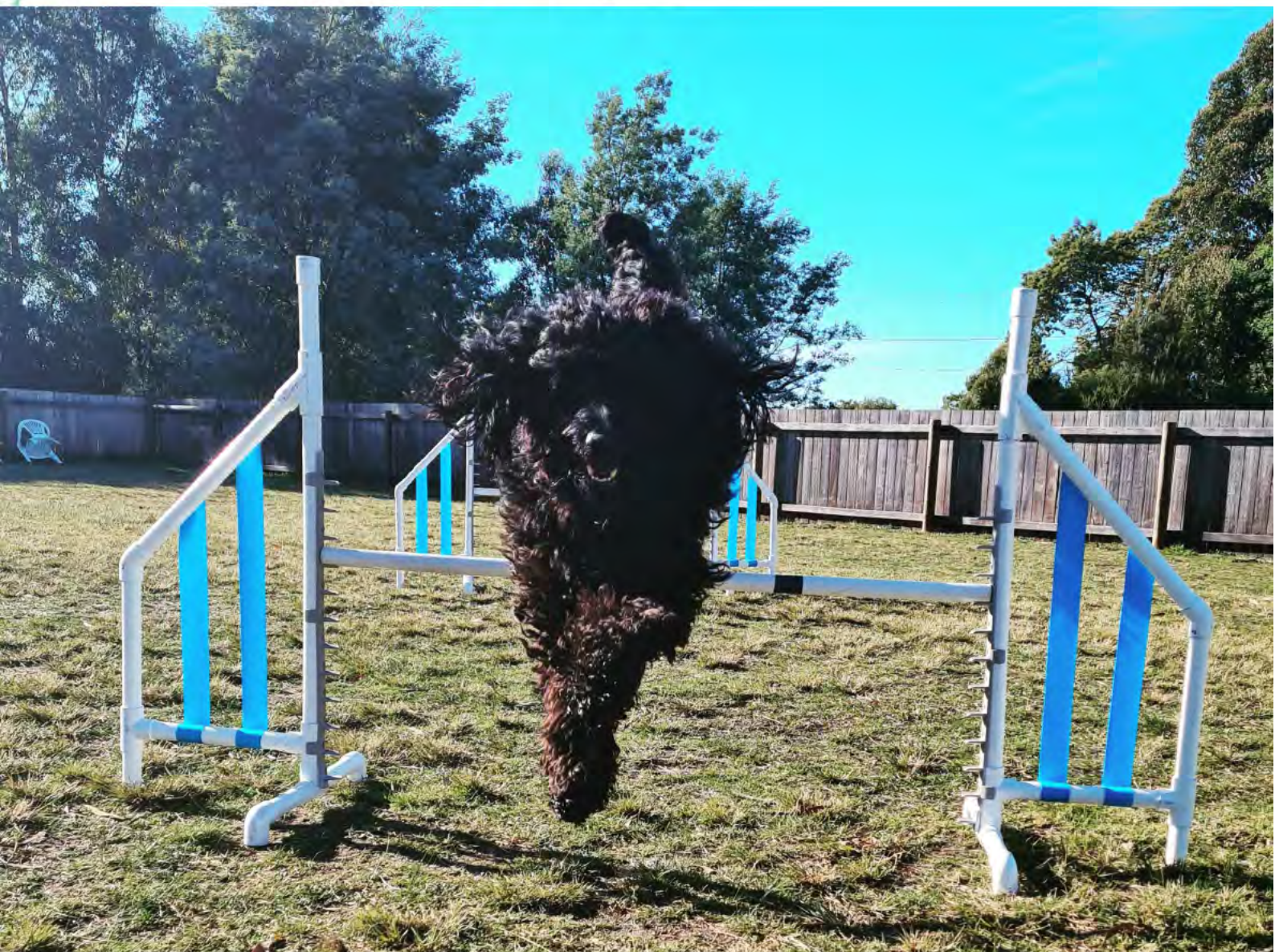




Break O'Day
COUNCIL

Dog Management Policy Review Consultation Report



Version: 1 – Date: July 2024

Introduction

Council reviews its Dog Management Policy every five years and has consulted stakeholders and the community input on a draft revision of the current Policy and dog zones (Declared areas).

The Dog Control Act 2000 requires Council to have a Dog Management Policy, review it regularly and, consult the community and stakeholders on the Policy and Declared areas, which it can also make under the Act.

This report aims to support Council's consideration of community and stakeholder input on the draft revised policy and a final revised Dog Management Policy and dog zones (Declared areas) that it will make under the Act. It outlines the consultation process undertaken for the 2024 review and provides an analysis of submissions received to be considered in the final Dog Policy and Dog zones.

The draft policy consultation follows on from previous comments and suggestions from the community on Council's current Policy as well as discussions and input from the Parks and Wildlife Service, Birdlife Tasmania and other interest groups and stakeholders.

Aims of Consultation

1. Give community and stakeholder groups from all points of view and interests across the community the opportunity to have their say to ensure equal access and say in making of the Policy by Council.
2. To balance the reasonable expectations of dog owners and the community in the Dog Policy; providing for dogs and their owners whilst public health, safety and amenity are maintained, and wildlife are not unduly harmed.

Preparing for the Dog Management Policy Review

Changes to the Dog Zone Mapping

How the dog zones are defined has been an underlying change for this updated Policy. To remove ambiguity around the extent of the linear coastal dog zones, these were translated into two dimensional areas with boundaries.

Since these coastal dog zones in particular are on Reserve managed (including regulation of dog access) by the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) they were closely involved in developing the new 2D dog zones map. At the same time this was an opportunity to consider changes PWS and Council had in mind from their work with the Break O'Day Shorebird working group as well as community suggestions.

Substantial changes from the previous Policy.

The revised policy is based on and follows the current one. Substantive differences include;

- Linear coastal dog zones translated into 2D areas with boundaries
- Off Lead beaches generally extend inland to edge of dune area, but keeping dogs leashed down access tracks to the beach proper
- Several new areas Prohibited to dogs: MTB Trails (20m corridor and trailheads, except at Blue Tier), St Columba Falls, Dora Point/Humbug NRA, St Helens Aerodrome, Dianas Basin
- Margerys Corner beach to Dog On Lead next to shacks
- Consider a 'dog swims' provision for On Lead areas
- Stieglitz Off Lead beach extended a short distance to public access track at Akaroa end
- Adjust southern boundary of Scamander seasonal bird refuge and provide for 'wet sand' beach transit north/south
- Future Off Lead exercise area on St Marys Railway Station reserve and retained previous plan at St Marys Sports Grounds
- Dog On Lead extended at Falmouth and Four Mile Creek to include Council reserves
- Mariposa Off Lead beach extended southward a short distance
- Seymour wetlands Dog On Lead
- Denison Rivulet dog zones coordinated with Glamorgan Spring Bay Council
- Policy clarifications: Declared areas (map) are not the only regulation of dog access in the municipality; requirement in Act for in a '2m lead' in 'built-up area' or Declared Dog On Lead area; and provision for temporary Prohibited areas for wildlife protection.

Community Engagement Process

The community engagement for this project was conducted in three phases:

Phase 1: Feedback and Engagement since the last Policy review

Since the last Policy update in 2018, we have received occasional community requests and feedback on how dog management in Break O'Day is going and requests for change. For example, requests for an alternative off lead area at Ansons Bay from community members and for a dog exercise park at St Marys.

A Community Workshop was held at the St Marys Hall on 21 February to hear from the community their ideas and feedback for an off-lead dog exercise area in St Marys. This was promoted with a poster, sent to the St Marys Township Email Database, St Marys Sports Complex and St Marys Dog Group as well as being shared on Council's Facebook page and January Newsletter. Approximately 10 people attended the session which included members from the St Marys Dog Group.

There were also suggestions for an alternative off lead area at Ansons Bay which was discussed during the Township Plan review. Residents and Council Officers discussed and investigated a suggested new location with the Ansons Bay Group.

Council has also been part of a Shorebird Working group which formed after 'implementation' of the previous Policy. Involved in the group are community shorebird advocates including; NE Bioregional Network, Hooded Plover Guardians, Seymour Community Action Group, the Parks and Wildlife Service, Break O'Day Council and NRM North. This policy review has been informed by the very good work of this group and their views for improving responsible dog ownership and the survival of shorebirds.

Phase 2: Broader Community Engagement

Engagement platforms in phase 2 for making a formal submission included an online survey/questionnaire as well as formal submission in writing to Council.

The online survey was designed to focus feedback on specific elements of the Draft Revised Dog Management Policy. Written submissions allowed people to respond from their own perspective to the draft revised policy and dog management.

Promotion of Engagement Opportunities

A Public Notice was published on 24 April in the Examiner newspaper announcing the Draft Revised Dog Management Policy and inviting submissions. Submissions were received until 14 May 2024, in accordance with the Dog Control Act.

The draft revised dog policy and opportunity to comment on it was promoted in the following ways;

- Council's facebook page
- Council's website
- Council's newsletter
- Direct email to previous submitters and contacts from past Dog Management Policy Review
- Email to newsletter database (approx. 600 community members)
- Media Release which was picked up by the Examiner and Valley Voice

There were 74 responses to the online survey. The survey questions were not mandatory and could be skipped, so not all respondents answered every question with 11 of 74 responders answering none of the questions (beyond their name and contact details).

We received 14 written submissions, all by email. They were variable with some very extensive with attachments to support their comments, and others brief and specific.

Assessment Process

To assess the community input received Council's NRM Officer and Executive Officer read and reviewed all submissions (88 in total) made through the online survey and written submissions. Submissions were also provided to Councillors prior to the development of this report as de-identified as possible.

Survey

The online survey platform recorded the numbers of responses that agreed or disagreed with questions on parts of the policy, and this is reported here. Respondents could also provide detailed comments on their response to these distinct questions. Common themes in these comments were identified, and summaries by theme for comments on each question have been provided. Typically, around a third to a half of those who answered the initial agree/disagree question went on to make further comments on their views about the part of the policy being addressed.

Written Submissions

The written submissions were reviewed and summarised individually and to identify what they supported or wanted different in the draft revised policy. These summaries were used to also relate the written submissions to the survey questions (agree/disagree and comments), to enable all submissions to be assessed on a common platform. The summaries of the written submissions are also available to Council to be considered in their own right.

