



MORNINGTON PENINSULA OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

Engagement Report

PHASE ONE
17 JUNE 2024





Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Bunurong people, who have been the custodians of this land for many thousands of years; and pay respect to their elders past and present. We acknowledge that the land on which we live and work is the place of age-old ceremonies, celebrations, initiation and renewal; and that the Bunurong peoples' living culture continues to have a unique role in the life of this region.

We also acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who now call the Mornington Peninsula home, their rich cultural heritage, and their connection to Country of their homelands. We understand that healing Country through truth-telling, traditional knowledge, and reconciliation will also start to heal cultural divides between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Cultural tradition and knowledge are intrinsic parts of valuing and connecting with the landscape (open space); this knowledge is a gift to be embraced by all.

An impressionistic painting of a park scene. In the foreground, a large tree with a thick, dark trunk stands on the left. The ground is a mix of vibrant colors: orange, yellow, and green. In the middle ground, a path leads through a lush green field towards a line of trees in the background. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall style is expressive and colorful.

About this Report

This report provides the findings of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council's Open Space Strategy engagement process, which was conducted for a six week period from January to March 2024. The purpose of the engagement was to gather input from the community on their use of and satisfaction with open space in the Shire, as well as their priorities for future open space planning.

The engagement activities included online information sessions, an online and hard copy survey, intercept surveys conducted at pop-ups across the Shire, targeted outreach to key stakeholders, community conversations conducted by interested groups, and submissions.

INTRODUCTION

Situated between Port Phillip Bay and Western Port Bay, Mornington Peninsula Shire is located 40-80 kilometres south-east of the Melbourne central business district.

Mornington Peninsula has a unique open space network with a particularly high percentage of natural areas including two national parks: Mornington Peninsula National Park and Pont Nepean National Park; and, one state park, Arthurs Seat.

The Shire has 192km of unique and dynamic coastline. Distinct landforms and ecosystems define the different coastal regions providing diverse open spaces and trails which are among the Peninsula's most popular tourist destinations.

MORNINGTON PENINSULA'S NEW OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

Our aim is to set a clear direction for achieving an open space network that meets the wide-ranging needs of a growing and diverse community.

The purpose of the Open Space Strategy (the Strategy) is to guide the future planning, provision, design, and management of existing and future open space for a 15-year period up until 2040.

The Strategy will seek to protect and enhance the Peninsula's distinctive and unique open space values as the Shire responds to increasing pressures including climate change, population increase, residential expansion, changing recreation needs, greater reflection of culture, history and stories, vegetation clearing and increasing levels of tourism.

CONTENTS

ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

AREAS OF ENQUIRY

Through the engagement we explored the following areas of enquiry with the community.



Use and Value of Parks and Open Space

Why and how people use open spaces, including the types of activities, frequency of visits, preferred features, and overall satisfaction with existing parks and open spaces.



Barriers to Use

Factors preventing or hindering the use of parks in the Shire, with a focus on people living with disabilities, women, gender-diverse individuals, and single-parent families.



Priorities for the Future

Priorities for investment in open space, including what people would like to see more of.

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES



Online Engagement

Online engagement, including a survey, was conducted to gather community input on their experiences in open spaces and ideas for improvement through Council's Shape Our Future platform. In total, 129 people participated in the survey, and 57 people filled out physical copies of the survey.



Online Information Sessions

Two online information sessions were held to provide an opportunity for the community to find out about the project and ask questions. The sessions were held online via Teams on the following dates:

- Online information session #1, 30 Jan, 2024 (5:30pm to 6:15pm)
- Online information session #2, 1 Feb, 2024 (5:30 pm to 6:15 pm)



Pop-ups

Six pop-ups were held around the Mornington Peninsula to engage with the community through community events and open spaces. Intercept surveys were conducted at pop-ups, and 255 intercept surveys were completed. Pop-ups were held at the following locations.

- Point Nepean Portsea Markets, 21 Jan 2024 (9 am - 1 pm)
- Mornington Main Street Market, 24 Jan 2024 (9 am to 1 pm)
- Fred Smith Reserve, 24 Jan 2024 (3 pm to 7 pm)
- Somerville Recreation Centre, 31 Jan 2024 (9 am to 1 pm)
- Rye Foreshore Market, 3 Feb 2024 (7 am to 12 pm)
- Flinders Park, Flinders, 3 Feb 2024 (2 pm to 6 pm)



Community Conversations

Nineteen community conversations were submitted from community groups and sporting clubs across the Shire.

