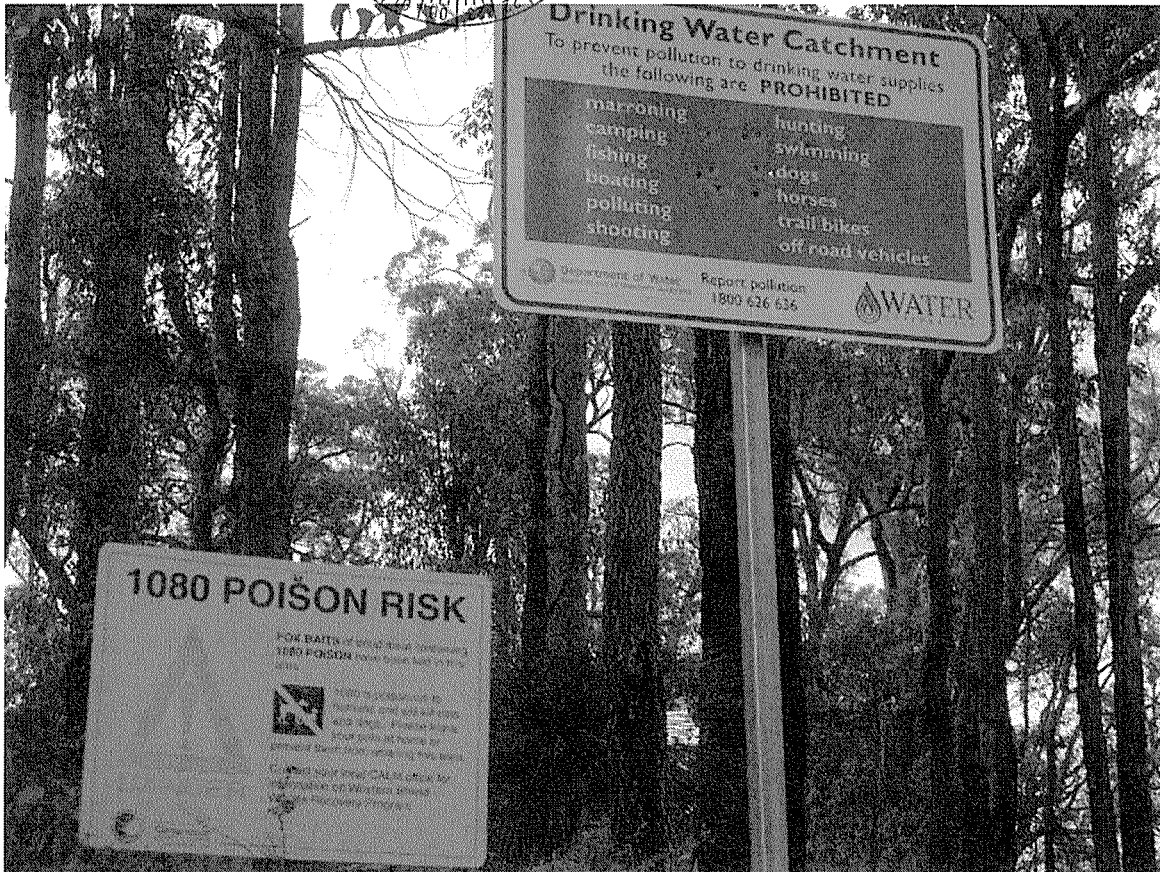


PUBLIC



RTRA

RECREATIONAL TRAILBIKE
RIDERS' ASSOCIATION WA



Towards more effective
Risk Management
in Drinking Water Source
Protection Areas.
The Trail Bike Perspective

Submission to the Standing Committee on Public Administration enquiry into
**Recreation Activities within Public Drinking Water
Source Areas**

Submission by:	The Recreational Trailbike Riders' Association of WA Inc PO Box 273 Darlington WA 6070 www.rtra.asn.au
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See also:

'Back on Track' The State Trail Bike Strategy – 2008 – Department of Sport and Recreation

Adventure Activity Standards for Trail Bike Touring 2009 – Outdoors WA and Department of Sport and Recreation

Steve Pretzel is available to appear before the Committee to explain or elaborate on this submission.

