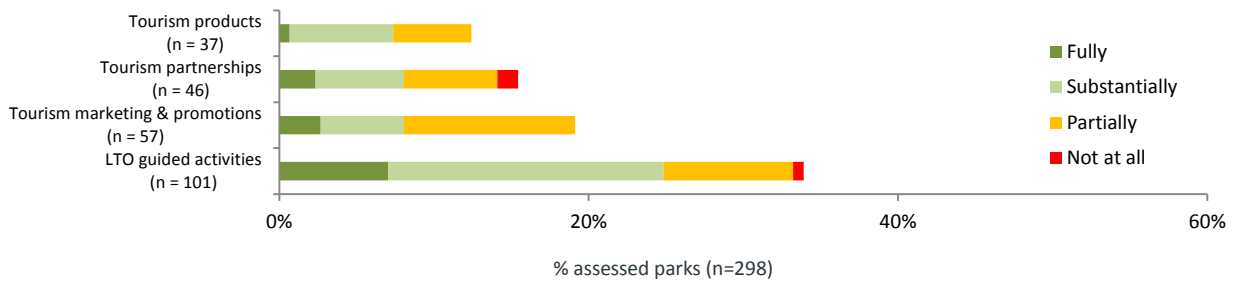
Park visitor satisfaction

Based on the Parks Victoria Visitor Satisfaction Index the overall level of visitor satisfaction across parks has continued to remain high. In recent years visitor satisfaction for peri-urban and urban parks has improved by around 10%, overall satisfaction non-urban parks has declined by around 5% and overall satisfaction for piers has been variable.

Across each park type, the park landscape setting and variety of activities available rate higher than the facilities and services provided.

The intention of visitors to revisit the park is another indicator of satisfaction. In the most recent survey 76% of visitors strongly agreed that they would revisit the park, with an additional 16% agreeing.

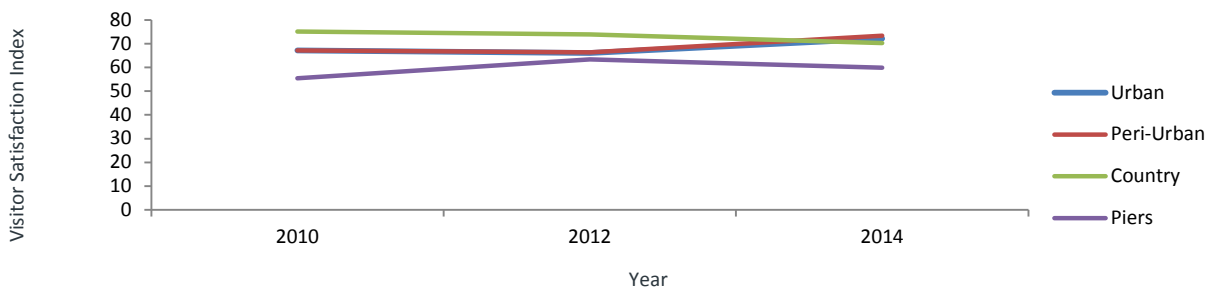**Figure 5.3.7 Visitor Satisfaction Index 2010-2014**

Legend:
- Urban
- Peri-Urban
- Country
- Piers

Figure 5.3.8 Visitor satisfaction- Country (non-metropolitan) parks (2013/2014)

Legend:
- ■ Fully Sat
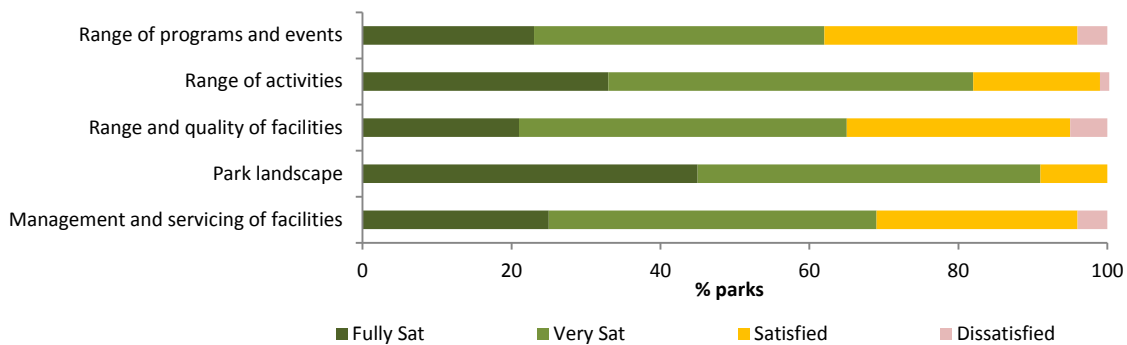- ■ Very Sat
- ■ Satisfied
- ■ Dissatisfied