- 12 Sport and user groups
- 3 Committees of management or business groups
- 4 Friends of or environmental groups



Key stakeholder outreach

Eight conversations were held with over 14 participants from community groups throughout the Shire. Discussions were held via phone, online via Zoom, and via email.

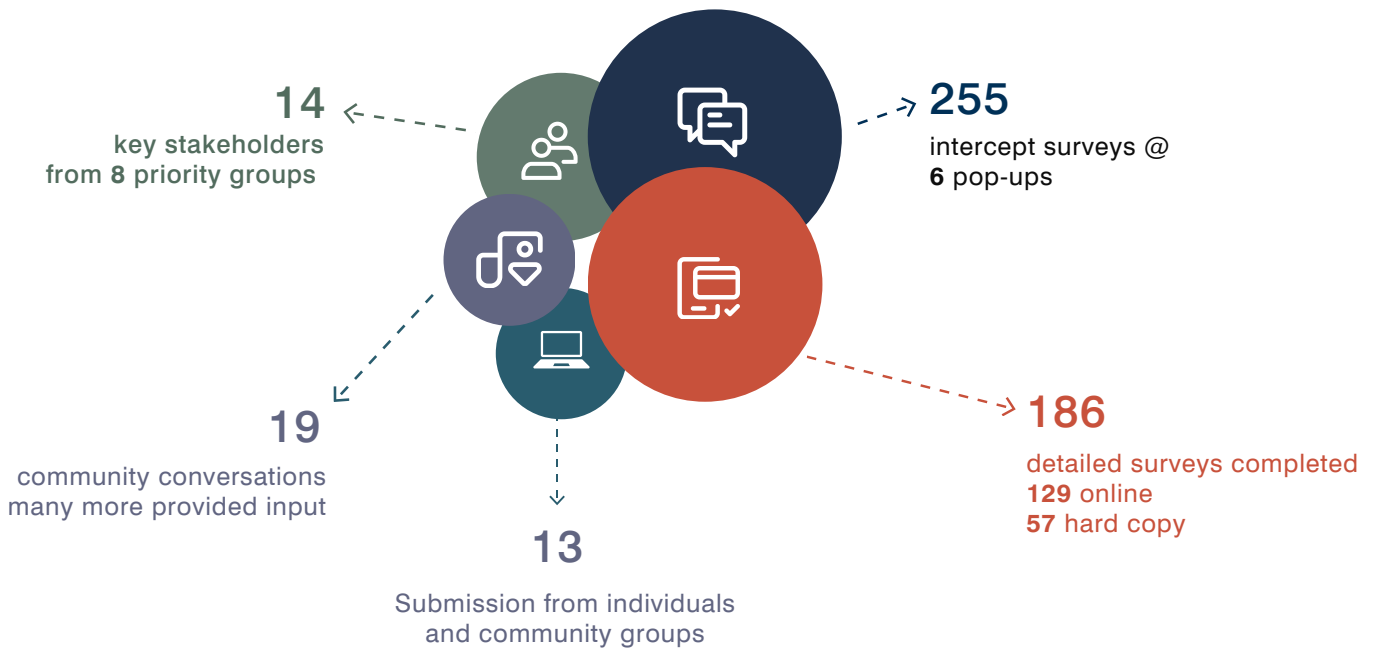


Submissions

Thirteen submissions were received from individuals and community groups.

More than 487 people participated

33 opportunities to provide input



220 discussion papers downloaded

50 community conversation guides downloaded

1940 online interactions

KEY FINDINGS

USE AND VALUE OF OPEN SPACE

What we heard from the online and intercept surveys



Use of open space

Most survey respondents use parks regularly, with over half visiting daily (47%) and a significant number weekly (39%).



Most common park or open space

The most popular parks include Rosebud Foreshore (6%), Rye Foreshore, Point Nepean National Park, and Fred Smith Reserve (all with 5%). A significant number of respondents (18%) identified 11A Allambi Avenue, Council-owned land in Capel Sound, comprising the Seawinds Community Hub and a large area of undeveloped land.



Activities

walking is the most popular activity (65%), followed by walking/exercising dogs (40%) and supervising children on play equipment (22%). Experience nature or wildlife (21%) and take in the scenery or views (20%) are also popular.



Most important features

Respondents value the presence of trees, gardens, and landscape features the most (45%), alongside cleanliness (37%) and maintenance of grass (34%). Shade (32%) is also an important factor.