Combined Assessment

The 14 written submissions were included with the online survey responses using the summaries, to give a total of 88 submissions in the online survey platform and framework. Collating all responses together allowed us to gain an understanding of all the community input and views holistically. Common themes for each question were applied to the text of the 'comments' questions (described above) and used to summarise comments by theme.

The relative numbers and the narratives of support, or not, of the different proposed policy provisions are intended to inform consideration of where the balance lies in the views of the community and stakeholders. The merits of their different arguments also need to be considered.

Findings

Questions 1 and 2: Name

This question recorded the respondents first and last name. This question was answered by 65 respondents doing the survey online and could be skipped if respondents wanted to remain anonymous (9 were).

Question 3. would like to be added to our email list for this project?

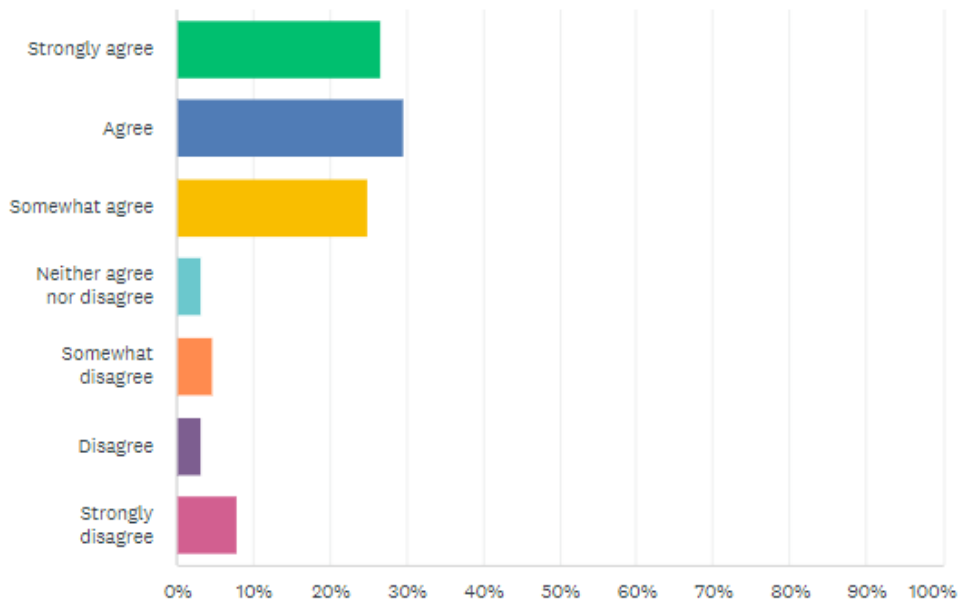
This question was included so that we can keep respondents and the community updated on the review and policy outcome and future reviews. Including written submitters, there were 61 responses to this question.

Question 4. Objective Statement

This question had 64 responses and asked whether people agreed or disagreed with the Policy's Objective Statement:

"Council aims to achieve a balance between the reasonable expectations of dog owners and the community. Dogs and their owners shall have the opportunity to enjoy what the Break O'Day Municipality has to offer them, whilst safety and amenity for the community are maintained and wildlife are protected from harm."

Answered: 64 Skipped: 24



Question 5: Do you have any other feedback regarding the Objective Statement?

24 respondents provided thoughts and comments on the statement in more detail, which are summarised from the perspective of some common themes raised.

It is worth noting this was the first opportunity in the online survey for people to articulate their particular concerns with dog management and the policy. Several referred to specific dog zones, which are addressed in the questions to follow.

Balance

The comments reflect a mixed response to the policy. Some appreciate the policy for its efforts to conserve shorebird populations, recognising it as a positive step. Yet others are critical and argue that the policy fails to adequately protect shorebirds and believe that shorebird data (science) should have more influence over the policy than the preferences of dog owners. On the other hand, there is a significant concern that the policy does not achieve a fair balance between shorebird protection and dog access, and dogs and owners should have more opportunities and access in public places. Conversely, supporters felt Council has struck the right balance between the interests of dog owners, wildlife protection and the public and its safety, emphasising the importance of fairness and respect for the community and our natural environment.

Compliance

The comments call for stricter enforcement of existing regulations by the Council and Parks. There is a demand for more control over dogs being off-lead in areas designated for on-lead only, emphasizing the need for better enforcement to ensure the safety of wildlife and beachgoers. There is also concern about operators of offroad vehicles that ignore boundaries for permitted use and drive along the entire beach without regard for nesting birds and swimmers and called for enforcement of the rules. (Management of offroad vehicles is not within the scope of Council's Dog Management Policy).

More dog access

Around half the commenters were generally in favour of dogs and their owners and were concerned opportunities, for off-leash access in particular, was not enough. At Scamander for example, particularly during holiday seasons when these areas become crowded with fishers and other dog walkers. Dog owners feel that the current restrictions, including the expectation to leash dogs when near others, are unfair and make it difficult to properly exercise their pets. There is a call for more expansive off-leash zones to alleviate congestion and provide dogs with sufficient space to run freely. Specifically, areas like the south of Dune Street entrance and north of Diana's Basin beach are suggested for extension to better accommodate the needs of dogs and their owners. Dog owners said they are serious about shorebird security and hygiene, yet feel constrained and oppressed by the current limitations, claiming they turn designated off-lead areas effectively into on-lead zones due to other users (and dogs).

Owner Responsibility

The comments present a divided view. Some believe that the proposed zones strike a fair balance between dog owners' expectations and wildlife protection. However, there is concern that what some dog owners consider "reasonable expectations" may not ensure a safe environment, as dogs deemed "safe" by their owners can still be aggressive. There is a call for stronger wording emphasizing dog owners' responsibilities and a greater focus on wildlife protection. Critics argue that while the policy's objectives are fair, they are unattainable in off-lead areas if

dog owners do not properly control their pets. They also suggest that many dog owners' expectations surpass what is best for wildlife and other beach users.

Safety

Some respondents said that some dog owners' "reasonable expectations" for off-lead areas often do not ensure safety for other dogs or their owners, as many dogs can be aggressive despite owners' assurances. While the policy's objective is commendable, critics argue that the Council has failed to maintain community safety and protect wildlife. Calls for more extensive off-lead areas, such as at Scamander, where related to other beach goers and congestion during holiday seasons, causing conflicts between dog owners, fishers, and families. Some dog owners felt need to leash their dogs near others was restricting them and turning off-lead areas into on-lead zones, which they find unfair. Specific suggestions were made for Scamander (south of "Dune Street entrance") and expanding off-lead access north over Diana's Basin beach.

Overall, on safety, there is a consensus that dog owners' expectations often exceed what is best for wildlife and other beach users, calling for a better balance between the needs of dogs and environmental protection.

Wildlife /shorebirds

Again, comments reflect a mix of perspectives. Supporters acknowledge the policy as a positive step for shorebird conservation, appreciating the balance between dog owners' expectations and wildlife protection through proposed zones. However, many believe the policy fails to achieve a fair balance, arguing that it inadequately protects shorebirds and they have been negatively impacted by dogs, potentially violating protection laws. Critics assert that dog owners are unfairly restricted, feeling oppressed by the limitations, which impedes the ability to exercise dogs freely. They emphasise the need for a stronger focus on wildlife protection and greater responsibility from dog owners, questioning whether the Council wants to be remembered for allowing species to become extinct.

Untagged

There were seven untagged comments. Significant points included emphasising the physical, social, and emotional benefits of dog ownership; asking for a clearer, more concise, and easily understood policy; and believing that having dogs on leads should suffice to protect wildlife.

One comment called for the policy to be more inclusive of pet greyhounds. They asserted that under state law greyhounds do not have the same access to off-leash parks and was advocating for a designated off-leash park in every municipality or allowing greyhounds in specific areas at certain times on weekends.

Conclusions:

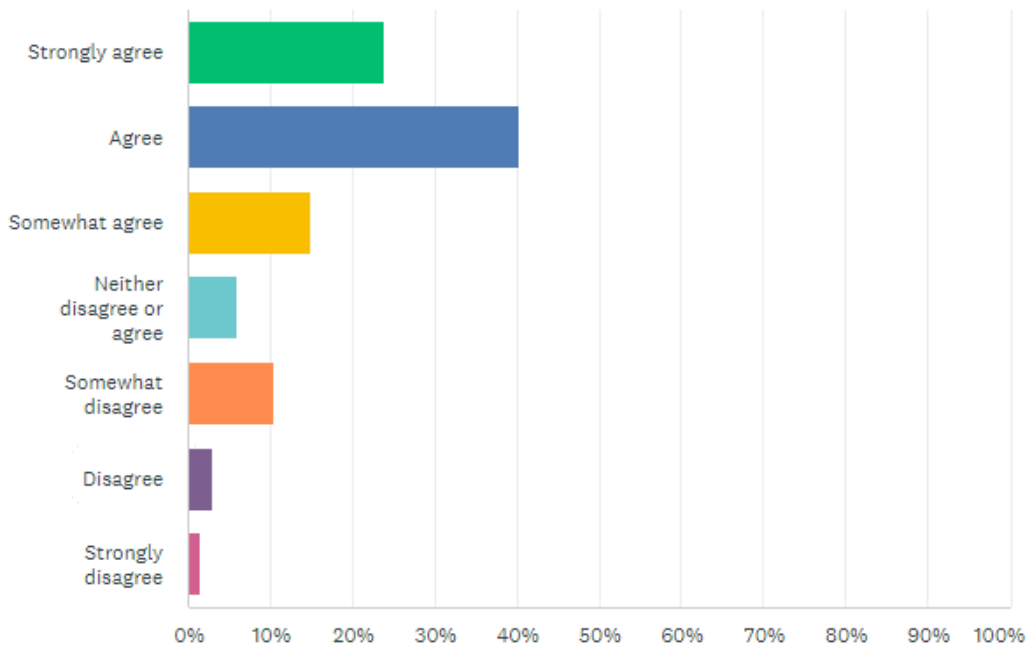
Overall, the Objective statement was supported with over 80% of respondents stating they either, strongly agreed, agreed or somewhat agreed with it recognising and balancing different needs. However, respondents also wanted to see more done to ensure community and shore bird safety, with an emphasis on owner responsibility. There were also a number of specific suggestions to adjusting the dog zoning and a request for special needs of greyhounds.

Question 6: Code Relating to Responsible Ownership of Dogs (Section 2).

