

Merimbula Boardwalk and Foreshore Concept Design Listening Report



Introduction

Council is developing a Concept Design to upgrade the Merimbula boardwalk.

From 19 July to 8 August 2021 Council sought feedback from the community on how people use the boardwalk now and how they would like to use the boardwalk in the future.

A survey was provided on the [project page](#) including five questions allowing people to provide feedback on why they use the boardwalk, what they value most, and what could be enhanced. Two pop-up sessions were held at each end of the boardwalk from 9am to 12pm on Wednesday 28 and Saturday 31 July to promote the survey and conduct face to face engagement.

Key insights from the engagement are summarised in this Listening Report. This information will be used to inform the draft Concept Design which will be released for public consultation in late 2021.

Key insights from the community

Key insights from the community and key themes are provided below in no order of precedence.

1. How do you use the boardwalk?

Key themes:

- Walking
- Running
- Sitting and taking in the natural surrounds
- Meditation
- Walking the dog on leash
- Educating children on shore and marine life
- Photography
- Access to back lake for stand-up paddle (SUP) board and kayaking, i.e. launching small watercraft
- 'Parkrun'
- Fish or to access fishing spots

Generally, most people either walk or run when they use the boardwalk, followed by sitting and taking in the peace and tranquillity. Other activities included walking the dog, photography, bird watching, launching small watercraft, meditating, fossicking, 'Parkrun', and fishing or accessing fishing spots.

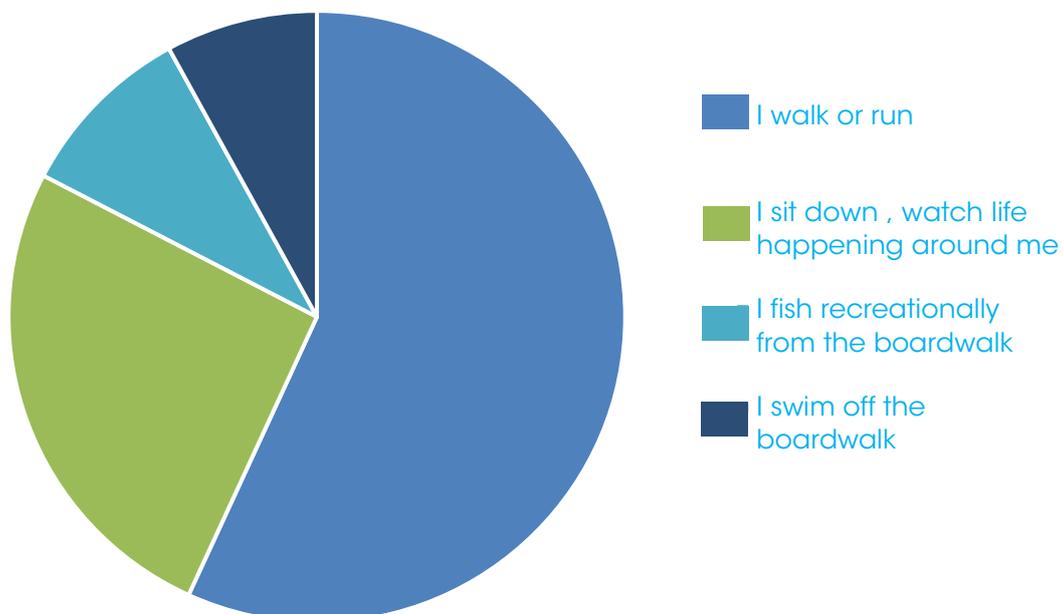


Figure 1: Responses to Question 1: How do you use the boardwalk?

2. Why do you use the boardwalk?

Key themes:

- To connect with nature
- To exercise in nature
- Good for wellbeing
- The flora and fauna provides interest, e.g. artistic pursuits, nature observations
- It's relatively flat and has rest areas
- The social interactions
- Dogs are allowed on a leash
- A convenient way to access town
- Something to enjoy for the whole family

Generally, the reason most people use the boardwalk is to slow down and connect with nature, followed by a need to exercise. Many people provided direct link between the need to exercise in nature for wellbeing. Other reasons included that: it provides an opportunity to photograph flora and fauna, sunsets and shore birds in particular; it is a relatively flat and easy walk suitable for a range of abilities; it's a social place and people enjoy it regularly with friends or enjoy greeting other regular users; it allows for on leash dog walking; it provides a convenient and easy access into town that is flat; it is a perfect walk for the whole family to enjoy, no matter what their age; and there is a kiosk and refreshments to enjoy at one end.

