

**Minutes from the Mountain Bike Trails Forum – 1pm, 15/7/17
Held at St Helens Neighbourhood House Bungalow
Facilitators- Dr Christine Adams-Hosking (CH), Mr Todd Dudley (TD)**

Presentation by Christine Hosking, Landscape Ecologist

A brief background to give attendees an insight to her concerns and where her areas of expertise are; studying/researching interactions between landscapes and people and impacts when things are out of balance. Her experiences from southeast Queensland have shown that there are serious ecological & social impacts from mountain bike (MTB) trails, and wants greater transparency from Break O’Day Council (BODC) with regard to building/maintaining/promoting the new proposed trails, and existing ones. There has been little, if any public consultation by BODC, and there needs to be a multi-stakeholder approach from council - not anti-mountain biking, however there are concerns about unbridled development in this area.

This Meeting was called to gain greater understanding about the social, ecological and economic impacts of proposed new MTB trails, and expansion of existing MTB trails, running down from the Blue Tier towards the coast, via Mt Pearson Reserve.

Impacts

Ecological:

- degradation and destruction of sensitive areas of bush, impacting on flora and fauna
- loss of ecosystems

Economic:

- cost to BODC ratepayers (who is paying for what)
- trail care employee (recently advertised)
- track construction

Social:

- loss of amenity to others who use these areas, as discussed by ‘Friends of the Blue Tier’, where these impacts have already been felt keenly
- areas previously used by walkers are reportedly being over-run by mountain bikers

Key points

- E-bikes are coming (motorized mountain bikes) already in the USA and other countries, how will this be managed?
- Deaths & injuries in MTB trails
- Pink bike survey – relating to MTB injuries- in this small community when ambulance is called away to emergencies on trails, other parts of community are left without this service.
- Need for alternative thinking, e.g.
 - pump tracks- which are nearer to towns, family-friendly and growing in popularity
 - utilize already degraded areas like old farms and quarries
 - utilize fire trails; existing infrastructure, family and general cyclist friendly
 - example of mountain bike trail management in National Parks and Reserves in other parts of Australia-in NSW there has been interpretative information (as educative tool) about the environment and wildlife given to users of the Park, including mountain bike riders
 - invest in walking/cycle ways along highway-boost existing tourism
 - Promote local history –e.g Derby Tin Mine Tunnel (cultural heritage)
 - Promote local bridges e.g Scamander bridge (cultural heritage)
- We have a treasure on our doorstep
- Compromise needed.
- Draft Strategic Plan has 3 key objectives –community, economy, environment, are these really the councils values? Input from ratepayers essential, calculation of impacts needed, investigation into keeping balance for all.

Comments/questions from floor

- Comparing SEQ to Tas-population base differences makes this unwise & unsuitable
- Concerns over environmental impacts
- Map of existing and new trails shown after a question regarding where the trails are, and will be going (Flagstaff Hill, Constable Creek)
- We are all stakeholders/ratepayers and all diversity of needs should be considered.

Presentation by Todd Dudley – NE Bioregional network.

3 important aspects of proposed mountain bike trails

- Avoid or minimize environmental impacts
- Minimize cost
- Maximize community benefit
- Does the mountain bike trails for BODC proposal stack up?
- Has there been a cost analysis done?
- Is it environmentally responsible?
- **TD** worked extensively during the Tasmanian Forest Agreement process putting together a detailed environmental study (LINKING LANDSCAPES 2007) and knows the proposed MTB trail area well, Flagstaff & Constable Creek areas.
- Importance of old-growth eucalypts, steep gullies and high ridges. Mention was made of using existing fire trails in the area.
- Erosion risk from high rainfall dumps, which invariably occur every couple of years when a deep low pressure system sits off the East Coast, dumps up to 200mms or more, last year's saw approx. 240mm in less than a week.
- Constable Creek has an entire track proposed along the creek line, which will see degradation occurring – more thought should go into directly people into these sensitive areas.
- New proposed track from the Blue Tier down to the coast at Swimcart beach, through Mt Pearson Reserve will risk the introduction of *phytophthora*, which can wipe out plant species, and is introduced by machinery, bikes and boots – big risks involved if this trail goes ahead.
- Proposal to use old forestry managed land