A total of 67 respondents responded to this question - Do you support the Code Relating to Responsible Ownership of Dogs? 79% either Strongly agreed, Agreed or Somewhat agreed.

(Including a Code in the Policy is a specific requirement under the Dog Control Act.)

Answered: 67 Skipped: 21



Question 7. Do you have any other feedback regarding the Code?

There were 29 comments from the community providing feedback on the Code, which are summarised from the perspective of some common themes raised. Again, many referred to specific issues or dog zones, which are addressed in the questions to follow.

Balance

The comments indicate mixed reactions to the Break O'Day Council's policy. While some believe the Council has successfully balanced dog owners' expectations and wildlife protection through the proposed zones, others feel the policy is heavily biased against dog owners, particularly during the summer months when access to beach areas is significantly constrained. One comment called for *"No private breeding or sale of dogs"*.

There is an acknowledgment of the need for places where dogs can access the beach, such as Seymour. Others however highlighted an abundance of prohibited areas and restrictive zones (marked in red and orange on maps), leading them to argue the policy does not adequately consider the needs of dog owners. This has caused frustration among those who feel the balance between protecting breeding shorebirds and allowing recreational access for dogs is not correctly achieved.

Compliance

The responses highlight several concerns regarding dog ownership and regulation enforcement in the Scamander area. Respondents unanimously agree that carrying dog poo bags and cleaning up after dogs should be mandatory, emphasizing the need for responsible pet ownership. Observations reveal widespread non-compliance with leash requirements and prohibited areas, suggesting a lack of accountability among dog owners.

Respondents argued that existing codes of conduct are rendered ineffective without proper enforcement, citing minimal patrols at Four Mile Creek for example and non-compliance at Stieglitz. They express frustration that dogs are left to roam freely for the majority of the year due to infrequent policing. To address these issues, respondents propose that the council allocate funds for a full-time dog ranger dedicated to enforcing regulations consistently. This, they believe, would enhance compliance, improve public safety, and better preserve local environments.

Education and Signage

The survey responses highlight significant dissatisfaction with the Council's efforts in educating the public and enforcing dog regulations, particularly in areas significant for wildlife conservation. At Seymour, for instance, increasing pressures on shorebirds and wildlife despite attempts to inform dog owners, calling for more proactive measures from the council. The respondents stress the importance of robust education for dog owners, especially regarding the protection of shorebirds during nesting periods. They critique the effectiveness of current signage, citing instances where signs have been vandalized or inadequately placed, undermining their purposes for regulation and education. Additionally, there is a plea for clearer delineation of off-leash areas and explanation of what constitutes 'effective control' of dogs. Overall, there is a strong call to enhance educational efforts, improve signage quality, and enforce regulations more rigorously to mitigate conflicts and protect local wildlife effectively.

Wildlife / Shore birds

Several issues regarding dog management and wildlife protection are highlighted in the responses. At Stieglitz Beach, there was concern over dog owners disregarding leash regulations, with many allowing their dogs to roam freely and even encouraging them to chase birds. Instances of dogs hunting wildlife through bush tracks, sometimes with owners found far from their pets, were reported.

At Seymour, while the need for dog-friendly spaces was acknowledged, disturbance by dogs was increasing pressures on shorebirds, despite efforts by individuals to educate dog owners. The responses emphasise the importance of clearer, more durable signage to inform visitors and locals about designated dog areas. Overall, there's a plea for better balance between dog owners' expectations and wildlife protection across the municipality, particularly in ensuring adequate beach access during peak seasons while safeguarding nesting shorebirds.

More access for dogs

The comments agree with existing dog zones but criticize their allocation, arguing they do not provide sufficient space for dogs to exercise adequately. They believe the current zones are poorly located in crowded areas, restricting the majority of responsible dog owners who seek to exercise their pets freely on wet sand under effective control. The responses advocate for larger designated areas where dogs can be off-leash and still under effective control, emphasizing the importance of allowing more extensive stretches along wet sand for this purpose.

Less access for dogs

There were two comments untagged for this theme:

- *I would like to see all of Four Mile Creek Beach be a "Dog on Lead" beach.*
- *Seasonal areas should also be lead only.*

Owner Responsibility

The comments reflect widespread issues with responsible dog ownership in the municipality. At Stieglitz Beach, there's significant disregard for leash requirements, with dogs often chasing birds and tracking native wildlife through bush areas. There's a strong call for mandatory dog poo bag usage to address hygiene concerns. Observations at Scamander highlight ongoing non-compliance with on-leash zones, indicating insufficient enforcement and responsibility among dog owners. And despite efforts to educate dog owners at Seymour, more was needed to better protect wildlife.

Safety concerns arise from incidents at Beaumaris Beach where off-leash dogs were not adequately controlled, emphasizing the need for clearer signage and education on wildlife protection. The comments stress the importance of respecting both dogs' needs and public space, urging explicit rules to maintain cleanliness and safety in community areas.

Safety

The feedback highlights various concerns related to dogs on beaches. There are instances of dogs not under effective control on designated leash-required sections of Beaumaris Beach, posing safety risks. *"The dog owner was apologetic, nonetheless her dog was not under effective control."* Emphasis is placed on the need for better education of dog owners regarding wildlife protection, supported by clear signage delineating on-lead, off-lead,

and prohibited areas. Criticism is directed towards the inadequate placement of signage, with calls for more durable installations to prevent removal.

There is also dissatisfaction with the allocation of dog zones, viewed as insufficient for allowing dogs adequate exercise on wet sand under effective control. Concerns about dog socialization in parks are raised, suggesting a need for respectful consideration among pet owners to avoid conflicts. Additionally, there's a broader critique of beach access policies during peak seasons, with a call for better balance between recreational use and wildlife conservation.

Untagged

There were four untagged responses to this question. Three related to a broken link within the survey. When investigated it was found that the link was not working for the last period of the survey. One other related specifically to wording of one section of the policy regarding how many dogs could be owned.

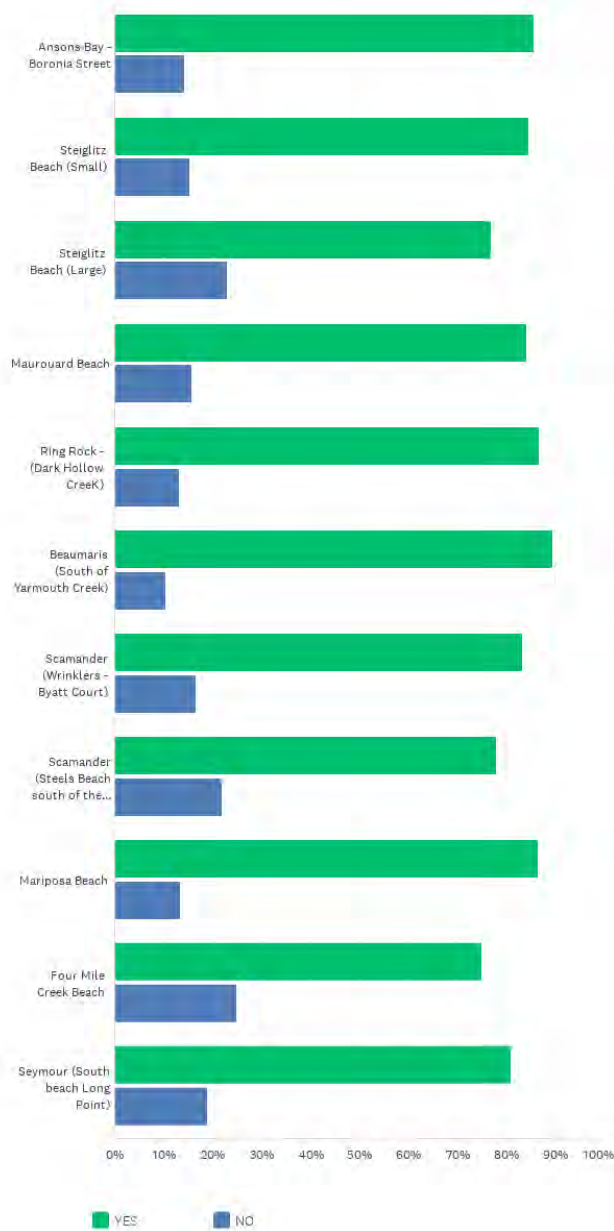
Conclusions:

Overall, the Code Relating to Responsible Ownership of Dogs was supported by about 80% of respondents either, 'strongly' to 'somewhat' agreeing with it. Many focussed on public safety and wildlife protection through the Code, highlighting the roles of education and information and enforcement. While some dog owners felt dog management was biased against them.

Question 8: Off Lead (exercise) beaches (Section 3.1.1) Do you support the following Off Lead (exercise) beaches?

This question was answered by 56 respondents with more than three quarters in support the Off Lead beaches (75-90%)

Q9 Off Lead (exercise) beaches (Section 3.1.1) Do you support the following Off Lead (exercise) beaches?



Question 9: Why you do or do not agree?

There were 42 comments from the community on Off Lead (exercise) beaches, which are summarised from the perspective of some common themes they raised. Respondents were asked to make sure they referred to locations of the Off Lead beaches they were commenting on.

Balance

Many respondents appreciated the balance struck adequately met the community's requirements, between dog exercise, public safety, and wildlife protection in these designated areas. Others however felt there was not enough and long enough stretches of beach available for off leash exercise. The current allocation off-leash dog beach at Seymour Beach was viewed as adequate for the community's needs and supported. Specific suggestions include adjusting boundaries slightly while preserving ample space for off-leash exercise, for example to ensure safety near the boat ramp at Ansons Bay.

Compliance

The feedback emphasizes several concerns regarding various locations. There is a strong call for clearer signage marking the start of dog exclusion zones to prevent off-leash dogs from entering restricted areas. The Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) supports the extensions to off-leash areas proposed where they simplify enforcement activities.

For compliance reasons some suggested designated dog access areas be either strictly on-leash or completely dog-free. During breeding seasons, using movable/temporary fencing was suggested to protect wildlife and for better public safety, particularly for children playing in these areas. Enforcement of dog waste cleanup is also highlighted as critical for maintaining a safe and healthy environment. Instances of dogs harassing wildlife and people further underscore the need for effective management and enforcement to mitigate such incidents on beaches.