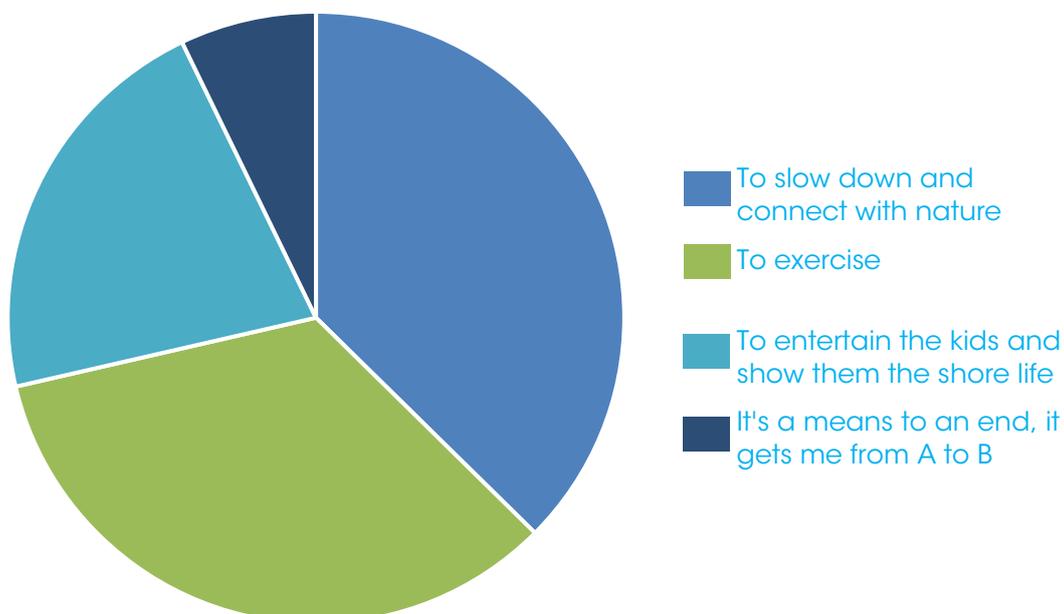


Figure 2: Responses to Question 2: Why do you use the boardwalk?

3. What do you value most about the boardwalk?

Key themes:

- The environment, natural surroundings
- Access to the water for swimming, getting feet wet or small watercraft
- The seating and platforms for resting
- Interpretive signage and interesting information
- It's simplistic design; the way it blends into its surroundings
- Dogs allowed on leash
- Pathway connection to town and school

Generally, people value the environment and the nature experience associated with the boardwalk. Other values included: access to the lake and the experience of walking over the water; the scenery, views and the serenity; the simplicity of the design and its materials that provide a strong connection with nature i.e. timber and no balustrade; people mentioned how they valued the seating, resting, jetty platforms and picnic spots; being able to walk dogs on leash; the pathway connection into town and school; the existing alignment over land and water providing different perspectives.

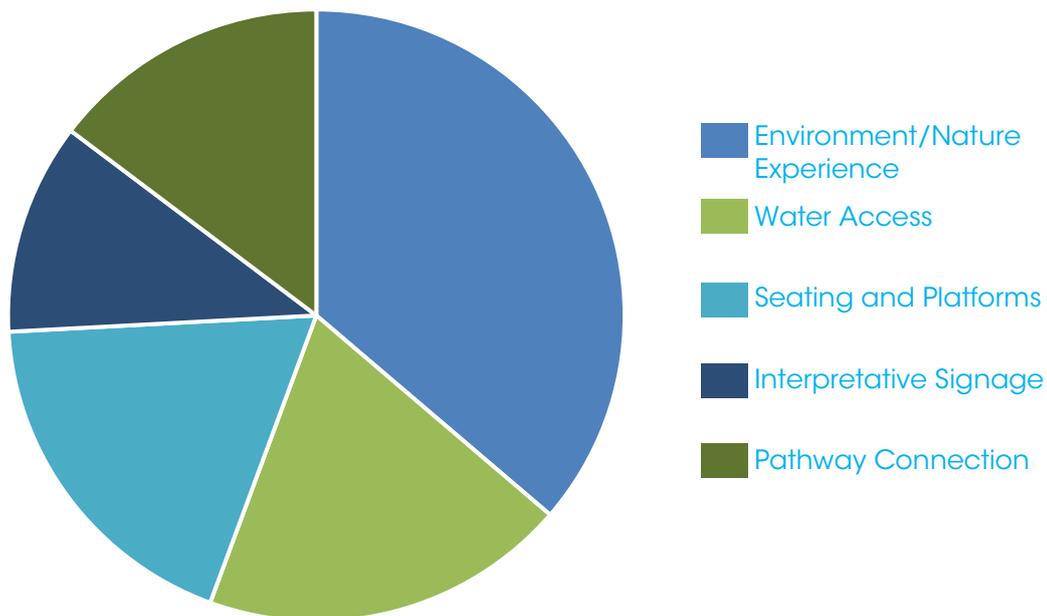


Figure 3: Responses to Question 3: What do you value most about the boardwalk?

4. What do you think is unique about the boardwalk and its experience?

Key themes:

- Peaceful connection to the natural environment
- Easy viewing of shore and marine life including fish, crustaceans, and water birds
- Feeling of walking on water, no balustrade, it's an immersive experience into the surroundings
- It's natural design merges into the landscape and provides an opportunity for people to feel 'at one' with nature
- Changes depending on the tide, sun and weather
- Relaxing and peaceful way to exercise
- A family friendly walk
- Unique 'Parkrun' course – a feature in Australia.