Concerns

- Increased illegal MTB trails occurring
- The TRC Tourism economic-cost benefit analysis document lacked substance, visitor numbers data was over-estimated, as well economic benefits data. Many assumptions were made.
- What are the community benefits?
- BODC is a small municipality – small rate base – care must be taken with allocation of funds.
- MTB users do not pay any fees for riding trails
- Housing affordability 'going through the roof'
- Since Bay of Fires/ Binalong Bay mentioned in Lonely Planet Guide, there have been changes in the housing availability and cost, more Air BNB's
- As a community, are we driven by quantity or quality?

Comments/questions from floor

- People don't want another Byron Bay
- Council risks trashing 'the goose that lays the golden egg'
- Impacts of business plan
- Highest rates in BODC
- Should public money be spent on these trails?
- \$1,000 per km every year, looking at approx. 80kms of trails.
Dorset municipality are considering selling assets to fund MTB trails, where people come and camp/use toilets for free & ride the trails for free
- The impacts of bike trails around Derby
- Tracks are far too dangerous for 'ordinary bike riders', suitable for 'adrenalin junkies', with expensive bikes and equipment
- The health system in the area is being impacted, ambulance callouts to accidents, means ambulance cannot attend to other health emergencies in the municipality
- Implement bike club-funded triage on the tracks, ambulances are being called out for minor issues/injuries which don't warrant callouts.
- BODC'S 'Strategic Plan' conversations; do they reflect the values of the community?
- Strategic Plan talks about "sustainable this & that", which isn't being delivered, and councilors are only looking out for themselves.
- Those at the meeting can go online and comment about the 3 key values of the Strategic Plan. Comments can be made up until July 28th, or thereabouts.
- Why are there so many tracks marked in the new bike trail plan? There are tracks for different levels of ability, e.g kids and families.
- Has the area marked for new trails had previously been logged?
- Attendee was unsure about Mt Pearson, but Constable Creek is old growth forest, and is very steep.
- What % of Derby is for novices? The response was 3 tracks for novices, the Blue Tier is downhill for younger riders, and at times there is conflict between experienced and novice riders.
- Whoever uses tracks, there is always the 'ratbag' element, who disregard others, who "poop and wee everywhere"
- Who has decided on the trails?
- Who is responsible for injuries, on-going health issues, risk analysis & financial analysis?
- An attendee commented on the TRC Tourism report, declaring it biased and unusable in its forecasts, and stated BODC has done this awaiting an 'economic boom'
- Some Mountain bikers may want another groomed track, but do they need more?

- \$3million spend for tracks, without toilets or ongoing infrastructure
- Council promoting this as fulltime employer.
- Bikers would without doubt like more trails to ride, and why is the council doing this for a small user group?
- Attendee BOD Councillor commented about this project being mainly tourism/economically driven, agreed that more consultation is needed, and there will be the opportunity for that.
- Attendee commented she has been trying to get a response from BODC for quite a long time, with regard to an issue at the Blue Tier regarding needing a solution to car parking issues (an asphalt car park not wanted)
- Advised to contact the BODC Manager, Community Services and the General Manager with her concerns. Be consistent and even sit in on council meetings, there is an opportunity to ask a question, it may not be resolved on that day, but eventually there should be a response.
- It is good to have activities in BODC for visitors to enjoy.
- Agreed more community consultation is needed, and disappointed this hasn't been the case.
- The possibility of a petition, 1,000 signatures are needed.
- The waste of ratepayers money going towards building a \$3 million 'tin shed'
- Rates are going up by 6%, is there an option of \$10 fee for trail riders
- Response from group was then locals couldn't afford this.
- The higher cost of living in BODC, and that employment tended to be seasonal.
- The need for a balanced approach to this issue – with increased rates, who is benefitting from this?
- Derby being chosen for the MTB trails, and how it wasn't easy to access the area, not family friendly
- Not a lot of businesses are benefitting from the riders coming into Derby town, a couple of cafes and Weldborough pub.
- Bringing MTB trails to St Helens will allow families to come here and ride, and there are other activities for non-biking family members e.g fishing, beaches etc.
- A pump track in St Helens a good idea, discussion around the fact that BODC is not a tourism body, and \$600,000 has been spent already, and then there is the on-going maintenance etc.
- Examining maps of Blue Tier to Coast track, this can be done without spending any money, just a re-route of the trail.
- A Blue Tier to Bay of Fires track could be established without building any new tracks (just using existing ones).
- When orienteers visit this area for competitions, there is a shoe washing station.

