



**DRAFT DOG  
MANAGEMENT POLICY  
REVIEW 2021**

**Clarence City Council**

***Submission from the  
Dogs' Homes of  
Tasmania***

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## 1. OVERVIEW SUMMARY

The Tasmanian Canine Defence League Inc. trading as the Dogs' Homes of Tasmania (DHoT), welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Clarence City Council's 2021 review of its Dog Management Policy.

DHoT is contracted to provide Councils Pound services. We acknowledge the mutually respectful and valued relationship that endures between us through this relationship.

Unfortunately, we are disappointed with the manner and nature of Council's attempt at stakeholder engagement and strongly oppose many of the policy changes Council proposes under the 2021 review.

The proposals to change most off-lead dog exercise areas, to on-lead, and prohibiting dogs from some dog exercise areas is extremely disappointing and reflects Local Government attitude of decades past.

It is short-sighted to promote anti-dog friendly initiatives at a time when the community has experienced the greatest health and social challenge in our respective lifetime with the impact of Covid 19. At a time when the community's health and wellbeing is best enhanced through social engagement, Council proposes changes that will restrict the activities and social interaction of its community.

Council has failed to discharge the onus of proof to support its proposed changes and it is disappointing Council's public statements in support of the changes are unsubstantiated in fact. By way of example changes to Anzac park are claimed to be a response to dogs defecating near the war memorial. No supporting evidence is advanced, no complainant identified, and the statement is strongly contested.

Council's proposed changes to restrict the freedom of dog owners is short-sighted and will have a negative impact on responsible dog owners.

- ***DHoT strongly opposes the changes to existing off lead / on lead dog areas.***

There are more than 10,000 registered dog owners in the City of Clarence and approximately 60% of households own a dog.

*This is a significant percentage of the population the new regulations will disadvantage.*

Rather than restrict the freedoms and rights of responsible dog owners, the City of Clarence should allocate its resources to fulfilling its obligations under the Dog Control Act 2021 and enforce the legal obligation of owners to register their dog. Council's data reveals as at February 2021, Council presides over at least 2092 dogs with unpaid registration.

*It is unreasonable to fail to enforce dog registration and simultaneously seek to restrain the freedoms and rights of responsible registered dog owners.*

We do not understand Council's proposals to adopt a dog unfriendly community and to ignore the preferences of the majority of its community.

We urge Council to listen to its Community and to consider the persuasive evidence of fostering a dog friendly community.

We are disappointed the Dogs' Homes of Tasmania was not properly consulted as an external stakeholder. We are concerned Council continues to publish statements inferring we had been consulted.

## 2. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Council's public statements claiming external stakeholder engagement on the draft Dog Management Policy review, are misleading and contested.

Although Council's Facebook post was amended following our complaint, Council's website continues to claim: -

***“Over the last few months Council has created a Draft policy after meeting with various organisation such as Dogs’ Homes of Tasmania ... “***

Council ***DID NOT*** meet with DHoT as claimed nor have we been properly consulted.

There was a brief conversation with the CEO of DHoT that discussed Council's intention to consult with external stakeholders. DHoT nominated a representative for this purpose.

Later the DHoT Team Leader called Council to discuss a matter unrelated to the Dog Management Policy Review. During this discussion Council touched on aspects of the review. This was an off record and casual conversation. The Team Leader was not nominated to advance DHoT views on Council's Draft Policy, was unprepared to do so, was unaware this was a consultation process and consequently offered little feedback.

We value and respect our relationship with Council staff and for this reason we assume some misunderstanding presented.

Regardless, DHoT was not properly consulted as an external stakeholder and we believe other organisations have made similar claims.

We understand the limitations imposed by COVID 19 related restrictions. Whilst “face to face” meetings may not have been an option available technology offered other means of conducting an effective meeting process.

- ***We recommend, Council review its external stakeholder consultation process.***
- ***We request Council remove the misleading public statement claiming to have met with DHoT on the Draft Dog Management Policy.***

### 3. DOG FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

The Australian Animal Health Alliance research reveals: -

- 63% of Australian Householders own a pet.
- 83% of Australians have a pet in their lifetime.

