

# NATURE PLAY

FOR NEW SOUTH WALES—  
INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Centennial  
Parklands

**We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work and pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.**

## **PARTNERS**

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## **Report Acknowledgements**

The Nature Play for New South Wales (NSW)– Insights and Recommendations report is designed to facilitate growth of nature play in the state. The information provided in the report is drawn from targeted consultation with key stakeholders, as well as close collaboration with leading nature play experts and advocates across NSW and Australia-wide.

Production of the report was led by Centennial Parklands, which is part of Greater Sydney Parklands.

Centennial Parklands has delivered nature play programs and events since 2012, reaching thousands of participants of all ages. The Parklands is home to The Ian Potter Children’s WILD PLAY Garden. Since it opened in 2017 the garden has welcomed over 500,000 visitors to its state-of-the-art, nature-connected play spaces.

Through Greater Sydney Parklands, nature play programs have been introduced to Callan Park in Sydney’s Inner West and the Western Sydney Parklands sites located in Liverpool and Blacktown.

The generous support of the Centennial Parklands Foundation and the Neilson Foundation enabled Lead Learning Specialist at Centennial Parklands, Sam Crosby to play a central role in bringing together the following report and recommendations.

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Playing outdoors in natural environments provides children with opportunities to use their minds and bodies, freedom and imagination, often without adult intervention.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

**Nature play is a growing movement within communities, education, active recreation and place design.**

Playing outdoors in natural environments provides children with opportunities to use their minds and bodies, freedom and imagination, often without adult intervention. Nature play experiences are a way for children to connect with each other and their surroundings.

Nature play occurs informally in families and communities, and formally within the organised programs of early childhood, primary and high schools, out of hours care programs, as well as in a broader recreational sense.

The Nature Play for New South Wales (NSW) – Insights and Recommendations report explores nature play in the state, details the extensive consultation process and outlines key recommendations. The recommendations are written to drive the growth of the nature play movement and industry in NSW.

The report recommends a collaborative approach to advocating for nature play in NSW, as already occurs in other Australian states. Recommendations focus on the funding and resources required to drive the sector forward, including a steering committee, best-practice and pedagogy co-ordination.

The report is designed to reach major stakeholders including government departments, policy makers, urban designers, educators, the recreation sector, preventative health specialists and environmental managers. The subsequent goal is to inspire involvement in a formal Nature Play for NSW strategy.

## 2. WHY NATURE PLAY?

**Due to rapid changes in modern lifestyles, the experiences previously common to childhood such as climbing trees, getting dirty, building cubby houses, catching lizards and having freedom to roam and explore the local neighbourhood, often no longer occur.**

Children today have fewer opportunities to spend time outdoors in nature compared to 20–30 years ago (Laird, McFarland–Piazza & Allen 2014). Modern children have replaced unstructured outdoor play with sitting inside, huddled over screens playing video games, on social media and doing homework.

The report 'Growing Up Digital' (Gonski Institute for Education, 2020) states 92% of Australian parents think smartphones and social media reduce time children have for physical activity and outdoor play, and 77% acknowledge devices hurt a child's well-being and relationships. It is also reported that heavy media-multitasking results in an impaired ability to focus on cognitively demanding tasks and can impair social and emotional development (Williams, 2018). Clearly, indoor technology-based activities are impacting the way children live their day to day lives.

Increasing participation in technology-based activities has meant children's engagement in outdoor physically active play is declining (Dobia, Truong, Ward & Regalado, 2019). The disengagement with outdoor play is more

prevalent in Western contexts, including Australia. An Australian national study found that one in 20 children does not leave home to play (Laird, McFarland–Piazza & Allen, 2014) and Planet Ark (2012) reports that one in four Australian children has never climbed a tree.

Evidently, the benefits of active outdoor activities are not accessed by all Australian children and health impacts are emerging as a result. The NSW Health of Children and Young People Report (2014) states one in four children is overweight or obese and more than 70% of children do not participate in adequate daily physical activity.

As a result of the decreased outdoor time, children's connection with nature is not developing as it has in the past. Louv (2005) coined the phrase, *nature deficit disorder*, to describe 'the human cost of alienation from nature' (p. 36). While not a formal medical diagnosis, the term encapsulates an emerging trend. The nature-estranged lifestyles can change human behaviour, cause depression and generate negative social impact.

Countering these concerning trends is a growing body of evidence to support connection to nature (Chawla, 2020, Christiansen, Hannan, Anderson, Coxon & Fargher, 2018, Elliott & Chancellor, Hinds & O'Malley, 2019, Lloyd & Gray, 2014, Roberts, Hinds & Camic, 2019, Tidplay & Menter, 2020). It is now recognised that access to active outdoor play is essential for healthy child development, physical literacy, mental health and wellbeing (Kids in Nature Network, 2018). Nature play is a vital way for children to engage in active outdoor play and thus, to experience increased health and well-being.

