

Study into allowing Dogs on Warringah's Beaches



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Background

- Since the introduction of the Companion Animals Act 1998 dogs have been effectively banned from all beaches
- All councils are required to have at least one area for dog unleashed exercise

Council's Policy

Council allocates free-run areas for dogs on the basis that:

- Dogs are permitted free run only under effective supervision and in the locations identified in the attached appendix.
- The person in charge of the dog takes full responsibility for the activity and behaviour of the dog
- Before allocating an area as a free-run area for dogs Council will ensure there is no conflict with other users of the area
- All free-run areas for the exercising of dogs will be adequately signposted
- Free-run areas are to be allocated on the basis that faeces deposited by dogs are collected and removed by the person supervising the dog.

Issue

- Dogs are frequently illegally on the beach
- Dog owners have been requesting a beach swimming area to legally swim their dogs

History

- In 2000 a trial for dog swimming at Manly Dam was abandoned due to environmental impacts
- In 2005 a review into the suitability of Long Reef for dog swimming was undertaken
- Rejected on environmental grounds

History

- In 2009 Council granted access the Curl Curl lagoon adjacent to current unleashed exercise area for dog swimming.



Dog swimming area

Recent

- In August 2010 Council resolved to research potential areas in the northern end of the LGA for beach swimming.
- The aim was to find a beach suitable so people would not illegally take their dogs to environmentally sensitive areas



Components of Study

- Literature review into suitable planning documents.
- Primary document relating to dog exercise areas is "Public Open Space and Dogs – A design and management guide for open space professionals and Local Government by Harlock Jackson (1995).



- Review of other councils way of dealing with allowing dogs on beaches. Most of these were in less populated areas such as north and south coast
- Community Consultation
- Environmental Impact Assessment



Community Consultation

- Community consultation via on line forum March 2011
- <http://yoursaywarringah.com.au/dogsonbeaches>
- This is good for gauging how community feels about topics but is not a statistical tool
- Very active – over 5,000 site visits with 1,408 comments posted
- Clear the issue was very divided



Random Phone Survey

- July 2011 a telephone survey of 600 residents
- When asked whether we should open selected beaches 29% strongly opposed, 9% were slightly opposed (total 38%)
- Conversely 24% strongly supported and 22% slightly supportive (total 46%)
- 16% were unsure



- Major concerns raised included dog waste, children's safety, amenity/peace of the area.
- These results differed slightly from a Council's previous survey on Environmental Perceptions in 2010 of which two questions were asked relating to dogs on beaches. This found 76% of participants thought all beaches should be dog free and 79% focused on dog droppings as an issue.



Environmental Assessment

- A review of the previous studies and current beach use showed only one section of Narrabeen Beach would be potentially suitable.
- An environmental study by Eco Logical Australia found the presence of Sand Spurge (*Chamaesyce psammogeton*) in the dunes



Sand Spurge



- Sand Spurge is listed as endangered under the Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995.
- Key threats include trampling.
- As the sand dunes would be difficult to effectively fence to keep dogs out this site was ruled out as a possibility.



Last Hope – Curl Curl

- When Council realised that there were no suitable locations for swimming dogs in the Northern area of Warringah it passed a resolution into looking at trialling dog swimming at Curl Curl.



Why Curl Curl?

- Adjacent to the beach is an unleashed dog exercise area from which it was proposed dogs could enter the beach



- The unleashed area was built on an old tip so it was unlikely endangered species were present
- Dogs are currently allowed to swim in the lagoon but many complain it is polluted
- The study was to look at restricted hours access 100 m away from flagged swimming areas



Components of study

Public Consultation

- Public engagement was essential due to high use of Curl Curl
- Council Policy states that an unleashed dog exercise area must not conflict with other users



Engagement Strategies

- Letters sent to all residents adjacent to Curl Curl Beach – 653 letters were sent
- Significant stakeholders contacted which included both Surf Clubs and Curl Curl Lagoon Friends and Curl Curl boardriders and the Manly district dog club
- Advertisement in Manly Daily




- Emails sent to approximately 3000 people on council's community engagement register
- Information kiosk held on site 10am-12pm on a Sat & Sun in February
- Council's Companion Animal Advisory Committee notified.



Results of Community Engagement

- 588 written submissions were received – 8 from stakeholder groups
- Of the individual responses 40% were in favour of a trial while 60% were against dogs on beaches at all.



Reasons For



- Just want – 52%
- Community feeling/pets good for health 18%
- Works well in other places 15%
- Dog enrichment 8%
- Large numbers of dogs need facilities 5%
- Water quality poor in lagoon 4.2%
- Only acceptable with conditions 3.8%
- Dogs need to swim 1.7%
- Non dog owners a vocal minority – dogs owners have right to access beach 1.3%




Reasons against



- Dog faeces not always picked up 70%
- Risk to safety particularly young and elderly 39%
- Conflict with other users eg joggers, fishermen, children 34%
- Resources to ensure compliance not available or economical 25%
- Unsustainable numbers would use beach 15%
- Dogs will urinate on belongings/can't pick it up 15%




- General non-compliance of dog owners to stick with rules 26%
- Dogs wont be under effective control 19%
- Environment/wildlife impact 19%
- Lagoon adequate for swimming 18%
- Zoonotic diseases from faeces 11%
- Owned a dog but didn't think should be on beach 12.5%
- Potential for shark attack 7%
- Seen damage done in other locations 5%

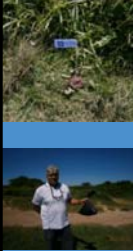


Other Components


- Study done of beach use in proposed times (before 8am and after 5pm) showed up to 300 on beach – up to 129 joggers/beach walkers and 130 surfers in a one hour period.



The Great Poo Pick Up




- Due to large number of complaints regarding dog poo we went to the dog park at Curl Curl to quantify issue.
- In an area 130m x 30 m 56 dog scats were collected
- Bins and bags were provided in this area.




Environmental Study

- Eco Logical carried out an environmental impact study
- Concluded that proposal was unlikely to have significant impact on threatened or migratory shorebirds.




Final Resolution

- Council’s Policy states that “Before allocating an area as a free-run for dogs Council will ensure there is no conflict with other users of the area”
- Based on community engagement it was clear there would be conflict which has been supported by the study
- The recommendation to not proceed with the trial was adopted.



Conclusions

- Hugely political with strong lobby groups (Nearly became a referendum at the upcoming Council election)
- Need to ensure a number of engagement strategies are used to ensure you can properly gauge the public opinion.



Questions?