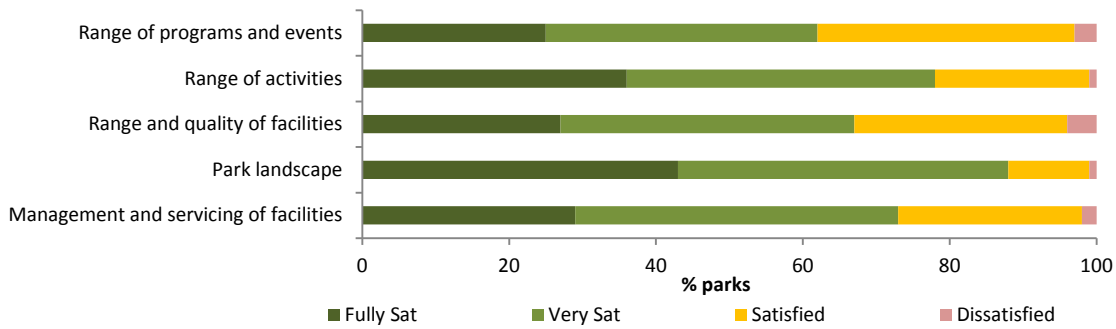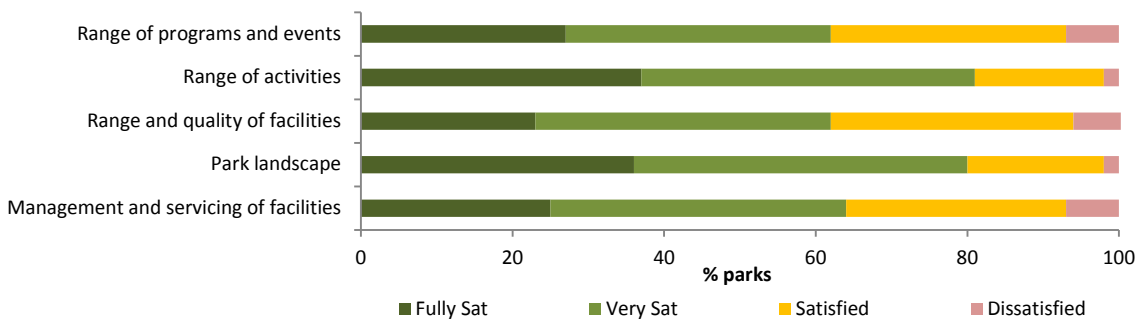**Figure 5.3.9 Visitor satisfaction- peri-urban parks**

Figure 5.3.10 Visitor satisfaction- urban parks

Community satisfaction with park management

Community satisfaction with park management (including both visitors and non-visitors) has remained relatively high since surveys began. Since 2008 the proportion of respondents that are satisfied with the management of parks.