Congestion

The feedback highlights dissatisfaction with the current size and location of off-leash dog areas along Scamander Beach. Commenters feel these areas are too small and frequently congested, particularly impacting interactions between dog owners and fishers. There's a call to extend off-leash zones to alleviate these issues, suggesting that larger stretches of beach, such as Ring Rock and Steeles Beach, could accommodate more dogs if restrictions were loosened to the wet sand areas only. The emphasis is on ensuring dogs are under effective control to avoid conflicts with other beach users. The commenters advocate for fair enforcement, penalizing those who do not comply while not unfairly restricting responsible dog owners who adhere to regulations

Dog Owners

The comments emphasize responsible dog ownership as a primary concern regarding off-leash beach regulations. They stress the need for stricter rules and clearly marked boundaries in off-leash areas to protect shorebirds during breeding seasons. Advocates suggest dogs should be leashed on access tracks to beaches and allowed off-leash only on wet sand to minimize disturbance to nesting birds. The importance of educating dog owners about wildlife conservation was also raised.

Regarding accessibility, a concern was raised regarding the distance to travel to the Ring Rock off lead beach was becoming increasingly costly and hard to meet. A suggestion was to relax restrictions at Ring Rock, contingent upon dogs staying on the wet sand, to balance accessibility with environmental conservation efforts.

Criticism is directed at the size and location of off-leash areas in Scamander, seen as inadequate and prone to congestion. The choice of heavily used beaches for off-leash zones is questioned, particularly regarding conflicts with fishers and potential entanglements with fishing lines along the water's edge.

Wildlife / Shore birds

The comments highlight concerns about wildlife protection on beaches, especially in areas like Stockyard Flats in Georges Bay, recognized for its bird life. Critics question why sections of coastal reserves, vital for bird breeding, dogs are allowed off-leash at all, advocating for stricter regulations during shorebird nesting periods. They emphasize the need for clearly marked boundaries in off-leash areas to prevent dogs from encroaching into sensitive zones.

Confusion over designated off-leash areas, particularly near Steels Beach and Scamander River Mouth, underscores the importance of good mapping and clear signage. There's a strong call for enforcing leash rules to enhance public safety and reduce disturbance to wildlife. Suggestions include rationalizing of on/off-leash areas to better protect shorebirds, driven by concerns over dogs harassing wildlife on beaches.

More Off Lead areas

The comments emphasize a strong desire for expanded off-leash dog areas across various beaches. Perceptions of limited off-leash zones at Scamander and Steeles Beach caused frustration and they are seen as congested and inadequate for dog owners and fishers alike. Suggestions include extending existing off-leash areas to cover longer stretches of beach (EG merge Beaumaris and Ring Rock), contingent on dogs off-leash being kept to the wet sand and 'effectively controlled'. Rationalizing current on/off-leash designations would create larger, more connected dog-friendly zones that respect both wildlife and dog owners' needs they argued. Overall, there's a plea for more accessible and expansive off-leash areas to accommodate local residents and holidaymakers alike.

Additionally, there was a suggestion to adjust the Four Mile Creek southern boundary to a more recognizable physical feature, such as rocks 100 meters south of the current boundary, while the northern boundary is considered appropriate as it is. And there was a comment on the need for an area near Binalong Bay.

Less Off Lead Areas

A number of commentators called for there being no off-lead beaches at all or at current locations, mainly for reasons of the health and safety of beach goers, but also to protect shorebirds. Specific comments objected the two proposed extensions - at Stieglitz (while another suggested merging the two already there) and at Mariposa Beach (as being unsafe). Others commented they saw a lack of off lead beaches already.

Safety

The comments highlight concerns about safety and hygiene on beaches, advocating for stricter regulations and enforcement to ensure public safety and wildlife protection. There's a strong stance against unrestricted off-leash areas due to risks posed by aggressive dogs and inadequate waste management, which threatens beachgoers, especially children. Criticism is directed towards negligent dog owners for failing to control their pets and clean up after them, suggesting that busy beaches might need to be dog-free during peak times to ensure a safe and enjoyable environment for all visitors.

Untagged

There were three untagged responses to this question. Respondents made mapping suggestions and stated it was important that people were aware of where they can walk their dog.

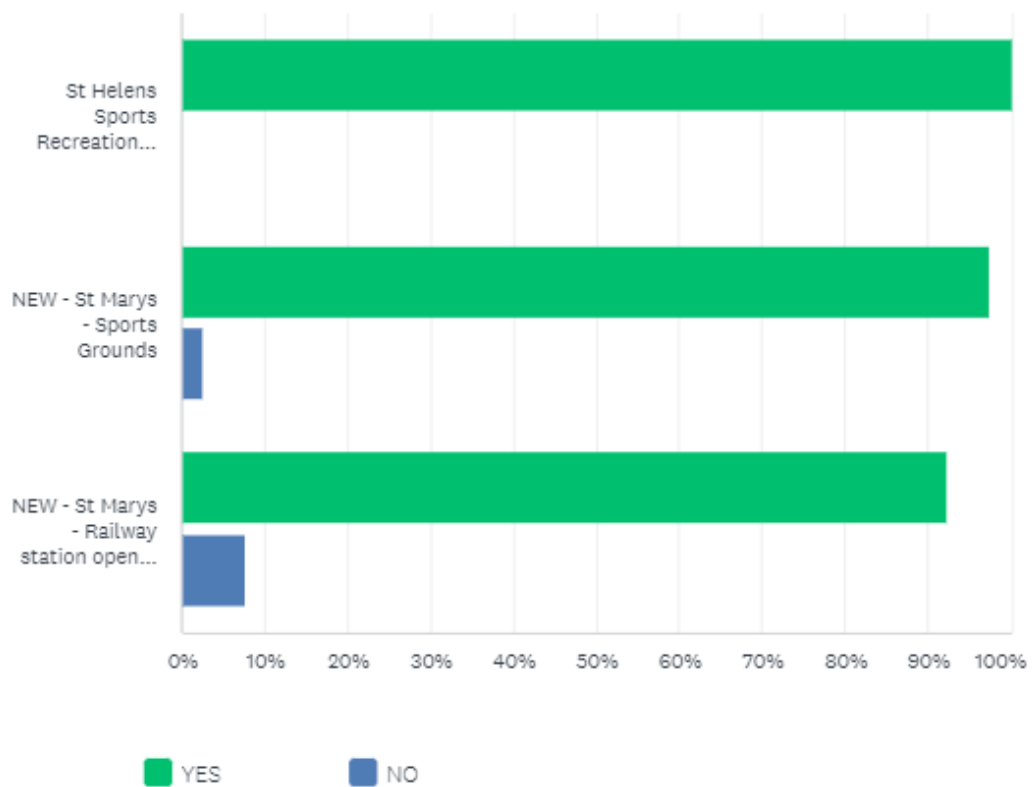
Conclusions:

More than a third of respondent provided further comments on these Off Lead beaches. Around half advocated for more and easier off-leash beach opportunities. Roughly similar numbers were concerned about the impacts on public health and safety and wildlife with the existing Off Lead beaches. Records and research on shorebirds, referred to by some submitters, show dogs (on and off lead) are one of several sources of disturbance to shorebirds on beaches that impact them and are implicated in several being listed as protected threatened species. Concern for compliance, signage and education was again prominent.

Question 10: Off Lead Dog Exercise parks (Section 3.1.2, 3.1.3 and 3.2).

This question – Do you support the following Off Lead Dog Exercise parks? – was answered by 41 respondents. 100% of respondents supported the current dog park in St Helens at the Sports Complex. Respondents were alerted to two proposed two exercise areas at St Marys and 97% of respondents supported the site at the St Marys Sports Complex and 92% supported the site near the old rail yard.

Answered: 41 Skipped: 47



Question 11: What do you like/dislike about these areas?

There were 24 respondents provided additional feedback on the Dog Exercise yards.

Railway site

The respondents enthusiastically support the concept of a dog yard in St Marys similar to the one in St Helens, praising the fenced areas that allow for safe off-leash exercise for dogs. They emphasise the importance of daily exercise for their active dogs and believe a local dog yard would greatly benefit both residents and tourists, enhancing the town's appeal. They highlight concerns about safety at this old railway station, Site B, due to it being alongside Esk Main Road and advocated for a spacious, well-fenced location to ensure dogs' safety. That the proposed location is within an area on the Tasmanian Historic Register was also a concern.

St Marys Complex site

The respondents expressed strong support for establishing a dog yard at the St Marys Complex site, similar to the setup in St Helens. They believe a dog yard at the St Marys Complex would be beneficial for local residents, providing daily exercise opportunities that could prevent restlessness and excessive barking at home. They also emphasize the appeal of dog-friendly spaces for tourists and newcomers to St Marys, enhancing the town's attractiveness as a destination for dog-friendly travel.

St Helens

Responses appreciated the safety of multiple fenced areas in St Helens, where they can safely exercise their two dogs off-leash without concerns about other dogs. Some questioned why dogs are prohibited in recreational grounds outside the designated dog park. One responder suggested having two dog yards for the St Helens area due to the growing dog population. They also highlight practical improvements needed at the St Helens dog park, such as fixed drink bowls and bench seats. Additionally, they raise concerns about management issues, suggesting that gates between different areas should be locked to prevent uncontrolled access and ensure the safety and socialization of dogs.

Fencing

The responses emphasize the importance of good fences in potential dog yards in St Marys, particularly near roads, to ensure safety and prevent escape. They also express concern about the unfenced open space near St Marys Railway Station, highlighting its proximity to a main road as a safety issue.

Safety

The responses raise concerns about safety due to lack of fencing in dog areas, doubting safety for dogs if owners don't comply with leash restrictions. They highlight risks at the St Marys Railway Station site, being unfenced and near a main road without visible street access/parking. They support new dog areas in St Marys as assets, emphasizing the need for safe spaces where residents and tourists can exercise and train dogs securely.

Wildlife

There was only one response applying to this theme and it related specifically to platypus observed near the St Marys Rail site.

