



Leash-Up Pilot Communications Project

Post-program Results Report

Byron Shire Council. 29 June, 2020.



1. Background

Funded by the NSW Koala Strategy's *Conservation through Community Action* pillar, Byron Shire Council's *Leash-up Pilot Communications Project* aims to reduce dog-koala/wildlife interactions and attacks. The Leash-Up project tests the efficacy of social behaviour change communications (SBCC) using TV, social, digital and signage media.

Domestic dog attack is a recognised threat to vulnerable koalas, and other wildlife. In the last decade, 230 koalas were rescued from dog attack in the Northern Rivers including up to five in Byron Shire annually¹. Recorded dog attacks in the shire have tripled in three years to 59 in 2020 and 70% involve animals². Identifying domestic dog attack as an issue for management, the [Byron Coast Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management](#) (BC-CKPOM) covers 25% of the shire along urbanised coast with a population of 240 koalas.

Changing human behaviour is difficult, and dog control is a complex and sensitive issue. Dog-koala interactions and attacks are more likely to occur on private versus public land, but dog owner behaviour change on private land is unable to be reliably gauged. Alternatively, dog leashing rates are often used to gauge dog owner behaviour change. Off-leash dogs are common in public, natural and no-dog areas across Byron Shire and neighbouring LGAs. According to the *Companion Animals Act 1998 (NSW)* dogs must be leashed in public spaces not designated off lead. Thus, the initial pilot project uses dog leashing rates as an indicator of public behaviour change where a legal obligation exists.

Estimates suggest 50% of Byron Shire's 15,646 households own 1.3 dogs on average³. Around 14,000 residents or nearly 40% of the shire's population (35,081) are attributed with primary or secondary responsibility for managing one or more dogs³. With an estimated 10,000+ domestic dogs in the shire, dogs outnumber koalas by approximately 100 to one in the BC-KPOM area.

In the West Mullumbimby Koala Management Precinct of the BC-KPOM is a pilot site bordered by koala habitat with koala sightings occurring within 100 - 900 metres of high density, peri urban development where housing will grow by 40%. The site has restored riparian habitat, park/field, playground, sports courts, oval and sealed paths throughout. Dog ownership is high and on-leash dogs are allowed in public spaces, except the playground and oval where regulatory signs include no-dog icons. Despite a designated off-leash area being 1 km away, off-leash dogs are exercised at the sports oval where a dedicated no-dog sign was installed but removed by council due to community outrage.

Over June/July 2020, pre-program statistical field data collected from the pilot site showed 69.2% of dogs off-leash on average in public spaces and no-dog areas (n = 15, 118 obs.)⁴. Since then, no enforcement activity has been undertaken and the Leash-Up pilot project's *Bow Wow! Leash-me now!* campaign ran for eight weeks in April to June, 2021. The campaign was developed via two stages of online dog owner engagement research, development of an SBCC strategy and creative concepts, followed by the production and deployment of campaign media (Appendix 1). This report outlines the results of a Post-campaign Awareness Survey and dog leashing field data from June, 2021 to gauge behaviour change arising from communications only, prior to enforcement activity.

¹ Friends of the Koala Inc., 2010 - 2019. Annual Reports - Regional koala care records by LGA and cause for rescue.

² Byron Shire Council, 2018 - 2020. Annual Reports - Compliance with the Animals Act 1998 section.

³ Byron Shire Council, December 2020. Bow Wow Dog Owner Survey Results: Updated Final Report.

⁴ Byron Shire Council, July 2020. Pre-program Benchmarking Results - Draft Report.

2. Campaign Survey Results

A five-minute, online survey was conducted to benchmark awareness of the campaign, key messaging, any change in attitudes and social norms compared to prior measures. The survey was emailed to 146 dog owners who opted-in during prior council surveys.

Sixty-two respondents completed the survey representing a participation rate of 42%. The sample (n = 62) could vary within +/- 12% of the true value of the primary and secondary dog owner population estimate of 14,000 (95% CI).

Participant ages skewed older with 96% aged 35+ and 52% aged 55+. Gender skewed strongly to 69% female with 26% male and 5% non-identified. Sixty-five percent advised they always leash their dog, while 35% do not.

Key measures of awareness

Participants were asked if they could 'recall the main message/s of any communication they had recently seen or heard about leashing dogs' with 68% recalling one or more of the message options.

