



Robyn Parker MP

Minister for the Environment

Minister for Heritage

MEDIA RELEASE

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MORE PEOPLE THAN EVER ENJOYING OUR BOTANIC GARDENS AND NATIONAL PARKS

Online campsite bookings, the expansion of a dynamic new website and the abolition of entry fees to Western Sydney botanic gardens, have resulted in more people than ever now enjoying the scenic beauty of the State's national parks and botanic gardens.

Environment Minister Robyn Parker said today tens of thousands of additional families have benefited from the NSW Government's decision to abolish entry fees to the Australian Botanic Garden at Mount Annan and the Blue Mountains Botanic Garden at Mount Tomah.

And with the NSW Government committing \$40 million to make national parks even more attractive to visitors and the increasing popularity of the new National Parks website, there has been a 10 per cent increase in bookings for campsites throughout the State.

Speaking on a visit to the Australian Botanic Garden, Ms Parker said new data shows that in the 12 months after fees were scrapped in April 2011, almost 295,000 people visited the Garden - an increase of more than 206,000 visitors for the 12 months before abolition of fees.

At the Blue Mountains Botanic Garden more than 115,000 visitors attended in the 12 months after the fees were scrapped, an increase of almost 45,000 visitors from the previous 12 months.

Ms Parker said that since the abolition of fees, the Australian Botanic Garden has received more than half a million visitors to December 2012 and the Blue Mountains Botanic Garden more than 240,000 visitors for the same period.

"I'm delighted thousands of families and seniors have benefited from this initiative which has opened up these beautiful gardens to them free of charge," Ms Parker said.

"I understand the cost of living pressures being faced by families, particularly those in Western Sydney, and if by removing this fee we have made it easier for them to enjoy a picnic then that's terrific.

"It is only equitable for families in Western Sydney and the Blue Mountains to also have free access to their Botanic Gardens."

The Western Sydney Parklands is also experiencing increased visitations with more than 20 per cent more visitors taking in the Parklands' attractions. In 2011, almost one million people visited the Parklands compared with less than 800,000 the previous year.

During this time, \$ 5.8 million was invested in upgrading playgrounds, renewing urban farming, opening tourist destinations and regenerating bushland and wildlife diversity across the Parklands.

"Two of the playgrounds have recently won state-wide awards, and are very popular with families who travel from across Western Sydney to enjoy them," Ms Parker said.

Ms Parker said that the dynamic new website www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au which was launched last year, had been expanded for the summer holidays allowing the public to take in spectacular holiday destinations, natural local attractions and fun activities for all the family.

"The website now features more than 180 parks in every corner of NSW, close to 1000 park attractions and thousands of images and videos," Ms Parker said.

"An additional 40 extra on-park holiday properties and 30 extra camping locations (each containing multiple sites) are featured on the website, a total of over 70 stay options, all of which can be booked online.

"With the rollout of the second phase of the website we are continuing our commitment to double tourism expenditure in NSW by 2020."

Ms Parker said the new four lane entrance to the Australian Botanic Garden on Narellan Road which was opened by the Premier in September 2011, has provided safer and easier access for visitors.

"It's also a welcome addition for tourists, with interstate and overseas visitors now able to enter through this magnificent new gateway with landscaping that reflects the scale and quality of the Garden experience," Ms Parker said.