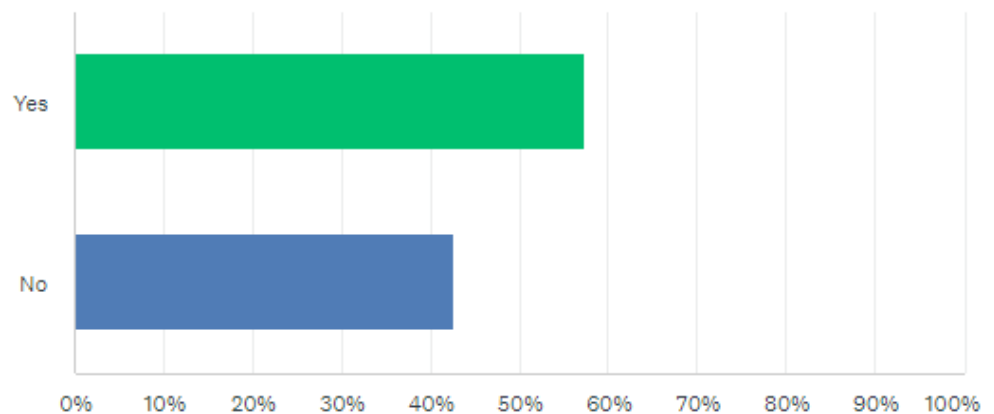
Conclusions:

The existing Dog Exercise Park at St Helens is fully supported and was held as an example for the overwhelming support of both of the proposed new Dog Exercise parks at St Marys. Ensuring Dog Exercise parks are well set up and safe is a concern.

Question 12: Various Dog On Lead areas (Section 3.3.1)

This question was addressing numerous places across in the municipality where dogs would be required to always be on a lead. It was answered by 54 respondents with 57% in support of the designated On Lead Areas and 42% not in support.

Answered: 54 Skipped: 34



Question 13: Why do you agree or disagree with the various Dog On Lead areas?

There were 36 responses to this question.

For

Survey respondents generally support designated 'On Lead' areas for dog exercise, with some highlighting issues of non-compliance and suggesting stricter enforcement measures, such as fines and improved signage. A few sought On Lead being applied to more areas, for example Binalong Bay beach, or as a rule.

Against

Survey responses reflect varied opinions on what on-leash dog access is appropriate, including the balance between on-lead and off-lead and other dog zones. Some respondents saw the on-leash areas as too restrictive and more off-lead areas were called for, and accessible in populated areas. Many emphasized the need for stricter enforcement to ensure compliance with existing rules and there's also criticism of the current map's clarity.

Compliance

Compliance remains a significant concern across various beaches and natural areas. Instances in designated on-lead zones include dogs running freely, chasing wildlife and, for example: *"I frequently see dog owners walking along the beach with a lead in their hand while their dog/s roam free."* There is a call for stricter enforcement through regular monitoring and fines, as well as improved signage to reinforce rules and facilitate reporting of non-compliance to local authorities.

Education and Signage

One response mentioned this theme and in association with comments on compliance/enforcement, that there should be *"improved signage both in information and locations to reinforce the requirements. Also, perhaps on signage an option to report people if they are not complying with the rules and are being a nuisance, is this reported to the local council or parks and wildlife?"*

Wildlife / Shore Birds

The survey responses highlight significant concerns about the impact of dogs on shorebirds and wildlife in various coastal areas:

- At Stieglitz Beach (north), there's frequent disregard for leash rules, with some owners allowing dogs to chase birds and roam through sensitive bush tracks.
- Compliance with leash regulations is inconsistent at Steeles, Wrinklers, Beaumaris, and Dianas Beaches, leading to uncontrolled dogs running into dunes and threatening nesting shorebirds.
- Rather than proposed 'On Lead', there's strong support for Prohibiting dogs at Moulting Bay, Scamander River mouth and Seymour Conservation Area due to their impact on wildlife habitats.
- Concerns are raised about dogs disrupting nesting areas on Denison Beach and Denison Rivulet Conservation Area, crucial for species like hooded plovers.
- Calls for better enforcement and signage to ensure compliance with leash regulations to protect coastal birds and wildlife are emphasized across several areas.

Overall, preserving birdlife and wildlife habitats from dog disturbances emerges as a central theme in these responses.

More dog access

Responses emphasized the need for increasing off-lead dog areas into the proposed On Lead areas.

- A larger off-lead area at Scamander on Steeles Beach towards Winifred Curtis to Falmouth, advocating being kept on the wet sand and under effective control to avoid disturbing birds. Longer beach stretches are desired for dog walking and mental health benefits were highlighted.
- Similar requests are made at Dark Hollow (Ring Rock Off Lead), south towards Beaumaris and north towards Diana's Basin, again advocating for off-lead access under effective control on wet sand.
- Concerns are raised about the current size of the off-lead area at Four Mile Creek, suggesting it should be expanded or reverted to its previous larger size between major rock areas for better recognition, especially for visitors.

There is a perception of too few off-lead areas without restrictions and a desire to convert many current on-lead areas to off-lead, reflecting a preference for more expansive dog exercise areas.

Less dog access

The responses emphasize stricter regulations and restrictions, with prohibitions on dog access and all dogs on lead at all times if suitable off-lead areas are not available.

In some locations, rather than the On Lead access proposed, Prohibiting dogs was advocated at:

- Moulting Bay from Sams Spit to the camping area.
- Scamander River mouth surrounding bird refuge area (and on the seasonally Restricted refuge area), due to very high shorebird values
- Seymour end of Templestowe Beach, rocky islet and Seymour Conservation Area (wetlands), due to significant wildlife presence.

Concerns are raised about dogs being off lead on beaches frequented by families and small children at Boat Harbour Point (rockpools, at Binalong Bay). Suggestions here were to prohibit dogs on the second and third rockpools from the end of the Point due to the safety concerns, while shifting the current on-lead access to the outer rockpool beach (which is currently seasonally restricted to dogs).

On Binalong Bay beach there was a suggestion that on-lead access apply, limited to 'near the water' during breeding times to protect birds and minimize disturbance.

Conclusions:

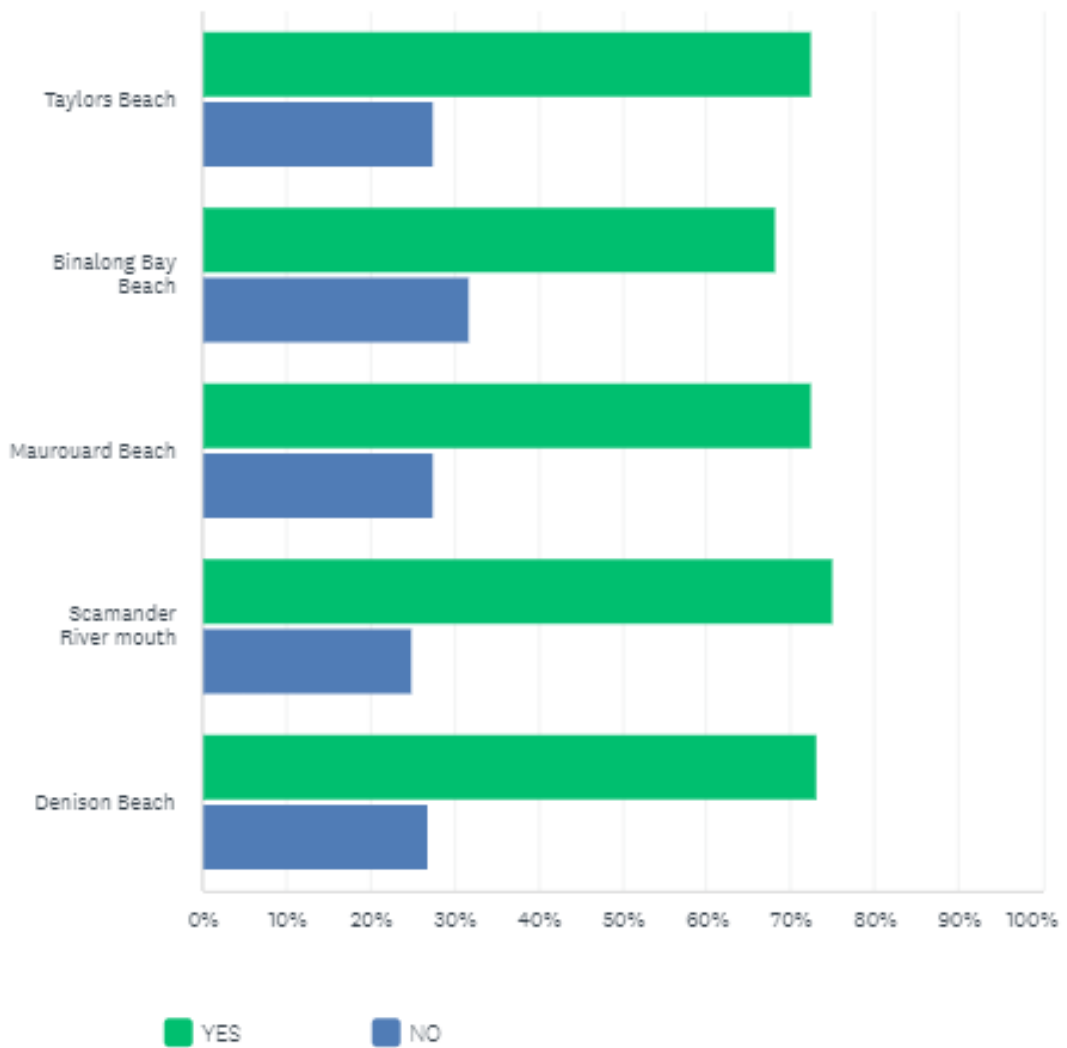
There was general support for On Lead beaches but also a split in support. There were two areas of concern, and desire, firstly for dogs to have more off lead access instead, and on the other hand dog being prohibited from some On Lead beaches instead. Several suggestions to zone areas differently have been put forward from these perspectives.

There was particular concern for dog owners not keeping their dogs on lead in these areas, bringing public safety risks and impacts on shorebirds, and calls for stricter enforcement.

Question 14: Beaches with Seasonal Restrictions - (Section 3.3.2)

There were 48 responses to this question with around 70% of respondents supporting the six current areas with Seasonal Restrictions (“Dogs prohibited from 1 October to 31 March and On Lead at all other times”) that were being proposed unchanged, apart from a minor reduction on Taylors Beach north.

Answered: 48 Skipped: 40



Question 15: Please explain why you disagree or agree and why?

There was an increased proportion of respondents who provided further comments on the (35 of the 48). And the proportion expressing concerns for community safety and protection of shorebirds was greater than those focussed on dog access.