Submission Summary

The position of the Recreational Trail Bike Riders' Association of WA can be summarised as follows:

1. Trail bike riding is an increasingly popular recreation activity that has social, physical and economic benefits. It is now recognised in the Western Australian Trails Strategy.
2. Trail bike riding requires large tracts of land, well away from residential areas and with a mix of topography, environmental aesthetics, proximity to population centres and surface durability that is best exemplified in the Perth Hills.
3. Trail bikes are a relatively low impact, low risk activity when compared with water-based recreation activities, agriculture, forestry, urban development or mining.
4. Trail bikes are low impact when compared with 4 wheel drive activity, and need to be considered separately.
5. The current 'Risk Avoidance' policy is not effective in managing the use of trail bikes within DWSPAs.
6. The current policy and ByLaws are too broad, can be difficult to interpret and preclude planning and management options that may deliver a better end result for water quality.
7. Current water policy imposes significant – and we believe, excessive - constraints on where trail bike activity can occur, and this places an additional burden on Local Government Authorities and residents who are dealing with issues of a growing number of trail bikes and riders and too few areas in which they can be ridden.
8. Trail bike use and impacts can be managed, but proactive planning is needed rather than simply an attempt to exclude.

Who is the Recreational Trail Bike Association of WA (RTRA)

The Recreational Trailbike Riders' Association of WA (RTRA) is an organisation formed in 2007 for the purpose of ensuring a sustainable future for the activity of recreational trail bike riding.

The RTRA has four objectives:

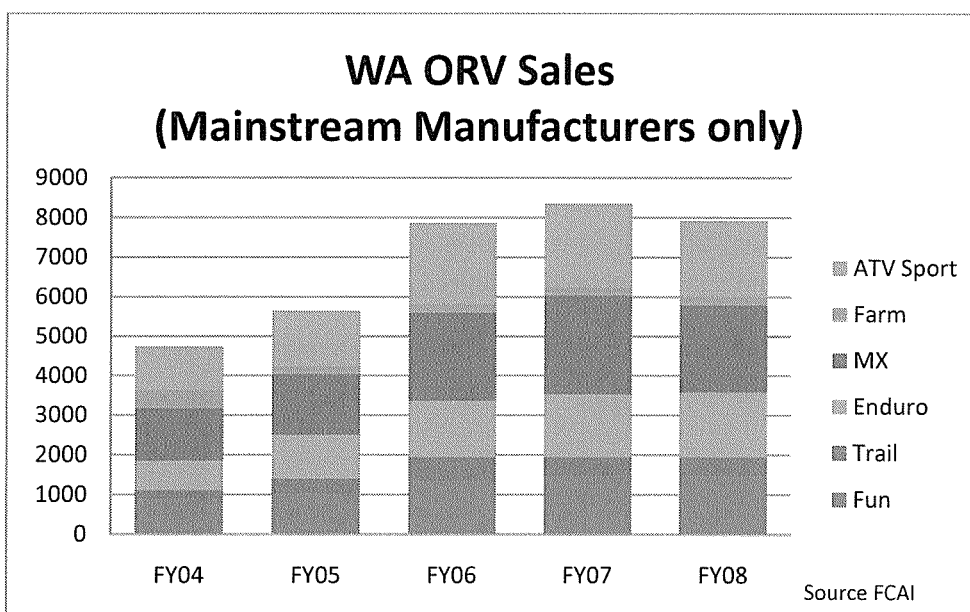
1. To protect and extend quality, safer off-road riding opportunities for Western Australian recreational trail bike riders of all ages.
2. To promote and encourage safety and responsible riding attitudes, including minimising noise and trail damage.
3. To actively pursue the needs of trail bike riders with government agencies, councils, landowners and other stakeholders.
4. To improve the perception of trail bike riding as a recreational activity amongst stakeholders and the broader community.

RTRA currently has a member base of 1,909 riders, ranging in age from 5 to 75 and represents the interests of all recreational trail bike riders in Western Australia.

