



A division of NSW Business Chamber

Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Draft Strategy

Submission from the Illawarra Business
Chamber to the NSW Office of
Environment and Heritage

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Summary

The Illawarra Business Chamber (IBC) endorses the Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Draft Strategy ('the Draft Strategy'), prepared by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) and Wollongong City Council (WCC).

Illawarra Business Chamber/Illawarra First

The IBC is the Illawarra region's peak business organisation, dedicated to helping businesses of all sizes maximise their potential. The IBC directly represents some the 2,500 businesses.

Through initiatives such as Illawarra First, the IBC promotes the economic development of the Illawarra through evidence-based policies and targeted advocacy. Illawarra First membership comprises a select group of leading businesses in the Illawarra, sharing a commitment to driving the development and prosperity of the Illawarra.¹ Through their leadership and direction, the Chamber has commissioned research to advance the economic interests of the Illawarra.

The IBC is a Division of the NSW Business Chamber – a founding member of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Requirement

The IBC understands that the Draft Strategy proposes a sustainable network of mountain bike trails on the Illawarra escarpment, and that a coordinated government response to better manage use of the escarpment is necessary as:

- Mountain biking occurs on the escarpment both legally and illegally
- The demands and impacts of mountain bike use on the escarpment are increasing
- The condition and sustainability of the existing trail network varies greatly
- Environmental and cultural impacts of illegal use and ad-hoc trail development need to be reconciled.²

This joint undertaking by OEH and WCC is a creditable means through which to engage with Aboriginal people and the broader community about the proposal. Ultimately, mountain biking will continue on the Illawarra Escarpment, with or without a Strategy; however this presents an excellent opportunity to improve the amenity and derive significant economic benefit.

With successful adoption of the Draft Strategy, requisite environmental assessments and approvals will need to be undertaken and funding and management resources identified.

¹ Illawarra Business Chamber, *Illawarra First Membership*, <<https://www.nswbusinesschamber.com.au/About/Our-Locations/Illawarra-Region/About-Illawarra-Region/Illawarra-First-Members>>, accessed 20 November 2018.

² NSW Office of Environment and Heritage and Wollongong City Council, *Draft Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy*, <<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/Parks-management-other/illawarra-escarpment-mountain-bike-draft-strategy-180399.pdf>> accessed 14 December 2018.

Economic impact

The IBC notes the following projected impacts on the local economy, as well as the creation of additional economic opportunities into the future:

- 15 FTE jobs during trail construction
- 175,000+ annual visits
- \$21,875,000 per annum direct economic impact in year one
- \$41,562,500 per annum direct + indirect economic impact in year one
- 6+ new businesses created as a direct result of the project
- 20+ new FTE jobs created as a direct result of the project.³

Accordingly, there is significant economic benefit to be derived from the development of an Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Project, which this Draft Strategy would provide for.

Domestic and international visitation

A well-developed mountain bike precinct, within close proximity to Sydney and two international airports, would be a tourism drawcard for the region and see an uplift in domestic and international visitation. At present, mountain bike enthusiasts from Greater Sydney and the Illawarra travel to Canberra (3 hours) and the Snowy Mountains (5 hours) for similar quality and scale of facility as that which the Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Project presents.

Potential visitation was quantified by Brent Harley & Associates in late-2015 at up to 101,825 visitors per annum.⁴ The IBC notes that this analysis will be dictated by the provision and capacity of an uphill service (shuttle or lift) and the carrying capacity of the trail network. Since this work was undertaken, however, the projected annual visitation has risen significantly (to 175,000+), with the scale an ambition of the project. Regardless, significant domestic and international can be expected.

Large-scale events

It is worth drawing parallels to the ACT's Stromlo Forest Park, regarded as one of the world's premier mountain biking destinations. In 2009, the Capital Region attracted some 30,000 spectators and \$20 million into the region's economy when it hosted the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) World Mountain Bike Championships.

Similarly, the Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Project would have similar potential to become a world class mountain bike precinct, capable of staging international events. Wollongong will have precedent in this regard, with the UCI Road World Championships being earmarked for the region in 2022. The IBC is confident that WCC and Destination Wollongong aspire to and would welcome future large-scale events of this nature.

³ Dirt Art Pty Ltd, *Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Biking Concept Plan*, <<https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/-/media/OEH/Corporate-Site/Documents/Parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/Parks-management-other/illawarra-escarpment-mountain-biking-concept-plan.pdf>>, accessed 17 December 2018.

⁴ Brent Harley & Associates, *Mt. Keira Market and Socio-Economic Benefits*, <<http://www.visitwollongong.com.au/uploads/1541/mt-keira-adventure-playground-2016-update.pdf>>, accessed 18 December 2018,

Environmental and heritage considerations

The IBC recognises that a properly designed and constructed network of trails will minimise environmental disturbance and mitigate the damage caused by sustained usage. With regard to the cultural impacts, the IBC is keen to see development that is respectful of the cultural sensitivity of the area.

The IBC understands that environmental and heritage considerations will be looked at in more detail before construction commences, and measures required to protect these values put in place. However, the IBC does not want to see this process, or certain conditions, unduly constrain this development.

Consistent with state government strategy

The IBC considers the Draft Strategy consistent with the aims and intent of the NSW Visitor Economy Industry Action Plan (VEIAP).⁵ The NSW Government has set an ambitious target of tripling 2009 overnight visitor expenditure to 2030, aiming to achieve \$45 billion by 2025 and \$55 billion by 2030, which a mountain bike precinct on the Illawarra Escarpment would directly contribute towards.

Further, the Draft Strategy is consistent with the Illawarra-Shoalhaven Regional Plan, which recognises that tourism is one of six priority growth sectors in the regional economy.⁶ The Plan integrates economic, social and environmental considerations in the interests of achieving ecologically sustainable development, which the active involvement of OEH ensures.

Transport connectivity

The IBC notes that the ~5 million population of the Greater Sydney area has comparatively poor access to formal mountain bike trail opportunities when compared to other major Australian cities. While the Illawarra is within 1.5-2 hours, the IBC is of the view that improved road and rail connectivity to Greater Sydney is vital to the growth of the Illawarra visitor economy.

If the Illawarra is to fully benefit from the sustainable development of the Illawarra Escarpment and service intrastate, interstate and international riders, the importance of transport connectivity to Greater Sydney and the future Western Sydney Airport will be integral.

Conclusion

The IBC endorses the Draft Strategy and supports the prospect of the Illawarra Escarpment being used for mountain biking into the future. The IBC looks forward to adoption of the Draft Strategy, and successful negotiation of environmental and heritage assessments, and identification of management and funding sources.

⁵ NSW Department of Industry, *Visitor Economy Industry Action Plan 2030*, <https://www.industry.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/172092/Visitor-Economy-Industry-Action-Plan-2030.pdf>, accessed 17 December 2018.

⁶ NSW Department of Planning and Environment, *Illawarra-Shoalhaven Regional Plan*, <<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/Plans-for-your-area/Regional-Plans/Illawarra-Shoalhaven/Plan>>, accessed 18 December 2018.