

DRAFT FOR EXHIBITION



Dogs in Public Spaces Strategy

2022 - 2032



Byron Shire Council

Acknowledgement of country

In the preparation of this Strategy, Council acknowledges and pays respect to the Bundjalung of Byron Bay – Arakwal People as Traditional Custodians of the land within Byron Shire, and form part of the wider Aboriginal nation known as the Bundjalung. In addition, Council acknowledges and respects the Widjabal and Mindjungbul people as Traditional Custodians within the Byron Shire. Council acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside within this area.

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Introduction

Background

This Dogs in Public Spaces Strategy (Strategy) sets out the vision and strategic direction for the management of dogs in Byron Shire Council's public spaces for the next 10 years.

The Strategy has been created in consultation with the Byron Shire community and under the *Our Byron Our Future - Community Strategic Plan 2032* direction to "enhance community safety and amenity while respecting our shared values".

It embraces Council's holistic approach to the management of its public spaces for the enjoyment of everyone in the community - dog lovers and the general public alike.

The five themes and strategic directions in this Strategy reflect a balanced policy approach to address the needs of all public space users. These themes and directions will inform Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan in the future.



Vision

To manage dogs in suitable public spaces in a way that creates safe and respectful places and reflects a balance of needs between the environment, dog owners and the broader public.

Strategy objectives

The Strategy aims to:

- Balance the public space needs of both dog owners and the wider community
- Protect areas of important environmental and recreational value by designating areas where dogs are prohibited
- Integrate community views and expectations in the management and control of dogs in public spaces
- Minimise potential conflicts between dogs, environmentally sensitive areas and other recreational activities
- Provide dog owners with access to public spaces to exercise their dogs off-lead
- Support and promote the social value of responsible dog ownership
- Encourage greater compliance with relevant legislation and ensure the safety of the public

These objectives inform the five broad themes in the Strategy.

Themes



Theme 1: Environment



Theme 2: Education



Theme 3: Responsibility



Theme 4: Infrastructure



Theme 5: Spaces

Context

Background

Our Shire has over 10,000 registered dogs plus a myriad of stunning public spaces which are enjoyed by our 35,000 residents and 2.2 million annual visitors.

We know that lots of people in our Shire love dogs. There is also substantial evidence which suggests that dogs provide significant benefits to not only their owners but the community in which they live.

At the same time, public spaces are for everyone in our community and are home to precious wildlife and habitat that are vulnerable to the impact of dogs. Dog owners must also follow certain rules when out and about in public with their pooches. Council has an active role in managing our public spaces and enforcing compliance with the rules.

This makes it important for Council to have a clear strategic direction on the management of dogs in public spaces. This Strategy reflects a balanced policy approach that promotes proactive and responsible dog ownership and enables dogs and people to coexist in our community.



10,000+
dogs

35,000
residents

2.2m
annual
visitors

Pressures and constraints

There are several unique pressures and constraints in the Byron Shire. Firstly, the population in the Shire is set to continue to increase together with levels of dog ownership. This means more people and more dogs in our public spaces.

In recent years, and particularly following COVID, increased dog ownership has also seen attitudes towards dogs evolve. This includes the humanisation of dog behaviour and the view that dogs are a part of the family. At the same time, there is an increasing concern about poorly behaved dogs and dog owners not following the rules. There are also unique needs and challenges of our transient population (such as people experiencing homelessness or who are sleeping rough) when it comes to dog ownership and management. Added to the mix is the laid-back attitude and culture in the Shire.

On top of these dynamics, the availability of public space is highly constrained with the Shire having a large amount of environmentally sensitive land. Many people live in and visit our Shire because of this beautiful environment. At the same time, there is growing awareness about the negative impact that dogs can have on native habitats and wildlife.

There has not been a review of the dog off-lead areas for some time and no new spaces have been created to match the population growth and the changing demographics and attitudes toward dogs. Due to the proximity of the existing off-lead areas to the National Parks estate, there are also limited opportunities to change the boundaries. There can also be competing needs of dog owners and the wider community, particularly at beaches and sportsgrounds. In addition, large areas of public space are scarce, meaning that developing new off-lead areas away from the beach in every village or township is difficult.

These factors have resulted in increasingly polarised views and feelings about dogs in public spaces and how their behaviour should be managed in the future.



Connection to other plans and strategies

This Strategy falls under the *Our Byron Our Future - Community Strategic Plan 2032* objective to “cultivate and celebrate our diverse cultures, lifestyle and sense of community” and the strategy to “enhance community safety and amenity while respecting our shared values”.

The themes and actions in this Strategy will inform Council’s four-year Delivery Programs and annual Operational Plans.

The Strategy, together with the new *Guide for Dog Areas in the Byron Shire*, replaces the Companion Animal Exercise Areas Policy 2019. It will also inform future planning for open spaces in the Shire. Other relevant policies include Council’s:

- **Enforcement Policy 2020** - sets out Council’s regulatory role in relation to dogs
- **Open Space Asset Management Plan** - sets out the customer service levels for open space in the Shire
- **Local Orders for the Keeping of Animals** - prescribes certain areas in the Shire as wildlife protection areas and limits dog ownership to two per household
- **Annual Compliance Priority Report** – sets the compliance priorities for Council each year across all areas including animal enforcement.



Strategy development

Council followed three key steps to create this Strategy.:

Step 1: Research & review

This stage included reviewing the legal framework and policy options available, analysing enforcement and compliance data, benchmarking against other councils as well as site inspections and desktop review.

Step 2: Community engagement

Council then actively engaged with the community to understand their needs and concerns. This included dog owners and general members of the public. Activities included a Community Working Group, online surveys and in-person drop-in sessions.

Step 3: Strategy development

The draft Strategy was developed with further input from the Community Working Group and with direct feedback from the community through public exhibition on Council's website.

975

Online survey responses

55

Business survey responses

300+

People at the drop-in sessions



Summary of engagement activities

Below is a summary of the engagement activities carried out by Council to inform this Strategy over 2020 - 2022. Together, these consultation outcomes have been used to develop the themes, strategic direction and site-specific actions that will guide Council's implementation of the Strategy.

