

OPEN LETTER

The Australian Outdoor Industry calls for National attention and action as we head into the most important Federal election for the industry's future

MAY 2022

Since COVID, Australians have had a wonder-filled re-engagement with their environments and are recognising the benefits the Outdoors provides - whether in recreation, education, tourism or physical or mental health activities. But the effects of COVID have impacted the sector greatly, as the workforce is 60% of what it was in 2019, while demand growth is now 130% of what it was in 2019.

The Outdoor Council of Australia makes up the state peak bodies and national partners in the Outdoor industry - they are calling on the government to recognise the contribution this industry makes to the economy, to the education of our youth, to communities across the country and to health and wellbeing of Australians. At 1% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product, an industry worth \$20Billion, Federal issues must be recognised and policy makers must work in partnership with the industry for solutions. The sustainability of Australia's outdoor industry contributes directly to the health and wellbeing of our communities.

National Challenges

The industry led the formulation of a standard and guidelines (the **Australian Adventure Activity Standard and Good Practice Guides (AAAS)**) that served to provide a tool to industry that ensured good practice in the industry. Led of its own accord, distributing through the industry, and educating on the adoption of the recommendations, State and Territory landowners and land/water managers are recognising the AAAS as essential tools for responsible and credible adventure leaders. Federal authorities must also recognise the value of the AAAS and commit funding to the outdoor industry to facilitate regular reviews and upgrades of these standards. This will deliver consistency across the nation, while increasing safety standards and allowing the industry to working in partnership with land/water owners and managers for sustainable outcomes.

As a mostly unregulated industry, market conditions across the world have not helped our industry in gaining suitable **insurance** for our needs. Increased support and recognition of the AAAS provides an opportunity to assist in gaining more support for the industry when it comes to gaining certainty with insurers.

Workforce attraction, acquisition, and retention of staff in the outdoors is at an all-time low as we come out of COVID. The Outdoor Industry is emerging in Australia, thus not largely understood in comparison to the nations that have a mature industry; United States of America, Spain, Argentina and even our small neighbour New Zealand has nearly as many graduates annually in Outdoor Leadership than we do in Australia. In 2019, our industry relied on up to 45% of its paid workforce coming from other countries as skilled workers on temporary or working visas. As borders shut our industry lost approximately half of its paid workforce. As we are emerging from COVID, the demand for outdoor activities has never been bigger. The importance of mental health and resilience has been realised, the importance of nature is more understood in the many ways nature provides solutions to these challenges, and the desire of Australian communities for more outdoor experiences and adventures has grown since we emerged from lockdowns.

Outdoor industry training and qualifications are not widely available in Australia because registered training organisations (including TAFEs) and universities have wound back investment. Quality outdoor training is a qualification that is expensive to run, so opportunities to be educated in outdoor leadership are diminishing in most States.

The Outdoor Industry connects people to adventurous activities across the landscape that not only provide experiences, but health and wellbeing outcomes. We wish to ensure we work alongside **First Nations Peoples** and their objectives in the appropriate use of lands and waterways for outdoor activities and help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in continuing the connection of their wealth of experiences, so visitors and participants are also educated in the continuation of the world's oldest living culture.

As an industry that is significantly impacted by **Climate Change**, the Outdoor industry is working on mitigation and adaptation options but needs attention from government and policy makers to this issue. Safety of participants is a core concern for all outdoor operators, and cancellation of activities due to extreme weather is increasingly common. Cancellation or postponement of activities quickly becomes very costly, due to the levels of coordination required for outdoor adventure activities. The discussions need to be had with all stakeholders, including national landowners and managers, to work through the options of adaption, and ultimately, appropriate climate action.

We call on the Federal government and policy makers to recognise the large volume of research evidence that clearly indicates improved health and wellbeing outcomes for our communities by connecting them to nature and the outdoor environment. This includes the results of **NDIS programs** when conducted in natural settings and outdoor education facilities. By engaging in outdoor activities, Australians become more connected to the environment and gain a more educated understanding of protecting it for future generations.

With the recent review by Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, it was pleasing to see the recommendations to take more activities outdoors:

"Strengthening the focus on students being physically active and content with a focus on activity in natural and outdoor settings."

We need more **leadership** from a national level on the importance of this to ensure it is in-built into each State's and Territory's **curriculum**. Outdoor education opportunities need to be for all children, not just the privileged.

CAPACITY SUPPORT

Provide seed-funding to boost the OCA's capacity and unite the industry to address the federal areas of need that provide quantifiable results for the industry at state, territory and local community levels.

EDUCATION

Assist in building awareness of the need for Children (of all ages) to incorporate the Outdoors in their education to builds skills and results that cannot be learnt in the classroom. In addition, this assists with the health and wellbeing of our children; physically and mentally.

ACCREDITATION

Support the introduction and development of an adventure activity accreditation that can be built on existing accreditation frameworks that provides safety consistency, insurance capability, improved business practices and reduces the need to legislate the industry.

SUPPORT A LABOUR AGREEMENT

Ensure the priority access to qualified staff for the industry and approve a labour agreement for the sector to attract and retain qualified leaders in the industry that will ensure the sustainability of our workforce.

We urge the Federal government to act on what is important for the future of our communities, work in partnership with the OCA in getting Australians active and in nature in the great outdoors!

Sincerely

The Outdoor Council of Australia



For more information contact

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Outdoors NSW & ACT

Benefits of Outdoors Education

THE UNDENIABLE FACTS



**Forbes,
July 2018**

University of East Anglia

"Spending more time in green spaces was linked to reduced levels of the stress hormone cortisol, lower heart rate, reduced risk of coronary heart disease, lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, reduced risk of type II diabetes, reduced all-cause mortality and death from heart disease....Among all the participants, on average, there was an increased likelihood of self-reporting one's health as "good."

**Outdoor Youth Programs
Research Alliance
(OYPRA)**

Dec 2018

"the sharp rise in the youth anxiety and mental health challenges can be improved through participating in outdoor programs. In addition, the students improved confidence, self-efficacy and increased belief to achieve their goals after the participation in outdoor programs. Data that is incredibly hard to argue against and endorsed by leading universities including the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute."

**U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services
2018**

"Regular physical activity in childhood and adolescence improves strength and endurance, helps build healthy bones and muscles, helps control weight, improves cognitive function, reduces the risk of depression, and may improve cardiovascular health."

"Of those who participated...16% of students suffered higher levels of anxiety, however, were significantly less anxious after the 5-day outdoor program... 11% of students surveyed had low levels of self-efficacy; however, following a 5-day school camp, their confidence levels were significantly boosted."

**Murdoch Children's
Research Institute
Oct 2018**

OVER DECADES, MANY WORDS HAVE BEEN USED TO DESCRIBE THE BENEFITS OF "STRUCTURED OUTDOOR, CAMPS AND NATURE-BASED PROGRAMS".

CHARACTER TRAINING, SKILLS FOR LIFE, RESILIENCE TRAINING ARE SOME OF THESE, BUT IT IS THE EVIDENCE-BASED RESEARCH THAT PROVIDE PROOF INTO WHY WE NEED TO HAVE "MORE KIDS OUTDOORS MORE OFTEN".