OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTY

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ACCESS FOR ALL

<u>Submission to: NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service</u>

Re: Cycling Policy Review and Sustainable Mountain Biking Strategy

General overview

The Outdoor Recreation Party is committed to reducing government restrictions on the use of parks and recreation areas which are paid for and maintained by taxpayer funding.

Public land should be accessible free of charge for recreational purposes. It should also be actively managed, not locked up and neglected.

The Outdoor Recreation Party supports access by all public and special interest groups and actively encourages efforts by mountain bike groups and individual bike riders to secure greater access to public areas, such as National Parks, with a minimum of bureaucratic interference.

Mountain bikers, their support teams and organisers should be viewed as integral and not alien to the environment.

Mountain biking is a legitimate, healthy outdoor pursuit.

The ORP aims to counter the political influence of minority groups that advocate an unscientific approach to environmental issues and which seek to limit public land access to a privileged few. We view current restrictions on many outdoor activities as symptomatic of a larger problem of excessive regulation, bureaucracy and government intrusion.

Responsible governments should encourage healthy outdoor activity by ensuring they have ample space. Already many outdoor activities compete for the same public space, which are limited or have restrictions on their use.

There is scope within existing National Parks legislation to allow mountain bike groups to manage use of bike trails without the need for any additional regulation or excessive government controls.

Mountain bikers should self-manage their activities

Mountain bike clubs and related interest groups are in the best position to design, locate, implement, manage and assess mountain bike trails in National Parks; perusal of some group websites brings an understanding of how organised and well informed they are.

Mountain bike groups have wide-ranging knowledge of the issues, riding aspects, trails and terrain. For example, Mountain Bike Australia Inc. has a well researched policy on mountain bike access to natural areas, which includes detailed consideration of sustainability, biodiversity, safety of riders and others sharing the use of riding trails, and a valid code of conduct.

Those who participate in the sport of mountain biking tend to enjoy their personal freedom, are competitive and resent external restrictions. Enforcement of proposed regulations and additional controls would not be achieved without substantial enforcement, costing significantly more than any potential benefits.

Authoritarian regulation will severely limit the scope for various different mountain bike disciplines. There are significant differences between the various disciplines, (eg. downhill compared with cross country), which would drive these onto illegal trails or other private property.

Compliance with policies supported and managed by mountain bike interest groups will be better than a regulatory approach because of the more positive, open and informed consultation process and communication networks, allowing wider community involvement and education.

The ORP appreciates that there are good reasons for not using certain specific areas due to fragile environments, preservation of flora/fauna etc. However, mountain bike interest groups, with the advice (but not control) of authorities, are quite capable of ensuring these are protected.

The optimum approach to sustainable use of public space in National Parks is to match different disciplines of the sport with suitable areas. This can be efficiently and economically achieved by drawing on the knowledge and experience of the mountain bike groups, with National Parks advising of areas of particular sensitivity or concern.

The proposal to increase concentration of activities on small areas of National Parks would increase the risks of erosion, collisions, environmental damage and degradation, with the added aspects of illegal and uncontrolled trails at spots less likely to be met with enforcement.

There are already examples of these arrangements working well in other parts of Australia and overseas.

Less regulation – better results

We note that there is mention in the NPWS Discussion Paper of "user-pays" as being a future possibility. (Section 5.1 Funding) The ORP is strongly against any sort of payment, levy, or surcharge being applied to what is already a publicly-owned facility.

The ORP also highlights the need for motorised support vehicles to be free to move to and from designated mountain bike tracks. There should also be no unwarranted restrictions on overnight camping at those areas, for mountain bike riders and their supporters.

Charges should not apply for travel into, or through a National Park, or for camping in those areas.

The NPWS has more than 6.7 million hectares under its control, creating problems due to inadequate staff and resources.

It is noted in the Discussion Paper that there has been a problem in some areas due to NPWS staff turnover. (Section 5.2.Volunteers). Our proposal will help to reduce that.

Furthermore, the NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water document "New South Wales State of the Environment 2009" highlights the fact that many National Parks have a serious problem with invasive species, plants and introduced pest animals. The current approach is clearly not working.

It has been reported elsewhere that NPWS has insufficient qualified staff to undertake even a minimum amount of hazard reduction to reduce the risk of bushfires. Under our proposal, at least it will not be aggravating the problem.

It is obvious that more controls and additional management by NPWS staff of mountain biking will lead to poorer outcomes for both the environment and outdoor recreation.

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