Trail Bikes as a Recreational Activity

Trail bike riding is an increasingly popular activity in Western Australia.

Sales of off-road motorcycles and quad bikes rose by around 70% from 2004 to 2007, and although sales have tapered off over the past two years the prospect of a new resources boom in Western Australia is likely to see this growth continue. Although little hard data exists, it is estimated¹ that there around 50,000 trail bikes ridden regularly in Western Australia, with up to 1.5 million riding 'events' per annum.



The term 'Trail Bike' is often used as a collective term to describe any motorcycle or quad bike ridden off road. However it is important to distinguish between several different types of bikes and riders.

Full details can be found in the State Trail Bike Strategy, however for the purposes of this submission the following categorisation should suffice:

Competition

Motocross – racing conducted on closed circuits and usually under the auspices of Motorcycling Australia.

Enduro – similar to car rallies, conducted primarily in State Forests and usually under the auspices of Motorcycling Australia. In the context of this submission this category would also include non-competitive organised events that can involve large numbers of riders (100+) riding a temporarily signed course.

¹ State Trail Bike Strategy 2008 p52

Trials – low speed activity conducted on private or public land where the emphasis is on the skill of the rider in negotiating obstacles

Recreational

Trail Bike Touring - Road Registered / Licenced – often over long distances (50-200km per day) on road-registered trail bikes by licenced riders.

Not Road Registered / Unlicenced – Legal to ride on private property (with the owner's consent) or in one of five Off Road Vehicle Areas gazetted under the Control of Vehicles (Off-Road Areas) Act 1987.

This submission focuses on just one of these categories – **Trail Bike Touring - Recreational Road Registered / Licenced**, although many of the arguments raised in this submission would also have relevance to competitive enduro and non-competitive organised events.

RTRA acknowledges and supports the submission of Motorcycling WA in relation to the management of organised competitive events within DWSPAs.

Social, Economic and Environmental Values of the Activity

Trail Bike Touring is an activity that is enjoyed by a very diverse group of participants. Research indicates² a high correlation between the values sought by trail bike riders and those sought by other outdoor recreators such as bush walkers, mountain bike riders and horse riders:

- Freedom, getting away from it all, adventure, exploring
- Stress relief, relaxation
- Meeting new people
- Exercise and fitness
- Enjoying the outdoors, environment, scenery
- Focus of a hobby or interest

In parallel with mountain bike riding and other 'high-intensity' outdoor activities there are also the elements of:

- Challenge, skill improvement, test abilities
- Adrenaline, excitement, thrill, speed

Significantly, whilst trail bike touring is often physically demanding, it is an activity that has an extremely broad range of participants.

A segment of particular interest is males 40+, many of whom used to ride in their youth and who are now getting back into the activity as economic and career / family circumstances come into favourable alignment. As this is a group that is at higher risk of obesity, diabetes and heart disease, trail bike touring can be highly beneficial from a physical, mental health and alertness and social perspective.

In economic terms, it is estimated that the off road motorcycle industry generates over \$120 million per annum to the State's economy³.

Most directly, small businesses located near trailheads benefit from accommodation, meals, fuel and supplies. As an example, it is estimated that businesses in the town of Lancelin⁴ derive over \$1 million per annum as a direct consequence of the Lancelin Off Road Vehicle Area.

Environmentally, trail bike touring provides an opportunity to explore greater distances in a given timeframe, and often to reach places that would otherwise be impractical to access.

Trail bike touring can be relatively low impact when compared with other activities such as four wheel drive vehicles or horse riding:

² State Trail Bike Strategy 2008 p63

³ State Trail Bike Strategy p82-83

⁴ Trail Bike Management Pty Ltd Small Business Survey 2008

- Trail bikes are light – around 200kg including rider – and have a small tread impact which minimises surface compaction.
- A trail bike touring group rides on established trails, generally passes through an area only once each ride, and does not seek enjoyment from the 'bog and recover' antics of some four wheel drivers.
- Many trails used by trail bike touring groups throughout the Perth hills for many years, show no visible signs of deterioration.