The top messages recalled are ranked as follows:

- 44% - Protect wildlife
- 35% - Protect koalas
- 29% - Control of the dog
- 24% - Safety for dogs
- 17% - Safety for people
- 17% - It's on-leash unless off-leash
- 16% - Avoid the unexpected
- 14% - Reduce stress

Non-campaign communications may have contributed to this result. However, given 'recent dog leashing communication' was specified and 'protecting koalas' performed strongly, it would be fair to assume the result is likely due to the Leash-Up campaign, and the same for 'protecting wildlife' to some extent.

Among dog owners, the prompted campaign awareness is indicated:

- 29% awareness of the 'If koalas could talk' dog-leashing TV ad
- 17% awareness of the 'If dogs could talk' dog-leashing video
- 13% awareness of the digital ads

Differences in attitudes and social norms

A few attitudes and social norms were remeasured with the greatest changes being:

- 60% (+23%) disagree that most community members walk their dogs on leash
- 68% (+16%) disagree the choice to leash is entirely up to them
- 58% (+21%) disagree leashing is a hassle
- 56% (+10%) agree that leashing reduces their dog's ability to exercise
- 77% (+9%) agreement that dog leashing helps to protect wildlife

These results may suggest that participants may feel more strongly about dog leashing now, compared to the before the Leash-Up campaign.

3. Post-campaign Leashing Results

Data

Statistical field data was gathered based on '[A simple method for monitoring dog leash compliance behaviour in parks and natural areas](#)' by Leung, Walden-Schreiner, Conlon and Miller (2015). Data were gathered for one-hour periods across three weeks. Day and time of collection was matched to pre-campaign data collection as much as practically possible. The data variables collected include location, exercise surface, leash compliance and dog size. The percentage of observations at each location were matched to within 4% (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of locations contributing to dog leashing observations

Location	Pre-campaign (n = 15, 118 obs.)	Post-Campaign (n = 15, 149 obs.)
Sports oval	36%	40%
Park	21%	17%
Street	38%	40%
Other	5%	3%
Total	100%	100%

No enforcement activity was performed by Council over the study period to ensure that naturally occurring behaviour was observed. Data were collated, summarised and analysed using Excel. The percentage of on-leash and off-leash dogs was calculated for each sample and the average of sample percentages.

Results

Fifteen one-hour data collection sessions ($n = 15$) gathered 149 observations with an average of 9.9 dogs per hour. This represents an increase of 2.0 dogs per hour compared to pre-program benchmarking. Increased dog ownership and population growth in an expanding housing estate might offer one explanation for this.

On average 57.8% ($s = 0.14$) of dogs were off-leash representing an 11.4% increase in dog leashing compared to the pre-campaign off-leash rate of 69.2% ($s = 0.21$) (Figure 1). The percentage of dogs off-leash ranged between 36.7% - 90% (Figure 2).

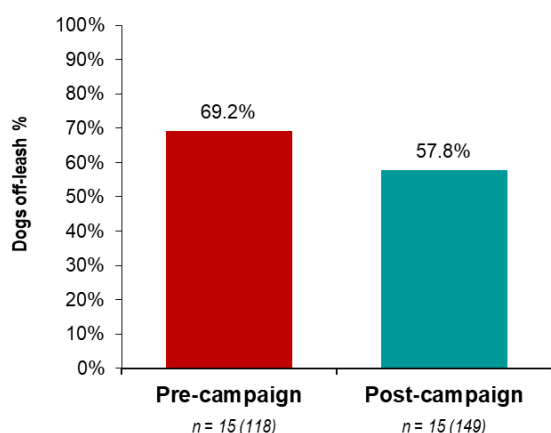


Figure 1: Average percentage of dogs exercised off-leash pre-campaign (69.2%, $s = 0.21$) and post-campaign (57.8%, $s = 0.14$) at West Mullumbimby Koala Management Precinct.