In the 2020/2021 year the City of Clarence contains over 10,000 dogs. It is estimated over 60% of householders have a dog as a family member.

Dog owners are a significant and influential part of the City of Clarence community and have a strong expectation Council will foster dog friendly policies.

Forward thinking Local Government Authorities are responding to the needs of dog owners in their municipalities through the creation of dog friendly areas. Dog owners are an organised and articulate group with proven capacity to effectively influence the outcome of Local Government elections.

The creation of a variety of dog friendly off lead / on lead areas offers numerous benefits to the dog, the dog owner, and the community.

Off lead areas offer dogs the freedom of unrestrained exercise that can help release bottled up energy and alleviate many public nuisances associated with lack of activity such as chewing and barking.

Not all dog owners have the ability to effectively exercise their dogs on lead due to ambulant issues. Off lead areas ensure all dog owners have a safe area to exercise their dog that can contribute to their own health and well-being and the bond with their dog in addition to the benefits of meeting and interacting with other dog owners and lovers.

It also offers opportunity for non-dog owners, unable to house a pet, to interact with dogs and their owners.

Off lead dog areas therefore.

- Encourage people and dogs to exercise,
- Foster good dog ownership and management through peer support and advice,
- Provide opportunities for people to meet and interact,
- Break down social barriers and dog owners gather regardless of race or social and economic status,
- Reduce incidents of nuisances create by dogs,
- Foster improved health and wellbeing of dog owners and dog lovers,
- Offer Council and excellent investment in social capital with demonstrated benefits.

On lead exercise areas offer similar benefit to dogs, their owners and the community and it is appropriate some public areas be nominated on lead.

A reduction in the number of dog exercise areas (both on and off lead) is likely to lead to crowding in the remaining areas, with a likely increase in the number of incidents between dogs and humans due to lack of space.

A wide range of choice of good accessible areas is an effective way to support the rights and expectations of the Community.

**Councils that appreciate the benefit of social capital invest in the creation, maintenance, and expansion of off lead dog areas in effective response to the majority of its constituents and their expectation of Council.**

#### **4. CLARENCE CITY COUNCIL 2021 DRAFT DOG MANAGEMENT POLICY REVIEW.**

Council's proposals to reduce the number of off lead / on lead dog exercise areas reflect a Council that is not in accord with the majority of its constituents and is dismissive of the social capital benefits available from fostering a wide range of good accessible on lead / off lead dog exercise areas.

There is no sustainable or plausible argument to support restraining the freedoms and rights of dog owners in the municipality by reducing the number of on lead / off lead dog exercise areas in the region.

Particular concerns with Council's proposed changes follow.

##### **a. ANZAC PARK – LINDISFARNE**

Not unexpectedly, there is very significant opposition from the community to the changes proposed to Anzac Park. Council's proposed changes do not represent contemporary views, reflect a misunderstanding of the nature of the use of this area and offer a less safe and less accessible alternative.

Council's claims of dogs defecating near or at the war memorial and the waste not being removed by owners is unsubstantiated and without credible substance.

The existing area is a very popular and much loved off lead dog exercise area responsibly maintained by dog users. It offers an excellent example of peer support encouraging responsible dog ownership. There are a large number of dog owners who help maintain the area and many are also involved with gardening sessions within the Lindisfarne Village where Council has not maintained the area.

Dog owners and other users of the area have happily coexisted in this area for many years.

The proposal to move the off-lead area is ill conceived and inconsiderate. The proposed area will not be accessible to many users with ambulant restrictions and offers a less safe and useable area.

Council as the agent advocating change has failed to discharge the onus of proof to substantiate its argument. The proposed change imposes a diminution of rights and freedom of dog owners.

We challenge Council to clearly articulate the concerns causing it to propose to remove the off-lead status of this area. The Community should be afforded to opportunity to assess the validity of these concerns and if valid have opportunity to respond and offer solutions.

