Good Morning,

Thanks for the chance to provide feedback on this important draft MTB strategy for the Illawarra region. I strongly support the development of this strategy. Overall, the proposed plan for MTB trails in the Illawarra is impressive, representing a huge step forward for mountain bikers & the wider community of the Illawarra.

I acknowledge that Aboriginal people are the original custodians of the Illawarra area, including Mt Keira and the surrounding escarpment area. Any developments need to respect their wishes and cultural connection to the country where these trails are proposed.

The development of a legal trail network in the region is well overdue. Mountain biking is a fast growing sport, popular across all age groups, and there is a large and increasing demand for legal trails. I recognise the growing impact of increasing numbers of MTB riders on the escarpment and commend the plan to design & construct sustainable, well managed trails. It is great to see a mix of independent, one-direction riding and walking tracks proposed. With suitable signage and education, this will improve safety and enjoyment on the trails for a range of users.

Given the cross-tenure nature of the plan, I would encourage NPWS to negotiate a more specifically inclusive & integrative approach to MTB by Wollongong City Council (WCC) in the PoM for the Mt Keira Summit Park. For example, the draft strategy refers to ‘a beginner’s loop at the Summit’, however, Map 2 (Mt Keira) provides no information about that trail, nor does WCC’s PoM provide any specific reference to it. The original Dirt Art plan includes a beginner’s loop in the Summit Park and I suggest that, if that proposed trail location isn’t appropriate, council staff and NPWS work with stakeholders to identify a more suitable option.

Riders are also wanting to give back to the riding community. There is already a strong volunteer network of riders that currently look after the maintenance of existing trails and they will be more than happy to continue to do so for the legal tracks. I believe that in similar trail building/maintenance projects undertaken in other areas of NSW (Menai, Hornsby, Blue Mountains etc) a significant number of local people have volunteered to assist with trail building and/or rehabilitation of bushland.

To be effective, I think it is important to satisfy the need for both cross country trails (climbing and descending) and gravity orientated trails (descending focus). It is also necessary to satisfy the need for both beginner and more advanced trails. If this variety is not adequately catered for, unfortunately, I would expect significant illegal trail building to continue. The draft does cater for a small amount of ‘black’ trails, although this is minimal when compared to the amount of blue and green trails. There is also a big lack of ‘black’ trails proposed on Mt Keira and Mt Kembla. This
approach does not accurately represent the proportion of advanced, gravity riders in the community, nor the locations in which they currently ride.

There is also a need to have more black trails incorporated in Stage 1 of the development. Given the importance of reducing the impact of riders upon unregulated trails in undesirable locations, it’s imperative that all levels of rider are catered for in the first phase of development.

The draft MTB strategy lacks detail around the provision of appropriate facilities, such as amenities and parking. The provision of such facilities at various locations around the trail network, including the Mt Keira Summit Park, is vitally important to the long-term success of the project.

Linking the Mt Keira and Balgownie trail networks is obviously a difficult challenge, due to the motorway dividing the two areas. However, as a long-term goal, it would be worth considering a rider/pedestrian bridge, located adjacent to the truck stop at the top of Mt Ousley. Such a link would not only dramatically expand and improve the MTB trail network, it would also open the way for an extended hiking trail network, stretching from the Royal NP in the north, through the escarpment and linking with other NP’s to the south of the Illawarra.

The bushland on Mt Keira is beautiful, with stunning views throughout the ascent to the summit. The proper development and management of a mountain bike and walking track network has such great potential as an attraction for local residents and for tourism, because it combines fun and challenging trails (riding and walking) with a particularly beautiful environment.

The Draft MTB Strategy for the Illawarra is a fantastic starting point, providing a great foundation for a network of MTB trails in the region. With some minor additions and changes, this plan will form the basis for a unique and outstanding MTB trail network that will benefit the Illawarra for generations to come.