

9. Review of Companion Animal Management Policy & Guideline

This Report recommends the exhibition of an additional beach based leash free area in Bermagui as part of the review of the Companion Animals Management Policy (4.3.2) and Guideline. Minor changes to the Guideline are also recommended.

Group Manager, Planning and Environment

BACKGROUND

10 With the commencement of the Companion Animals legislation in 1998 there was a need for local government to declare at least one leash free area within each local government area. In 1999 a leash free area was introduced at Auckland Street Bega in the river reserve. This site provided only minimal facilities for dog owners.

This was reviewed in 2001 and a draft policy was issued proposing ten leash free areas across the shire. These leash free areas were based on existing areas that were at that time being used as unauthorised leash free areas. Community consultation then followed extensively and the Policy was adopted in mid 2001.

The Policy was again reviewed in accordance with Council's resolution in 2003 and after much public comment was adopted with minor changes in late 2003. The Policy has been generally well received and has been supported in implementation by production of a very popular guideline and educative work by the Rangers team.

20 DISCUSSION

The current review was identified in the 2008/09 operational plan and was advertised for a 6 week period over the 2008/2009 summer holiday period.

While no Policy changes were recommended Council did receive submissions recommending changes to the Guideline. These submissions are summarised along with staff comments:

1. The establishment of a leash free area at Moorhead Beach Bermagui. A number of comments also requested that Moorhead Beach Bermagui not be declared a leash free area owing to the proximity of the beach to the environmentally sensitive Bermagui Flora and Fauna Reserve.

30 ►► Staff comment:

The additional leash free area requested at Moorhead Beach Bermagui by a number of submissions (by way of a petition and form letters) was countered by a number of submissions requesting that Moorhead Beach not be declared leash free. Currently Bermagui is served by a leash free area at Dickinson Reserve. There is no beach based leash free area in Bermagui. The nearest beach based leash free area is located at Camel Rock Beach.

40 Beach based leash free areas are popular and demand at this stage would appear to indicate that a beach based leash free area in Bermagui would be appropriate. Moorhead Beach is on the northern side of Bermagui along from the breakwall and is accessed from the northern side of Bermagui River along Wapengo Street with only a small carparking area available. The beach appears to have a diverse mix of users. The northern end of the beach is backed by a wetland that forms part of the Bermagui Flora and Fauna Reserve and concerns have been raised regarding the impact of the leash free area adjoining this sensitive environment.

While staff support a beach leash free area in Bermagui it is considered that Moorhead Beach is not the most desirable location given the poor access, limited carparking and a number of conflicting beach uses including the location of the Bermagui Flora and Fauna Reserve. It is not centrally located for the larger urban area of Bermagui.

50 Staff recognise that Bermagui does not have a beach based leash free area and that travel to the Camel Rock leash free area is not practicable for some Bermagui residents.

The southern end of Beares Beach is considered by staff to be a better alternative to Moorehead Beach as it is centrally located and is well serviced by a large carparking area. It is considered that this beach based leash free area may be more appropriate for Bermagui residents and may also be more accessible for dog owners.

- 60 2. One comment sought the establishment of leash free areas in locations where disabled and aged persons could more readily access the leash free areas.

►► **Staff comment:**

Leash free areas are generally established in areas where dogs had been historically exercised off leash. As such, the majority of leash free areas in the Shire are beach based. However beach access for disabled and aged persons is generally difficult.

70 Leash free areas in the Shire at Bermagui (Dickinson Headland Reserve), Merimbula (Short Point Headland Reserve), and Bega (Auckland Street Reserve), are reasonably accessible for aged and disabled persons. Future leash free areas should consider improved disabled access in their establishment. It is likely that this would see the establishment of more leash free areas away from beaches which inherently provide access difficulties. Staff consider at this time that the community is quite well catered for in terms of leash free areas and that further areas (excluding a beach based leash free area proposed in Bermagui) are not currently warranted. Community Services staff have also advised that they are investigating ways to improve access to the existing leash free areas, including accessways, hardstand areas and seats.

Council's Rangers have also made a number of minor suggestions in regard the Policy and Guideline review.

1. Main Beach Merimbula leash free area is currently very well used. An increase in the leash free area by approximately 300 metres south along the beach to provide an area approximately 1km in length will improve the leash free area with minimal impact.
2. Short Point Reserve leash free area is very well used but is located 50 metres from the carpark. With the recent removal of playground equipment it is now possible to increase the leash free area towards the carpark providing better access and a larger area with negligible impact.

ISSUES

Legal

The Companion Animals Act 1998 requires that Council have at least one leash free area and the existing Policy and Guideline satisfies that requirement. No changes are proposed to the Policy or Guideline in regard the dog prohibited areas in the Shire.

Policy

The Policy is being reviewed in accordance with the Operational Plan.

Consultation

The existing Policy was formulated with extensive consultation processes. Areas such as wildlife zones were established based on specific advice from government agencies including the National Parks and Wildlife Service and Environment Protection Authority.

Financial

The review of the Policy and Guideline has to date incurred advertising costs. Should changes to the Policy and Guideline be adopted then additional costs will be incurred such as signposting and printing costs. A budget exists to cover these costs.

Resources (including staff)

Staff resources are covered by existing budgets.

Operational Plan

The review of the policy is a requirement of the current operational plan. Initial exhibition comments have not required large scale changes to the Policy or Guideline.

CONCLUSION

An additional beach based leash free area at Moorhead Beach in Bermagui has been proposed by some members of the community with others suggesting that the site

110 should not be considered owing to its environmental sensitivity. Staff consider that a beach based leash free area in Bermagui is warranted, but propose that a leash free zone at the southern end of Beares Beach would be a better alternative than Moorhead Beach. It is appropriate that further consultation regarding the establishment of a beach based leash free area at Bermagui be conducted. Minor changes to the guideline are also proposed by staff.

RECOMMENDATION

120 That a draft proposal for a companion animal leash free area at the southern end of Beares Beach Bermagui, together with minor changes at Main Beach Merimbula and Short Point Reserve leash free areas, be advertised in the local media and on Council's website and that, at the close of the exhibition period, the matter be reported back to Council for determination.