Figure 5.3.11 Community satisfaction with management of National, State, Regional Parks and Conservation Reserves
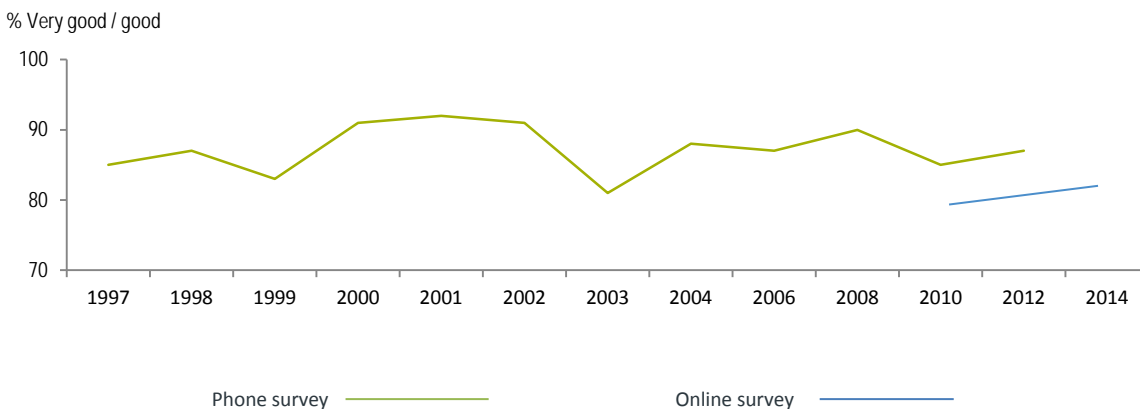
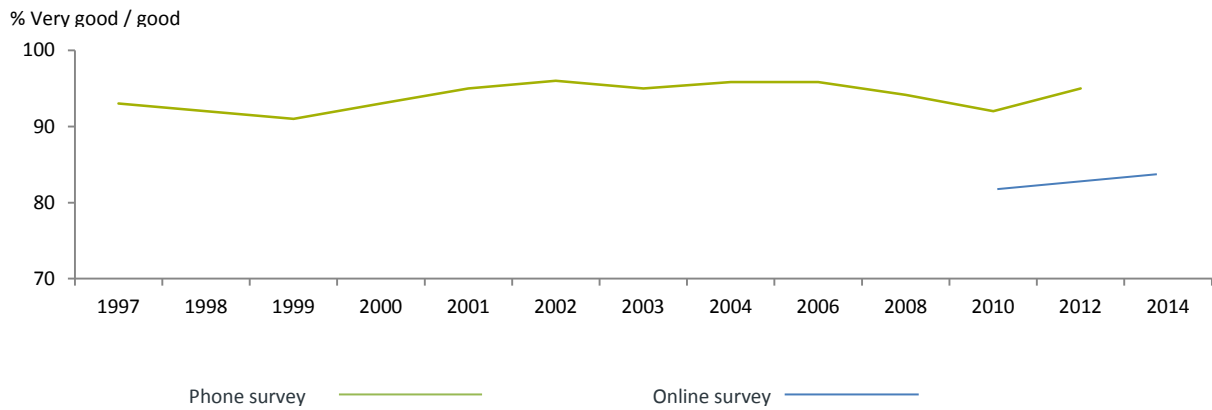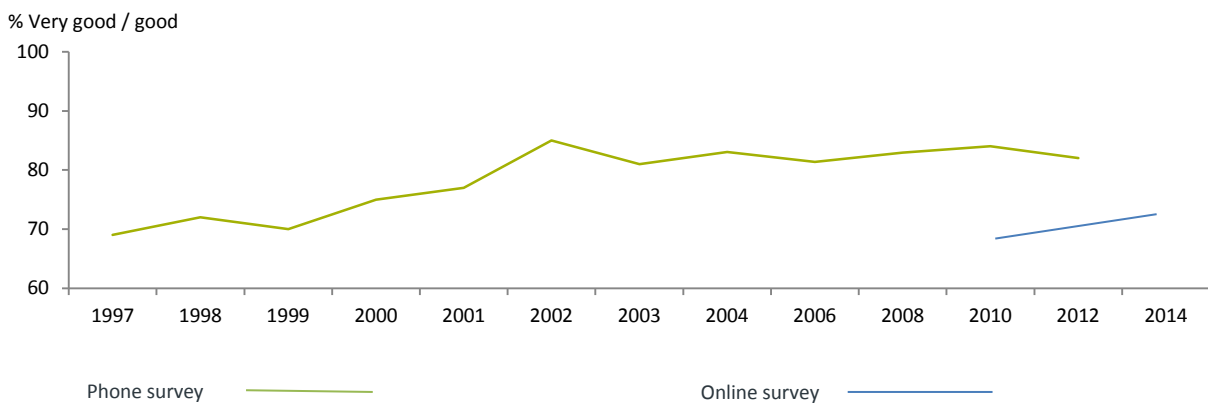**Figure 5.3.12 Community satisfaction with management of metropolitan parks**

% Very good / good

Phone survey ———— Online survey ————

Figure 5.3.13 Community satisfaction with management of bays waterways and piers

% Very good / good

Phone survey ———— Online survey ————

Community benefits of parks

Around one-quarter visitors and non-visitors cited recreation, relaxation and leisure as the foremost perceived benefit of parks. Family interaction (14%) and a place to get away from the city/suburbs (11%) were key benefits identified more strongly by park visitors than non-visitors (10% and 8%, respectively). Non visitors of parks rated the provision of open spaces more strongly than visitors.