For

There is strong support for seasonal restrictions on dog access to sensitive wildlife areas. However, it arises from some respondents favouring prohibiting dogs year-round at locations like the Scamander River Mouth bird refuge, emphasizing the importance of protecting shorebirds during nesting and breeding seasons to maintain their populations sustainably. While others advocated for dogs, for example being allowed On Lead during sensitive bird nesting periods, with Off Lead access during less critical times. Weighing these different perspectives up together, overall, the seasonally restricted areas provide a balanced approach. The needs of wildlife and the safety of beachgoers are respected, especially during peak summer months when beaches are heavily used by both. They view this zoning strategy as a reasonable compromise that accommodates both conservation efforts and public recreation needs effectively.

Against

Some respondents oppose allowing dogs on the family-oriented second and third beaches at Boat Harbour Point, citing concerns about potential disruptions to beachgoers, especially children. They suggest the less accessible furthest beach could permit dogs on leash without affecting others.

As noted for the 'For' theme above views are qualified by differing suggestions to change these areas. Some criticize extensive bans and seasonal restrictions proposed for Taylors, Maurouard Beaches, and the Scamander River mouth, arguing they are confusing and often ignored due to signage vandalism and inadequate enforcement. They prefer clearer signage and stricter enforcement over complete bans, advocating for more dog access with 'practical solutions' to also meet wildlife protection with public access concerns. And on the other hand, seeking prohibition of dogs all the time rather than seasonally.

Compliance

Respondents argue for stricter regulations at sensitive areas like Taylors and Maurouard Beaches, advocating for their return to being fully Prohibited to simplify compliance. They emphasize that areas like Scamander River mouth, highly significant for shorebirds and seabirds, should be completely Prohibited to dogs to protect nesting habitats. Concerns are raised about confusion due to unclear signage and ineffective enforcement of seasonal and daily restrictions across all areas, which they believe complicates compliance and leads to rule violations. Some suggest keeping dogs strictly on lead rather than banning them altogether, citing difficulties in managing popular areas where seasonal restrictions are often disregarded.

Education and Signage

Respondents emphasize the importance of clear education and signage about dog regulations in various beach areas. They propose clearer seasonal signage, such as "NO dogs on the beach" during summer and "Dogs on leash" in winter at locations like Boat Harbour Point and Binalong Bay to enhance clarity and compliance. They express frustration over confusion caused by seasonal and daily restrictions across all areas, advocating for consistent enforcement and frequent policing of policies to address vandalism and ensure adherence. Some stressed there is

a need for education to increase community understanding and support, for their suggestion of prohibiting dogs year-round in bird nesting areas like Scamander River Mouth for better protection to be effective.

Wildlife / Shore Birds

Respondents express strong support for protecting shorebirds and wildlife in beach areas, advocating for prohibitions on dog access to nesting and breeding habitats year-round. Specific mentions include seasonally restricted areas at Scamander, Taylors, Maurouard and Denison Beaches, returning them to completely prohibited to simplify compliance and ensure nesting success for shorebirds. Amongst these responses consensus was strong for Scamander River Mouth being a significant habitat area that should be completely prohibited to dogs throughout the year, emphasizing the need for community understanding and clear signage to enforce these protections effectively. The PWS also preferred the Scamander bird refuge area being Prohibited to dogs.

One respondent, expert in shorebirds of the area and their conservation, proposed seasonal restrictions start earlier, from August instead of October, to safeguard nesting shorebirds more effectively. Overall, there is a shared sentiment about the necessity of respecting and protecting wildlife habitats against potential disturbances from dogs, underlining the importance of conservation efforts in these sensitive environments.

More dog access

Respondents express a desire for expanded off-lead areas on beaches, advocating for more opportunities for dogs to be off-leash, particularly during the off-season or extended times in summer. They question why beaches like Maurouard [north] cannot be leash-free outside of peak periods and suggest cordoning off specific wildlife-sensitive areas rather than imposing complete prohibitions on entire beaches like Taylors, Maurouard and Denison. Overall, there is a call for more flexibility in beach regulations to accommodate dog owners while also respecting wildlife protection measures.

Less dog access

Respondents advocate for fewer off-lead areas to protect shorebirds and wildlife. They support seasonal restrictions prohibiting dogs during bird nesting seasons and prefer dogs to be on-lead at all times on popular family beaches. A total ban on dogs on certain beaches throughout the year was suggested due to the presence of vulnerable species, such as penguins, which are at risk from dog attacks. Locations suggested by different numbers of respondents included Taylors, Binalong Bay, Scamander (most support), Maurouard and Denison Beaches. There is a call for stricter on-lead policies and better monitoring to ensure compliance and enhance safety for both wildlife and beachgoers.

Untagged

There were three untagged responses to this question. Two were considered invalid while the third mentioned the need for off road vehicle and 4WD provisions to be catered for. While this is a valid point this is not something that the Dog Management Policy has provision for.

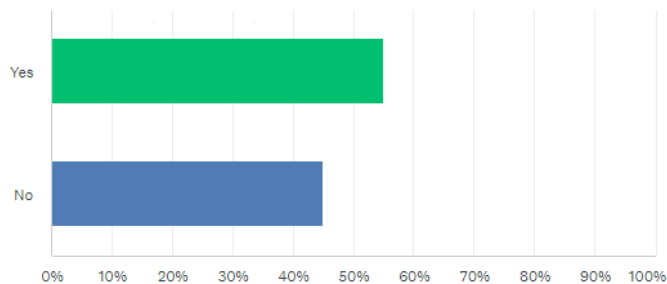
Conclusions:

Support for seasonally restricted beaches was qualified by views for less and relaxed restricted areas, versus more restriction by making areas prohibited at all times and enforcing compliance. While this can be interpreted as community support for the seasonally restricted areas being fairly balanced, there were more respondents arguing for tighter restrictions and prohibiting dogs from these areas instead, particularly at Scamander. Concern Effective implementation and compliance with of these seasonally restricted areas was a frequent concern.

Question 16: Dog Swims in Dog On Lead areas (Section.3.3.3)

This question was answered by 49 responders with 55% being in support of Dog Swims and 44% against the proposed provision. The proportion 'against' is significantly higher compared to all the other questions.

Answered: 49 Skipped: 39



Question 17: Why do you agree / disagree with the Dog Swims provision?

Most of the respondents (37) went on to provide comments on this question.

For

The comments in support of Dog Swims reflect a general consensus that swimming is beneficial for dogs, particularly mature ones, as it provides low-impact exercise. Many agree that dogs need the opportunity to swim off-lead, as leads can tangle and restrict them. Specific areas like Wrinklers lagoon are seen as suitable for this activity. Some raise concerns about what constitutes "brief" swimming time and suggest clear definitions. While supporting the idea of designated swimming areas for dogs, there are concerns about owners' ability to control their dogs and ensure compliance. Overall, there is appreciation for safeguarding both beach users and dogs, with emphasis on the need for responsible ownership and well-trained dogs.

Against

Responses against Dog Swims showed strong opposition to allowing dogs off-lead in on-lead areas due to concerns about compliance, wildlife protection, and enforcement. Critics argue that dogs off-lead would chase birds, escape owner control, and disturb beach users, complicating enforcement for council and parks staff. Observations show frequent non-compliance with on-lead rules, and the proposed provision would likely worsen this issue. At sensitive areas like the Scamander River mouth, significant for shorebird habitats, dogs should be prohibited entirely to protect wildlife. Seasonal restrictions are confusing and poorly enforced, making consistent on-lead rules essential. The idea of allowing brief swims is seen as unenforceable and risky to other beachgoers and wildlife, leading to calls that the requirement for dogs to remain on-lead at all times in such areas be maintained.

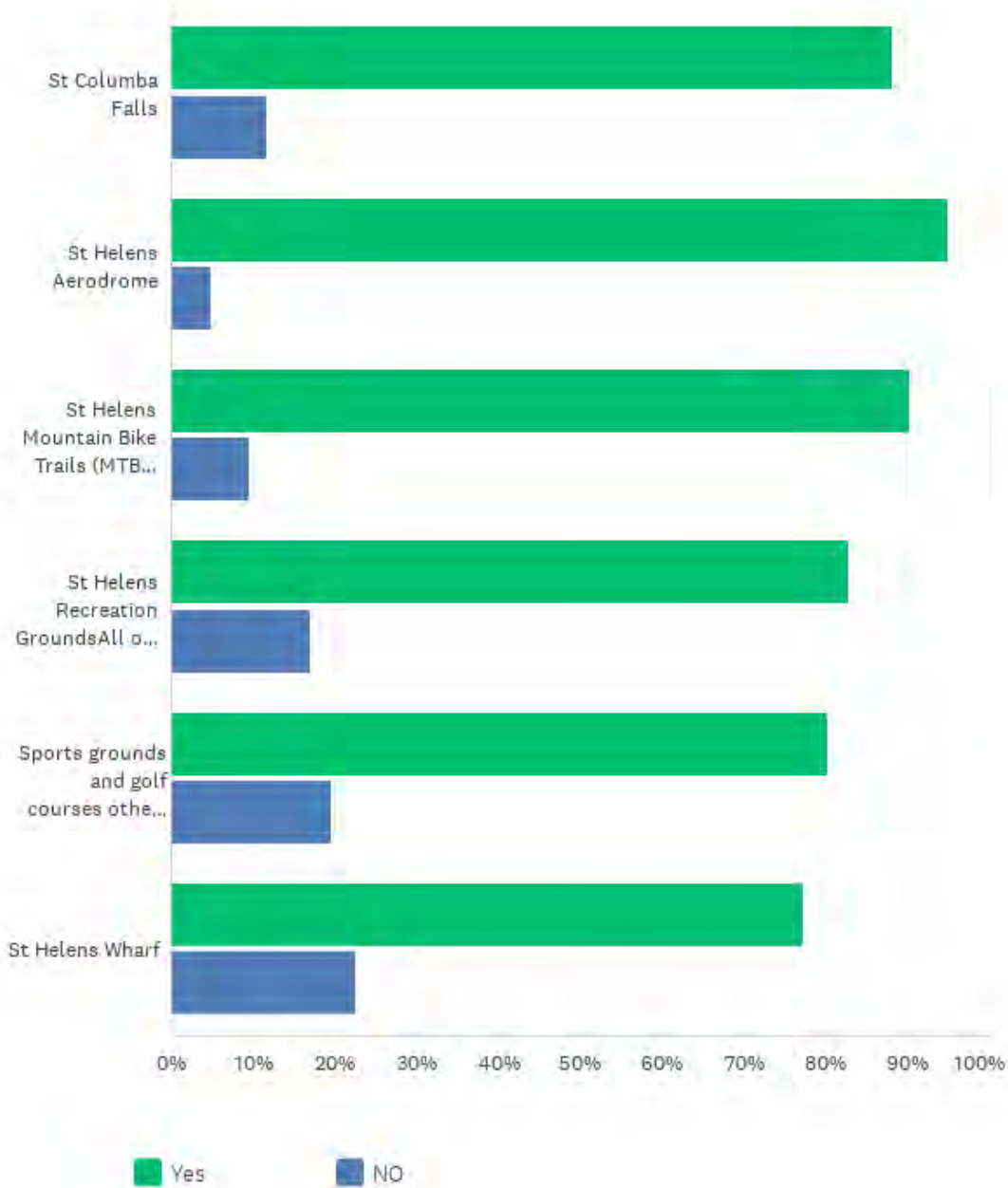
There were no untagged responses to this question.