Satisfaction

The survey reported high satisfaction levels for personal safety (3.58 out of 5), cleanliness (3.55 out of 5), and the presence of trees and landscape features (3.29 out of 5). Lower satisfaction was noted for the condition of footpaths (2.90 out of 5), children's playgrounds (2.84 out of 5), accessibility (2.84 out of 5), and amenities like toilets and seating (2.77 and 2.78 out of 5), especially among people living with a disability or those with young children.



Decision factors

The presence of natural features (48%), cleanliness (39%), and maintenance of grass (37%) most influence the decision to use a park. Shade (34%), condition of footpaths (27%), and amenities like dog facilities (26%), seating and tables (25%) also play critical roles.



Transport to Parks

The majority (65% survey) prefer walking to parks. Driving is the next most common mode of transport (29%).

What we heard from the community conversations

Participating in organised sport (53%) was the most popular activity, followed by socialising, meeting friends and family (21%). Walking, recreation or exercising and volunteering, conservation or citizen science activities were also popular (all 16%).

When asked what they most valued about parks and open space in your area, the groups identified the following:



Ease of access: Respondents enjoyed easily accessing parks and open space in the Shire, noting the availability and ease of access to a variety of different open spaces in relatively close proximity to most communities.

“Proximity of open space close to residential areas and schools”
Baxter Residents and Traders Progress Action Committee.



Enjoying nature: Respondents valued the environmental beauty of the Shire, noting the unique bushland and abundance of natural open spaces.

“We have a unique Bushland, fabulous walking tracks and a peaceful area”
Olivers Creek Bushland Reserve Friends Group.



The provision of dog facilities was also valued by people who enjoyed the availability of off leash dog parks.

“We value the fact that it is a lead-free open space within walking distance of where we live”
Bittern Dog Park Shenanigans.

What we heard from key stakeholders

Popular uses of open space among community groups include formal and informal sports, hosting community events, volunteering, and conservation.

Taking a closer look at different groups in our community



Gender

- Males are slightly more likely than females to visit parks daily (57% to 53%). When it comes to the duration of visits, females tend to stay longer, with a quarter (25%) spending 1 to 2 hours compared to males (12%).
- Walking is the most popular activity for females and males, though a significantly higher proportion of males (98%) reported walking than females (58%). Women are more likely to supervise children and socialise than men. On the other hand, men show a greater inclination towards exercising the dog and cycling.
- When deciding which park to visit, females place more importance on the condition of children’s playgrounds, the amount of shade, and personal safety than males. Males focus on cleanliness and accessibility.
- Men are more satisfied with cleanliness/lack of litter, the condition of grass, and personal safety than women. Women report higher levels of satisfaction with the condition of children’s playgrounds and accessibility to people of all abilities.



Age

- Younger age groups (15-34) are more likely to visit parks weekly, while older age groups (65+) predominantly visit daily. The youngest age group (15-24) also has the highest rate of park non-use.
- Younger age groups (15-34) are more likely to run/jog and cycle in parks, while middle-aged groups (35-54) are more likely to supervise children and participate in social activities. Older age groups (55+) predominantly walk and walk their dogs.
- Younger age groups (15-34) prioritise lighting and personal safety, while middle-aged groups (35-54) focus on children’s play areas. Older age groups (65+) value the presence of trees and well-maintained grass, with cleanliness being universally important.
- All age groups were satisfied with park cleanliness except those born between 1940 and 1949, who reported the lowest satisfaction with cleanliness. The presence of trees was well-received by middle-aged to younger groups. Younger respondents are generally more satisfied with park features, yet they share concerns about toilet facilities with all age groups.



Other groups

- People living with disabilities prefer parks in good condition and with accessibility features. However, they report the lowest satisfaction with toilets (1.93 out of 5) compared to all other subgroups, including age and gender.
- Families with children visit parks frequently, largely to supervise children on play equipment and socialise. Their decision factors and satisfaction levels emphasise the importance of safety, cleanliness, and the condition of playground equipment.
- Nearly all dog owners use parks regularly, with activities centred around walking and exercising their dogs. They value cleanliness, safety, and dog-friendly facilities.

BARRIERS TO USE

What we heard from the online and intercept surveys



Personal safety: Intercept survey participants noted a concern for personal safety as a barrier to using open space. The concerns were largely related to a lack of lighting and antisocial behaviour in parks. Lighting in parks and footpaths was essential for improving feelings of safety, particularly for women.

“Lighting on trails and paths, especially in winter, is something that can provide a sense of safety without impacting wildlife. Sometimes, security and safety can be a concern.”