This is not, of course, to suggest that trail bike touring is a no impact activity. It is acknowledged that localised soil disturbance can increase sediment run-off, particular in high flow events, and this can increase turbidity.

Soil destabilisation on hills can create water channel rutting (although nowhere near the impact of four wheel drives on hills). This can be managed by incorporating drainage into the trail development.

In wet conditions, soil can be transported from one area to another – with a risk of spreading dieback if travelling from an infested to a non-infested zone.

RTRA believes that with just a little planning, however, these impacts can be controlled.

Safety and Trail Conflict

With an ever-increasing number of outdoor recreators competing for space in Western Australia's State Forests there is growing potential for conflict.

Separation is needed between trail bike tourers and other trails users.

User Group	Noise impact	Trail surface impact	Collision Risk
Walkers	Significant	None – high ⁵	Some ⁶
Mountain Bikes	Some	None – high	Moderate
Horse Riders	Significant	Low	Some
4WD	None	None	High ⁷
Other Trail bikes	None	None	High

It is not only trail bike riders that have trails conflict issues. Bush walkers don't like mountain bikes on their trails (which is why the Munda Biddi was developed – to divert mountain bikes off the Bibbulmun Track) and horse riders don't like mountain bikes as they appear without warning.

Logically, it makes sense to try to provide separation of the various trails uses wherever possible. Of course this supposes that there is enough space and trails available to accommodate the various uses.

⁵ Depends on trail surface

⁶ Bushwalkers and mountain bikes can hear trail bikes approaching and step off the trail

⁷ Trail bike riders cannot hear approaching 4WDs or other trail bikes. This is the highest risk of collision

Why Catchment Areas are Important to Trail Bike Riders

The Inquiry will be looking at possible recreation sites or opportunities available outside the Perth hills and south west drinking water catchments.

RTRA's position is that alternative options are limited. The Perth hills are important for trail bike riders as they offer a quality of riding experience that is not available on the coastal plain.

- The quality of the visual environment – a significant factor for most trail bike tourers.
- The quality of the terrain – the firm ground is easier and more satisfying to ride than the sand of the coastal plain.
- The durability of the terrain – hard-pack trails can be ridden on for many years with no discernable degradation. By contrast, sand trails quickly form 'whoops' – undulations that once started continue to increase in depth and pose both a safety hazard and reduce rider satisfaction.
- The topography – hills and trail undulations add greatly to the riding experience
- The opportunity for off-highway rides of significant length (typically in excess of 50km)
- The proximity to the major population centre providing accessibility for day or part-day trips

There are already several constraints on access to the hills, most notably being Disease Risk Areas and designated trails for walk and mountain biking (eg Bibbulmun Track and Munda Biddi).

Trail conflicts are already occurring and to resolve these conflicts we require more – not less – trails.

The State Trail Bike Strategy⁸ explains this:

One concept that has received almost universal agreement is that in order to reduce the amount of undesirable trail bike use there has to be more provision made for managed use of trail bikes.

The starting point for this is to identify the existing areas and trails where trail bike use can be encouraged, consider the requirements of quantity and type of trails needed and prepare a gap analysis to inform what additional areas and trails are needed.

The objective is to provide enough trails and riding areas to satisfy riders (thereby gaining compliance) whilst minimising environmental and social impacts.

In general, the more dispersed the riding, the greater is the opportunity to:

- *reduce the environmental impact that occurs through over-use*
- *provide separation of uses that will avoid usage conflict (including the conflict between motorised and non-motorised recreation)*
- *provide the diversity of experiences sought by riders*
- *attract riders away from areas where trail bike use creates problems*

⁸ State Trail Bike Strategy 2008 p141

Providing *managed* access to outer catchment areas could provide potentially hundreds of kilometres of new trails which would assist in the managed dispersal of riders, reduce conflicts with other trails users and better cater for the expected continuing growth in popularity of trail bike touring as a recreational pursuit.

