



# Dog Control Act Amendment 2019 consultation

## HOBART DOG WALKING ASSOCIATION SUBMISSION

The Hobart Dog Walking Association Inc (HDWA) promotes:

- the importance of both on- and off-lead dog exercise areas for the physical and social benefits of both dogs and their owners
- responsible dog ownership

Since 2006, the HDWA has lobbied for the retention of dog exercise areas, including beaches. The beach areas we have lobbied for have a history of being dog off-lead exercise areas such as Bellerive Beach, Seven Mile Beach and Nutgrove Beach, at Sandy Bay. Bellerive and Nutgrove Beaches are in suburban areas.

### Finding the right balance

The HDWA wishes to have the following input into the Dog Control Act Amendments:

The *Dog Control Act 2000* needs to be amended to create more balance so Councils are compelled to provide dog exercise areas for dog owners, along with better education and enforcement.

Some Councils do a very good job at striving to have balance and provide dog exercise areas, others do not. In some Tasmanian municipalities one struggles to find public off-lead dog exercise areas.

### Wildlife

Our members respect wildlife and are animal lovers and include:

- Bushcare volunteers
- Volunteers for Injured and Orphaned Wildlife
- Land for Wildlife property owners and land owners with conservation covenants on their properties.

Naturally, we were very upset by the deaths of little penguins in the North and North West. We publicised the Burnie Penguin Rehab and Release needing donations on our website and in our newsletter.

Being southern based, we are unfamiliar with Doctors Rocks, near Wynyard, but noted on the ABC TV report about the penguin deaths, there was a “no dogs” sign. Media reports also gave the impression that the penguin deaths were caused by a dog at large. Where was the owner or owners?

The HDWA supports the increase in fines for dogs killing wildlife. We also support the use of DNA as a tool of proof in any legal case.

## Questions and concerns

The HDWA does have questions and concerns:

- Will increased fines really work?
  - Unfortunately, there is a group of people for whom wildlife, their dogs and fines mean very little.
- Will some Councils and other groups use wildlife as an excuse for limiting access to public spaces for dog walking. Councils should provide an inventory of the natural values and sensitive fauna to justify dog bans. Decisions need to be evidence-based:
  - Kingborough Council bans dogs from Blackmans Bay Beach purportedly for the “natural values”, yet this is a suburban area has introduced weeds and water pollution issues. Why can't there be time share arrangements on Blackmans Bay Beach or a dog area on this beach?
  - There is a small vocal group in Taroona that tried very hard to limit dog access to beaches in Taroona and tried to use wildlife as a reason for maintaining the ban. Human activity in this area would have more impact on wildlife in this semi urban area than dogs.
  - We are concerned this section could be used as a back door approach to cover areas that should stay within the remit of a Council's Dog Management Policy.
- Wildlife is becoming more displaced due to land clearing and urban sprawl, and being forced into more urban areas. This means wildlife can appear more prevalent in urban and suburban areas due to loss of habitat and bushland. Dry weather conditions are also forcing wildlife into more urbanised areas. This brings wildlife into urban areas with dogs and cats.

## Planning dog exercise areas

It is widely recognised that it is important to provide dog exercise areas since many community members own dogs. The health and wellbeing benefits of dog ownership are also widely documented. Dogs encourage owners to walking and this reduces the likelihood of social isolation.

Not much open space is being set aside for dogs, or community parks, as subdivisions are created. This needs addressing.

Dogs are excluded from many beaches across most of the state.

Dog bans are extremely extensive around Tasmania with many beaches displaying ‘no dogs’. Only in areas in the southeast, where we have active dog walking associations, has any kind of balance been established.

Kingborough only allows dog access on a few beaches. Clarence has time share arrangements and dog bans on beaches.

Clarence City Council (CCC) is due to produce its next Dog Management Plan in 2020, and might use the new proposed *Dog Act* amendments to target several beaches for further restrictions. The CCC tried to ban dogs from Bellerive Beach in 2007. In 2014, dogs were banned from about one-third of Bellerive Beach plus the Bellerive Play Park (known as Apex Park) despite the children’s play area being fully fenced and a no dog area.

Banning dogs from Bellerive Beach is contentious. Every suburb or town should have at least one dog off-lead exercise area, preferably within 15 minutes’ walk of a person’s home.

The suburb of Bellerive lacks dog off-lead exercise areas:

- Dogs are excluded from Bellerive Beach from 10am – 6pm, 1 December to 1 March, plus one-third of the beach at all times.
- The fenced dog training park in Bellerive is not always available to dog owners as it is used as a carpark when major events are held at Blundstone Arena.

The quietly influential bird lobby, together with some environments groups, will say that dog bans is all as it should be and put forward a case for imposing further dog bans. There is, however, a danger that extreme exclusion/restriction of dogs on beaches will generate indifference or even hostility among some dog owners towards birds and wildlife. Conversely, cooperation from the majority of dog owners in reporting and enforcement could be greatly enhanced if a few more beaches could be returned for dog walking, including off-lead. Otherwise, Councils need to set aside more parklands and trails for off-lead dog exercise.

Dog restrictions or bans should be established on an evidence-based case by case basis. Otherwise Councils will be only too pleased to use their new powers to avoid the more onerous consultation requirements of previous legislation.

## Greyhounds

### 5. Section 18 amended (Effective control of greyhounds)

Greyhounds – like other dog breeds – need access to exercise areas. Owners also need to effectively and responsibly manage and socialise their dogs. All dog owners need to be aware of their dogs breed and needs.

We are pleased with the changes and clarity around “effective control” for greyhounds. This will remove so many restrictions for greyhounds and their owners.

The one concern we have in relation to access to Council Declared areas is what the Councils will do. Some Councils are now providing fenced off-lead areas. This has been a great step forward. However, there are also Councils that appear to be less obliging.

The Hobart City Council has a good policy of allowing dogs to be exercised on sports fields when organised competitions are not being played. This is good sharing of limited space in the municipality.

### **Section 19 (a) (6)**

Unfortunately, we do have incidents where people will make accusations against dogs and owners that are untrue and often done maliciously.

What protection can be afforded dogs and their owners if evidence of an actual injury is not required?

People, when frightened of dogs and hypersensitive to their presence will misinterpret a situation and their distress will give rise to behaviours that excite dogs. Screaming, running or waving arms around will excite dogs. Dogs can read these behaviours as a start to a game.

Many people do not know how to read dog body language. We would like to see more public education. The Delta Safe Dog program is run in schools and helps to address this lack of education and awareness. The Dogs' Homes of Tasmania also has a school program, limited to the Hobart area due to budget restrictions. Government support for such programs would be beneficial. These programs rely on schools being willing to invite the programs into their classrooms and understanding their importance.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion the HDWA supports this Bill but with some reservations around its efficacy in relation to protecting wildlife and perhaps providing a way for some groups to limit or reduce dog access to public spaces.

We feel that we have made some suggestions that would provide a more permanent and sustainable solution to protecting wildlife.

The HDWA thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the amendments.

### **Contact details**

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