

MCTA Inc Press Release – MCTA Inc Seeking Public Assistance to Address Policy and Delivery Gap with Mountain Biking's Land Managers

Mountain Biking's popularity and growth skyrocketed throughout COVID, alongside a general increase in the Sutherland Shire and wider community seeking outside unstructured recreation. This move toward unstructured outdoor recreation has also coincided with land managers, like Sutherland Shire Council (SSC) and National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), recognising that need in public policy documents like NPWS's Mountain Biking Plan, and SSC's Open Space Strategy and Implementation Plan.

However, on the ground delivery of this infrastructure is proving to be stagnant, despite the goodwill of these policy documents.

It was 2002, when Mountain Biking was first 'trialled' in the Royal National Park, with trail audits conducted by outside contractors in 2015, then again in 2020 by DirtArt. NPWS conducted a community consultation in 2017, and eventually released a strategy to implement sanctioned trails around Loftus, Engadine, Heathcote and Helensburgh via their "Mountain Biking Plan" in May 2023. It's now nearly the beginning of 2024, and still there exists no change to mountain biking conditions in the parks.

"We've got numerous club members, and the public, waiting for something to occur to improve both the protection of the environment, and improve the standard of trails for mountain bikers within the parks. We've even got 83 volunteers lined up and waiting to help, but there's no funding available to actually get going with the steps required in the plan." Sean Hill, Director and Spokesperson for the Mill Creek Trail Association said.

It's a similar story within the Lucas Heights Conservation Area, where the Mill Creek Mountain Bike trail network, managed by Sutherland Shire Council, is struggling to have basic carparking or safe off-road access provided.

SSC have been 'negotiating' leases with ANSTO, SUEZ, and Cleanaway, since 2012, to provide for improvements to mountain biking trails and infrastructure. As of 2023, they seem close to securing a lease for a carparking site, and a cycleway corridor, but aren't intending to begin construction until April 2024, and the scope of works and funding are limiting the success of the project.

"The club has been very successful in the Lucas Heights Conservation Area, closing old trails, rehabilitating bushland, and providing new high-quality trails for the community, working together with Sutherland Shire Council. We've got a great relationship. But when it comes time for SSC and the other land managers in the area to actually get these really important safety improvements completed in a timely or quality way, funding and bureaucracy tend to get in the way." Mr Hill said.

"We really need these land managers to have proper funding, and proper staffing resources, so that they can leverage the volunteer power and community goodwill local clubs like ours can provide. We

want great outcomes for the community and the environment to actually occur, not to just exist in fantasy in these policy documents”.

Mill Creek Trail Association are calling for help in the public signing a petition calling on land managers, like NPWS and SSC to do just that. Signing up and more information is available via; <https://chnng.it/q5WWcdfzbh> .

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SH' or 'Sean Hill'.

Sean Hill

Director - Spokesperson

MCTA Inc

21st December, 2023