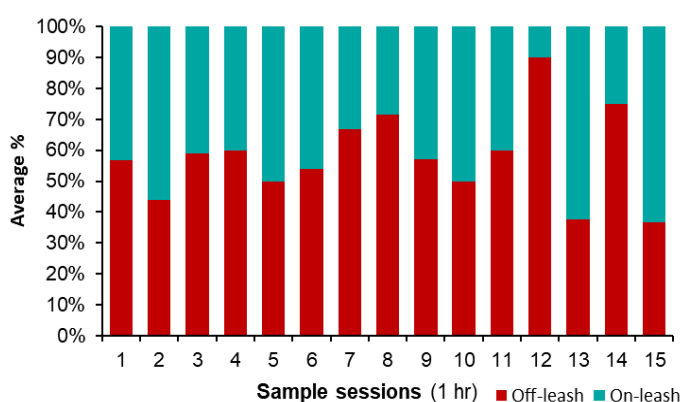


Figure 2: Average percentage of dogs exercised off-leash versus on-leash for sampling sessions of one hour duration at the West Mullumbimby Koala Management Precinct.

Dog leashing increased by 22% on streets and 21% in park areas, but only by 5% at the sports oval (Figure 3). Some dogs were observed on-leash until reaching the oval for off-leash exercise. Leashing decreased at the sports courts with 100% of dogs off-leash but is only based on four observations as lesser destination for dog exercise compared to others.

The percentage of large dogs off-leash reduced by 26% which is the largest change indicated, while medium-sized off-leash dogs reduced by 17%. In contrast, the percentage of small dogs exercised off-leash has increased by 8% (Figure 4).

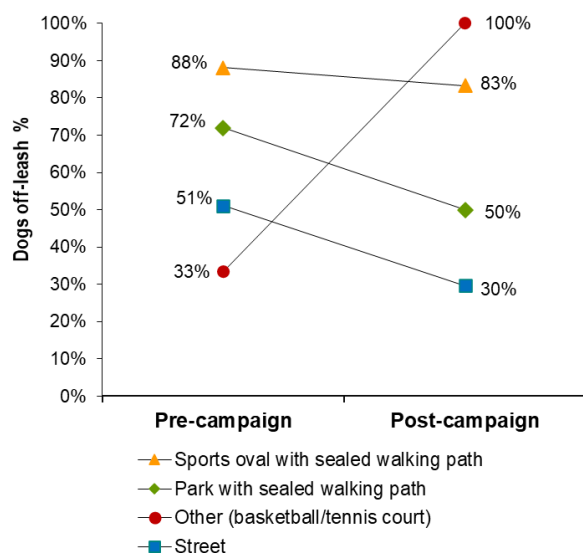


Figure 3: Percentage of off-leash dogs by location, pre-campaign and post-campaign for at the West Mullumbimby Koala Management Precinct.

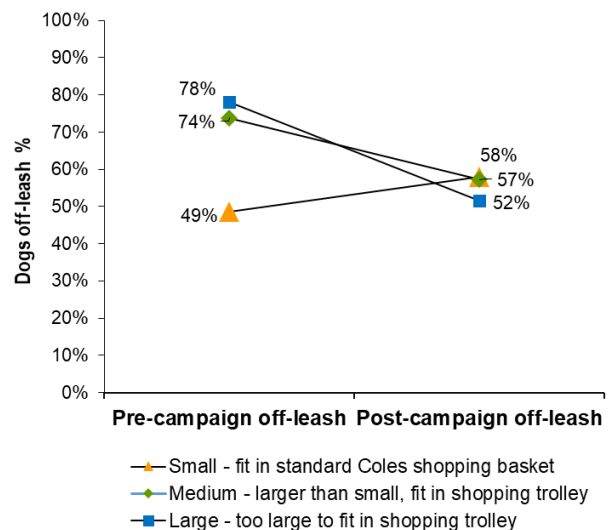


Figure 4: Percentage of off-leash dogs by size, pre-campaign and post campaign at the West Mullumbimby Koala Management Precinct.

Conclusion

Although dog leashing only increased incrementally by 11.4%, some very clear behaviour changes are evidenced:

1. Dog owners are increasingly leashing their dogs in streets and parks by +20%; and
2. Owners of large dogs are increasingly leashing their dogs by +26%.

In this regard, the campaign communications do appear to have had a positive effect and achieved incremental changes to dog owner behaviour.

Analysis of off-leash behaviour among owners of small dogs would likely show much of it occurs at the oval and contributes substantially to the sustained presence of unleashed dogs, as was observed. Any reduced presence of large, off-leash dogs at the oval might further motivate increased off-leashing of small dogs, along with other behavioural factors.

Lastly, for koalas and dogs in private land settings, this work could suggest that owners of larger dogs might be more amenable to making changes to their dog and land management practices in favour of other animals.

