



**ILLAWARRA
BIRDERS**

ILLAWARRA BIRDERS Inc.
PO Box 1355 Wollongong NSW 2500
Email: info@illawarrabirders.org
Website: www.illawarrabirders.org

Illawarra Birders Inc. **strongly object to** the Draft Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy.

We have numerous objections to this proposal – please also see our submission re- **Proposed Impacts to Wildlife**

Development and Maintenance

- We would like more details about who will develop and then maintain the tracks?
- How will the impacts of the trails development be mitigated for vegetation and fauna communities existing on the escarpment?
- How will biking tracks be made distinct from walking tracks as the two are not compatible?
- What is to stop MORE tracks being opened up illegally if these tracks are created?
- Who will be responsible for closing tracks in the event of bad weather to prevent damage/accidents ?
- The Site Selection of the bike strategy states that *“The selection and assessment of sites was based upon ...”* and lists numerous factors. We would like to see details of these assessments particularly the assessments said to have been conducted in respect to native plants and wildlife.

If these trails are opened up:

- Who will police the use of these trails? Currently there are a myriad of existing illegal tracks. Residents from Balgownie and neighbouring suburbs report they hear motor bikes in the bushland (on the escarpment) day and night and feel that NOTHING is done to stop this despite complaints to council, police and National Parks and Wildlife Service. WHO will police the trails and HOW can this be done if it is currently unmanageable? WHAT will change to make MORE trails become manageable?
- Illawarra Birders survey areas in the Illawarra Region for birds regularly therefore we have seen the impacts of bikes in our forested areas already. When Blackbutt Reserve opened up it was agreed Grey Headed Flying fox roosting areas would be out of bounds – this has NOT happened and bikers can be found using ALL trails – trails are NOT well marked – time has seen increased bike activity there as well as issues with walkers safety.
- Croom Road has erosion issues caused by bikes and the impacts they have caused are immediately visible. When we survey this site quarterly we pick up bags of rubbish and see tyre prints where bikes have skidded, caused trail erosion and soil compaction and entered areas with clear signs stating they are closed trails for regeneration. We also see constant evidence of damaged and vandalised signage.



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- The Mountain Bikers claim that they already illegally use numerous tracks on the Illawarra Escarpment. This statement does not paint some members of this group of people in a favourable light. They have also stated they will just continue to use these trails illegally if the proposal is denied and that by agreeing to the proposal some of the trails they illegally use may be closed.
- Stating you 'break the law' and will continue to do so if not granted what you want does not seem like a logical progression – if you trespassed on someone's property without their permission and said you intended to just keep on doing so if they did not allow you to do this seems crazy!
- What is to stop the use of the new trails illegally by motor bikes, trikes, quad bikes and 4WD's etc.
- Has there been any studies done into stability of Mt Keira that relate directly to this strategy? – there have already been tracks closed due to erosion and rock falls that have still not been re-opened. The geological society has maps of areas of the escarpment that are known to be unstable.
- Who will monitor and control weeds introduced by the increased usage? – if bikes are brought from other areas they have the potential to introduce not only weed species but plant diseases that have the potential to severely impact the escarpment.
- Where will all of these users go to the toilet?? This will have impacts on the bushland. Mountain Bikers commonly spend 2-3 hours on average pursuing their sport.
- What plans are in place to deal with injuries to riders/ potential accidents/ injuries to wildlife

Finance

- Who will pay for creation of 82 km of trails, signage, impact studies necessary etc. This will be an expensive project and we would like to see the expenditure plan and exactly where all of the finance will come from.
- Who will pay for maintenance and track repairs?
- Who will pay when signs are damaged or vandalised to replace/ repair them?
- Who will pay for weed control and to remove pollution?



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Other Important Factors

In research for this submission we have looked at studies on the impacts of mountain biking. The majority have listed these areas of concern:

- Vegetation loss and compositional changes.
- Soil compaction.
- Trail incision
- Erosion - which increases storm water runoff, destroys habitats and ruins the trails for other bikers.
- The creation and maintenance of trail corridors also removes shrubs and trees, allowing greater sunlight exposure that favours a different set of groundcover plants within trail corridors.

What strategies are in place to address these impacts on new and existing trails?

Illawarra Birders Inc. members would like our questions answered. As you can clearly see we have a huge number of major concerns relating to this strategy and have begun discussions about the possible legal action/s we could take if plans for such a vast network of trails were to go ahead on the Illawarra escarpment.

The escarpment is supposed to be part of a 'green' conservation corridor that links Royal National Park with the Shoalhaven area. Crisscrossing this precious area with 82 kilometres of tracks for fast moving, relatively silent bikes to have the potential to impact this wildlife is NOT something our group can support.

Yours Sincerely
Michelle Rower
Conservation Officer
Illawarra Birders Inc.