

Survey results confirm Bibbulmun Track's increasing profile overseas

The Bibbulmun Track is now one of the State's major tourism and recreation drawcards with walkers making 137,500 visits in a 12-month period and spending an estimated \$21 million annually.

These statistics are part of the findings of the Bibbulmun Track User Research Project announced by Premier Geoff Gallop earlier in the year.

The Premier said the research project highlighted the great success the Bibbulmun Track had achieved in the State and internationally since its extensive redevelopment was opened five years ago.

"The Bibbulmun Track is now world-renowned with many thousands of people having walked on it and camped in its 48 campsites, generating many millions of dollars in economic benefits for the South-West region," he said.

"The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) and the Bibbulmun Track Foundation have done an excellent job in managing and promoting the track and in providing users with a high standard of experiences and facilities.

"Results of the User Research Project highlights the important role the track plays in delivering social, economic and environmental benefits for the local and wider communities."

The Premier said a Lotterywest Trails Funding Program grant of \$25,000 enabled the Foundation and CALM to conduct a user survey last year between April and October at 12 different and diverse locations along the track.

"A range of sites were surveyed including popular tourist spots, remote locations and popular day walks and local walking spots by a small army of dedicated volunteers," he said.

"The survey results suggested that the Foundation's marketing strategies are bearing fruit and that the track had a profile far beyond WA - highlighted by the fact that one in three overseas and interstate visitors using the track indicated that they had intended to walk the track before arriving in WA."

Other results of the survey include:

- Walkers made 137,500 visits to the track during the 12-month period;
- Walkers on the track spend around 280,000 user days each year - an increase of 65,000 user days since a survey conducted by CALM in 1999.

- Seventy-two per cent undertook walks of one day or less in duration with 20 per cent walking two to three days, and eight per cent undertaking longer hikes including end-to-end walks.
- An even distribution between male and female walkers, a great improvement from seven years ago when the majority of track walkers in all age categories were male.
- An even spread across the middle age groups, with more than 80 per cent of walkers being between 25 to 60 years of age and the rest distributed evenly between youth and the over 60s.
- Zero percent of walkers surveyed expressed even mild dissatisfaction with the track while 82 per cent rated the track at either six or seven out of seven in terms of how pleased they were with their walk.
- 81% of people in Perth and 91% of people in the South West are aware of the Bibbulmun Track.
- 93 per cent of people surveyed on track and 62 per cent surveyed by phone who were aware of the track expected to walk on it again.

The Premier said the results clearly showed that the track had very strong support from the Western Australian public and visiting tourists.

"It is doubtful that any other passive recreation facility could match this enormous awareness level in the wider community and indicates the important role the track plays in progressing the State Government's physical activity strategies," he said.

"Well marketed and managed walking trails such as this are a potent force in motivating the community to adopt a more active, healthier lifestyle."

Dr Gallop said survey results also substantiated and added weight to previous estimates that the track generated substantial economic benefits for the State.

"An estimated \$21 million annually is spent by track walkers on a range of goods and services such as equipment, transport, accommodation, meals and food supplies, with much of this extra income being injected directly into regional economies," he said.

"These exciting results have paved the way for the development of an effective methodology by consultants, Colmar Brunton, in conjunction with the Foundation and CALM's Tracks & Trails Unit, which can be applied to many other longer walking tracks across this State and Australia - a first for Australia and possibly the world."

"The results of this survey will help the Foundation, CALM and the tourism industry in managing the track to ensure its future economic, social and environmental sustainability."