Given that the Leash-Up campaign has provided a foundation which by design, encompassed many dog breeds for broader appeal, future programs might consider owners of large dogs more specifically.

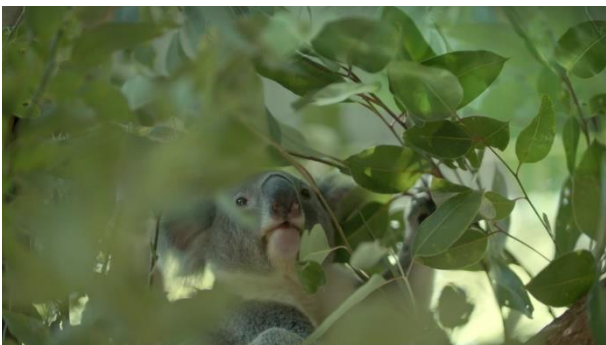
Overall Project Learnings

1. More off-leash areas are needed to reduce the impacts of domestic dogs in general. Some dog owners are leashing more consciously on the street and in the park, but some dogs are being unleashed for exercise once arriving at the oval (or not leashed at all).
2. Engaging signage with a 'thank you for leashing' message is ignored by some dog owners, and not others. Numerous dog owners pass 'on-leash' signs with dogs off-leash. Two out of the four signage locations were ideal (street and park) for communication to foot-traffic, while the other two not so much due to one lower profile site, and the other needing larger size if appealing to vehicle traffic from a road island.
3. Some dog owners point to others and their dogs as the problem rather than considering they may also contribute by not leashing (i.e. reinforcing the social norm).
4. Wildlife conservation (and safety) is not the most widely appealing motivator to change dog leashing behaviour but gives a 'feel good' to those already doing the behaviour.
5. Use all communications to drive website traffic via link/visit webpage call to action with a smart-url.
6. Social media can provide a monitor for qualitative, not quantitative engagement, and short, boosted videos increase and extend audience engagement, discussion and sharing of important information. This encourages 360 degree comments over time.
7. A mix of multi-pronged media and high repetition is required to reach dog owners in high numbers to generate message recall.
8. Human behaviour is very hard to change. Expect a minority to respond fairly quickly and aim for increments of change e.g. off-leash area proximity/convenience as next target issue.
9. Projects (especially with an element of 'bad news' for some dog owners) take longer and are much more difficult to implement within local government than anticipated.
10. Achieving incremental changes in leashing behaviour is possible to an extent via communications only, and without enforcement activity. However, shifting social norms will take longer than two months and requires consistent, ongoing effort. The program appears to have raised the 'care-factor' concerning dog leashing indicating a first step.

Appendix 1 – Campaign materials and performance

1.1 TV ad - If Koalas could talk

<https://www.facebook.com/100064469540703/videos/198822565408604>



TVC PERFORMANCE

- Six week campaign 16 May - 26 June, 2021
- Aired across 3 commercial TV networks in the Northern Rivers/Northern NSW region
- Reach to 53% of TV viewing households (237,000) with frequency of 3+ times
- Reach to 41% of TV viewing households (183,000) 7+ times

Facebook video (public stats)

- Views 4,800
- Likes 20
- Shares 10
- Comments 0

1.2 Social media video - If dogs could talk

<https://www.facebook.com/100064469540703/videos/222673913002790>



DOG VIDEO PERFORMANCE

Facebook – boosted post (public stats)

- Views 13,000+
- Likes 190+
- Shares 60+
- Comments 80+

1.3 Social media video: Koala Vet talks koalas and dogs

<https://www.facebook.com/100064469540703/videos/1390044188024326>



1.4 Digital Display ads – Pay per click

- Over 500,000 viewable impressions (at least 50% of ad visible for 1 second)
- 925 click throughs to council's dog-leashing page
- Almost four times the traffic received by council's koala pages for same period
- Equals one third of the visits received by koala.nsw.gov.au (for 2 months)
- The most effective ads in attracting click-throughs were - 1) Hound, drop-ins 2) Border collie, safety 3) Staffy, stress relief 4) Dalmatian, spotted and 5) Airedale, 'Wuv me'



Avoid getting collared with a fine.



In Byron Shire

On-leash unless off-leash here →

Leashing reduces stress all-round.



In Byron Shire

On-leash unless off-leash here →

Safer for your dog and others.