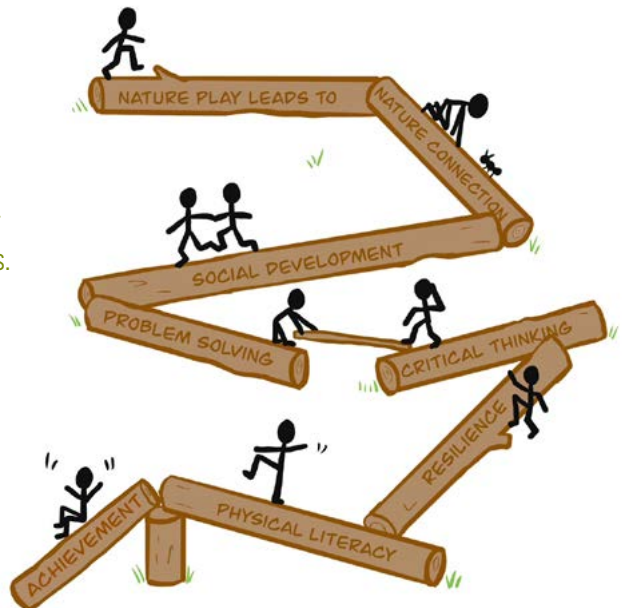
Nature play describes child-led, age-appropriate activities in an outdoor natural environment. The combination of play and the outdoors provides a powerful driver for physical literacy, social development, imagination, critical thinking, gross motor skills, mental health and nature connection.

Self-directed outdoor play provides children with vital opportunities to build the foundational skills required to face challenges, solve problems, establish friendships and build self-esteem. Nature play creates resilient, innovative and healthy children who have the self-confidence to create their future.



Nature play for me is an evolution from the decreased opportunities for kids to play simply outdoors. There is a great need to increase the opportunities to play outdoors and importantly make the connection to this sense of autonomy and learning skills for life."

*CONSULTATION SURVEY COMMENT*



## 3. NATURE PLAY IN AUSTRALIA



**Nature play is a worldwide movement connecting participants of all ages to nature.**

In Australia, common ways to participate in nature play include free unstructured play within family and community groups, activities in natural playspaces, time spent in nature, outdoor immersive experiences, bush walks, beach and bush kinder, bush school, outdoor learning and aspects of outdoor recreation. Nature play occurs in both informal activities and in planned programs, as part of the growing nature play industry.

As part of a broad and growing nature play industry, professionals deliver nature play experiences to communities, in early childhood settings, to children in primary and high schools, and within out of school care programs. Professionals deliver nature play programs in playspaces, natural parks, on beaches and at educational settings. Programs are delivered to children, youth, parents and educators.



Nature Play WA began as a program in 2010, within the Department of Sport and Recreation with the aim of helping grow children's levels of physical activity through the promotion of outdoor play. The program began with one staff member (journalist and father Griffin Longley) for two days a week and drew on best practice from similar organisations around the world. Nature Play WA was formed as an independent organisation a year later, bringing together member organisations from the health, education, environment, and recreation sectors. Members included two government departments (environment and sport), the AMA, the College of Physicians, the Primary Principals Association, the Conservation Council, and the Local Government Association. Funding was secured through Cabinet, and the organisation grew to include eight staff and to share its programs and structure with state governments in South Australia, Queensland and the ACT."

*GRIFFIN LONGLEY, NATURE PLAY WA CEO*

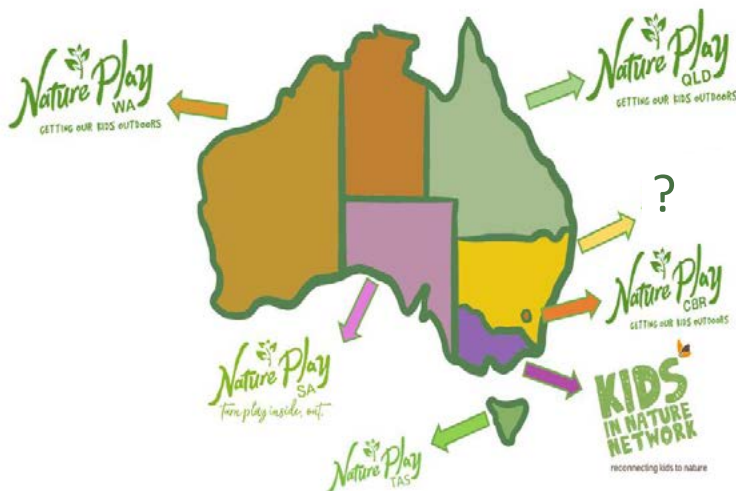


Multiple organisations across the globe ensure advanced levels of advocacy occur to drive nature play. Most Australian states have established advocacy organisations that promote and drive nature play.

- *Nature Play WA* and *Nature Play SA* have formed state-based incorporated not-for-profit organisations
- *Nature Play QLD* and *Nature Play ACT* are government-funded programs
- *Kids in Nature* is Victoria's incorporated non-profit network
- *Tasmania* has an active Nature Play Network hosted by the Sustainability Learning Centre, under the Department of Education.

Nature Play organisations in Australia reach over 700,000<sup>1</sup> participants directly within programs and more than 40 million people through their social and mainstream media. The organisations provide training and resources, deliver conferences and workshops, advise on play space design and run events. Outdoor Classroom Day is the most successful national event run by Australia's Nature Play chapters.

It is significant to note that Nature Play WA was the first Nature Play titled organisation in the country.




1. Combined participation numbers from the Nature Play WA, SA, Qld Annual Reports



NSW has the largest population of all Australian states and the majority of people live in urbanised areas. However, NSW is the only state without a nature play organisation. This Nature Play for NSW report is a move towards a more unified approach to advocacy in the state, to benefit all stakeholders.