Bow wow dog owner survey

Completed by 400 residents as part of the Bow Wow! campaign. It identified beaches are the top places people like to take their dogs off-lead.

Open space asset survey

Community survey on the customer service levels for open spaces highlighted people want Council to focus on the quality and renewal of existing spaces.

Companion animals survey

Initial survey on the current dog exercise areas in the Shire with 88 responses. This highlighted the need for a balanced approach to the issues.

Community Working Group

The Group was established to help inform and guide the preparation of the Strategy. With around 10 active members, it worked with Council in an advisory role.

Online surveys

The community survey received a total of 975 responses highlighting the diversity of opinions on the issue. The business survey attracted 55 responses.

Drop-in sessions

12 drop-in sessions were held across six localities with the Shire with over 300 dog owners and the general public attending and providing feedback on the emerging themes.

Exhibition on website

The project has been promoted on Council's website including the formal exhibition of the draft Strategy for public feedback.

78%

Dog owners see the social aspect of owning a dog as important / very important

60%

People see increasing enforcement as important / very important

40%

Dog owners always use Council provided dog waste bags

Consultation outcomes

The consultation outcomes reflect the diverse and divided opinions in the community about how to manage dogs in public spaces. Despite the range of opinions, there was a general consensus that it is important to protect the environment from the impacts of dogs – both wildlife and habitat.

Many dog owners value the social aspect of dog ownership and also value the community aspect of the places they go with their dogs. Many dog owners are satisfied with the existing off-lead areas though given their popularity some of the off-lead beaches are crowded and other spaces are seen as too small or not fit for purpose.

At the same time, there is growing concern from the wider community about out-of-control and poorly trained dogs, particularly at off-lead beaches and places where dogs should be on-lead or are not allowed. There is also general concern about dog owners not picking up after their dogs and some being aggressive / recalcitrant or having a sense of entitlement about spaces.

There is a difference in opinion about the best approach to manage the issue. Many desire greater visibility of rangers and more enforcement action for non-compliance. Others want a strong focus on education about responsible dog ownership and appropriate dog behaviour together with better signage.

Council's provision of dog waste bags at various locations is well-regarded by the community. Although the existing signage is seen as old, confusing and inconsistent and in need of renewal. There is an identified need to improve the information about the rules as well as places dogs can and can't go in the Byron Shire. This includes communicating the "why" behind the rules and the need for personal responsibility.

86%

believe community and Council should protect wildlife and their habitat

68%

strongly enjoy their dog being able to move freely off-lead



Legal framework

Overview

The legal framework for the management of dogs in public spaces in NSW is the *Companion Animals Act 1998* (the Act). Council and dog owners have important responsibilities under the Act.

The general rule – dogs on lead

Generally, dogs must be on a lead in a public space. This is the law under the Act. The only exceptions are spaces that are designated off-lead areas, or where dogs cannot go at all (known as prohibited areas).

Under the Act, public spaces are called a “public place”. These are defined in the Act as “any pathway, road, bridge, jetty, wharf, road-ferry, reserve, park, beach or garden, and any other place that the public are entitled to use.”

Council’s responsibilities

Council is responsible for administering the Act in the Shire. Council’s role is to:

- promote awareness of the Act with respect to dog ownership
- designate at least one area in the Shire as off-lead
- declare places where dogs are prohibited
- enforce non-compliance with the rules

Council has dedicated animal enforcement officers to assist the community in relation to the Act.

Council also undertakes annual community education programs and other companion animal initiatives to support responsible dog ownership.

Owner’s responsibilities

When a dog is in a public space, the owner must:

- have a collar and name tag (with an address or phone number of the owner) on their dog
- keep their dog under the effective control of a competent person
- have their dog on a lead (or similar), with the lead held by, or attached to, a person
- immediately clean up after their dog when it poos
- not have more than four dogs

Dog owners are liable if their dog attacks a person or another animal. Significant fines can also apply where the laws are not followed.

Role of National Parks & Wildlife Service

Dogs are prohibited from land reserved or acquired under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974*. This includes National Parks and Nature Reserves. NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) is responsible for enforcing restrictions in these areas. Council works in partnership with NPWS to raise awareness about the rules in these areas.

Policy options

To balance the needs of dog owners and others in the community, there are a number of policy options relating to the use of spaces that which Council has considered in creating this Strategy. A summary of these policy options is shown in the table below.

Policy option	How it works	Comment
Dog prohibited areas	Dogs are not permitted in designated areas	Used to exclude dogs in areas where conflicts can readily arise between dogs, people and the environment (e.g. popular tourist beaches, Nature Reserves and highly use sportsgrounds).
Dogs permitted on-lead only	Dogs are permitted to enter and use areas, but only when on-lead	This is the default option for most public spaces.
Time share	Dogs are permitted off-lead only at certain times	Potentially viable in areas that have variable use, such as low use sportsgrounds and beaches. Requires responsible dog owner cooperation to avoid conflicts (e.g. picking up after dogs on sportsgrounds).
Dogs permitted off-lead	Dogs are permitted off-lead within a certain area in which other activities may occur	Requires clear definition of boundaries within a broader area to avoid user conflicts.
Dedicated dog park	Dogs are permitted off-lead in areas generally only used by dogs and their owners	May included enclosed fenced areas or areas where there are typically no other uses such as playgrounds, picnic facilities and formal sporting activities.

Public spaces in the Shire

Overview

Council manages around 150 different open spaces in the Shire. This includes beaches, sportsgrounds, reserves and parks. Many of these beautiful places are loved by dog owners and the general public alike.

For the purposes of this Strategy, “public spaces” include these open spaces plus any place that is generally open and accessible to the public that is not privately owned land.

Beaches

Our beaches are popular public spaces to take dogs, particularly the designated off-lead areas. However, dogs are also prohibited on many beaches in the Shire either by signage at access points or because the beaches are located within the National Park estate.

Beaches that allow dogs off-lead are accessible year-round.

Parks and reserves

Our parks and reserves are also popular for dog walking and exercise including in our in-land villages. Generally, dogs must be on-lead in these places except in designated off-lead areas (e.g. Bangalow and Mullumbimby).

Sportsgrounds

Whilst many sportsgrounds may seem like great dog areas, they can create conflict between dogs and sporting participants. Dogs are not therefore generally prohibited from these areas by signage.

