



**TOMAREE RATEPAYERS AND RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION INC –
DOG AREA REVIEW – PUBLIC FORUM - 12 AUGUST 2013 MEETING
NELSON BAY BOWLING CLUB – 7 PM**

President of TRRA Inc Terry Wall introduced Port Stephens Council officers - *Brendan Callander, Community and Recreation Planning Coordinator* and *Emma Shanks, Media Officer*. Around 50 members of the community were in attendance, many of whom were not members.

It was emphasised that TRRA Inc was acting only as a platform to raise awareness in the community of the review and as such will not be making a submission and nor would any motions be accepted from the floor.

Main points made in introduction by Brendan

- 10 years since the last dog area review
- A petition from Fingal Bay to Council earlier in the year and other dog issues on the Tilligerry Peninsula had been the main catalyst for a review of the existing areas.
- Stage 1 involved staff looking at existing maps and where it was working and where it was not, overriding legislation and other factors.
- Stage 2 (current stage of process) involves community consultation via public forums at various locations, a Facebook page which already has 255 friends and 532 submissions and comments. This has been interactive and Council officers have been answering questions left on Facebook. A reminder was given that Facebook comments are not made with any privacy. Submissions close at 5 pm on Monday 19th August.
- Stage 3 will be a review of the comments, recommended changes to mapping and promulgation for Councillors to review at a future meeting
- Stage 4 will involve finalisation of mapping and presenting to Council for final approval.
- The new maps will not come into effect until approved by Council.

Criteria includes

- only Council owned and managed land, eg, NPWS areas are not included
- Associated legislation, eg, Companions Act which precludes dogs within 10 metres of a playground
- Mapping only for off lead and prohibited areas,

- Prohibited area examples include sports fields, high concentration of people reserves, areas adjoining Marine Parks (eg Fly Point); patrolled beaches, Fingal & Birubi
- Blanket approach for all other Council reserves taken as on lead
- Dogs on leads acceptable in prohibited areas on designated pathways to facilitate passing through a prohibited area to access other areas.

Importance of Education and Signage

- Signage will be an important part of the implementation phase
- Information will be provided on the Council website; brochures will be produced for the general public and also provided to Vets waiting rooms.

Questions/Discussion with Attendees

- Anna Bay prohibited areas are too extensive. A large petition will be presented in particular to exclude Shelley Beach from the prohibited area.
- Definition of patrolled beach was the “general eye of the personnel patrolling”
- Strong concern about need for consultation with NPWS
- Suggested inclusion in prohibited zone of Dutchies from toilet block to play area as people would still be able to transit through with dogs on leads. Popular picnic area.
- Questions on lack of enforcement of current rules should be referred to enforcement officers and are not part of the review. Rangers cannot be everywhere all the time.
- Query on multi lingual signage – signs will include picture signage.
- Suggestion to check out other Council websites from around Australia, eg some allow dogs off lead on sporting fields when they are not in use.
- Not sending a welcome message to tourists with the limited areas we have for dogs off lead.
- Perception presented that 99% of dog owners are responsible and the whole exercise should just be risk managed.
- Concerns about how the message is relayed about transit through prohibited areas.
- Not enough dogs off lead areas, particularly on beaches or for people without vehicles to drive to dog beaches.
- Designated times for dogs off leads in the evening through to early morning seems to work well in many places.
- Beaches have few people on them outside tourist times and weekends. Call for more flexibility with seasonality.
- Current regulation of dogs generally on Birubi Beach and clarification sought on which area is designated as patrolled.
- New signage will be part of the review and resourcing this could be one of the challenges.
- Families would like a park set aside to picnic with their dog.

- Concern about dogs polluting the beaches and the fear that many people have of dogs off leads
- Access does not need to be the whole beach and the health benefits for owners is beneficial.
- How do we get people to read the signs? Education is the key
- Port Stephens dog laws appear Draconian compared to other States and places.
- Dog parks are available, particularly in densely populated areas, eg Leichhardt where there are coffee outlets and a general social area for dog owners. Opportunity for this to happen naturally at the proposed prohibited area at Fingal if cycleway and play area was fenced off
- Comment about the public consultation the lack of real opportunity to talk to Council officers present. Council used the “drop in” concept so that some of the voices not usually heard in a public forum would not be drowned out by the rest.

Where to from Here?

- Need to accept that people, other than dog owners, need a voice as well. Not everyone will be happy with the outcomes.
- Brendan and Emma will be advised when minutes are available on the TRRA website. There will be no separate TRRA submission. Members need to submit their own.
- Submissions will be sorted by Council officers (due to the volume) to find common threads. Names are not included on the business papers for privacy reasons. However you should be able to identify the comment you made.
- Changes from the current maps will be highlighted for the Council meeting and included on the agenda (publicly available from the Council website from 5 pm on the preceding Friday). Once adopted a new set of maps will be produced and publicised (as indicated in the introduction.)
- Everyone advised to put their own comments into Council by Monday 19th.
- Full contact details were displayed on the screen. They can be in any form, eg, email to council@portstephens.nsw.gov.au , letter to P O Box 42, Raymond Terrace or join in Facebook.
- *Recommendations are made to Councillors and it will be up to them to decide.*

Compiled from brief notes taken at the meeting by TRRA Secretary, Margaret Wilkinson.
Errors and omissions accepted.