## 4. INSIGHTS INTO NATURE PLAY IN NSW



The landscape of play in NSW has been strongly influenced by the NSW Government's Everyone Can Play (ECP) Program which was introduced in 2018. ECP is a commitment to the creation of better and more inclusive playspaces where everyone can play no matter their age, ability or background.

The ECP Guideline and grant program helps designers and councils to deliver inclusive playspaces through design principles and best practice recommendations no matter the size, type or budget. While nature play often occurs in unprogrammed settings, playspaces can also include nature play elements or opportunities for nature play.

The ECP program offers a platform and network to deliver on the best practice design of spaces for nature play to occur. The ECP Guideline is being updated in 2021 to include new resources which will guide designers on the creation of inclusive nature playspaces in collaboration with Centennial Parklands.



**Stakeholders from the nature play movement in NSW have a broad range of needs, interests and priorities. The common aim is to ensure people, especially children and youth, experience natural outdoor environments as often as possible.**

There are currently no formal statistics detailing where, how and who is participating in nature play within NSW. However, ad hoc evidence suggests:

- families and communities are engaging in outdoor nature-based play, in the form of nature walks and play in natural wild spaces and designated nature playgrounds.
- early childhood settings have the highest participation rates within formal programs
- there are some primary and high schools engaging in outdoor curriculum focused lessons/ extracurricular activities, with playgrounds being constructed using nature play design principles for use in play and lesson time
- out of school hours programs occur in the form of day activities during school holidays and within adventurous pursuits.

The Everyone Can Play program of the Department of Planning, Industry, and Environment, reports an increase in grant applications for nature-themed play spaces or playspaces with connections to areas for nature play, showing the rising demand for the growth of the nature play movement on community land.

The following **case studies** showcase the wide range of nature play currently occurring in NSW.





## Families and Community

### Hiking in Sydney with Kids

(Facebook group with over 4,000 participants)

Melissa Derwent, Group Facilitator

Hiking in Sydney with Kids is a way to encourage families to get outside and explore nature in Sydney. Families have been invited to join other families in getting outside, since 2016. During the pandemic, seeking out and sharing local outside adventures for children to continue to experience the joy that nature can bring has been a focus of the Facebook group. The group is a place to find nature spaces in Sydney to explore seasonal changes of native and introduced flora. A place to find spaces for babies, toddlers and children to enjoy nature by walking or being carried. Hiking in Sydney with Kids aims to give families across Sydney the inspiration to enjoy adventures, all year round, from their local neighbourhood to across town.



### Le Family

Jody Le, outdoor loving mum of seven children aged 3–18, Nowra NSW

Outdoor play in the backyard and in local places, time in the bush hiking and camping and playing have always been important for our family. It's a place for us to bond as a family, challenge ourselves, take risks, relax and recharge. Our seven children aged 3–18 have become very comfortable in the bush and engage readily in nature play and more generally in outdoor recreation. These activities outdoors have continued for our older children into young adulthood, and are opportunities they seek out constantly. When our children were all young, as parents we planned the adventures. Now our 14, 16 and 18 year olds are the ones researching the overnight hikes they would like to do either solo or as a family.





**The Ian Potter Children's WILD PLAY Garden,**

Christian Eckardt, Education and Community Programs, Greater Sydney Parklands

The Ian Potter Children's WILD PLAY Garden was created as the first state-of-the art, purpose-built space for nature play in NSW, located in the heart of Sydney. Free of charge, this Garden assists childhood development through stimulating children's senses and imagination while building a stronger bond with nature. Through its design, children are encouraged to run, jump, play, learn and discover nature at their own pace. Since opening in 2017, The Ian Potter Children's WILD PLAY Garden has had 479,500 visitors. According to the Wilding Nature Play for Children and Families research in cooperation with Western Sydney University, 71% of parents attending the garden with their children noticed an increased responsiveness to nature.





## Early Childhood

### **Keiraville Community Preschool**

Margaret Gleeson, Centre Director

Since 1952 Keiraville Community Preschool has had a commitment to nature play within our curriculum. We have been venturing beyond the fence on Bush Preschool in Terms 2 & 3 since 2017. Daily, a group of 10 children and 2 educators spend unhurried time in nature using one of 6 play sites in the escarpment neighbouring our preschool. Aimed at fostering connections, appreciation and investment in the natural world, Bush Preschool also builds dispositions and skills for a smooth transition to school. Both within and beyond the fence, children are immersed in the wonders of the natural world and learn to identify hazards and assess risk while building their awareness of their capabilities. A child's capacity for joy, curiosity and love of learning is fostered hand in hand with their emerging autonomy, citizenship, resilience and sense of agency.



### **The Nature School Port Macquarie**

Jacqui Leach, Head of Early Learning and Play

The Nature School Early Learning and Play encompasses the Little Explorers Playgroup, Early Years program and School Holiday programs, all of which are run completely outdoors in bush spaces in and around Port Macquarie. The Little Explorers Playgroup caters for children aged 0–3 years and their parents, fostering an early love of nature and exploration. Early Years is a drop off preschool-style program operating from 9am–3pm and educating children aged 3–5 years old. It is primarily child-led learning, taking a respectful, reciprocal and risk benefit approach to education and care, allowing each child to learn and develop in a way that suits them. The Early Years program opened in 2015 with a 1 day/week pilot program for a term and has since grown to care for 15 different children each day, 5 days a week.





