



**Rob Stokes**  
Minister for Planning and Public Spaces

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

Sunday, 28 June 2020

### **SYDNEYSIDERS TAKE TO GREEN SPACE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Visits to Sydney's parklands and gardens have increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic as Sydneysiders embrace our wealth of green space.

The Australian Botanic Garden at Mount Annan has recorded its highest visitation ever this year, with more than half a million visitors already. Centennial Park visits are estimated to be up by 20% and temporary car-free initiatives have also boosted numbers at Parramatta Park's new People's Loop. Use of the Western Sydney Parklands 60km of tracks and trails has doubled (100% growth) since the commencement of COVID-19 restrictions.

"Mounting global research is clear – accessible green space offers immense health, social and economic benefits," Planning and Public Spaces Minister Rob Stokes said.

"Sydneysiders have voted with their feet - and bicycle wheels - during this health crisis by enjoying the wonderful public spaces we have at our fingertips."

The increased visitor numbers are supported by new data from the *Department of Planning, Industry and Environment's Public Space During COVID-19* survey, that has been filled in by more than 750 people since 8 May.

In the first month of results, the majority of people (72%) said local parks had been "especially useful" or "appreciated more" during COVID-19 restrictions. Almost half the respondents (46%) said they spent more time in public spaces than prior to COVID-19 restrictions and 96% said personal exercise (walking, running, fitness exercise, cycling etc) is the top reason for using public spaces during the pandemic.

"The NSW Government created the Public Spaces portfolio and made greening our city a priority because good, functional and green public spaces are central to a healthy and happy society," Mr Stokes.

"Increased visits to our many parklands in recent months shows why we cherish our public spaces and why we must work together to enhance them."

Western Sydney Parklands and Parramatta Park Executive Director Suellen Fitzgerald said views of the Parklands' digital walking, running and cycling maps more

than tripled during April and May, with more than 10,000 web visits and 1,700 map downloads during its Get Back on Track campaign to encourage parklands use.

“Our two-month trial of our People’s Loop, with its changed vehicle access, parking and circulation in Parramatta Park, has also been overwhelmingly supported by the community, in both numbers and survey feedback,” she said.

“Spending time in green spaces offers much-needed solace and is proven to reduce feelings of anxiety, lower blood pressure and create a sense of wellbeing, which we can all appreciate now,” Ms Fitzgerald said.

The Blue Mountains Botanic Garden also had more than 10,000 visitors during the recent long weekend as regional travel bans lifted.

Have your say on public space during [COVID-19 here](#).