By contrast, any assumption that trail bike riders can be 'fed the scraps' after the DoW, walkers, mountain bikers and horse riders have laid claim to every square inch of the hills misses the point of what trail bike touring is all about, ignores the principles of recreational diversity and would be ineffective as a control mechanism.

It is worth noting that the Mundaring Weir Catchment Area Drinking Water Source Protection Plan (June 2007) recommended undertaking a recreation planning exercise to find suitable alternative sites for recreational off-road driving⁹. This recognised the historical importance of the Mundaring region for recreational trail bike riders and four wheel drivers.

However when the area was re-classified under the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage Act in December 2007 many areas that had previously been used by these groups became illegal, yet no attempt was made prior to this reclassification to consider the impacts on these activities, or the impacts of their displacement.

⁹ Mundaring Weir Catchment Area Drinking Water Source Protection Plan (June 2007) p 50

Current Drinking Water Source Protection Policy and Trail Bikes

There are two mechanisms that currently constrain the riding of trail bikes within Drinking Water Source Protection Areas.

The most powerful of these is the Metropolitan Water Supply, Sewerage and Drainage By-Laws 1981, in particular:

S4.7 Protection of water from turbidity, which states *inter alia*:

4.7.2 No person shall drive a vehicle on any part of a catchment area other than a road or track which has a graded, gravelled, sealed, primed or other prepared surface without written approval of the Commission.

This ByLaw has the effect of preventing trail bike touring groups from accessing the types of trails sought by riders – eg older management or forestry tracks and trails, many of which are still open public roads – effectively restricting trail bikes to ride on gravel roads. This is akin to expecting bush walkers to walk only on gravel roads.

By contrast, there is no such restriction on horse riders, who may ride on any public road irrespective of its surface.

The second mechanism is Policy 13 itself which declares Off-Road Driving incompatible in all levels of PDWSAs and restricts 'Pleasure / scenic driving' to public roads and designated access roads.'

This policy precludes the development of trail bike-specific trails that could be developed to provide both the desired separation from other trails users and planned routes to minimise sediment run-off and other trails impacts.

Why the Current Policies are not working

RTRA perceives several deficiencies in the current policies:

1. Policy 13 assumes that the Risk Avoidance strategy for Priority 1 (P1) areas actually works, and that the only recreational activities occurring in the catchment are those that are permitted. Clearly this is not the case, as trail bikes are regularly ridden throughout the catchment areas – on and off road. Enforcement actions cannot guarantee exclusion; they either have only a temporary effect on a local area or displace unauthorised activity elsewhere within the catchment. If a risk does exist, this strategy is not avoiding it.
2. The definition of a *'graded, gravelled, sealed, primed or other prepared surface'* is open to interpretation and has resulted in riders being fined under the ByLaws when they genuinely believed they were riding in an area that was permitted. It is highly likely that in some cases riders have been fined when they actually were riding in permitted areas.
3. Reliance on the above definition of a *'graded, gravelled, sealed, primed or other prepared surface'* is not in itself a cure for turbidity. A well placed, well designed single-track trail might actually introduce significantly less soil disturbance and runoff.
4. The confusion about what is legal and what is not leads riders to assume that they are always riding illegally within water catchment areas. Without a sense of privilege there is less sense of responsibility. Or to put it another way, if I'm riding illegally through this single-trail I won't be any more illegal riding through this creek bed.
5. The Metropolitan Water Supply Sewerage and Drainage Act 1909 defines a catchment area as being *"all land over, through, or under which any water flows, runs, or percolates directly or indirectly into any reservoir erected or used in connection with any water supply"*. This interpretation is not reflected in the PDWSA boundaries which have been created as a convenience for the Department of Water, as clearly there are many areas within the currently defined catchment areas where water does not – and cannot – ultimately flow into a reservoir.
6. The impact of land-based recreation pales into insignificance against the contamination caused by forestry, agriculture, mining and other large scale activities. As an example, the Mundaring reservoir receives water pumped back from the highly contaminated Lower Helena dam. An even more striking example is the photo on the front page of this submission showing fox baiting occurring within a Water Catchment area. Trail bike riders (and other recreators) are not blind to this inconsistency.
7. The Risk Avoidance approach precludes the adoption of more pragmatic management practices that may have a better overall result for water quality, while preserving opportunities for recreation within the catchment areas.