### **NSW Early Years Nature Connections**

Dr Fran Hughes, Early Years Educators Networking Group

NSW Early Years Nature Connections is a community of learners who are invested in a generous exchange of knowledge, experience, resources and time. It is a networking group for early years educators and enthusiasts who are interested in nature play and nature pedagogy. Our purpose is to promote young children spending more time outdoors in nature. Some of us have been venturing 'out the gate' with children for years while others are just beginning. Our nature play spaces vary from national parks to paddocks to beaches to tiny patches of green in urban landscapes.

The NSW Early Years Nature Connections objectives are: to build a community of learners who are committed to supporting all children's connections with nature and promoting their understandings of their role in caring for our world, for educators, children and families and to develop an ecological identity, to support research and become advocates and activists for nature within the context of curriculum.

## Primary School

### Mount Keira Demonstration School Nature Playground

Designed and built by *Playgrounded*, Ben Binder, natural playground designer and builder, outdoor education and environmental teacher, outdoor guide and horticulturalist.

The nature play space at Mount Keira Demonstration School contains four different areas: an Adventure Gully, Oola Boola Woo Outdoor Classroom, a Rainforest Retreat and The Farm. The local First Nations People, the Dharawal Elders, were consulted and involved in the naming of the outdoor classroom areas after the local Dreaming story. Designing for inclusivity and respect for different cultural, learning, physical, cognitive, play and personality types was a motivating factor in selecting the four different play areas focusing on adventure, sustainability, learning in nature and creating. There are also NSW Curriculum-linked extensions to the playground e.g. compass gardens to assist in students learning about seasons, magnetic fields and orientation/navigation. In 2020, the playground was awarded the Kidsafe National Playspace Design Awards: Winner in the Infants and Primary School Category and the Leicester Meares Bequest Award for Special Recognition of the Natural Place Space Design.





## High School

**Peter Dawe** Youth Community Greening, Botanic Gardens Greater Sydney

Youth Community Greening have been involved in working with students and staff to design and create outdoor learning spaces. These range from Indigenous gardens that showcase traditional uses of native plants to kitchen gardens, habitat gardens and sensory gardens. After being involved in the processes of creating these spaces, the students take greater ownership and pride in them and are more inclined to readily engage with them. Teachers too are more comfortable to take their lessons outside when they see the positive engagement of the students. The program often involves high schools, such as an installation of a 'silent space' at Macquarie Fields High School where the principal has said that space is now used effectively for reflection time.





“

All these areas need more resources and support. Aligning activities to meet the school curriculums will help, and playtimes could be further enhanced with increased access to and development of nature play opportunities in all schools, for all ages.”

*CONSULTATION SURVEY COMMENT*



## Out of Hours Programs

### **Melissa Slarp**

Education and Engagement, The Australian Botanic Garden Mount Annan

The Australian Botanic Garden Mount Annan's school holiday programs provide outdoor, hands-on and immersive nature experiences for children. Located in South-West Sydney, the Australian Botanic Garden is a 416 hectare green space of curated gardens as well as critically endangered Cumberland Plain Woodland. This interesting mix of floral design and natural habitat, allows for enriching and educational experiences that are unique to our Garden. Children develop their sense of place, self and community through activities such as bird identification, track walks, loose parts play, eco art, and much more.



The Australian Botanic Garden  
Mount Annan

## 5. NATURE PLAY FOR NSW

### 5.1 Aims

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The aims of the Nature Play for NSW report are to:

- Take stock of current programs and activities occurring in informal or formalised settings
- Discover challenges for nature play delivery in NSW
- Identify key priorities and best practice to support an increase in nature play activities in NSW
- Develop a list of recommendations to support the development of a Nature Play for NSW advocacy body





## 5.2 Timeline

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The Nature Play for NSW Report consultation process occurred between November 2020 and February 2021. The process gave various stakeholder groups the opportunity to offer opinions in the form of webinar discussions or through online surveys.

The consultation process occurred under COVID-19 restrictions. Planned face-to-face interviews had to be replaced by online discussions. Despite these limitations, the consultation phase was highly successful in engaging key players in the sector.

One major component interrupted by COVID-19 was planned site visits to relevant First Nations stakeholders. As these did not occur as planned, they are included in the recommendations and next steps.

### The Nature Play for NSW Timeline, 2020 – 2021

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#### June ongoing

Share and distribute Nature Play Strategy for NSW

#### January 2021

Connecting and consulting with underrepresented groups (targeted consultation)

#### December 2020

Consultation continues. Online survey, industry webinars, public forum

#### October 2020

Establish a draft vision and strategic process

#### February 2021

Distribute draft strategy document to stakeholders and work towards consensus on outcomes and endorsement