Bushland reserves

Dogs can be exercised on-lead in certain bushland reserves in the Shire, but not within the National Parks estate. Effective control of dogs on-lead is critical in these areas where there can be abundant native wildlife.

Fenced dog parks

There are no dedicated fenced dog parks in the Shire. Council has however identified the need to create new dedicated dog parks across the Shire and this forms an important part of proposed future directions.

Civic spaces

Civic spaces include a range of places in our towns and villages such as footpaths, streets and other public gathering areas. Dogs are to be on-lead in these spaces except in two wildlife protection areas where dogs are prohibited at Tread Lightly Estate (Hardy Avenue, North Ocean Shores) and Lilli Pilli Estate (Byron Bay).

Note: The use of private property for exercising dogs on-lead or off-lead (for example, <https://www.sniffspace.com.au/>) is excluded from the scope of this Strategy.

Places dogs can't go

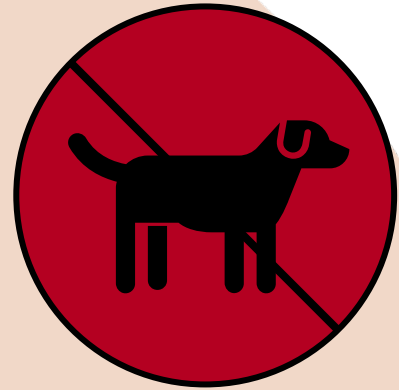
As well as National Parks and Nature Reserves, there are other public spaces where dogs cannot go. These rules are made under the Act.

These include:

- Within 10m of a children's playground
- Within 10m of public food preparation and eating areas
- Into areas that have been declared and signposted dog prohibited areas by Council. These areas can be beaches, recreation areas, sportsgrounds and wildlife protection areas.

Council can also prohibit dogs in certain places by signage under the *Local Government Act 1993*.

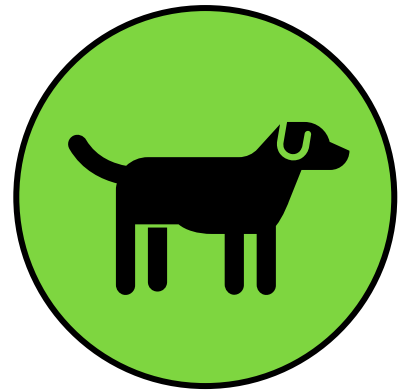
Council may prohibit dogs from public spaces for different reasons. For example, environmental protection of native wildlife and habitat, the safety of other users or repeated complaints of dog nuisance.



Places dogs can be off-lead

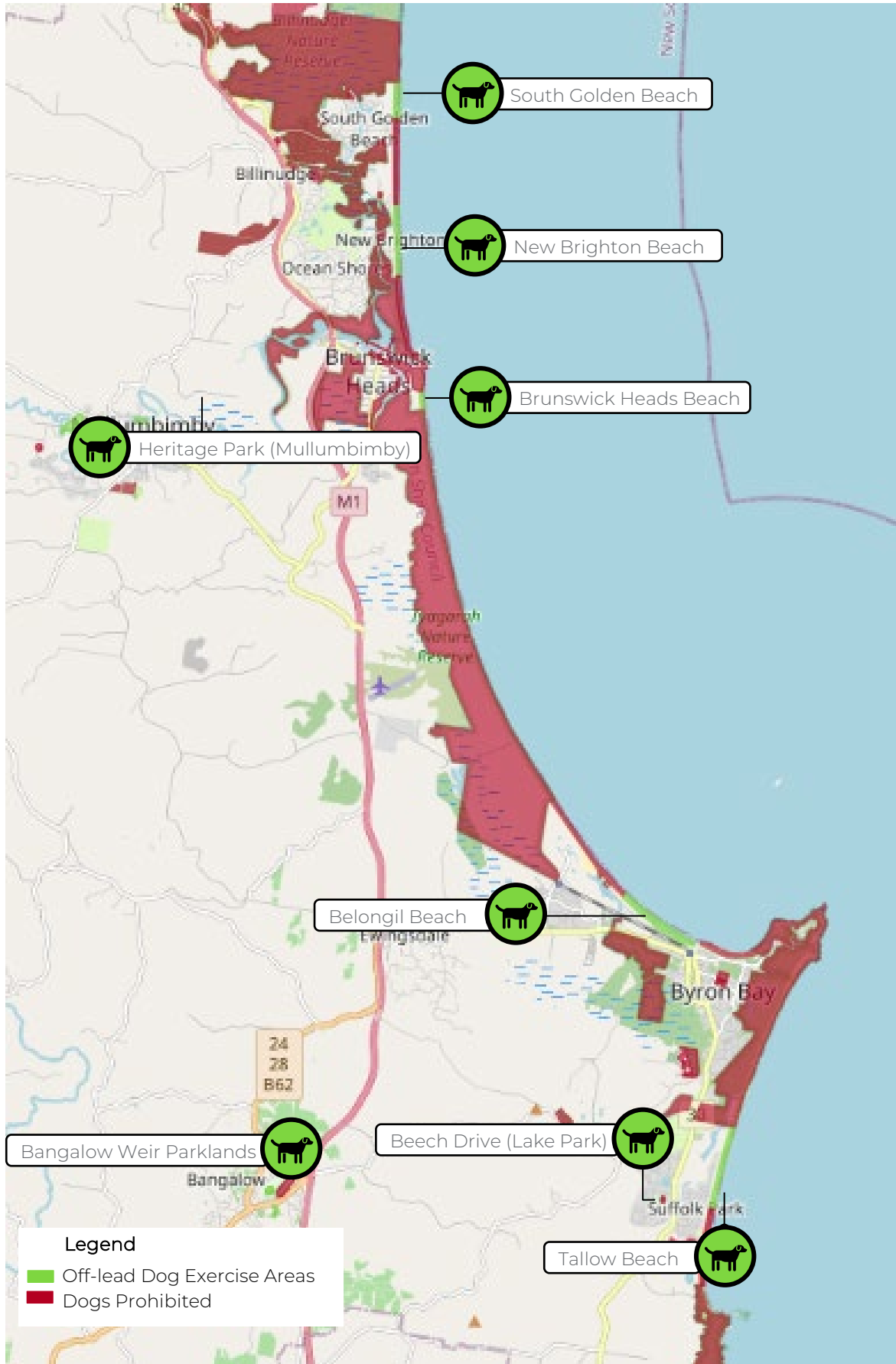
In 2022, Council has eight locations across the Shire that are designated as off-lead exercise areas. This includes parks and beaches of different sizes. A map of each area is available on Council's website and in the *Guide to Dog Areas in the Byron Shire*.