Implications of Current Policies Beyond the DWSPAs

It is one thing to highlight the inefficiencies of the current policies in respect of their effectiveness in protecting water quality.

But the impact of the current policies is also felt outside the DWSPAs, and this raises the issue of balancing the objectives of the Department of Water with the broader needs of the environment and the community.

The growth in popularity of trail bike riding, combined with the urbanisation of the outer metropolitan area is creating significant community pressures.

Put simply, there are not enough legal areas to ride.

The State Trail Bike Strategy conducted research amongst non –riders and ‘concerned residents’. 81% of respondents to the Community Survey saw providing more designated areas for trail bike riding as being the most effective solution to the issues.

The water catchment areas in the Perth Hills represent a real option to provide places to ride trail bikes that will resolve many of the community concerns, so a real effort should be made to enable this in a managed way that does not introduce unacceptable risks to water quality.

The current policy fails to capitalise on this opportunity, thereby exacerbating the issues faced by Local Government Authorities and residents.

A Queensland Case Study

The problems caused by lack of areas to ride trail bikes in South East Queensland has led to the announcement on 30th November 2009 that the State and Local Governments will jointly fund a \$4 million trail bike park on 745 hectares at the new Wyaralong dam site (copy of announcement appended)

The significance of this announcement is that the trail bike facility will be within the water catchment area of this new dam.

Even more significant is the fact that this is not a historical legacy, but a planned development.

This is clear evidence that issues of community need and protection of drinking water catchments are not mutually exclusive.

The US Experience

The US Forest Service has adopted a process of creating Vehicle Use Maps to define where Off Highway Vehicle use can occur. These maps are derived through stakeholder consultation and can include both gazetted and user-created trails as considered appropriate.

RTRA Preferred Model

RTRA advocates replacing the Risk Avoidance model with a Risk Management model.

In the context of recreational trail bike use this would involve the following, with the objective of improving the catchments while providing for recreational access:

1. **Transition from unmanaged, illegal trail riding to managed, legal.** Total exclusion makes everyone illegal. Creating more legal opportunities to ride within catchment areas will create more opportunities to engender environmental awareness and responsibility among riders and will provide more opportunity to influence where riders ride.
2. **Inclusion of the activity of trail bike touring in any recreational master planning for catchments.** There is growing recognition from agencies such as DEC and DSR of the need to include recreational trail bike riding in trails master planning¹⁰. To realise the benefits of appropriate separation of uses, trail bike trail planning should be undertaken concurrently with other recreational planning.
3. **In consultation with DoW, plan designated trail bike routes within outer catchments that provide a satisfying rider experience while avoiding the most sensitive areas and RPZs.** The concept of designated trails is central to the transition to managed riding. To achieve this will require a pragmatic approach to recognise that not all formed roads are good and not all user-created single trail is bad. Changes to the Policy and ByLaws, which currently preclude all riding off public roads, will be required to enable the designation of specified trails as legal riding.
4. **Where necessary, construct culverts, crossings and other protective devices to minimise impacts.** Planning the designated trail routes will avoid many of these issues, however where necessary an investment in impact mitigation infrastructure could open up large areas that are currently not deemed practical.
5. **Monitor trails and use rotational closure for rehabilitation.** A regular program of trail monitoring will identify any maintenance work required, and trails could be routinely rotated to provide for rehabilitation.
6. **Inform and educate riders about the responsibility required to retain the privilege.** No amount of 'NO TRAIL BIKES!' signs will be as effective in encouraging the desired behaviour as an integrated program of conditional access, education, information and dialogue. The end result is trail bike riders better understanding their role in protecting our water quality. RTRA is willing and capable of contributing to such an education program.

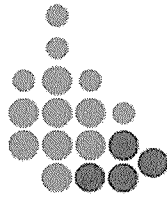
¹⁰ Western Australian Trails Strategy 2009-2015 pps 8, 11

Conclusion

The Recreational Trailbike Riders' Association is not advocating for an uncontrolled free-for-all within DWSPAs.