#### January 2021

Extracting key ideas and understandings from the consultation process

#### November 2020

Consultation begins. Online survey, industry focus groups

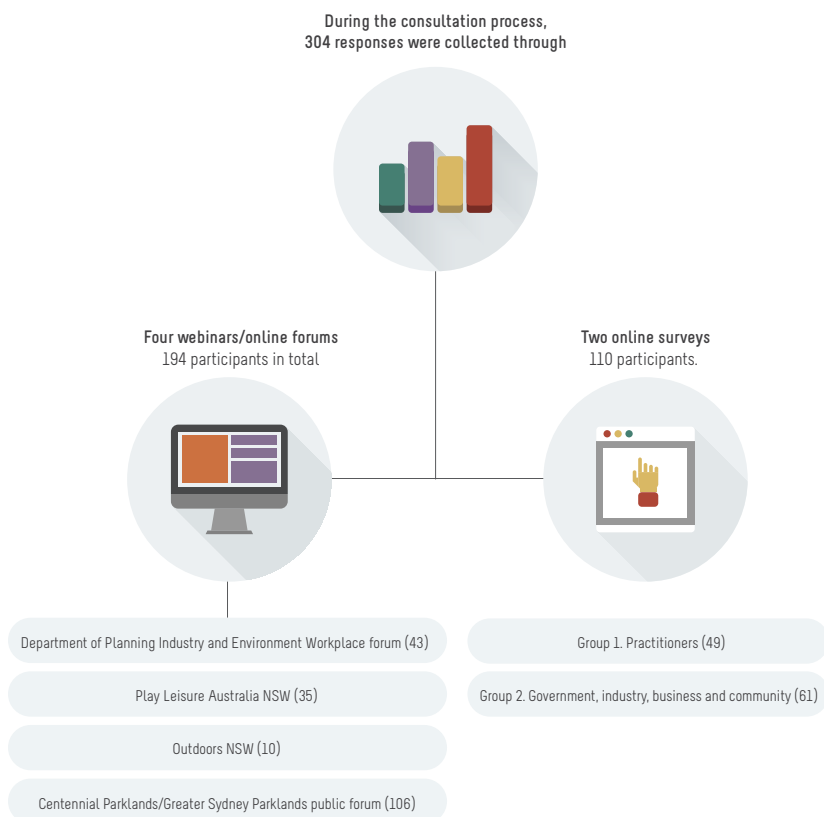




## 5.3 Consultation Process

Key stakeholders, advocates and nature play professionals participated in the consultation process. Participants included teachers, educators, outdoor recreation specialists, government representatives, land managers, health and wellbeing professionals and outdoor advocates i.e. the outdoor peak body Outdoors NSW/ACT.

The broad range of stakeholders in this group ensured a well-rounded dialogue occurred throughout the consultation process.



## 5.4 Results

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### Webinar Results

The webinar series was a vital component of the consultation phase as it enabled the establishment of a stakeholder group, face-to-face (online) connections and discussions, and most importantly, the development of key focus areas for nature play recommendations.

The sharing of ideas and dialogue informed the initial key themes used to analyse the data, including the written survey responses.

### Online Survey Results

The online surveys were completed by 110 participants:

Group 1 – Practitioners

Group 2 – Government, industry, business and community.

There are slight differences in the group survey questions in line with the respondents' areas of expertise. The variation ensured maximum relevance to their specific area of involvement and enabled proactive and relevant responses.

Significant results include:

- I. Participants' profile and nature play practice/connection (Group 1 and 2)
- II. Challenges in delivering nature play and education in NSW (Group 1)
- III. Insights into current support for nature play in NSW (Group 1 and 2)
- IV. Expected benefits in enacting a nature play strategy for NSW (Group 2)

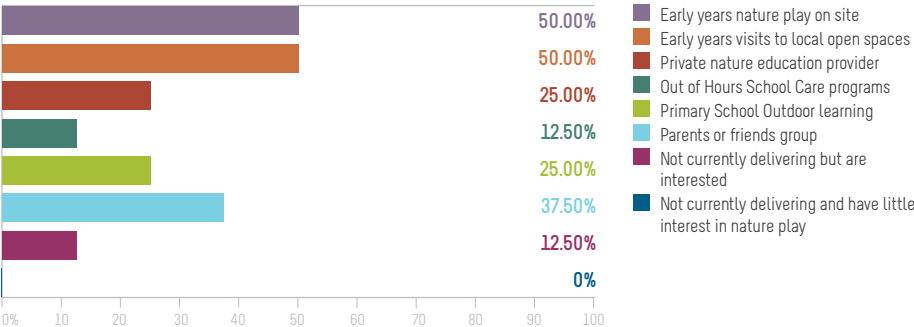
Participants were asked to rate the most important initiatives related to nature play advocacy. These are directly reflected in the report's recommendations.

## I. Who completed the survey and how are they involved in nature play (Group 1 and 2)?

Most participants are involved in the early childhood sector, which reflects the current state of nature play in NSW. However, the variety of other participants shows the wider reach across age groups, education sectors, land managers, government and industry. The education sector plays a large part in the growth of nature play but depends on the support of many others who participated in this consultation process.