Owners can exercise dogs off-lead in these areas (i.e. without having the dog on a lead as required in other public spaces). When exercising off-lead, the dog must always be under the effective control of a competent person and must not rush at, attack, bite, harass or chase any person or animal.



Dog owners can be issued a significant on-the-spot fine for failing to keep a dog under effective control in an off-lead area, taking a dog to a prohibited place, having a dog off-lead in on-lead area or not picking up dog waste.

Council designated off-lead dog exercise areas



Themes & directions

Council has developed five key themes to drive future actions identified in this Strategy. These themes are informed by community feedback and seek to strike a balanced policy approach to managing dogs in public spaces.

Key themes



Theme 1: Environment

Manage negative impacts of dogs on our wildlife and environment



Theme 2: Education

Engage with residents, businesses and visitors by promoting responsible dog ownership



Theme 3: Responsibility

Encourage dog owners to follow the rules by taking an active compliance approach and supporting individual responsibility



Theme 4: Infrastructure

Improve infrastructure to enable responsible dog ownership, communicate information and minimise impacts



Theme 5: Spaces

Create spaces that balance the needs of dog owners and other public space users

Priorities for the strategic directions

The priority of each strategic direction has been identified as:

- **Immediate** – to be implemented within a year
- **Short-term** – to be implemented within 1-3 years
- **Medium-term** – to be implemented within 3-5 years
- **Long-term** – to be implemented 5 years+
- **Ongoing** – ongoing implementation

It is recommended that the directions are reviewed in 5 years (ie 2027) to re-prioritise directions in light of any changed circumstances.



Theme 1: Environment

Manage negative impacts of dogs on
our wildlife and environment

Background

The Byron Shire has a diverse environment with local wildlife and habitat that is vulnerable to domestic pets such as dogs. These environments are often located on or near Council's public spaces, such as coastal dunes, bushland reserves or the National Parks estate.

Unfortunately, many native Australian animals are attacked or disturbed by domestic dogs each year. Native wildlife most at risk include shorebirds, koalas, wrens, lizards, wallabies, possums and turtles including their nests.

Most dog owners express great care for the environment and seek to protect native wildlife and habitat. However, some people still exercise their dogs in protected areas despite signs prohibiting dogs. Or they allow their dogs to run off-leash in sensitive areas such as dunes. This can lead to increased attacks on native wildlife and damage to their habitat. For this reason, education and signage must have strong messages and clear instructions for the ongoing use of areas (where dogs are permitted) and/or the potential for impacts

Importantly, Council is not solely responsible for managing the impacts of dogs on the environment and must work closely with NPWS and other agencies on an ongoing basis to address this issue in the broader environment.



Awareness of environmental impacts

Throughout community engagement for the project, it was clear that addressing the impact that dogs can have on the natural environment is a top priority.

Frequent comments on this issue noted that both dogs and their owners have been seen to negatively impact the natural environment. For example, owners not picking up after their dogs or leaving dog waste bags behind. Other examples include dogs harassing, or in the worst case, killing wildlife. This issue is further compounded by the number of Council's designated off-lead beaches bordering the National Parks estate that contains significant local wildlife and threatened species.

Some dog owners are simply unaware of the impacts that their dogs can have on the environment. For example, the scent left by dogs can interrupt the nesting and breeding cycles of shorebirds. Dune rehabilitation works can also be damaged by dogs running off-lead in the dune areas. This impact is incremental and it can be difficult for Council to address this issue at the time it occurs.

Council will undertake education targeted at dog owners (residents and visitors) that aims to raise awareness about the environmental impacts of dogs. This will build on the Bow Wow, Look at Me Now campaign. It will specifically address dogs in public spaces managed by Council, as well as seeking to partner with the National Parks & Wildlife Service to address this issue more broadly.

Strategic direction 1

Educate residents and visitors about the environmental impacts of dogs

Undertake targeted education initiatives with a specific focus on wildlife protection and understanding of access arrangements for dogs in sensitive localities.

Key areas to cover include:

- Online resources about shorebird and dune wildlife
- Installing educational signage
- Mapping dog prohibited areas including the National Parks estate
- Integrating environmental initiatives within ongoing responsible dog ownership programs
- Developing environmental education programs for primary-aged children

Priority: Short-term



Partnership approach

The Byron Shire has an extensive network of National Parks and Nature Reserves that are home to precious wildlife and habitat. As noted earlier, dogs are prohibited from entering the National Parks estate including:

- o Andrew Johnston Big Scrub Nature Reserve
- o Arakwal National Park
- o Billinudgel Nature Reserve
- o Broken Head Nature Reserve
- o Brunswick Nature Reserve
- o Cape Byron State Conservation Area
- o Cumbegin Swamp Nature Reserve
- o Goonengerry National Park
- o Hayters Hill Nature Reserve
- o Inner Pocket Nature Reserve
- o Jinangong Nature Reserve
- o Marshalls Creek Nature Reserve
- o Mount Jerusalem National Park
- o Nightcap National Park
- o Snows Gully Nature Reserve
- o Ti-Tree Lake Aboriginal Area
- o Tyagrah Nature Reserve
- o Whian Whian State Conservation Area
- o Tyagrah Nature Reserve

To protect these sensitive spaces and provide improved information to the public where dogs cannot go, Council will comprehensively map existing prohibited areas in the *Guide to Dog Areas in the Byron Shire* (refer to Strategic Direction 13).

Council will also continue to work with the NPWS and other agencies to provide education and enforcement activities. These will be designed to protect sensitive National Parks estate areas and ensure that dog owners are aware of the responsibilities of dog ownership in and around these sensitive environments.

