



**Adelaide Mountain Bike Club's submission to the
Inquiry into Australia's National Parks, Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected
Areas**

1. The Adelaide Mountain Bike Club encourages the Senate Inquiry into Australia's National Park, Conservation Reserves and Marine Protected Area to consider the recreational use of parks that are managed according to the National Parks Act. This submission relates to the inquiry's Terms of Reference paragraphs A, B and D.

Background

2. Our country's natural bushland locations are a precious resource. These forests not only conserve our environment for future generations, but, also provide valuable community recreational opportunities. There are now greater recreational demand for our nature parks since the significant decline in the number of natural forest State Forests. By changing classification from State Forests to National Parks we did protect these old growth areas from logging, however, it has also had a significant impact on recreational use.
3. We believe that human powered recreation, in particular off-road cycling (mountain bike riding), is generally consistent with national park value. Typically, it will not unduly impact on the environment. In fact, studies have shown (see appendix) that off-road cycling has a comparable impact on the environment as bush-walking. Generally, cycling is safe for cyclists and other trail users. Reported accidents involving walkers and cyclists are rare and mostly the safety issue is a perception rather than reality. Adelaide Mountain Bike Club would like to see greater support for human powered recreation use of our parks and reserves.
4. Historically, many trails in our natural areas have evolved in an ad-hoc manner which did not consider long term sustainability. Once, either the number of trail users increased or additional types of trail users, such as cyclists, were incorporated then these trails demonstrate signs of deterioration. World's best practice for trail design and maintenance can ensure narrow trails over natural surfaces within our parks are sustainable. Some existing trails might be able to be modified to meet world's best practice, and some trails may need to be closed down and rehabilitated now to prevent further damage. Trails to meet world's best practice are more expensive and take more time to design and construct compared to the traditional ad-hoc type of narrow trails.
5. Land mangers tend to be hesitant to provide extensive off-road cycling opportunities. This may impart be due to limited resources available for establishing trails that adhere to worlds-best-practice and managing another user group.



Benefits

6. There are many benefits to encouraging more diverse recreational use of our natural areas. Some of the numerous benefits an open trail network provides include: economic, health and fitness (mental and physical) for people at all stages of life, social through the establishment of a trail community, environmental education, recreation (a key issue in encouraging our youth to be physically active and promote family recreation), and the preservation of our environment and history. The appendix discusses in detail the key issues surrounding off-road cycling in natural areas.

Tourism Benefit

7. From a whole-of-government perspective, the economic benefit of off-road cycling can be significant. There is an economic benefit from the sale of mountain bikes with over one million bicycles sold each year. However, there are also significant benefits to the community through tourism [20]. Here in Australia, the 2003 Mont Australian 24 Hour Mountain Bike Championships in the ACT was estimated to have contributed \$1.6m to the local economy. But more significantly, there is a considerable potential to encourage national and international tourism via trail recreation. Numerous locations around the world attract international participants for events and recreational use. For example, Moab in Utah and a trail called Slick Rock is a tourist destination for mountain bike riders the world over. As is the Queen Charlotte trail in New Zealand and Whistler in Canada. The Welsh Government has been very successful in promoting off-road cycling tourism within its forests.
8. An example of the tourism potential that an open trails system can provide, consider the Welsh mountain bike initiative. Coed y Brenin, in the west of Wales, had a declining visitation rate. One forest worker had a vision and started to develop the area into a highly successful mountain bike park. The trails became progressively more popular over a 10 year period. In 1994 the area attracted 13,980 visitors. Each year attracted more visitors with 170,000 visitors in 2002. Surveys showed that riders typically stayed for two days in local tourist accommodation. It is estimated that income from trails in Wales in 2003 was \$25million. The Welsh government has set the goal of having three per cent of the Welsh Gross National Product coming from trails by 2005!
9. Potential exists to establish similar iconic tourist routes and destinations in Australia.

Proposal

Recreational Trail Corridors

10. Zoning of regions within our natural areas is a good technique to balance conservation and recreational needs. Zoning is used very successfully by many land managers. We would like the zoning concept to be extended to include the concept of multiple-use *Recreational Trail Corridors* for human powered activities.
11. A recreation corridor can be defined as a ribbon of land along which people can travel for recreation purposes. It can be used as a means of getting to a particular destination, or as a recreational experience unto itself.
12. As recreation activities frequently involve travelling along a well-defined corridor or route. Trail walking and off-road cycling are examples of recreation corridor activities. Corridors are an inherent and fundamental aspect of recreation.
13. These narrow corridors can provide desirable recreational opportunities, yet, maintain high



conservation commitments. Environmental impacts of the trail users are restricted to the localised area around the trail and large areas of land can be managed only for conservation. More than likely a recreational corridor will bisect a conservation zone, however, as the trail is relatively narrow the larger environment should not be unduly impacted.

14. Recreation trail corridors can be part of a strategy to increase physical activity and improve health and wellness. Recreation corridors also provide opportunities for economic development, rural diversification, tourism promotion, and economic retention.
15. Recreational Trail Corridors can be established that would link to key recreation zones, for instance, Mountain Bike Parks.

Recreational Trail Fund

16. We propose the establishment of a *Recreational Trail Fund*. This grant scheme would assist communities in establishing new trails or maintaining existing trails and trail related facilities. A primary focus should be given to projects that provide for a large number of compatible non-motorised recreational purposes and provide for innovative recreational trail corridor sharing (multiple-use trails).
17. The Recreational Trail Fund would encourage a healthy lifestyle, potentially provide tourism opportunities and also allow existing trails to be improved to meet worlds-best-practice for trail design.
18. Regional communities could use this fund to establish long distance iconic trails.
19. Although funding maybe available through other grant programmes, such as the EnviroFund or the National Landcare programme. However, as the money is competitively bided for a wide range of projects and off-road trail development does not align clearly with the core charter of these programmes. Few trail development projects would be approved.
20. The United States has a federally funded Recreational Trails Fund and this could be used as a model for Australia. The US fund is a grant programme established for the purposes of providing and maintaining recreational trails and trail related facilities.
21. Overseas initiatives, such as the Welsh Mountain Bike Initiative, have illustrated the economic and tourism benefits of a healthy and desirable trail system.

Recommendations

Adelaide Mountain Bike Club makes the following recommendations:

1. Federal Government to make in principle support for expanding recreational opportunities within our natural areas. In particular encouragement for management policies to be developed for off-road cycling rather than blanket prohibition of the recreational activity.
2. The establishment of *Recreational Trail Corridors* through natural areas. These corridors would provide recreational opportunities yet maintain high conservation levels.
3. A grant scheme, *Recreational Trail Fund*, to assist the establishment of new or improvement of existing multi-use recreational trails. Funding should be prioritised for multi-use icon trails and regional multi-use trail networks.
4. Provide training in world's-best-practice for trail design and construction for park staff and volunteers. This initiative will go toward improving environmental sustainability of all trails within our natural parks.