The provision of green spaces was identified as the main perceived societal benefit of parks and protected areas managed by Parks Victoria, with 64% of respondents stating that they 'Very Strongly' or 'Strongly Agree' with this. More than half of respondents very strongly or strongly rate conservation of heritage (55%), biological conservation (52%), increased community well being (52%), protection of biological diversity (52%), provision of clean air (51%) and increased community pride (51%) as benefits of parks. However less than one-third of respondents very strongly or strongly rated reduction in healthcare costs, employment and investment as benefits of parks.
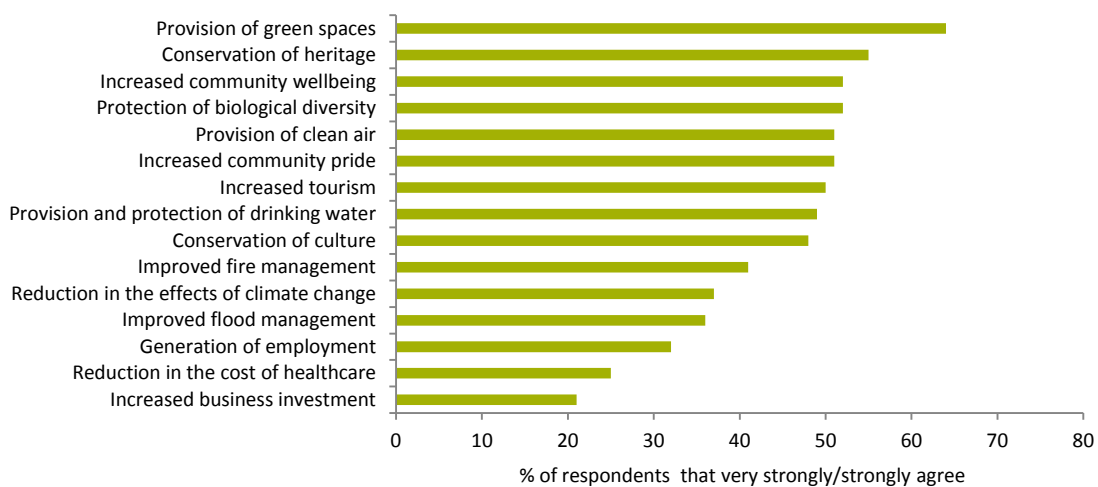
Figure 5.3.14 Perceived benefits of Victoria's parks
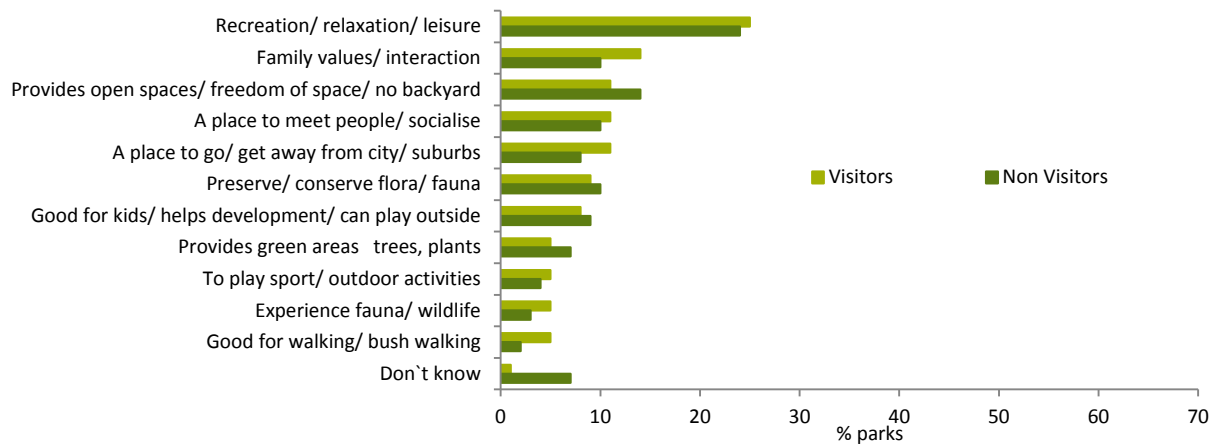
Parks Victoria Community Perception Monitor

Figure 5.3.15 Perceived benefits of parks to society

Parks Victoria Community Perception Monitor

Key factors influencing effectiveness

Improved management actions

- The increasingly recognised importance of the connection between healthy nature and healthy people continued to grow through the Healthy Parks Healthy People program.
- Fire and flood recovery programs enabled the construction of a of new contemporary visitor facilities at several parks such as the Grampians and Alpine national parks.
- A major effort was made to increase engagement and access to parks for people from culturally diverse communities and people with disabilities.
- A new long term framework for management of visitor experiences (Visitor Experience Framework) was developed.
- New knowledge partnerships were developed through the Research partners program to better understand and improve community awareness and benefits of parks.
- Master planning for major tourism sites such as the Shipwreck Coast was undertaken.

Future actions and challenges

- The delivery of park services was challenged by fire and emergency response and recovery, and growth in management responsibilities associated with new parks.
- Emerging climate-related threats from extreme weather patterns, including fire and flood, are likely to affect the ability to provide visitor assets and may change patterns of use across the parks network.
- The role that parks can play re-connecting children and youth with nature will be an important emerging priority.
- As visitor assets are in overall declining condition, visitor facilities and services will need to be increasingly targeted to ensure visitor safety and environmental standards are met.
- In accordance with the new visitor Experience Framework under development, it is possible that some sites or assets will need to be de-commissioned while others will be upgraded.
- Track changes in perceived community benefits of parks and factor results in web and other communication.
- Limited interpretation and education programs may affect long term awareness of park values and the ability to limit some negative impacts of visitors.