Strategic direction 2

Partner with NPWS, Marine Parks and Crown Lands to educate and enforce rules in environmentally sensitive areas

Continue to work with NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service, Marine Parks and Crown Lands to provide education and enforcement activities within and around the National Parks estate.

Priority: Immediate and ongoing





Theme 2: Education

Engage with residents, businesses and visitors by promoting responsible dog ownership

Background

Council recognises that education of both dog owners and non-dog owners is essential to ensure dogs and people can both enjoy the benefits of public spaces. Council has delivered many education initiatives over the years including education days, programs in schools and education following dog registration. These activities have been limited in the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community feedback highlighted the top priorities for education topics are:

- o owners picking up dog waste
- o impact of dogs on local wildlife and habitat
- o dog behaviour and interactions with other dogs and people
- o owners having effective control over their dogs
- o dogs being off-lead in the wrong places
- o dogs being in places where they are not allowed at all
- o aggressive dog behaviour towards other animals and humans

There is a strong desire for more education around these specific issues for all residents including vulnerable people and visitors to the Byron Shire. Educative initiatives will work together with improved signage (refer to Strategic Direction 10) and mapping (refer to Strategic Direction 15), as well as better online information about the rules and where dogs can and can't go (refer to Strategic Direction 4).



Education opportunities for residents

Many of the concerns highlighted during community engagement speak to poorly trained dogs and dogs not being adequately supervised or controlled by their owners. In particular, there is community concern about dogs running up to people and causing alarm, referred to as “rushing”, failing to come when called, running into private property and onto dunes, becoming aggressive with other dogs when playing and being unsupervised.

Council also recognises that some dog owners are unaware of their responsibilities under the Act and that some dog owners are vulnerable segments of the community who need additional and targeted education. This includes people sleeping rough or experiencing homelessness who may have dogs for companionship, but do not have a fenced area to keep their dog nor the financial resources to pay fines.

There are also some in the community who are scared of dogs due to previous attacks or incidents with dogs in public spaces. Some young children can also have a fear of dogs. These people could benefit from education around dog communication signals and how to overcome these fears and approach dogs in a safe manner (e.g. We Are Family and Living Safely with Dogs programmes run by the NSW Government).

Continued education opportunities are a key component of ongoing knowledge and understanding of responsible dog ownership. Opportunities may include increasing access to dog training classes, providing information with rates notices, partnering with local organisations, schools and dog trainers or developing a suite of educational material around specific topics

Given increasing dog ownership during COVID-19 and the concerns about poorly behaved dogs, it is recommended that Council allocate additional resources to this direction in the short-term.

Strategic direction 3

Increase education opportunities for residents

Develop and implement ongoing education opportunities for residents that target responsible dog ownership within the Shire. This includes education on issues such as:

- Impact of dogs on the environment
- Dog behaviour and communication signals
- How to overcome a fear of dogs
- Things to consider before owning a dog

Priority: Short-term



Accessible online information

Review of online material and site signage, combined with consultation outcomes, highlighted that there is a need to thoroughly renew information available to the public.

Whilst there is a significant amount of information on Council's website, it was often not readily accessible with simple searches. When reached, some information was not clear, such as having "on-lead" mapped areas, which may be interpreted as meaning that unmapped areas are "off-lead". Similarly, site signage was often unclear, with enforcement signage suggesting that dogs were prohibited sometimes being located next to off-lead exercise area signage (this is further discussed in Strategic Direction 10).

Having easily accessible and understood online information and education can go some way to ensuring responsible dog ownership. In the longer term, this online information can be linked to signage through a QR code.

The *Guide to dog areas in the Byron Shire* is recommended to be adopted at the same time as the Strategy. This Guide will comprehensively map areas in the Shire including the designated off-lead areas and prohibited areas (refer to Strategic Direction 13).



Strategic direction 4

Improve Council's online information about dogs and public spaces

Provide clear communication and material on Council's website about dogs including:

- o New guide that maps off-lead and prohibited areas and provides guidance on dog behaviour
- o Updated maps for dog areas in each major village / township
- o Dog behaviour and communication signals
- o Opportunities to participate in upcoming events and education activities

Priority: Short-term

Visitors and the tourism industry

A specific issue for the Byron Shire is the number of visitors to the area and the increasing trend of visitors who are looking for dog-friendly holiday options and bringing their pets on holidays. This includes “grey nomads” and other visitors. These visitors can be unfamiliar with the places where dogs are prohibited or where they can be taken off-lead.

Given the proximity to the Queensland border, the Byron Shire is also a popular destination for day-trippers and overnight stays from South East Queensland. A key issue is the difference in rules for dogs in Queensland and New South Wales, making the availability of clear and accessible information about dogs all the more important.

This direction is closely related to Strategic Direction 4 about the need for clearer and more accessible information. For visitors, being able to access and clearly understand this information is key to being compliant with the rules. Opportunities may include the creation of specific visitor guides (such as a fold out wallet map) and information to be distributed to accommodation providers and other tourism focused businesses as well as being available electronically via download, QR codes or via an app.

Strategic direction 5

Develop education material specifically for visitors, accommodation providers and the tourism industry

Prepare educational material for visitors to the Byron Shire that can be distributed through accommodation providers and other tourism-focused businesses about:

- o Where visitors can and can't take dogs
- o The impacts of dogs on the environment
- o How to be a responsible visitor in the Byron Shire
- o How to make a property 'dog-friendly'

Ensure that such information is also accessible on Council's website, including through the use of QR codes or other direct access arrangements.

Priority: Short-term





Theme 3: Responsibility

Encourage dog owners to follow the rules by taking an active compliance approach and supporting individual responsibility

Background

Dogs make wonderful companions, family members and workers and they play an important role in many people's lives. Many dog owners consider their dog as a member of the family. Evidence also suggests that having a dog can improve our health and wellbeing. Dogs can also be important companions, especially for older people and people who are vulnerable, isolated or live alone.

Whilst owning a dog has many benefits, it also comes with responsibilities. Community feedback highlighted concern about out-of-control dogs and poorly trained dogs (particularly at off-lead beach areas, some sportsgrounds and townships). There is also a feeling from some within the community that many dog owners have a laid-back attitude about how their dogs behave in public, or that dog owners can be aggressive or recalcitrant when reminded of the rules.

