

Environment

Action Created

Meeting Date: 17/02/2010 - Environment

Item 26

Subject AMENDMENT TO COUNCIL'S "DOGS ON BEACHES" POLICY

Director MATT ROGERS (DES)

The Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) has requested the Council to amend its Dogs on Beaches Policy with respect to dog permitted areas which abut National Park Reserves and key wildlife habitats. The difficulties associated with policing the National Parks and Wildlife Act and Councils Dogs on Beaches Policy is also a major factor in requesting these changes. This report outlines proposed policy amendments to address DECCW concerns and set clear boundaries between permitted and prohibited areas.

RECOMMENDATION

1. That Council amend its "Dogs on Beaches" Policy in accordance with the following:

(a) That Wash House Beach change from a Permitted Timed Unleashed Area to a Prohibited Area.

(b) That the small beach area directly to the North of the Tacking Point Lighthouse namely Little Bay be included in the policy as a Prohibited Area.

(c) That Pelican Island be included in the Policy as a Prohibited Area.

2. That the proposed Policy amendments be reported back to Council following a public exhibition of 28 days.

Discussion

At the request of the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW), the Council has been asked to review its Dogs on Beaches Policy. A review has been requested due to the proximity of some permitted beaches to Nature Reserves and wildlife habitats and the regulatory conflict that currently exists in these areas.

In particular, there is a need to have clear and concise boundaries between permitted dog areas and prohibited National Parks such as Katang Nature Reserve, Sea Acres Nature Reserve and Pelican Island. The current situation whereby dogs are permitted on Wash House Beach only below the mean high water mark between specific hours daily is not practically enforceable and is a direct contradiction to the conservation principles being applied to the adjoining land tenure.

The following changes are therefore required to ensure consistency between the DECCW and Port Macquarie-Hastings Council regulations:

- (a) That Wash House Beach change from a Permitted Timed Unleashed Area to a *Prohibited Area*.
- (b) That the small beach area known as Little Bay (not previously identified) be included in the policy as a dog Prohibited area.
- (c) That Pelican Island (not previously identified) be included in the policy as a dog Prohibited area.

The proposed changes to Little Bay beach and Pelican Island are as a result of DECCW concern regarding dogs being exercised in close proximity to nature reserves and endangered species habitats (in the case of Pelican Island). They have also advised that fox baiting programs using the poison 1080 are being carried out in the Pelican Island and Katang nature reserves.

The changes to the policy will have an impact on local beach users. However, it should be noted that alternative beach areas are available for dog exercising in the affected localities, ie Dunbogan Beach in the Camden Haven and a number of beaches in Port Macquarie.

Furthermore, the impact on the community can be further mitigated by revisiting the introduction of proposed leash-free areas. The Council has resolved at its meetings on 30/10/2000 and again on 13/09/2004 to consider the allocation of funds for the establishment of leash free dog exercise areas as follows:

- (a) \$29,000 in 2005/2006 - Oxley Highway, Wauchope
- (b) \$29,000 in 2006/2007 - Hindman Street, Port Macquarie
- (c) \$34,000 in 2007/2008 - Henry Kendall Reserve, Laurieton

If Council is concerned about the reduction in public access to beaches for dog exercising in the Camden Haven area, it has the option of bringing forward the establishment of the proposed Henry Kendall Reserve leash free dog exercise areas. The Henry Kendall Reserve proposed site was cleared in 2006 as part of a noxious weed reduction program and has since been left untouched. Whilst some remedial work would be required, the work (and associated cost) to establish this area would only be for fencing, turfing, car parking and activity tools. Additional funding would also be required on an annual basis for maintenance and upkeep.

It should be noted that the regulatory signs relating to dogs on Wash House Beach were recently changed to prohibit dogs, following the most recent request from DECCW. Subsequent to that change, staff were made aware that a rescission motion was passed by Council (2005) in relation to the prohibition of dogs at this location and this report seeks to deal with this matter from a formal policy perspective.

Alignment With Strategic Direction

Aligns with the Council's strategies on community consultation and providing a sustainable environment for all residents.

Consultation

Consultation has taken place with Council's Acting Parks & Gardens Manager, DECCW Management and staff, Council's Team Leader Ranger Services and Council's Manager Development and Environmental Compliance.

Planning and Policy Impact

This proposal has no planning impact but will result in changes to Council's Dogs on Beaches Policy.

Financial & Economic Implications

1. The cost for the renewal of on-site signage would be minimal and met through existing operational budgets.
2. Administrative costs associated with the change and reprint hard copies of the new policy for public distribution would be borne by Council's Development and Environmental Compliance Section. These costs are considered minimal and can be managed within existing budget allocations.
3. Advertising of changes to the policy in local media would be minimal and borne by Council's Development and Environmental Compliance Section.
4. Additional funding would need to be allocated if Council was to agree with the establishment of a dog "Leash-Free Park" at Henry Kendall Reserve. Estimated 2004 cost \$34,000.

Options

1. Accept the proposed changes to the Dogs On Beaches Policy and commence the community consultation process.

OR

2. Not accept the proposed changes and leave the policy as it is now.

COUNCIL RESOLUTION: ADOPTED:

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