Conclusions:

Dog owners wanted this opportunity of being able to give their companion dogs a swim off the leash within On Lead only areas, and it would help them and their dogs. However, there were strong arguments from others that the provision was not workable given past observations of leash-behaviour by dog owners, the safety risks near waterways to other people, children and other dogs, and to wildlife, and difficulties interpreting and applying the provision and achieving compliance. The PWS has strongly opposed this 'dog swims' in on-lead areas provision.

Question 18: Other Restricted Areas where dogs are not allowed. (Section 3.3.4)

This question was answered by 46 responders with the majority agreeing with all proposed Restricted Areas.



Question 19: Why do you agree or disagree?

34 responders took the opportunity to provide more detailed feedback about why they agreed or disagreed with these restricted areas.

For

There was support for prohibiting dogs on the Mountain Bike trails (with the Poimena MTB trailhead kept as 'On Lead'), at St Columba Falls and St Helens Aerodrome. Commenters agree that dogs should not be in these areas, except perhaps in cars, due to safety and cleanliness concerns. Many emphasize that wildlife in high-value habitats people at high-traffic well used sites should be able to use such areas without dogs being present. This is seen as a common-sense approach to maximize safety and amenity. These areas are considered unsuitable for dogs, and prohibiting them is considered reasonable, responsible, and necessary for health and safety. Specific mention is made of children's playgrounds and sportsgrounds, where safety and managing risk must be prioritized. Overall, these prohibitions are viewed as sensible measures to protect humans, wildlife, and ecosystems.

Against

Those against the prohibitions feel that the regulations favour certain groups and over-regulate others, reducing quality of life and creating divisions. They argue that responsible owners are being unfairly restricted due to a minority's actions and believe dogs should be allowed on lead at these sites as long as owners clean up after them. There is a concern that these restrictions are unnecessary and that issues at specific facilities should not lead to blanket regulations elsewhere. Additionally, there is a call for accurate mapping of prohibited areas, such as children's playgrounds and sportsgrounds, to avoid confusion.

St Columba Falls

Residents and visitors express concern over allowing dogs at St Columba Falls due to its high natural values, including vulnerable wildlife like platypus and pink robins. However, there are suggestions supporting dogs on lead at St Columba Falls, citing limited wildlife encounters on the walking path and proposing alternative dog-friendly trails during less busy times.

St Helens Aerodrome

The dog prohibition at the St Helens Aerodrome is supported, with comments highlighting significant safety issues if dogs were allowed. The prohibition is considered sensible, protecting humans at the airport and recreation ground. The general agreement is that the prohibition ensures safety and aligns with responsible management of the area.

St Helens MTB

The dog prohibition on the St Helens MTB trails and trailheads is generally supported, with one commentator noting that the Poimena MTB trailhead will still be 'On Lead'. It is considered a sensible prohibition, protecting wildlife and ecosystems. There are concerns about safety issues if dogs were allowed on the MTB trails. However, one comment suggests that dogs should be allowed on lead on specific trails, like the Flagstaff to Lions Park Trail, during less busy times.

St Helens Recreation Ground

Residents have varying opinions about dogs at the St Helens Recreation Ground. There's a call to open up the often unused and empty spaces on St Helens Sports Complex for dog enjoyment. For example, with a suggestion of allowing dogs but not on playing surfaces. Conversely, there are voices don't want the restrictions here to change

and others advocating for all recreational grounds being made dog-free due to concerns over odour, faeces, and threats from dogs that affecting the recreational amenity value. Overall, opinions on this matter are divided, reflecting different perspectives on managing dog access in recreational areas.

Other Sports and Recreation Grounds

Several comments were made about Scamander, expressing concerns about limited off-lead areas for dogs, and the Scamander golf course. Residents feel that responsible dog owners should not be penalized and argue that local wildlife causes more damage than dogs. Additionally, there is a sentiment against over-regulation, which some believe diminishes quality of life and creates unnecessary division within the community. Scamander residents highlight their frustration with restrictions on letting dogs off-lead at the Scamander Golf Club. They argue that responsible dog owners already avoid interfering with golfers and diligently clean up after their pets. Some residents even find mental health benefits in walking their dogs at the golf course. However, there are also contrasting views suggesting that recreational grounds should be dog-free due to concerns over maintenance and cleanliness issues associated with dogs.

St Helens Wharf

Comments about the St Helens Wharf show mixed opinions. Some support the prohibition due to safety concerns, citing experiences with uncontrolled dogs jumping into boats and creating disturbances. Others disagree with the prohibition, arguing that dogs on a lead should be allowed as it is a popular area for walking and relaxing with dogs. Some believe that responsible dog ownership, with dogs kept on leads, would make the area safe without the need for a complete prohibition.

Untagged

Two other comments to this question called for safety and hygiene standards to be maintained. Another wanted to see all the 'other' playgrounds and sports grounds included on the zone map.

Conclusions

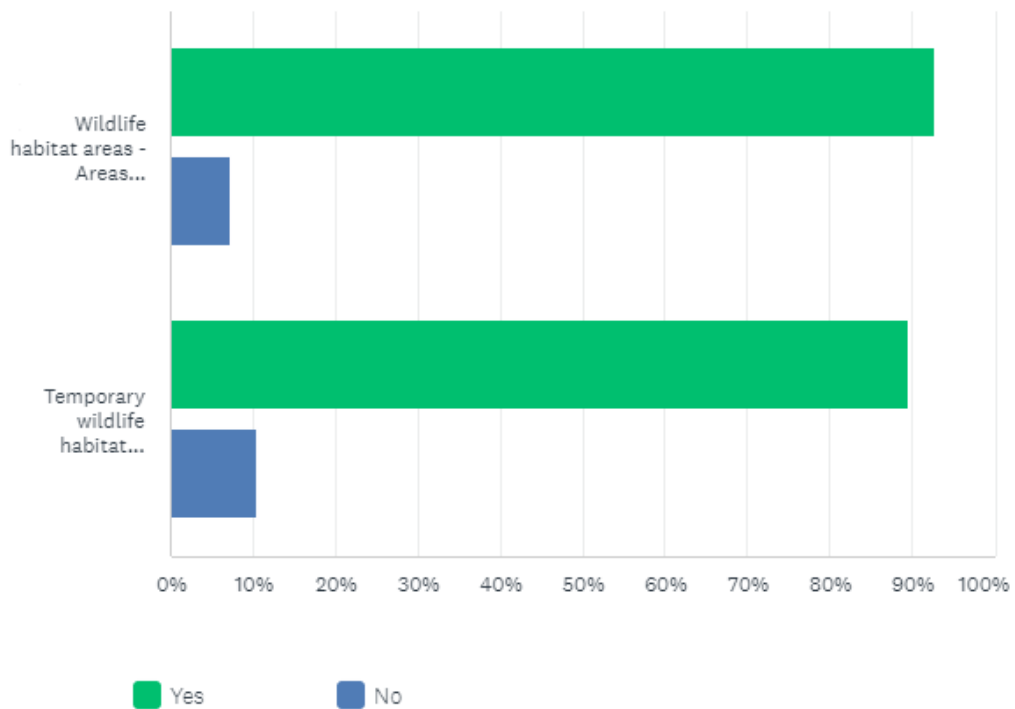
While support for these other restricted areas was quite clear, those making further comments were divided fairly evenly. Some wanted the restrictions relaxed to allow dogs while others felt the high levels and nature of use of them by people meant dogs needed to be restricted for public safety reasons. The most contentious locations were St Helens Recreation Ground (where dog would be prohibited) and Break O'Day's other sports and recreation grounds, including Scamander Sports Complex, (where they are prohibited from playing fields/surfaces at all times).

Question 20: Prohibited Areas (Section. 3.4)

55 Respondents answered this question. Respondents were asked to consider areas where dogs are Prohibited due to sensitive habitat for native wildlife and a provision for temporary Prohibited areas to be made to protect areas containing sensitive habitat for native wildlife from time to time, such as seasonal bird nesting areas.

Both statements were supported by the majority with Prohibited areas receiving 92% support and the Temporary wildlife protection measure with 89% support.

Answered: 55 Skipped: 33



Question 21: Tell us why you agree or disagree with these Prohibited Areas.

31 respondents provided additional commentary around their thoughts on the statements and dominantly from the perspectives of wildlife protection and improved information and enforcement.

For

The responders supporting the Prohibited areas emphasize several key points. Firstly, they agree with the new dog Prohibited areas at Dianas Basin and Dora Point, stressing the high value of these habitats for shorebirds and wildlife that require protection from disturbance and harm. And they advocate for improved signage at Dianas Beach, to clearly show dog exclusion zones and reduce incidents of dogs off-leash in sensitive areas. Responders agree that the current and new areas should be dog-prohibited year-round to ensure consistent wildlife conservation efforts, citing a need for clear boundaries and for easy compliance and enforcement, to uphold these protections effectively.