Rather we are calling for a more pragmatic approach to managing trail bike use and impacts so that such risks as may exist are more effectively managed, while maximising the use of these important areas for recreation.

We firmly believe that replacing the current 'risk avoidance' philosophy with one of 'risk management' will simultaneously advance the interests of the Department of Water, recreational trail bike riders, other trails users and the broader community.



Council of Mayors

South East Queensland

MEDIA RELEASE

State and local government deliver first major trail bike facility for SEQ

30 November 2009

The Premier has announced that 745 ha of State Government land at Wyaralong, near Beaudesert will be set aside for SEQ's first dedicated trail bike facility.

Premier Anna Bligh and Lord Mayor Campbell Newman said the Council of Mayors (SEQ) had agreed to support and jointly fund the development of the new facility on the State-owned land.

The Government will provide \$1 million in funding and \$1.5 million worth of land to the project which is expected to have a total cost of between \$3 million and \$4 million.

Ms Bligh made the announcement at her 20th Community Cabinet as Premier at Forest Lake in Brisbane's western suburbs.

"Off-road trail bike riding is a legitimate recreational pursuit that is becoming increasingly popular in Queensland," said the Premier.

"But illegal trail bike riding is a major issue in our suburbs and this new facility will give people a place to ride their motorbikes legally.

"Trail biking is a fantastic and exciting sport but it requires careful management in appropriate environments.

"That's why the Government is devoting land and \$1 million in funding for this new trail bike facility planned for Wyaralong.

"We are responding to the needs of local residents and riders, while also ensuring they do not impact on the natural environment."

Council of Mayors (SEQ) Chairman, Cr Campbell Newman, said South East Queensland's 230,000 trail bike riders need more legal and safe riding options that won't disturb local neighbours.

"This is the best solution to trying to reduce illegal riding in unsuitable sites that adversely affect local residents and the environment," Cr Newman said.

"The Council of Mayors (SEQ) has been working in partnership with the State Government to identify a suitable major facility site over the past year.

Media Contact: Nick Kennedy, (07) 3403 4994 or 0407 172 816

"We welcome the State Government's commitment and are willing to keep working with them to identify a suitable operator to develop and manage the site effectively and safely.

"This is a very good outcome for both trail bike riders and SEQ residents."

Planning for Stage 1 of the park is expected to be completed mid next year when the Council of Mayors will take over responsibility for its construction.

Stage 1 is likely to involve a basic camping facility, about 30 km of trail, signage, a natural terrain motocross course, a parking area and toilets.

Stage 2 of the park will provide improved camping facilities (with power, showers), a constructed motocross track (including race tower, spectator area, starting gates), additional trails and signage, and a kiosk/café.

"This site at Wyaralong, near Beaudesert, was identified because its terrain is well suited for trail bike riding. The natural topography of the area also means that noise and dust will be largely contained in the park area," said the Premier.

"The location is also one that can be easily accessed by trail bike riders from all over the South East and especially Ipswich, the Gold Coast, Brisbane and Toowoomba."

Sport and Recreation Minister Phil Reeves said the State Government has been working in partnership with the Council of Mayors (SEQ) to help identify suitable land in the south east for regional trail bike facilities.

"Queensland's booming population has made it increasingly difficult for councils to deliver these types of facilities so the state government agreed to partner with the Council of Mayors (SEQ)," said the Minister.

"This is the first major regional facility, however councils will continue to identify other smaller facilities to complement the Wyaralong site."

The development of the Wyaralong site is part of the Queensland Government's commitment under Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland to protect 50 per cent more land for nature conservation and public recreation.

Scenic Rim Regional Council Mayor and Deputy Chair of the Council of Mayors (SEQ), Cr John Brent, said he strongly backed the project and said it offered many benefits to his constituents and to all communities throughout the region.

"This will be a great facility for local residents and it will attract visitors from all over South East Queensland to our area" he said.

- Ends -