Unsafe walking or cycling access to parks: Respondents to the intercept survey noted the lack of paths forcing pedestrians and cyclists onto the road, lack of pedestrian crossings, and uneven or damaged paths, particularly close to the beach, which see build-ups of sand limiting the accessibility of paths, which becomes particularly heightened for people with mobility issues.

“There’s no access via footpaths. My kids and I often have to walk on busy roads when we are going to the park because there are no paths, which can feel very unsafe.”



Dogs in parks: Respondents were concerned about dogs in parks that were not considered dog parks and on beaches, and they were keen to see more signage and enforcement of dog-on-lead areas.

What we heard from the community conversations



Condition of sports fields: Concerns were raised over the condition of some sports facilities within the Shire, which limited the use of these assets and caused safety concerns. Drainage was a key concern, with some concerns that drainage issues are preventing the use of these assets and causing severe damage.

“Yes - the lack of drainage makes our grounds muddy and unusable, we have to cancel games regularly. The surfaces are also extremely poor for soccer”
Somerville Eagles Soccer Club



Poor grass condition: The condition of the grass presented a barrier to some, who noted that long grass prevents people from using open spaces. Concerns were also raised about the risks of snakes.

“Lack of play equipment, shade and seating. There is generally poor maintenance allowing long grass and the risk of snakes”
Baxter Residents and Traders Progress Action Committee



Unsafe walking or cycling access to parks was raised, with concerns relating to uneven paths that prevent people with mobility issues from using them.

What we heard from key stakeholders



Lack of infrastructure and amenities: Concern with the lack of necessary facilities like women's sports change facilities, signage, footpaths, picnic facilities, and public toilets, which can hinder the full use of open spaces.



Poor maintenance and upkeep: Concerns about a lack of maintenance deters the community groups from using these spaces.



Limited accessibility: Poor or limited accessibility is an ongoing barrier in many areas of the Shire, including the condition or lack of footpaths, safe roads and trails for biking, and poorly accessible park facilities like seats and tables.



Disconnection and fragmentation of open spaces: Lack of linkages between open spaces was a concern, as participants perceived there to be a lack of connectivity between different parks, making it difficult for the community to access parks and open spaces and for children to ride or walk to school.

What we heard from the submissions



Financial constraints: Concerns were raised over the perceived financial constraints of Council and the State government for implementing open space strategies and developing new facilities.



Lack of maintenance: including uneven and poorly maintained trails, lack of signage and information, and inadequate lighting.








Fragmented and disconnected spaces: The fragmentation and poor connectivity of open spaces limit their accessibility and usability.



Lack of facilities or amenities: The absence of facilities to support volleyball and amenities such as public toilets, parking spaces, and shade in playgrounds also hinder the use and enjoyment of open spaces.

What we heard from the online and intercept surveys

-  **Nature and environmental conservation:** Respondents advocate for prioritising nature within parks, including protecting natural areas, removing invasive species, replanting with native vegetation, and creating wild spaces to boost biodiversity and environmental engagement.
-  **Park maintenance:** Feedback points to concerns over park upkeep, with issues like overgrown grass, weeds, and deteriorating play equipment. There's a clear call for improved maintenance to enhance safety and usability.
-  **Dog off-leash areas:** There's a demand for more and better-facilitated dog off-leash areas, including fenced dog parks and designated beach areas, with particular emphasis on safety for smaller breeds and enhanced dog-friendly amenities.
-  **Physical activity spaces:** Respondents expressed a strong interest in expanding parks and open spaces that cater to physical activity, informal sports, and mixed uses. They are requesting larger areas with fitness equipment and versatile spaces for a variety of activities.
-  **Shade:** The need for more shade in parks is highlighted, with suggestions for both natural and built solutions to provide relief over playgrounds, seating areas, dog parks, and foreshores, enhancing comfort and usability.

“More trees to account for the loss of vegetation and canopy cover from development. Improving drainage and stormwater management:”

“I'd like to see more multi-use spaces. Lots of other shires are building new parks that have pump tracks, playgrounds, and basketball courts. We need more of those. The Hastings active rec hub is great, but I'd like to see more of them around.”

