

# Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy

## Submission

14 December 2018

*A Submission to National Parks and Wildlife Service  
and Wollongong City Council*

**by Regional Development Australia – Illawarra**



*Mountain Biking on Mount Keira*

## 1) Executive Summary

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Illawarra is pleased to provide this submission on the Draft Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy.

RDA Illawarra supports the implementation of the proposed Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy, as it:

- Enables Mountain Biking, which is one of the fastest growing adventure-based tourism activities, and is generating world-wide tourism benefits
- Is time to build a world-class Mountain Biking destination in the Illawarra that is well-planned and managed
- Is aligned with NSW, regional and local tourism strategies
- Is mindful of the unique biodiversity and important Aboriginal and non-indigenous culture heritage values, which have a low tolerance for disturbance
- Supports economic development of a significant Illawarra economic catalytic site, the Illawarra escarpment, including Mount Keira.



*Illawarra Escarpment*

## 2) Introduction

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Illawarra has an active and facilitative role in the Illawarra region, with a clear focus on growing a strong and confident regional economy that harnesses competitive advantages, seizes on economic opportunities and attracts investment.

RDA Illawarra Board, its CEO and staff are neutral brokers and collaborators across all levels of government, community, business and stakeholders for the growth of the Illawarra's economy (including Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama local government areas).

Mountain Biking is growing in popularity, with rapidly rising levels of participation. It is pleasing that NSW National Parks and Wildlife have partnered with Wollongong City Council to develop the draft Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy.

The Mountain Bike Strategy was developed over a timeframe of more than three years and included many Illawarra regional stakeholders in the consultation, including RDA Illawarra representatives.

Tourism is a vital sector of the Illawarra's economy and the development of 'legal' mountain biking is commendable. The development of the Mountain Biking tracks on the Illawarra escarpment, including Mount Keira, could bring significant economic benefits to the region through the growth of the tourism sector and economic flow-on impacts.

## 3) The Illawarra region Opportunity

There is a significant opportunity to generate economic activity as a result of implementing the Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy. The Illawarra Escarpment spans public and private lands in the Wollongong, Shellharbour and Kiama local government areas, which is the same footprint as RDA Illawarra's geographic boundaries.

It is noted that the Mount Keira Summit Park Plan of Management is also currently open for consultation at present. RDA Illawarra have made a separate submission to support the implementation of the Plan of Management and recommended that Mountain Biking be a permissible use on the Mount Keira Summit, especially for access to improved community facilities.

The Mount Keira Summit Park vision is to:

*Provide a diversity of exceptional visitor experiences that are distinctive to Wollongong, showcase the Escarpment's environmental and cultural values and define its identity and sense of place while supporting tourism to the region.*

This vision has been supported by RDA Illawarra as it enables Mountain Biking and other developments at the Summit Park to provide exceptional visitor experiences.

RDA Illawarra supports the implementation of the Mountain Bike Strategy as it could have a significant impact on our regional economy, with the estimated economic impact including:

- 175,000 annual visitors,
- direct economic impact of \$21.9m per annum,
- and combined direct and indirect economic impact of \$63.2m per annum (*source, DirtArt Concept Plan*).

Furthermore, it is noted that the Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy is aligned with the Illawarra-Shoalhaven Regional Plan, RDA Illawarra's strategy and other state, regional and local strategic imperatives, see table below:

- ✓ NSW Government's:
  - *Visitor Economy Industry Action Plan 2030*, which aims to triple overnight 2009 visitor economy by 2030
  - *Illawarra-Shoalhaven Regional Plan 2015*, which identifies Tourism as a priority growth sector of our economy
- ✓ Regional Development Australia Illawarra's *Strategic Plan*, (see Appendix A):
  - which identifies tourism as a priority growth sector, and identifies Mount Keira as a key tourism catalytic project
- ✓ Destination Sydney South Surrounds *Destination Management Plan 2018-22*:
  - which identifies Mt Keira Summit Park development as a part of Strategy 2, Destination Infrastructure which has the potential to significantly impact on the visitor economy at a regional level
- ✓ Wollongong City Council's Community Strategic Plan, *Our Wollongong 2028*
  - which aims to build Wollongong as a tourism destination
- ✓ Destination Wollongong's Strategic Plan 2017-21:
  - which aims to promote Wollongong, grow the visitor economy and attract investment to the region.

## **4) Implementation of the Illawarra Escarpment**

### **Mountain Bike Strategy**

Mountain Biking is one of the fastest growing adventure-base activities and has the potential to offer significant economic development opportunities.

It is commendable that the Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy will provide a safe sustainable approach to Mountain Biking. Conversely, the current unregulated mountain biking activity can cause damage to the environment, pose a risk to public safety, and can conflict with other user groups, such as bush walkers.