Against

There was one comment specifically against the Prohibited areas which seemed to support the idea of people being able to take their dogs anywhere so long as they were on lead: *"Too broad a definition. If humans can attend then so should dogs on leads."*

Compliance

Responders concerned with compliance highlight several key issues. They emphasize the lack of regard shown by some dog owners for wildlife protection in dog-prohibited areas, stressing the urgent need for clear signage and effective enforcement measures. They critique temporary wildlife habitat protections as ineffective without consistent policing and advocate for year-round prohibitions in sensitive areas to safeguard nesting shorebirds and other wildlife from disturbance. Additionally, they call for marked boundaries in sensitive areas and penalties for non-compliant behaviours, underscoring the importance of adequate resources to support Parks and Wildlife in their conservation efforts.

Ownership

The comments about dog ownership highlighted varying perspectives. Some emphasize personal responsibility and agree with wildlife protection measures, committing to keeping their dogs out of habitat areas. There was a call for reasonable discretion, suggesting dogs on beaches could run along the wave line but be kept away from habitat areas. However, there were also concerns about dogs being unpredictable and some owners being physically unable to restrain them are also raised.

Education and Signage

Responders mentioned the need for improved education and signage at Dianas Beach to clearly mark the dog exclusion zone, as dogs off lead are often observed in the area. Concerns are voiced about owners not respecting wildlife protection, emphasizing the necessity for clear signs and rigorous enforcement measures to address these issues effectively.

Wildlife and Shorebirds

The comments relating to wildlife and shore birds emphasize strong support for protecting wildlife and shorebirds from disturbance and harm caused by dogs in sensitive areas. There is widespread agreement amongst these comments on the need for extending prohibited zones at places like Dora Point and Dianas Basin due to their high shorebird and habitat values. Concerns are raised about inadequate enforcement of temporary wildlife protections,

advocating for year-round prohibitions and clearer signage to aid compliance. Many express a general commitment to wildlife protection over dog owner preferences, emphasizing the importance of stringent rules and enforcement to safeguard habitats and biodiversity.

Conclusions

Support for dog Prohibited areas protecting sensitive wildlife and habitats was very clear in numbers and comments. There some concerns these areas unduly limited opportunities for dogs and their owners, but also concerns about non-compliance and enforcement to make these areas effective. The provision for temporary Prohibited areas to protect sensitive wildlife locations was also supported.

Comments on previous questions had also suggested other dog zones be made Prohibited areas, at Scamander River mouth and on Taylors, Binalong Bay, Maurouard, Templestowe and Denison Beaches.

Question 23: Do you have any further feedback you would like to share regarding the Dog Management Policy Review?

Nearly two thirds (48) of survey respondents took this opportunity to provide additional feedback and comments.

Signage /Education

The survey responses highlight issues with signage about dog regulations on Break O'Day beaches. Respondents suggest clear, simple signs and more permanent solutions such as steel posts with riveted metal signs. Improved strategic placement is suggested, visible from the beach and in transition zones in areas like Dianas Beach and Seymour. Enhanced clarity and consistency in signage, including dual signs showing on-lead and off-lead directions, are recommended.

Additionally, there is a strong call for better education on responsible dog ownership and the impact of dogs on wildlife. Community engagement initiatives and increased enforcement, including regular patrols and consistent penalties, are suggested. Improving communication through a comprehensive plan involving Parks and Council, regular monitoring of policy compliance and bird populations, and better accessibility of online resources and waste management facilities are critical points. The overall feedback emphasizes the need for more effective signage, enhanced education, and stronger enforcement to protect wildlife and ensure harmonious coexistence between beachgoers and their pets.

Wildlife / Shorebirds

Survey responses underscore the critical need for enhanced protection of shorebirds and wildlife on Break O'Day beaches. Many participants highlight the presence of coastal birdlife of international significance inhabiting many beach and stream and lagoon mouth locations, such as Taylors Beach, Dora Point, Stockyard Flats, Beaumaris Beach, Scamander River mouth to name some. Several responses cited decades of monitoring and scientific research of shorebirds and their conservation. They highlighted many are listed and protected threatened species and international migratory species and called for Council to allocate dog access to beaches based more on the science and with PWS.

The main concerns include the detrimental impact of uncontrolled dogs and off-road vehicles on nesting shorebirds. Respondents call for more permanent and strategically placed signage, increased enforcement of dog regulations, and a shift in policy to prioritize wildlife habitat more over dog access. Suggestions include better fencing during breeding seasons, a comprehensive communication and compliance plan involving both Parks and Council and establishing human exclusion zones at shorebird breeding sites.

Overall, the feedback highlights the need for a balanced approach that respects that ecological value of the beaches while addressing the needs of responsible dog owners through clear guidelines and robust enforcement.

Responsible Ownership

Many of these further comments emphasized the need for responsible dog ownership and stricter enforcement of dog regulations on Break O'Day beaches. Many respondents expressed concerns about non-compliance with leash laws, noting that some dog owners only leash their pets when others approach, leading to uncontrolled dogs disturbing wildlife and other beachgoers. Additionally, increased enforcement and patrols are deemed necessary to ensure compliance, with some suggesting penalties for both off-leash violations and failure to pick up dog waste.

Respondents also highlight safety issues caused by aggressive, off-leash dogs, especially in areas like St Helens and around Scamander. They advocate for a balanced approach that educates dog owners while enforcing regulations to protect both wildlife and the community. Some respondents suggest that dog owners should be rewarded with more off-leash areas if they demonstrate responsible behavior, while others argue for prohibiting certain breeds in public places due to safety concerns. Overall, there is a strong sentiment that responsible dog ownership should be a priority to ensure the safety and enjoyment of all beach users.

Compliance

Survey responses reveal significant concerns about compliance with dog regulations on Break O'Day beaches. Respondents say that dog owners frequently ignore leash laws leading to uncontrolled dogs disturbing wildlife and other beachgoers.

Respondents suggest there is a lack of enforcement and patrols, resulting in rampant non-compliance, and many respondents call for more frequent patrols by Animal Control Officers and greater cooperation with the Parks and Wildlife Service. Incidents of aggressive dog behaviour, including attacks on other dogs and humans, are reported.

Recommendations for improvement include increasing enforcement resources, implementing a more hands-on approach to wildlife protection and educating dog owners. Respondents stress the need for a balanced approach that respects both dog owners and wildlife conservation.

More dog access

A strong desire for more off-lead areas for dogs was indicated in some responses. While acknowledging the necessity of prohibited and on-lead zones, many respondents feel that the current off-lead areas are too limited, particularly along Scamander. During peak holiday seasons, these areas become congested with dog walkers and people fishing, leading to conflicts and the need for dog owners to constantly leash their pets. Many respondents argue that responsible dog owners should be trusted and rewarded with longer stretches of beach where their dogs can exercise off-lead under effective control. Specific suggestions include extending the off-lead area from Dune Street south of Steels Beach towards Falmouth. Another called for exercise opportunities or areas to be provided suitable for greyhounds that have retired or never raced.

Respondents believe that by respecting the environment and ensuring the safety of all beach users, the privilege of off-lead areas can be maintained and expanded.

Less dog access

Survey responses show a strong preference for reducing off-lead areas for dogs and increasing restrictions. Many respondents emphasize the negative impacts of uncontrolled dogs on wildlife and other beachgoers, supporting the prohibition of dogs at specific locations like Dora Point/Humbug NRA and Dianas Basin campground. They argue that dogs should not be allowed to run unrestrained on any beaches, as this leads to disturbances, aggression, and harm to wildlife. There is a clear call for stricter enforcement and more designated on-lead or no-dog zones to ensure the protection of vulnerable species and to create a safer environment for all.

Other

There were survey responses show strong support for the council's dog management policy and appreciating the opportunity to comment and contribute to it. There is appreciation for the provision of safe off-leash spaces accessible to all dogs, recognizing the importance of equal opportunities for exercise and safety. Equitable resolution of barking dog issues was raised.

A suggestion was also made to monitor dog access and compliance on beaches and shorebird populations to inform Council's dog policy and reviews.

Parks and Wildlife Service

The written submission from the Parks and Wildlife Service (PWS) needs particular attention.

The PWS has legislated authority over dog access to the Reserves it manages. Council needs to align its responsibility under the Dog Control Act for its Dog Management Policy and Declared areas with PWS management of Reserves. Council has collaborated closely with PWS on this for many years. This is important on Break O'Day's beaches, which are largely PWS managed Reserves, because they are critical habitat for many significant and threatened shorebird species, while also being sought after by dog owners for recreation and exercise with their dogs. As do many other beach goers too.

The following points outline implications for parts of the draft revised policy from the written submission from the PWS. (The position and views of PWS is wider and go beyond these points alone.)

- Minor extensions to Mariposa Beach and Stieglitz Beach supported, no other Off Lead area changes. (The Off-leash Area at Lagoons Beach should be listed with others in Section 3.1.1 of the Policy.)
- Make seasonally restricted beaches, including the change to the restricted area boundary at the north end of Taylors Beach (Margerys Corner on Lead extension).
- PWS strongly opposes including the provision proposed for 'dog swims' in on-lead areas.
- Make the Restricted (prohibited at all times) areas, notably: St Columba Falls and MTB trails network (while also making 'On Lead' the area proposed at Poimena MTB trailhead).
- Supports Prohibited areas, including making the Prohibited areas at Dianas Basin and South of Dora Point, and 'temporary prohibited' provision.
- Prefers that the Scamander River Mouth seasonal closure area (bird refuge) be Prohibited to dogs. And would support at Seymour, prohibiting dogs from the wetland area (in Seymour Conservation Area) and Templestowe Beach (rather than the On Lead proposed).
- Implementation: all 8 access points on Taylors Beach (seasonally restricted) be signed in future to support compliance efforts.

Policy Implementation

Comments and suggestions were often made regarding signage, education and information and particularly enforcement of compliance with dog management regulations.

The Code Relating to Responsible Ownership of Dogs (Section 2 in the Policy, questions 6 and 7 in the survey) includes entitlements and responsibilities for everyone. These include for Council to apply its role under the Dog Control Act and undertake education, awareness and enforcement activities to promote responsible dog ownership.

The feedback received on things like dog zone and shorebird information signage, enforcement of dog access rules and information and education for the community is helpful for the implementation of the Dog Management Policy that will follow. Some proposals, such as the 'dog swims' provision, raised concerns about the practicality of implementing them. However, funding and delivery of the Policy is a matter for Council and others it collaborates with, such as PWS, and the whole community, not the Policy itself.

Marshalling the resources needed and then undertaking this work is not something the Policy can do for itself. The feedback on these implementation matters is welcomed; it will be informative for the community and will be helpful to Council and its partners.