What we heard from the community conversations

-  **Increased sports facilities and fields:** There's a significant call for more and improved sports facilities, including restoring unusable areas and enhancing existing fields to support a variety of sports. Respondents also express a need for more versatile mixed-use courts and facilities to accommodate various sports and activities such as pickleball, hockey and bocce.
-  **Improved maintenance and grass condition:** There is a call for stronger maintenance, including regular mowing and facility upgrades, which are necessary for a better user experience.
-  **More spaces for physical activity and informal sports:** There's a clear desire for additional open spaces catering to informal sports and recreation, including amenities like BBQ areas, picnic tables, and shaded seating. Such spaces should also support emerging sports and activities.
-  **Enhanced nature and environmental conservation:** The feedback emphasises the need for more natural spaces and conservation efforts. Improving access to nature reserves, protecting unique bushland, and establishing dedicated trails for safe recreational activities are highlighted as priorities.

“Somerville needs purpose-built soccer facilities. Our club has 12 junior boys' and girls' teams, a women's team, and four men's teams. It is very difficult to manage such poor facilities and grounds with no drainage and no flat surfaces. These grounds we do use become unusable for us very quickly”
Somerville Eagles Soccer Club.

“At least one full-size hockey pitch with adequate club rooms and change facilities, located within the Mornington Peninsula - not the Frankston City Council area”
Mornington Peninsula Hockey Club.

What we heard from key stakeholders



Connectivity: Community groups expressed the need for improved connectivity between different open spaces and town centres.



Maintenance and upgrades in open spaces to ensure better accessibility, inclusivity, and community well-being.



Environmental conservation in open spaces is a significant concern for the community, and there is a call for more planning, conservation and maintenance to ensure the long-term sustainability of these spaces.

What we heard from submissions



Preserving unique open spaces: There's an emphasis on protecting distinct natural areas of the Mornington Peninsula, including the Green Wedge, National Parks, and bushland reserves.



Accessibility and Inclusivity: Ensuring that open spaces are accessible and welcoming to individuals of all physical abilities is a priority. This includes the integration of facilities such as accessible toilets and changing rooms to support women's sports.



Provision of spaces for recreational and informal sports: There were calls for an increase in informal recreational amenities across the Shire, such as playgrounds, picnic areas, and mixed-use courts.

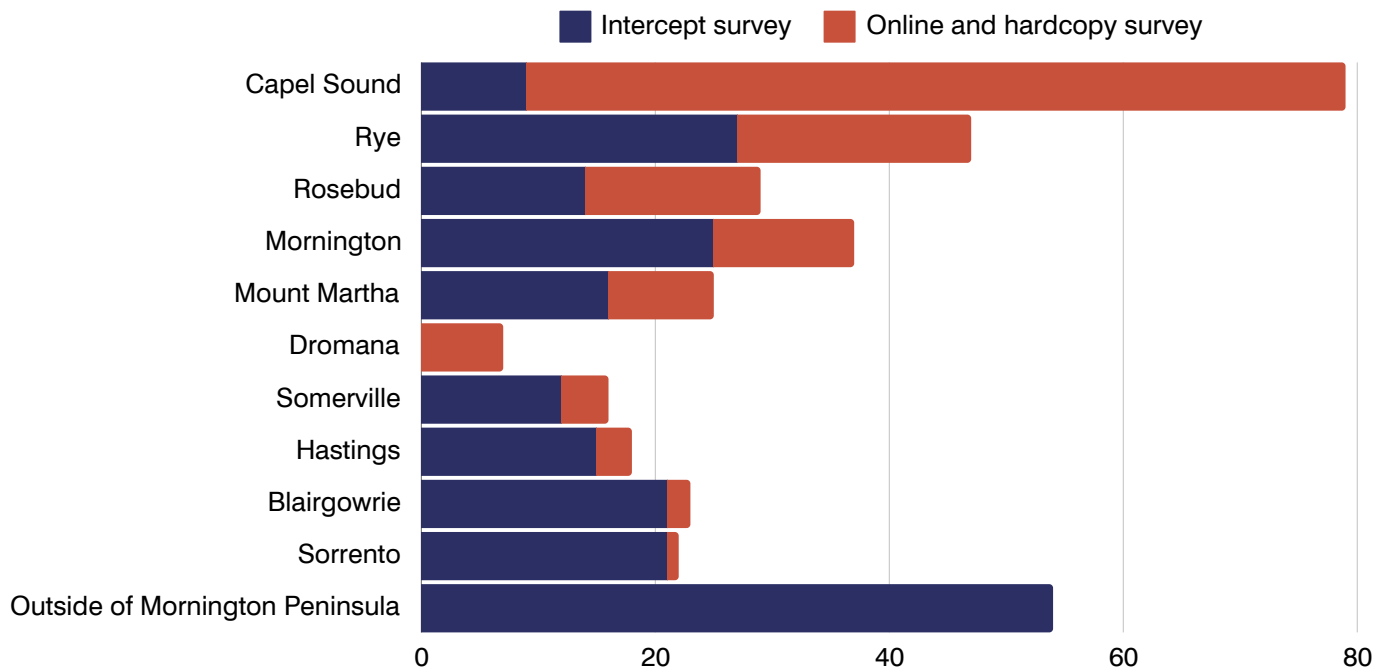


Environmental sustainability: There's a strong desire for open spaces to embody environmental sustainability principles. This includes the adoption of sustainable design elements and initiatives to educate the public about the Peninsula's cultural heritage and biodiversity.