There is a desire to increase enforcement measures for non-compliance with the rules. Many felt that an increased presence of enforcement officers in public spaces is essential to deter irresponsible behaviour, with feedback that this presence appeared to have reduced over recent years.

Council appreciates that personal responsibility and compliance are two strategies that need to work together to safely manage dogs in public spaces.



Individual responsibility

The rules about dog ownership and behaviour in public spaces are set out by the NSW Government. Council's preference remains for dog owners to inform themselves of these rules and act responsibly when in a public space with their dog. To enable this, Council has identified several opportunities including:

- o increasing opportunities for education initiatives for dog owners (refer Strategic Direction 3)
- o improving online information about dogs in public spaces (refer Strategic Direction 4)
- o improving signage about where dogs should be on-lead, off-lead or prohibited (refer Strategic Direction 10)
- o improving mapping about where dogs can and can't go (refer Strategic Direction 12)

Where this approach is not successful, Council will remain ready to enforce the rules through compliance measures, including the issuing of warnings, fines and court action in accordance with the adopted Compliance Priority Report (refer Strategic Direction 7).

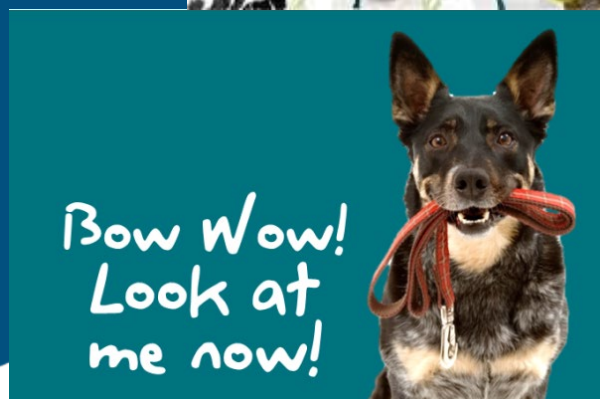
Strategic direction 6

Educate dog owners about their responsibilities

Undertake targeted education initiatives with a specific focus on the rules of responsible dog ownership under the *Companion Animals Act 1998*. Key focus areas include:

- o Effective control of your dog
- o Rules and requirements under the Act
- o Appropriate use of designated off-lead and prohibited areas
- o How to walk your dog on-lead
- o Penalties for non-compliance

Priority: Immediate



Compliance

Council is responsible for taking action for any non-compliances with rules about dogs in most public spaces except for areas that are the responsibility of other agencies. This includes issuing warnings or on-the-spot fines for minor non-compliances, orders for dangerous and menacing dogs, plus criminal prosecutions in the Local Court for serious infringements.

Council currently employs two animal enforcement officers who are dedicated to managing compliance in accordance with Council's Enforcement Policy and Annual Compliance Priority Report.

Overall, the community consultation highlighted a desire for a more active compliance approach. This was due to concerns about safety and impacts on the environment. Anecdotal feedback also suggests that there is the community is under reporting incidents involving dogs in public spaces. .

It should be noted Council has limited resources to commit to animal enforcement and that evidence suggests that enforcement measures have the most impact when paired with behavioural change initiatives. Given increasing dog ownership during COVID-19 and the concerns about out-of-control and poorly trained dogs, it is recommended that additional resources are allocated to this action in the short term with the effectiveness of this approach is periodically reviewed.

Council also recognises the fine line between necessary and excessive enforcement in the context of its overall compliance program. There are also significant costs associated with enforcement officers and the issuing of both fines and warnings (fees are payable to the NSW Government for each and every infringement notice or formal warning that is issued) and these do not raise sufficient revenue to cover ongoing costs.



Strategic direction 7

Take an active compliance approach

Increase patrols of designated off-lead areas and other locations of non-compliances in line with the Annual Compliance Priority Report advising dog owners of their responsibilities, area boundaries and taking compliance action where appropriate.

Priority: Short-term

Reward good behaviour

It is acknowledged that many dog owners do the right thing and follow the rules. From observation, there are also many dog owners who believe they are doing the right thing but are unaware they are not following the rules. For example, having their dogs off-lead in on-lead areas such as car parks adjoining beach off-lead areas.

In addition to an active compliance approach, it is also important to recognise and reward good behaviour. For example, Tweed Shire Council has recently trialled a pilot behaviour change program designed to reduce the threat of off-lead dogs to wildlife, people and other pets. It is called '*Dogs on Lead in the Tweed*'.

This direction is to support education and behaviour change initiatives. .

Strategic direction 8

Reward people for doing the right thing

Develop and implement annual programs and activities that actively encourage and reward dog owners for doing the right thing.

Priority: Medium-term





Theme 4: Infrastructure

Improve infrastructure to enable responsible dog ownership, communicate information and minimise impacts

Background

Council provides a variety of dog-specific infrastructure associated with designated off-lead areas. Council also provides some infrastructure in other areas where dogs are allowed on-lead. This infrastructure most commonly includes signage, dog waste bags, bins and drinking water for dogs. Other infrastructure elements can include facilities for the general public including car parking areas, seating, shade, refuse bins and drinking water.

Together, these facilities help to contain the potential impacts of dogs, such as:

- o ensuring that dog owners are aware of dog off-lead and prohibited areas through signage to avoid sensitive vegetation and habitats
- o have access to dog waste bags and bins to ensure waste is appropriately collected and handled

Community feedback has highlighted that the priorities are signage, dog waste bags, bins, and drinking water for dogs and people.

Council is also considering the implementation of dog-specific infrastructure, such as enclosed / fenced dog exercise areas (refer to Strategic Direction 14). These areas can provide safe and accessible areas for dogs where interaction between dog and non-dog owners, as well as dogs and wildlife can be controlled.



Prioritise bins and dog waste bags

Consultation highlighted that dog waste bags and bins are most important when the community uses off-lead areas. Many rely on the use of Council's waste collection bags and non-dog owners highlight that dog owners not picking up dog waste is a major deterrent to the use of public spaces. Many are concerned about the impact this has on the environment, particularly filled dog poo bags that are not correctly placed in bins.

Community feedback also highlighted that Council does an excellent job of providing dog waste bags and this should be continued in the future.