The potential for 82 kilometres of mountain bike trails to be developed on the Illawarra Escarpment, in a staged manner, is supported. This would enable any refinements to be made to Stage One implementation for subsequent stages.

The strategic aims of the Project are noted as:

- Develop a trail network plan that compliments and where possible enhances the natural values of the site
- Develop a trail network plan that is sensitive to the cultural values of the target area
- Develop a trail plan that offers significant opportunities for economic development and business development.

It is our understanding that the Mountain Bike Project is relatively low capital expenditure, has minimal ongoing operational expenditure and the potential for significant economic returns and social benefits. The Mountain Bike Project could see the development of a significant national and international tourism opportunity for the Illawarra region.

Growing participation, increasing satisfaction and maximising benefits of Mountain Biking is dependent on providing accessible, sustainable and appropriate trails that enable riders to fulfil their aspirations and potential. The proposed Mountain Bike Strategy could enable this to come to fruition.

Developing a world-class Mountain Bike destination provides the opportunity to attract local, domestic and international visitors. This includes the growing population of over five million people in Sydney who have the lowest formal trail kilometre to population ratio of any Australian capital city.

Significant economic opportunities are extant once the Mountain Biking strategy is implemented. Many of the 'must-visit' mountain bike destinations around the world have demonstrated the economic outcomes of Mountain Biking, (*source, Western Australian Mountain Bike Strategy, 2015-20, unlocking the potential*) including:

- ✓ **Canada**, where over 100,000 mountain bikers visit (Whistler, Squamish and North Shore) and generate more than **\$10m** in rider spending
- ✓ **Scotland**, where the value of mountain biking visitors generates **\$36m** to the local economy each year (7 Stanes) and the economic flow on of visitors is estimated at **\$214m**
- ✓ **New Zealand**, where 200,000 tourists mountain bike each year and **\$9.5m** is generated in Rotorua's Whakarewarewa Forest each year
- ✓ **Cairns**, where **10,000+ visitors** watched the UCI Mountain Bike World Cup in 2014, bringing an estimated **\$10m** to the Queensland economy from one event.

## 5) Conclusion

RDA Illawarra have reviewed the Draft Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy and support its timely implementation, as proposed, in a staged manner.

The economic benefits of this project stack up, and other international mountain bike destinations are reaping the economic and social benefits of planned and well-managed Mountain Biking activities.

It is time to build a world-class Mountain Biking destination in the Illawarra that is well-planned and managed. The Illawarra destination tourism spin-off benefits are clearly demonstrated and supported through existing state, regional and local economic and tourism strategies.



**Debra Murphy**

Chief Executive Officer

RDA Illawarra

# Appendix A

## RDA Illawarra Strategy

### Vision

We will grow a strong and confident Illawarra regional economy that harnesses competitive advantages, seizes on economic opportunities and attracts investments.

### Purpose

We are neutral brokers who collaborate across all levels of government, community and business for the growth of the Illawarra's economy. We value our people, culture and sustainable development.



### Infrastructure



### Industry



### Integration

STRATEGY	Enabling infrastructure to improve <b>connectivity</b> and unlock investment opportunities	Supporting development and <b>capability</b> of industry growth sectors from our Regional Plan	Leveraging a <b>collaborative</b> regional culture and working together on innovative solutions
ECONOMIC ASSETS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proximity to Western Sydney</li> <li>Future Western Sydney &amp; Illawarra Airports</li> <li>Port of Port Kembla</li> <li>Smart Cities (ICT)</li> <li>Road and Rail corridors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shell Cove Marina</li> <li>Wollongong Harbour</li> <li>iAccelerate</li> <li>Leaders in:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health &amp; Aged Services</li> <li>Advanced Manufacturing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University of Wollongong</li> <li>Highly skilled workforce</li> <li>Leading Health Alliances</li> </ul>
PROJECTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for improved road and rail connectivity</li> <li>Business development for airports, Port of Port Kembla and Western Sydney synergies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support tourism catalyst projects (eg WEC, Mt Keira, Cruise)</li> <li>Blue Economy development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen inter-regional/city alliances (eg Sandstone Mega-Region, NUW Alliance)</li> <li>Foster a collaborative leadership culture and grow the next generation of leaders (eg LIP)</li> </ul>

Regional Development Australia (RDA) Illawarra is an independent organisation with a Board of 14 local leaders. We are active and facilitative across the three local government areas of Shellharbour, Wollongong and Port Kembla. We are a member of a national network of 55 RDA's, largely funded by the Australian Government and local Councils and Cities.