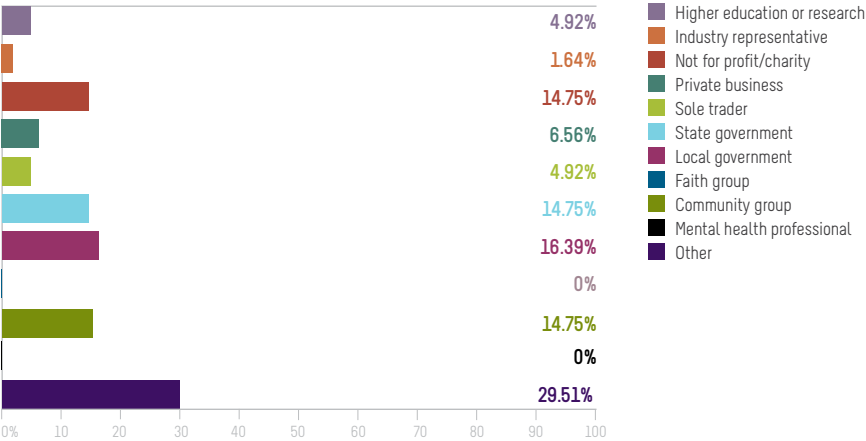
### Group 1

#### How are you currently delivering nature play/education?

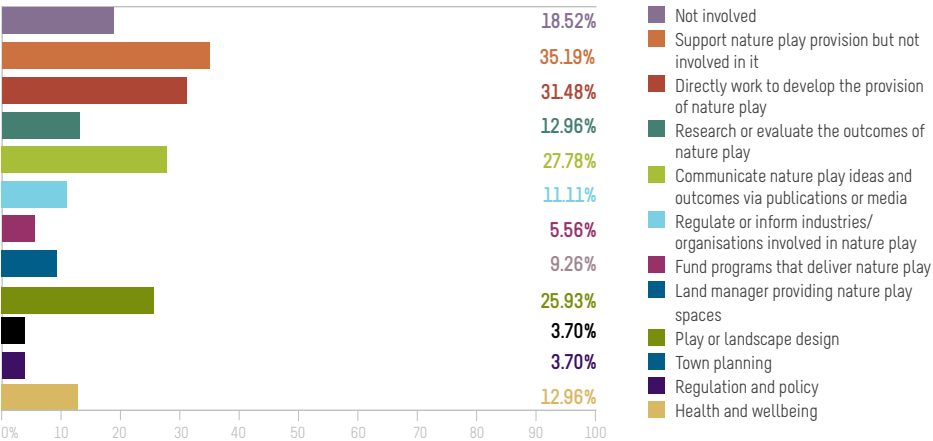


## Group 2

Please tell us which type of organisation you represent?



Is your organisation involved in nature play and if so, how?





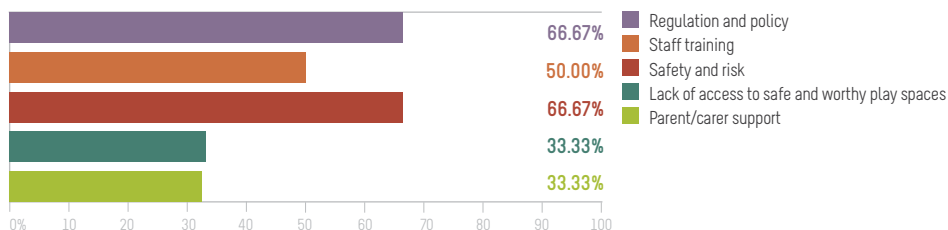
## II. The challenges to delivering nature play and nature-based education.

The practitioner survey asked respondents to identify the challenges to delivering nature play in NSW. The consistency of responses provides five areas to work towards in future recommendations for nature play:

- education training
- advocacy
- regulation and safety
- parent and carer education
- planning

### Group 1

What are your insights on the challenges when delivering nature play/education?



Within the education sector, nature play/education is most often an add-on occasional activity. School principals and staff need more confidence when supervising and encouraging more nature play which is most often enjoyed only at break-time. And that depends on there being any 'nature' to play in or with, which depends on the grounds.

The value held by others for nature play isn't always seen as valuable by the community or education providers. There is a lack of understanding around what being in nature and learning in nature can do for children and their development."

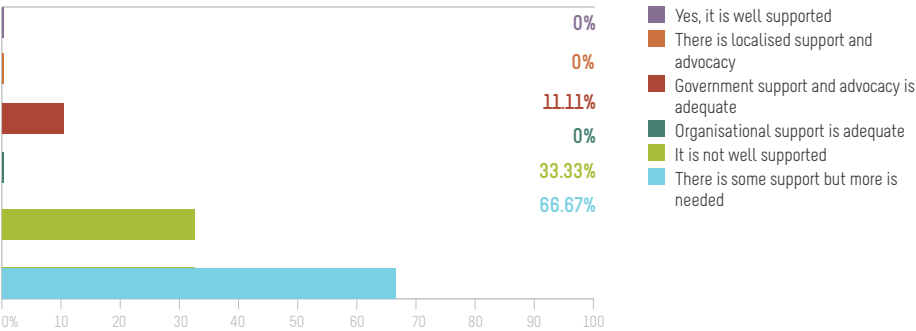
*CONSULTATION SURVEY COMMENT*

### III. Insights into the current support for Nature Play in NSW

The responses from both Group 1 and Group 2 indicate stronger support for nature play in NSW is needed. Capacity for the increase and development of nature play is also required. Comments attached to this question indicate advocacy, raising the profile of nature play, and leadership in the sector is necessary to grow nature play. Responses in this area highlight the need for a coordinated approach to nature play and outdoor learning across all sectors, including education, playground/ play space development, and community involvement in the outdoors.

#### Group 1

Do you believe that there is adequate support for and advocacy for nature play in NSW?

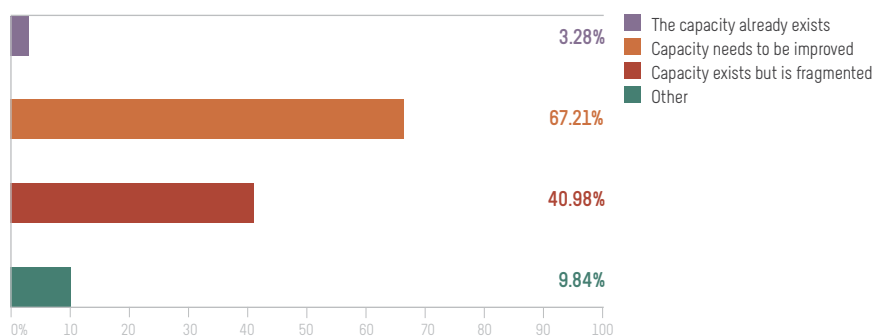


Advocacy at all levels of government and in all educational institutions is needed. Community education is needed to raise the profile of Nature Play and to encourage community support. This would be best achieved through a strategic plan that coordinates actions and mobilises all possible advocates."