Council recognises the importance of providing dog waste bags and bins to reduce the environmental impact of dogs and will continue to provide this service at off-lead areas and other appropriate locations.

Strategic direction 9

Prioritise the provision of bins and dog waste bags

Prioritise the provision of bins and dog waste bags at all off-lead dog exercise areas and selected other localities as required to reflect the importance of good waste management practices.

Priority: Ongoing



Signage across the Shire

An audit of Council's existing signage has been completed as part of the preparation of this Strategy. There is a mix of the type and style of signage that has been used over many years. Some signs are obscured by foliage, inconsistent with other signage in the area, and others are ageing and in need of replacement.

Community feedback highlighted that education efforts need to be supported by clear, consistent and engaging signage that focuses on clearly defining and explaining the boundaries of designated off-lead and prohibited areas. To be engaging, the signs should use clear and consistent graphics with simple messaging about rules and penalties and why these are important.

The signs should also be used to educate, for example, by providing information about the need to protect dunes or the importance of local wildlife and biodiversity. The signs could use QR codes to link to the maps on Council's websites or more information about wildlife in the area.

It is recognised that some dog owners, both local and visiting, may be confused about the exact location or boundaries of designated off-lead and prohibited areas. While Council will continue to provide clear online maps and resources, it is recognised that physical signage is important for clarity about the rules. With this signage in place, dog owners and non-dog owners can be well aware of designated boundaries.

As such, Council will create a Shire-wide approach to future signage with the overarching aim of engaging dog owners, providing clear and concise information, and establishing the rationale for encouraging responsible dog ownership. Where appropriate, this will consider consistency with adjoining council areas and their signs.

Strategic direction 10

Implement clear, consistent and engaging signage across the Shire

Create a Shire wide signage strategy to be progressively rolled-out to all off-lead and dog prohibited areas, as well as selected dog compliance hot-spot areas over a set period.

Priority: Medium term



Site specific upgrades

Given that the majority of Council's existing off-lead areas are located on the beach, there is minimal infrastructure associated with these spaces. However, over time the needs of specific dog off-lead areas and other public spaces will evolve alongside their infrastructure needs. Infrastructure needs will also continue to evolve as new dedicated off-lead areas are created away from the coastline (refer to Strategic Direction 14).

Through consultation activities, a number of site specific infrastructure needs have been identified. These include:

- Provision of an additional bin next to the dog waste bag dispenser at Mullumbimby off-lead area
- Improvement to parking areas at Tallows Beach and New Brighton Beach
- Upgrade of Brunswick Beach access point to more clearly delineate between dog and non-dog access points

In addition, Council will consider dog friendly elements to standardised street furniture when replacement is due. For example, dog drinking bowls on drinking fountains, lead attachments on furniture such as seat and beach shower attachments suitable for dog washing.

Strategic direction 11

Where necessary, implement site specific upgrades

On an as needs basis, identify and undertake improvements to off-lead and other areas to assist in establishing the necessary infrastructure to facilitate responsible dog ownership.

Priority: Long-term / as required





Theme 5: Spaces

Create spaces that balance the needs of dog owners and other public space users

Background

With the number of dogs and people in the Shire continuing to grow, there is significant demand on existing public spaces both now and increasingly into the future.

Consultation highlighted that most dog owners regularly exercise their dogs in public spaces, prefer spaces where dogs can run freely off-lead and would like such spaces to be close to home. For many, the current open beach setting is important for dog exercise, whilst for others, being a safe distance from roads where their dogs can mix with other dogs is a drawcard.

There is also a feeling within the community that some public spaces are being overcrowded with dogs and dogs are impacting non-dog owners enjoyment of public spaces and increasingly having impacts on the natural environment. This is particularly evident at some beaches that are designated off-lead, with these conflicts exacerbated during holiday times.

However, there are very limited alternatives to beach-based off-lead exercise areas. Non-beach exercise areas are limited in number, size and accessibility, meaning that there is a need to explore alternatives for new dedicated off-lead areas away from the beach. There is also an identified need to clarify the boundaries of selected existing off-lead areas, particularly to reflect sensible use patterns. Together with mapping existing prohibited areas, these directions should all assist in reducing conflicts between dogs, people and the natural environment.

As the population in the Shire continues to grow and viable alternatives are available for new areas, there may be a need to review the usage of some off-lead beach areas and selected sportsgrounds to explore timeshare arrangements.



Boundaries of existing off-lead areas

The boundary and suitability of existing dog off-lead areas have been considered as part of the development of this Strategy. Overall, there is limited opportunity to change these boundaries given the proximity of the National Park estates.

However, it is apparent that some existing off-lead area boundaries do not match the actual use patterns. These boundaries are recommended to change where these are sensible and balanced outcomes.

At other locations, there is a desire by some in the community to establish additional dog prohibited areas where there is seen to be an increasing conflict between users. This is to create safe places for people who want to enjoy the beach without dogs including families with young children and older people.

Strategic direction 12

Redefine boundaries of selected existing off-lead areas

Redefine the boundaries for selected existing off-lead dog areas to reduce conflicts between dogs, people and the natural environment and to reflect actual use patterns at:

- o Belongil beach – extend the existing off-lead area to adjoin the car parking area at the southern end of the beach.
- o Bangalow Weir Park – redefine the extent of the dog off-lead area to exclude sensitive environmental and children’s playground areas whilst including the open space adjoining the existing area

Priority: Immediate

Following detailed community consultation about any proposed change, consider the need to redefine the boundaries at New Brighton off-lead area to increase the dog-free area.

Priority: Medium term



Dog prohibited areas

There are a number of locations where there can be concerns about the presence of dogs in public spaces. These are typically related to the impacts of dogs on wildlife and conflicts with other non-dog users. Historically, Council has prohibited dogs in most of these areas by signage under the *Local Government Act 1993* rather than mapping and declaring these areas under the *Companion Animals Act 1998*. This means the boundary of these areas is confusing and unclear.

