Background
The popularity of mountain biking in Australia is increasing rapidly. Participation in both recreational and competitive mountain biking has increased significantly across the nation, which is reflected in the 18% increase in Mountain Bike Australia (MTBA) membership in the last 12 months.

To support this increase in mountain biking, significant investment has been made into trail construction and supporting infrastructure across the country. Land managers are increasingly opening, or being pressured to open, new areas to mountain biking through the construction of new trail networks.

Currently there are no national standards or guidelines for mountain bike trail design and construction in Australia. In lieu of national standards or guidelines, trail builder’s and land managers currently rely on high level guidelines published by the International Mountain Bike Association to justify design and construction decisions.

Land managers and trail builders, together with the wider mountain bike industry, have identified the need for national standards to be developed in order to better manage mountain bike trail developments and to ensure that the trail building industry is fully recognised as a profession, with a peak body and career pathways for people wanting to work in the industry.

MTBA, in collaboration with stakeholders from across the mountain biking industry have initiated a project to assess how to best develop and implement national mountain bike trail standards and to establish an accreditation framework for trail builders.

Key drivers for standards
The key drivers for the development of national mountain bike trail standards are:

• Land managers and trail builders have clear minimum standards for the design and construction of trails
• Stakeholders and investors in trail networks have more confidence that the commitments they are making to projects will result in sustainably built trails
• Land managers are better able to justify and progress trail developments with political and community stakeholders
• Land managers are better able to manage public safety risks and environmental risks associated with trail development
• Trail builders will have the ability to become accredited against the standard, to assist with ensuring that the mountain bike trail building industry is recognised as a professional body
• Land managers are better equipped to develop tender packages, and to assess and evaluate tender submissions
• Trail builders are better equipped to competitively scope, tender and price trail design and construction work
• Ongoing maintenance costs will be reduced as trails are built to minimum quality standards.
Project considerations
While there is a strong case for the development of national mountain bike standards, there are a number of issues that need to be considered, these include:

- **What form the standards will take** – there are a number of options for developing national standards (e.g. new stand-alone national standards (AS/NZS), amending existing standards to accommodate mountain biking requirements, national guidelines, etc.). This project will assess all options available to identify the most suitable method for documenting mountain bike trail design and construction requirements.

- **Who will own and administer the standards or guidelines** – as with any national standard, in order to stay relevant, ongoing updates are required. This project will identify the most suitable method for administering and managing the standards into the future.

- **Funding to develop and implement national standards** – the development of national mountain biking standards or guidelines will require substantial funds to complete. Currently there are no confirmed sources of funding to complete the work. Sourcing funding via grants may be problematic as there will not be any ‘infrastructure’ delivered as a result of the work.

- **Trail ‘normalisation’ as a result of national standards** – There are concerns in the wider mountain bike community, that national standard or guideline will result in all trails being built the same, with the same features providing a very similar riding experience wherever they ride. Any standards developed need to allow for a level of trail ‘individualisation’ and to incorporate regional trail identity. These issue needs to be addressed through effective engagement strategies and ensuring the wider mountain bike community has buy-in and real input to the development of the standards.

- **Adaptive mountain biking considerations** – any new standard or guideline will need to include Adaptive Mountain Biking requirements to continue to grow the number of participants, national events, and to enhance and build inclusive trail networks

- **Professional certification of trail builders** – a key benefit of national standards for mountain bike trail design and construction is the ability for trail builders to become accredited against the standard. Accreditation, if combined with the establishment of a peak body for trail builders, will ensure that the mountain bike trail building industry is fully recognised as a profession and will allow for the establishment of accredited training courses and the establishment of career pathways within the industry.

Where to from here?
At the 2015 Australian MTB Summit a project initiation working group was established to investigate the options and methodology to develop and implement national mountain bike trail standards and to establish a professional trail builder’s certification framework. Members of this working group are: Louise Wallace (former President, WAMBA) replaced with Peta Demidenko (WestCycle), Craig Stonestreet (Director, Natural Trails), Marty Krieg
By November 2016, the working group will aim to have investigated a range of options to deliver national mountain bike trail standards and to establish a professional trail builder’s certification framework in line with registered training organisation requirements. Key stakeholders and the wider MTB community will be consulted during this process with the results of these investigations and available options to be presented at a 2016 Australian MTB Summit.

The MTB community will be kept up to date via MTBA newsletters and other communication opportunities. Further information about this project can be found on the MTBA website www.mtba.asn.au or by calling Denise at MTBA on 07 5628 0110.