

Surfing injects almost \$3 billion into the Australian economy each year, research shows

June 19 2024



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It's no secret Aussies love to surf. It's one of our favorite pastimes, but it turns out riding the perfect wave offers more than just the ultimate

thrill—it also provides a major boost to the economy, according to new research from The Australian National University (ANU).

The researchers found [surfing](#) injects almost \$3 billion into the Australian economy each year. The research is published in [Marine Policy](#). Co-authors Asad Yusoff from ANU and Mark Lane and Katja Verreydt from Surfing WA contributed to the findings.

"We asked participants how much they spent on domestic travel and how often they'd traveled to go surfing during the last 12 months, but also how much they spent on new boards, wetsuits and other surf-related accessories," survey lead Dr. Ana Manero, from ANU, said.

"Our research shows adult surfers spend more than \$3,700 per person, each year.

"Using data from the Australian Sports Commission, which shows there are more than 720,000 active adult Australian surfers, we found that surfing injects at least \$2.71 billion into the economy each year.

"This is a conservative figure at best because it doesn't factor in overseas visitors who travel to Australia to go surfing or money generated through professional surfing."

The nationwide survey of 569 people found that more than 94 percent of respondents reported surfing had a positive impact on their physical and mental well-being and ability to deal with stress in their life.

Meantime, more than 80 percent of respondents believe surfing helps foster a greater sense of connectedness to their community.

"Although surfing is typically perceived as a thrill-seeking activity and an individual sport, it's actually a much more social endeavor than

previously thought," Dr. Manero said.

According to Dr. Manero, Australia's surf breaks are increasingly coming under threat from a range of issues including [climate change](#), [coastal erosion](#), poor water quality and overcrowding pressures.

She argues governments have for too long "overlooked" the value of surf breaks and sees an opportunity for better policies and local coastal management plans to help safeguard our nation's surfing environments and ensure they are more resilient.

"Surf breaks are valuable natural assets, but waves only form under a very delicate set of conditions that can be easily altered by anything that we do to the coast," Dr. Manero said.

"Things like sand nourishment programs, the construction of infrastructure, the expansion of a marina, can impact how waves form and how often they break.

"A previous ANU study found a wave off the town of Mundaka in northern Spain disappeared because of changes to the sand bar caused by dredging in the nearby river. That resulted in the cancelation of a competitive event and led to a slowdown in economic activity in the area.

"Meantime, closer to home, the expansion of the Ocean Reef Marina in Perth in Western Australia caused the disappearance of three surf breaks in 2022. An [artificial reef](#) has now been proposed, but it would have been better to recognize the value of the natural breaks in the first place."

Dr. Manero said Australia has an opportunity to follow other countries and adopt formal legal protections to preserve the country's surfing

environments.

"Unlike countries like New Zealand and Peru, where surf breaks are recognized by national-level legislation, Australia's environmental laws and policies largely overlook surf breaks as valuable natural assets. Across the country, only 20 surf breaks have some form of legal protection," she said.

"This means that in Australia you can basically make a wave disappear and no one bats an eyelid because these surf breaks sit in a legal vacuum."

More information: Ana Manero et al, A national assessment of the economic and wellbeing impacts of recreational surfing in Australia, *Marine Policy* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.marpol.2024.106267](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2024.106267)

Provided by The Australian National University

Citation: Surfing injects almost \$3 billion into the Australian economy each year, research shows (2024, June 19) retrieved 20 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-06-surfing-billion-australian-economy-year.html>

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