Many people mentioned the way in which the boardwalk is **immersed in its environment** is unique; it is low key and subtle. The unique feeling of '**walking on water**', and the lack of balustrade enables good viewing no matter what your height.

"Sometimes it feels like you are walking on water. It's magic."

It provides **easy viewing of shore and marine life** including fish, crustaceans, and water birds.

The way the boardwalk **intermingles in an unobtrusive way through mangroves and saltmarsh**; it's natural design merges into the landscape and provides an opportunity for people to feel 'at one' with nature.

"Peaceful walk, chance to walk above shallow water to see marine animals"

The scenery is unique, and **changes depending on the tide, sun and weather** so that every day presents people with a different experience, view, and colour of Merimbula Lake. This provides never-ending photo opportunities for photography enthusiasts and special encounters with nature for nature lovers.

"Love the fact that depending on the tide you are either over water looking at the fish, or over sand watching the crabs!"

It provides a **relaxing and peaceful way to exercise** and enjoy the lake **away from roads and traffic**.

It feels remote and provides a backdrop of birdsong.

"It is just a very pleasant walk away from the traffic."

Many mentioned that it is a family friendly walk; a lovely flat walk for all ages. Offering a marine and nature experience which is great for everyone.

The unique 'Parkrun' course which is a feature across Australia, many people travel to Merimbula specifically to complete this course.

"It has a reputation for being one of the best Parkrun courses in Australia."

5. How do you think the boardwalk could be enhanced?

Key themes:

- Wider
- Repair gravel sections to be less boggy, slippery and muddy
- Additional jetties, viewing platforms and seating areas
- Entry points to sand and water that respect the environment
- Lighting
- Formalise bush tracks and access to residential streets
- Safer connection across market street
- Improved interpretive signage particularly displaying information on the Yuin Nation
- Better wayfinding and directional signage
- Removal of invasive species and revegetation of native species

An overwhelming proportion of people said that they would like to see the **boardwalk widened**. Key reasons were to: allow two wheelchairs, prams and people walking with dogs to pass more easily, i.e. “to enable ease of passing other users coming from the opposite direction, many have prams (which can be quite wide) and dogs.”

The next most common response was to **repair the gravel sections** of the footpath, so they are less boggy, slippery and muddy, particularly the western end. Some noted the obvious presence of aboriginal middens and suggested that these be better protected.

People requested that there be **additional jetties, viewing platforms and access points** such as steps and ramps into sections of water to enable swimming and fishing in the deeper sections of the lake. There were requests for a larger fishing platform at the fisheries end near the bridge. Additionally, people mentioned the need for more areas to step away from the main track so that when stopping and watching the fauna and marine life, the main thoroughfare would remain obstructed, i.e. “places where you can dangle your feet in the water or fish without blocking the boardwalk.”

Some people requested that **lighting** be considered, for example low level or strip lighting that would cause minimal light pollution.

People voiced their love for the **bush tracks** that part way with the boardwalk and run along the sewer line and some property boundaries; they felt they could be enhanced to provide better drainage, be less muddy and boggy and provide better access to residential streets, noting that the boardwalk is people’s connection to the town of Merimbula.

“The walking tracks that branch on and off the boardwalk are also an integral part of the boardwalk’s appeal.”

A few people said that the **connection across Market Street** into town needed to be made better, perhaps going under the bridge or made safer crossing the road.

There were suggestions regarding the **interpretive signage**, and that it could be enhanced and improved to be more engaging. People wanted to see more aboriginal interpretation, and stories of the Yuin Nation displayed. Additionally, people wanted to see more information on identifying birds and plants.

“It could be enhanced by updating the boardwalk signage with brighter graphics and text, as well as including more information on the wildlife (e.g common types of fish found in the water) and indigenous place names (e.g the name of the local traditional owners and the names they used for this area.”

Better **wayfinding and distance markers** were also common suggestions.

There were comments around invasive species along the boardwalk and the potential for removal and **revegetation works**.

Some people suggested the inclusion of bikes, however a large proportion of respondents requested that the **trail remain pedestrian only**.

A small proportion of people said that they would like to see a balustrade applied to the boardwalk, however a large proportion requested that **balustrades be kept to a minimum** to retain the visual amenity and subtle character of the structure.

What's Next?

The information provided by the community and summarised in this Listening Report will be used to inform the draft Concept Design which will be released for public consultation in late 2021.

Council has allocated funding to complete Stage 2 of the project for the Merimbula Boardwalk and Foreshore Path Upgrade project.



Timeline for Stage 2 Works

June 2021	Site assessments
July 2021	Community engagement and online survey
November 2021	Draft concept design completed
December 2021	Public consultation on draft concept design
February 2022	Final concept design completed
April 2022	Completion of Stage 2. Project on hold until funding is received for Stage 3 – Develop and Stage 4 – Deliver.

Thank You for Your Feedback

664 people
provided
survey
submissions

648 people
visited the
project page

2 face to face
pop-up
sessions were
held on site