To ensure that signage and prohibited areas are more clearly defined, a review of these areas has been undertaken. Areas prohibited by signage have been mapped in the new *Guide to dog areas in the Byron Shire*. Examples of areas that are currently identified by signage as being dog prohibited include:

- Byron Main Beach
- South of Strand Avenue beach access point in New Brighton, extending to the Brunswick Heads Nature Reserve
- North of Helen Steet beach access point in South Golden Beach, extending to the Billinudgel Nature Reserve
- South of the Jarman Street entrance in Suffolk Park (Tallows Beach), extending to the Broken Head Nature Reserve
- Brunswick Heads Beach from north of beach entrance to the rock wall

Dogs are also prohibited in some places by signage where their presence on-lead is considered to be acceptable. This includes much of the public open space at Brunswick Heads, particularly those areas to the south and west of Simpsons Creek and the Brunswick River. It also includes the riverside walkway through the arboretum at Mullumbimby. In this case, it is recommended that the signage is updated so that dogs are permitted on-lead in these areas.

Strategic direction 13

Clarify and map dog prohibited areas

Map existing areas where dogs are currently prohibited by signage under the *Local Government Act 1993*, the *National Parks & Wildlife Act 1979* or the *Companion Animals Act 1989* including key tourist beaches, sportsgrounds and wildlife protection areas. .

Priority: Immediate

Remove signage prohibiting dogs (and therefore allowing dogs on-lead only) at:

- Brunswick Heads riverside open spaces
- Mullumbimby arboretum

Priority: Short-term

Dedicated off-lead areas

The increase in the number of people and dogs in the Shire means that there is a greater need for additional off-lead areas for people to take their dogs. Given the potential for crowding on off-lead beaches and the mobility barriers for some people to safely access beach areas, additional dedicated off-lead dog areas need to be created away from the coastline. Such areas could be either fenced or unfenced spaces on appropriately located public land.

An initial review of potential sites for an enclosed dog park has been undertaken as part of the preparation of this Strategy. Based on these criteria potential localities to further investigate include:

- **Mullumbimby** – within Council owned land to the south of the community gardens and sportsgrounds, known as Lot 22.
- **Brunswick Heads** – area of Council managed Crown land east of Brunswick Heads Bowling Club.
- **Bangalow** – area to the north of the sportsgrounds.
- **Suffolk Park / Byron Bay** – area of former settlement ponds south of Byron Bay High School.
- **New urban release areas** – to be identified.

Once these new dedicated off-lead areas have been investigated and if feasible, established, consideration can be given to the future use of other existing off-lead areas. Such as a timeshare arrangement at beach off-lead areas or removal of existing off-lead areas at Bangalow and Mullumbimby that are perceived by some to not be fit for purpose.

Criteria for dedicated off-lead areas

Accessibility: accessible to as broader range of the community as possible

Size: sufficient size to be safe and usable for dog exercise

Ownership: within public ownership and available for potential use

Competing or conflicting uses: including between on-site and neighbouring activities

Existing use by dog owners: recognising areas that may already be known for dog exercise activities

Strategic direction 14

Develop a network of new dedicated dog off-lead areas

Investigate potential sites for new dog off-lead exercise areas (either fenced or unfenced) and where feasible, design and develop a network of dedicated dog off-lead areas over the next 10 years at locations to include:

- Mullumbimby
- Brunswick Heads
- Bangalow
- Byron Bay / Suffolk Park

Priority – Short to long term

Off-lead areas through timeshare

Consultation has identified the potential for some existing open space areas to be utilised for dog off-lead areas when not being used for other purposes. For example, low-use sportsgrounds. It is also apparent that some sportsgrounds are being used for this purpose despite signage prohibiting dogs in the area.

This self-regulated timeshare approach has already successfully been used by the community at the Bangalow Showground.

Whilst shared use could present an opportunity for greater use of existing spaces, it can also result in conflicts if not well communicated and agreed between user groups. As such, trialling potential off-lead dog exercise areas through a timeshare arrangement is suggested in the first instance. Potential locations could include sportsgrounds that have low levels of use (e.g. only being used on weekends or seasonally) or open space / park areas that have sufficient space.

Strategic direction 15

Trial timeshare arrangements for selected sportsgrounds and reserves

Following detailed consultation with existing user groups, establish (under trial conditions initially) effective timeshare arrangements to enable new off-lead areas to be established at agreed locations.

Priority: Medium-term



Existing designated on-lead areas

Council has five specific locations currently designated as “on-lead” areas. These are:

- Bayside Brunswick
- Ocean Shores Lookout – Devine’s Hill
- Ocean Shores – Water Lily Park Orana Road
- Ewingsdale – Brookview Court and Citriadora Drive
- Federal – Coachwood Court, Roses Road

As previously identified, areas that are not designated as off-lead or where dogs are prohibited are by default “on-lead” areas. Mapping of only selected areas has created confusion within the community about the rules.

As dogs are already allowed on-lead in most public spaces under Act, the on-lead areas currently designated by Council will be removed from Council’s website. This will still allow dogs to be on-lead in those areas but not being ‘designated’ by Council will minimise confusion about the rules.

Strategic direction 16

Remove existing designated on-lead areas

Remove designated on-lead areas from Council’s website and other information sources to minimise public confusion about where dogs may be taken on or off-lead.

Priority: Immediate



Implementation by timing

Direction	Details	Timing
6	Educate dog owners about their responsibilities	Immediate
16	Remove existing designated on-lead areas	Immediate
2	Partner with NPWS to educate and enforce rules in environmentally sensitive areas	Immediate / ongoing
13	Clarify and map dog prohibited areas	Immediate / short-term
12	Redefine boundaries of selected existing off-lead areas	Immediate / Medium-term
7	Take an active compliance approach	Short-term
1	Educate residents and visitors about the environmental impact of dogs	Short-term
3	Increase education opportunities for residents	Short-term
4	Improve Council's online information about dogs and public spaces	Short-term
5	Develop education material specifically for visitors, accommodation providers and the tourism industry	Short-term
14	Develop a network of new dedicated dog off-lead areas	Short to long-term
10	Implement clear, consistent and engaging signage across the shire	Medium-term
15	Trial timeshare arrangements for selected sportsgrounds	Medium-term
8	Reward people for doing the right thing	Medium-term
11	Where necessary, implement site specific upgrades	Long-term / as required
9	Prioritise the provision of bins and dog waste bags	Ongoing