In Byron Shire

On-leash unless off-leash here →

Avoid getting spotted without a leash.



In Byron Shire

On-leash unless off-leash here →

Leashing helps prevent the unexpected.



In Byron Shire

On-leash unless off-leash here →



Leashes. Not just for bad hair days.



Find out why in Byron Shire →

Which random place is my cat in right meow?

[Share](#) 18 comments 286 points

People Are Sharing Their Cozy Places And The Pics Look Very Inviting (40 Pics)


INTERIOR DESIGN

In this hectic world, the home has become our shelter, and all we want is the sheer coziness of it.

women's violence towards men And Men's Violence Towards Women


69 comments 64 points

Safer for your dog and other creatures.



On-leash unless off-leash here →

In Byron Shire

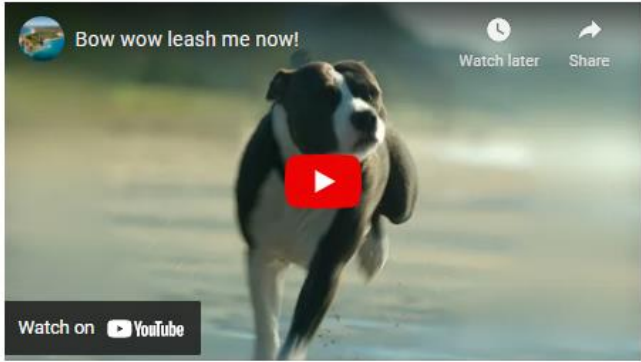


I Explored New Zealand's Diverse Beauty, Here Is A Timelapse Video And Photos That I Made

6 comments 42 points

1.5 [Byron Shire Council's Dog-Leashing web page](#)

Dog leashing



Dogs make wonderful companions, family members and workers with approximately 10,000+ domestic dogs living in Byron Shire.

Leashing all dogs in public spaces not designated 'off-leash' ensures you're always in control and attentive to your dog (including their waste).

When everyone leashes, it not only benefits you and your dog, but other dogs, dog owners, people and animals because leashing:

1. reduces unwanted dog approaches and stressful interactions
2. limits aggression and minimises bites
3. keeps your dog safe and under control
4. helps to protect our wildlife.

Leashing means avoiding a \$330 fine, or more if an off-leash dog rushes, harasses or chases any person or animal. Find out more about [responsibilities and penalties](#).

Bow Wow! Thanks for leashing now!

Why does dog leashing matter?

Leashing is good dog community care. With dog owners generally spending more time in nature than non-dog owners, many dog owners conscientiously leash their dogs in public spaces and understand the potential impacts of free-roaming dogs.

Six things to consider

1. Even if your off-leash dog is friendly, other on-leash dogs can be more protective or aggressive when approached by off-leash dogs.
2. Whether your dog is legally on or off-leash, before approaching an unfamiliar dog [look for these canine signs](#).
3. In unexpected or threatening situations, normally predictable dogs can act out of character on canine instinct, especially in highly stimulating environments.
4. Dog walking in natural habitat can reduce the number of birds by 41% and the types of birds by 35%.
5. Off-leash dogs cause breeding shorebirds to leave their nests for longer than on-leash dogs so keeping dogs out of sand dunes helps (endangered) shorebirds to successfully raise their chicks.
6. Dogs often out-number threatened wildlife. For example, there are approximately 100 dogs to every koala across 25% of the shire, including where koalas move between fragmented habitat close to areas regularly frequented by numerous domestic dogs.

In fact, appropriately leashing dog owners can be good wardens for nature and the environment in general. [Find out more about Byron Shire's wildlife](#).

WEBPAGE PERFORMANCE

Page views: 3,400

Unique page views: 3,200

Time on page: 1 min 50 sec

Main traffic sources

- Facebook 62%
- Google Display ads 29%
- Ranked 4th most visited page on website over campaign period
- Visitors spent 10 sec longer on leashing page compared to the average page time (1 min 40 sec)

Comparatively:

- 300 page views for koala web pages over same period
- 550 unique visits to off-leash dog maps page

1.6 On-ground signage

On-ground, aluminium signage (450 x 300 mm) comprised eight different messages on double-mounted signs using existing open spaces poles. The size-wise worked well for passing foot-traffic but larger signs are required for vehicle drivers. Signage was not installed close to the oval given its 'no-dog' status and sign copy stating 'on-leash' area.