Can Council produce evidence of infringement notices issued to dog owners using this area and if Council has received any complaints what evidence has been provided and what actions has Council taken to investigate any complaints. DHoT is unaware of any evidence being presented nor infringements investigated, and we cannot find any record of infringement notices being issued.

The alternative suggested of a fenced area at Anzac Park is a steep slope and unsuitable for the many elderly dog walkers using Anzac Park. The area would be unsuitable for any user who experiences mobility issues.

***DHoT strongly opposes the suggested change to the Lindisfarne Anzac Park Off Lead Exercise area.***

#### **b. NATONE HILL**

No details have been provided on the alternative area proposed at Natone Hill and it is not possible to comment on a proposal Council has failed too properly articulate. It is inappropriate Council advances a proposal and not offered sufficient information to enable the public to provide an informed response.

#### **c. BEACHES**

Prohibiting dogs from Bellerive and Lauderdale's Roches Beach from Canal Street to May Point is a further example of Council seeking to reduce the rights and freedom of dog owners in its municipality.

For dog owners using the Bellerive area there are few acceptable options to the beach area. The distance to other beaches is for many prohibitive. We would prefer Council concentrate its efforts on education and enforcement to ensure responsible dog ownership for users of this area if concerns have presented. There are many individuals and groups who would assist to ensure the continued coexistence of dog owners and non-dog owners.

Likewise changes to the Lauderdale area are further example of a diminution of the freedom and rights of dog owners and unresponsive the needs of a growing population area.

***DHoT opposes Councils proposed changes to the Bellerive and Lauderdale Beach areas.***

#### **d. TANGARA TRAIL**

Council proposes to apply on lead status to dog owners using the Tangara Trail from Cambridge to South Arm.

The reasons supporting this change are not articulated nor understood.

It is a spacious area capable of safely supporting all users and we cannot see any valid reason to make changes to this area.

***DHoT opposes changes to the Tangara Trail as Council has failed to advance any argument to justify the change.***

#### **5. SUMMARY**

DHoT is very disappointed with the nature of Council's consultation and the changes proposed under the 2021 Dog Management Policy Review.

At a time when Council should be investing in social capital in its community by providing excellent dog on lead and off lead exercise areas to foster good dog management practice, it is seeking to reduce the freedom and rights of dog owners in its municipality.

We find this to be a very odd proposition advanced without appreciation of the large numbers of dog owners in the municipality.

We do not understand why Council would seek to raise the ire of such a significant, influential, and responsible group to generate the increasing volume and public protest against Council seeking to make the changes it now proposes.

Council's energy should be invested enforcing the registration of the 2092 listed dogs in the municipality whose owners as of February 2021 are yet to pay their dog registration fee. It is inherently unfair to seek to restrict the rights of responsible dog owners by reducing available dog exercise areas and yet not enforce the obligations of all dog owners.

It would be a more forward thinking and enlightened strategy to work with local dog owners to address any issues of concern with existing dog exercise areas and concentrate on fostering responsible dog ownership and enhancing the available areas for on lead and off lead dog exercise areas.

Council should be aware that fewer dog exercise areas will lead to overcrowding in the remaining available exercise areas. In these circumstances it is more likely incidents will occur between dogs and owners. Council is obliged to mitigate risk does not foster it.

Council should be aware that off lead dog exercise areas are essential for community cohesion and for effective socialisation of dogs.

Council should understand that a dog friendly municipality offers a wide range and combination of on lead, off lead, fenced and unfenced areas to meet the needs of its community.

Regrettably, Council proposes to reduce the available exercise areas options for dog owners and offer smaller and less appealing land areas. We note the proposed provision of off-lead areas for Greyhound owners but are concerned at the small size of some of the areas under consideration.

DHoT does not understand why Council would pursue policies that appear to seek to satisfy the unidentified concerns of a minority of the community to pursue policies that restrict the development of a dog friendly community and the resulting benefits.

DHoT is disappointed that Council has proposed the restriction of dog exercise areas and has failed to understand the demands and passion of a very large section of its community.