WHO WE HEARD FROM

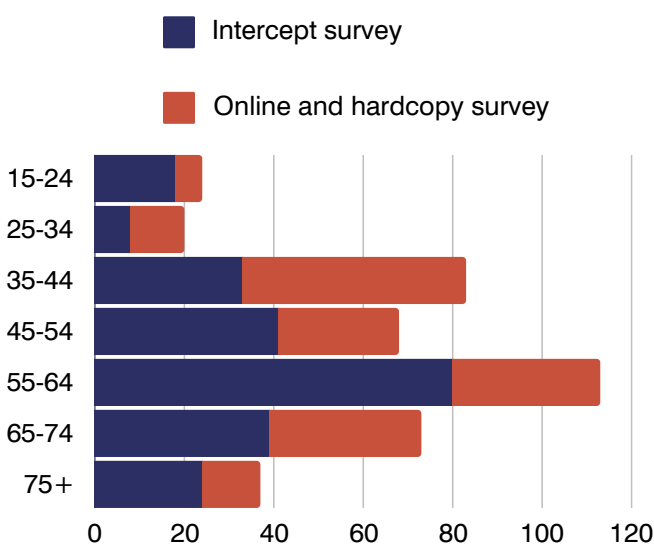
Suburb

Capel Sound was the most engaged suburb, this was followed by a high participation rate from visitors from outside of the Shire who provided feedback through the intercept survey.



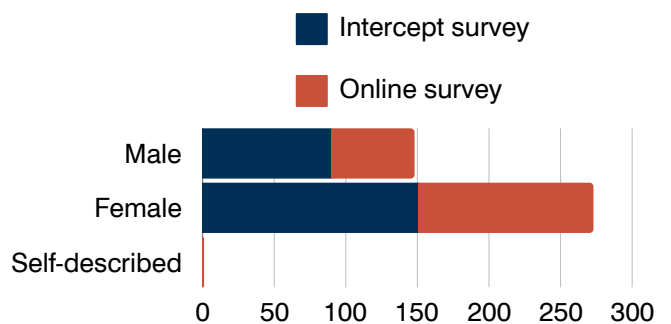
Age

The 55-64 age group has the highest representation, making up 27% of the total respondents, the 35-44 age group also constitutes a substantial portion, with 20%.



Gender

A higher number of females (65%) participated in the engagement than men (35%).



WHO WE HEARD FROM

ONLINE SURVEY

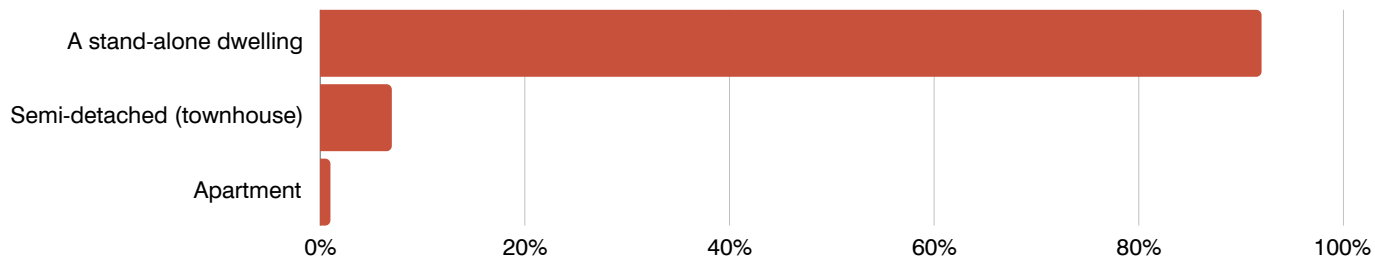
People living with children under 12



People living with a health condition or a disability



Housing type



Members of sports and recreation clubs



People living with dogs



Member of a volunteer group that works with public open space





i.e.
community



**MORNINGTON
PENINSULA**
Shire