*CONSULTATION SURVEY COMMENT*

## Group 2

What capacity do you think NSW currently has to deliver nature play through existing providers, organisations and facilities?



Capacity exists but it would need leadership and coordination from a state and/or local Nature Play body."

CONSULTATION SURVEY COMMENT

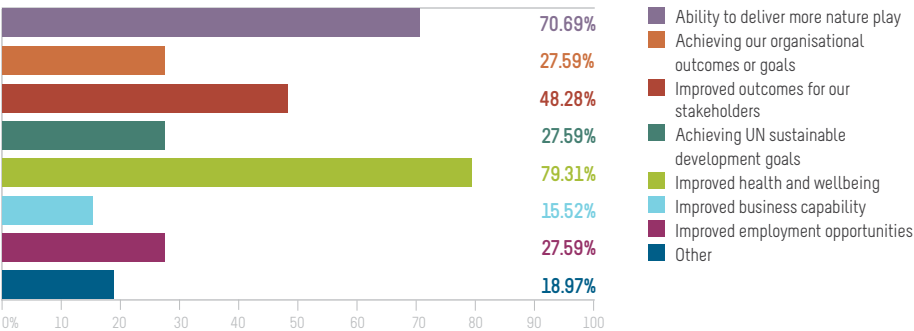


#### IV. Expected benefits of a nature play strategy for NSW

Group 2 expects the benefits of a nature play strategy to apply to all stakeholders and the greater community. Respondents believe increased nature play opportunities would directly impact health, wellbeing, education and social skills of all involved. A unified approach to advocating and promoting nature play across sectors was identified as the best case for success.

#### Group 2

What would the benefits to your organisation be if nature play strategy is enacted in NSW?



“ Hopefully improved networking between organisations will ensure we are working with each other instead of on top of each other. Also – the ability for our organisation to advertise a NSW wide strategy would give legitimacy to our training program.”

CONSULTATION SURVEY COMMENT







## 5.5 Consultation Conclusions

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Throughout the consultation phase it became clear that there is overwhelming support for a coordinated approach to advocacy for nature play in NSW. The vast majority of participants highlighted some form of coordinated network, peak body or organisation would be best suited to drive nature play in NSW into the future.

The consultation process defined the age range of nature play in NSW as 0 - 18 years and included areas termed as outdoor learning, outdoor recreation and active recreation. Acknowledging this age range and terms broadens the scope of nature play to its full potential.

Promotion of the benefits of nature play to families and communities, education settings and other various stakeholders is vital.

Looking to the future, there is strong support for collaboration between various stakeholders, e.g. landowners and nature play designers. The consultation highlighted the fact that connecting nature play/ outdoor learning advocates with the relevant education departments is vital to advance policy and practice.

The online webinars promoted cross collaboration between stakeholders, and there was an acknowledgement of the importance of continuing the conversation.



## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATURE PLAY FOR NSW

The Nature Play for NSW consultation process identified four strategic focus areas to promote and engage children 0 – 18 in nature based outdoor activities in NSW.



Success in the strategic focus areas will best be achieved by:

- further engaging key stakeholders and consultation participants
- establishing a steering committee to drive nature play in NSW
- co-ordinated delivery of the consultation recommendations through adequate resourcing
- development and support for best practice in new and existing nature play programs across the state

The four strategic focus areas incorporate the following actions.

## 1. Advocacy to raise the profile of nature play in NSW

- 1.1 Engage with various levels of government to drive policy that promotes nature play in all formats and settings
- 1.2 Engage with various levels of government and non-government agencies to support accessible natural playgrounds/ spaces for all
- 1.3 Liaise with First Nations organisations and communities to develop cross cultural nature play and to build support for nature play from the Aboriginal education community
- 1.4 Promote nature play philosophy and its positive effects on mental and physical health including social benefits within the community, e.g. parents/carers, community groups and local councils.
- 1.5 Promote the learning benefits of the outdoor environment and associated pedagogies, within education settings for 0 – 18 year olds
- 1.6 Promote the importance of connecting with nature in the era of climate change