- Myrtle Rust threat also, important not to be careless with the issues which may affect flora, and fauna as well.
- Possibility of trails around St Mary's & Fingal on the old train line
- Important to have a balanced vision, what can we do as a collective to come up with options which are environmentally cheaper?
- How do we get council to take notice of our concerns? There are complaints forms, also come to council meetings, and ask 'Questions without notice'. Write to BODC Manager, Community Services and the General Manager & have all councilors cc'ed in emails, so they know what is really going on in the community.
- Next council meeting is Monday, 17th July, 10am, minutes of meeting will become available on council website.
- The council also has a FB page
- How does council get information out to all ratepayers?
- The council newsletter is available at the supermarkets. Difficult when some ratepayers don't read the newspaper, watch the news or listen to radio, or have access to internet etc.
- Maybe a newsletter to go in with the rates notice?
- Mountain bike representative spoke about the assessment of the project, of which there has been a lot, and a key thing is there will be a person employed to coordinate all of this, this will be the contact person, for community consultation, mail outs etc .
- Comment of mountain bikers being communicative, keeping the discussion respectful, and voice our concerns together, respectfully, perhaps mobilise a group of friends and let them know what is going on around the MTB issue.
- Discussion around the issue of governance, which seems to be a sticking point in the community; public money being used for private benefit.
- Historically BODC has created a lot of angst in the community with failed projects e.g aiming to get the boat from Qld to be dropped in Skeleton Bay.
- Mountain bike representatives admitted having vested interests in the trails, but they are also involved with 'bigger picture' projects:
 - recycled bikes in the community
 - helping to build resilience in young people
 - junior bike development for young riders
 - education about responsible trail use
 - creating an app for bike washing techniques
 - democracy
 - don't make illegal trails
 - education about weeds and management of that issue
 - don't want the environment trashed

General discussion for moving forward

- Maybe Blue Derby (BD) admin can get onboard and make sure trails in that area aren't logged, there has been a change of tune around getting involved with this issue
- How closely linked are BD and Forestry (which has a new name now), concerns about gossip and palms being greased
- Moving forward is about engagement and governance
- Mountain bike groups could be seen to not support the trail down through Mt Pearson, pressure on BODC not to use this route for the reasons mentioned earlier in the meeting.
- Bike washing facilities very important in this area, must be seen to be 'worlds best practice', and then there are questions about who will maintain this.
- Experience in southeast Queensland (SEQ) regarding mountain biking in bushland reserves: doing a survey of ratepayers, maybe mailed out with rates notices, to gauge public opinion. In SEQ the trail builder was the front man, and it was very stressful for him, as the public were very unhappy about what was going on in regard to MTB trails and rider behavior.
- Why do people MTB? The thrill, the scenery, maybe flow trails are the way forward, on existing fire trails.
- Concern about buses, which drop riders off at the Blue Tier, are coming down from the Tier driving very fast, which is a danger to residents of the area.
- Are riders really appreciating the environment they are riding in?

Where to from here?

1. **We would like to see a *diverse* working group established to work with the future Trails Project Manager. This group would represent local business, the mountain bike community, ordinary ratepayers, volunteer groups and environmental experts.**
2. **We feel that an investigation of alternative proposals that would preserve our natural assets while maximizing the economic benefits to the local community is called for.**
3. **Ultimately, we would like to see a balanced and robust mountain bike trail proposal put to the community from BODC that incorporates social, environmental and economic impacts. The community can then have a say on how it feels about this proposal before it is progressed any further.**

Meeting closed at 3pm.