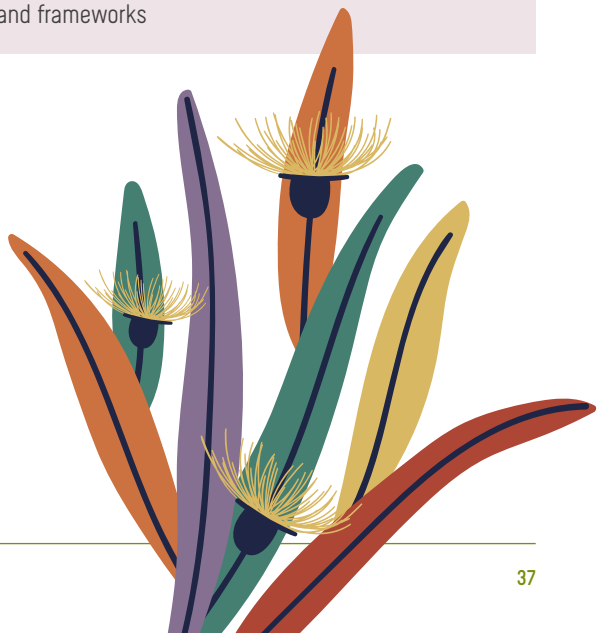




## 2. Funding and resources to promote and further expand nature play opportunities for children in NSW

### Funding and resources must be identified and secured to:

- 2.1** Support a central point of contact that enables collaboration for nature play in NSW  
e.g. a network, association, peak body, central hub or centre for excellence
- 2.2** Promote existing best practice nature play programs in order to increase stakeholder engagement and support
- 2.3** Invest in new and redesigned natural play spaces and the promotion of wild play spaces on public land, e.g. local council lands
- 2.4** Support the development of physical play spaces with an emphasis on 'natural spaces', within educational settings
- 2.5** Enhance nature play for families and communities, including innovative use of technology
- 2.6** Guide nature play within educational settings in alignment with relevant policy documents, curriculum outcomes and frameworks



### 3. Support for educational settings

- 3.1** Liaise with the Department of Education to include nature play, outdoor activities and curriculum outdoors in all education settings
- 3.2** Prioritise the provision of professional development and training to reach all levels of education e.g. policy makers, leadership, teachers and educators in training
- 3.3** Support the expansion of existing outdoor programs and new outdoor programs with the provision of training and resources
- 3.4** Engage with centres and schools to support policy, curriculum, learning and practice for nature play/outdoor learning
- 3.5** Emphasise options for inclusion, capacity building and recognition of First Nations connections within nature play
- 3.6** Promote nature play events that encourage centres and schools to be involved in outdoor play activities



#### 4. Connections with families and communities

- 4.1 Liaise with local council and other landowners/managers to create quality inclusive natural play spaces for all.
- 4.2 Build an understanding of current use of local natural spaces by families and communities to best inform landowners of future outdoor nature play needs
- 4.3 Establish a portal for families to access resources that encourage outdoor play, connection to nature and access to local spaces
- 4.4 Leverage parent/carers support for nature play to inform practice within educational settings
- 4.5 Provide assistance for families to access nature play mentoring
- 4.6 Promote nature play events that encourage families and communities to engage in outdoor activities and nature play together.

## 7. NEXT STEPS & SUMMARY

**The Nature Play for NSW Insights and Recommendations Report has highlighted four recommendation areas.**



Together, they provide a strategy with the potential to drive nature play within the state.

For this to occur the following actions are suggested:

- Create a Steering Committee to drive the development of nature play within the state
- Expand the conversation with key stakeholders, including First Nations organisations and communities
- Complete the stakeholder mapping of nature play in NSW
- Partner and collaborate with advocacy and funding organisations
- Promote best practice nature play practices and providers
- Deliver playspaces for nature play utilising the Everyone Can Play Guidelines
- Identify potential resources and funding opportunities, including dedicated support for the Steering Committee and best practice examples for nature play practice and pedagogy.



## SUMMARY

Nature play encourages children and youth to play freely in outdoor natural environments. Recognised benefits to nature play occur across health, wellbeing, physical activity and in enhancing learning outcomes in early childhood settings, primary and high schools. Most Australian states have an established Nature Play organisation that promotes the movement in their state. These began with Nature Play WA in 2010.

NSW is now the only Australian state not to have an organised agency that advocates for the promotion of nature play.

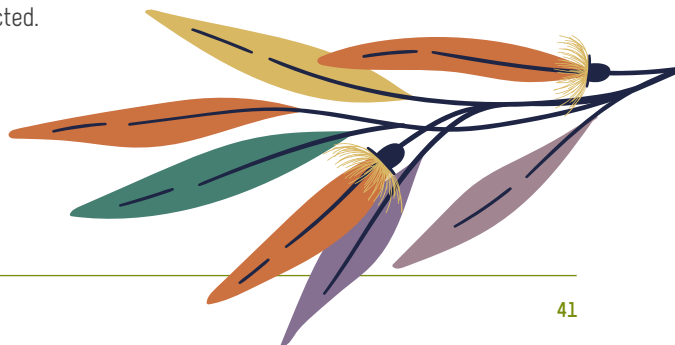
However, in NSW nature play does occur in families, communities, education and recreation settings. There are many positive case studies that show the depth and variety of nature play occurring in the state.

The Nature Play for NSW report conducted an extensive consultation process to ascertain an understanding of the current status of nature play in the state. The process occurred between October 2020 – March 2021, with over 304 responses collected.

Strong collaboration between the various NSW stakeholders is identified as a key point to progress nature play in the state. Key recommendations include actions in the focus areas of: Advocacy, Funding and Resources, Support for Educational Settings and Connections with Families and Communities.

The next steps for the nature play in NSW revolve around further collaborations with stakeholders, connecting with First Nations communities and establishing a Steering Committee to further drive the movement and report recommendations.

The Steering Committee will be comprised of academics, nature play advocates, educators and relevant associated peak bodies. To coordinate the Steering Committee and advocate for the completion of the Nature Play for NSW recommendations, it is vital to identify appropriate resourcing, encouragement of best practice and pedagogy/training.



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