

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

DOG OFF LEASH TRIAL



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1. About the Project

According to the Queensland Government Coastal Management Plan 2013, about 80% of Queensland's population lives within 50km of the coastal line. This creates high demand for freely accessible public beaches, tidal waterways, and foreshore reserves. It was also reported that 38% of Australian households currently own a dog (Animal Medicines Australia 2016) and as human populations increase so does dog ownership and the increased demand for dog recreation opportunities in these coastal areas.

The presence of humans and dogs on beach areas creates a threat to wildlife. Whilst current local and state government laws require dogs to be on leash in most parts of the foreshore, previous research (Stigner et al 2016) showed that about 84% of dogs in the reviewed area (Moreton Bay foreshore) were unrestrained.

This creates an awareness that dog owners need to be educated on the wildlife impact that their animals could have, and the balance needed for recreational demand versus conservation values to ensure our wildlife are not impacted by these activities.

The success of dog off-leash area trials will depend on community awareness and compliance.

Cassowary Coast Regional Council plans to trial (up to) six Dog Off Leash Areas, for up to 12 months. Council's Natural Environment Technical Officer undertook an investigation that determined the proposed areas. The investigation included assessment criteria, such as proximity to population, parking availability, nearby roads, signage requirements, interactions with other users, identified in previous planning documents, environmental values, crocodile risk and facility type (free range/constructed), bin services and increased Local Law Officer support required.

The proposed locations were Groom Esplanade, Innisfail; Boustead Park, Kurrimine Beach; Wildsoet Park, Tully; Coral Sea Park, Cardwell; Mission Beach foreshore; South Mission Beach foreshore.

Assessment Criteria	Groom Esplanade	Boustead Park	Wildsoet Park	Coral Sea Park	Mission Beach	South Mission
Proximity to Population	H	M	M	L	L	L
Parking availability	Y	Y	L	Y	Y	Y
Adjoining roadways/traffic interactions	L	L	M	M	L	L
Signage Required	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Residential Support (TBD)						
Interaction with other users/conflicts	L	L	M	L	M	M
Use Identified in previous planning documents	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
Environmental Values	L	M	L	M	M	M

Assessment Criteria	Groom Esplanade	Boustead Park	Wildsoet Park	Coral Sea Park	Mission Beach	South Mission
Crocodile Risk	M	L	L	L	M	M
Facility type (Free Range/Constructed)	F	F	F	F	F	F
Bin Service	N	N	N	Y	L	L
Increased LOS required	Y	N	Y	N	N	N

Assessment criteria as undertaken by CCRC Environmental Services

Table Legend	
High	H
Medium	M
Low	L
Yes	Y
No	N
Free Range	F
Constructed	C

2. Introduction – Community Engagement

Effective community engagement is a contribution process that is the foundation for genuine community development. This process allows our community to voice their support, concerns, and identify the appropriate responses and solutions to the issues that affect them.

The Cassowary Coast region is diverse and includes people of different backgrounds, needs, values and expectations. Inclusive community engagement has been identified as a priority of Council to ensure all residents have an opportunity to have their voice heard.

The Dog Off Leash Area Trial (DOLA) has been identified as a topic of interest for the community and Council provided an opportunity for community members to provide feedback on the trial and proposed locations.

The consultation commenced Thursday 29 September 2022 and concluded on Friday 28 October 2022, which generated feedback with 467 submissions. Respondent submissions were received by Council via the Have Your Say website and submissions were also received directly via email and other channels. A number of community groups also provided feedback directly to Council. Groups included Cassowary Keystone Conservation, Mission Beach Cassowaries, Cardwell Chamber of Commerce, Cassowary

Recovery Team and C4 Community for Coastal and Cassowary Conservation. Council acknowledges and thanks all contributors for the time taken to provide feedback on this matter.

The consultation process was supported by media release, paid social media targeted ads on Facebook and Instagram, social media campaign run via Council's Facebook page, radio advertising as part of the Have Your Say campaign, on-hold phone messaging, corflute signage at all six proposed locations and advertising in Council's fortnightly Community Connect.

This report identifies and captures all feedback associated with the consultation and serves as a public document to close the loop on the engagement process. The findings contained herein are presented in their entirety and draw no conclusions or recommendations on project or strategy outcomes going forward.

3. Community Consultation Outcomes

It is noted that the DOLA trial can be an emotive topic with responses both in support for the trial and against.

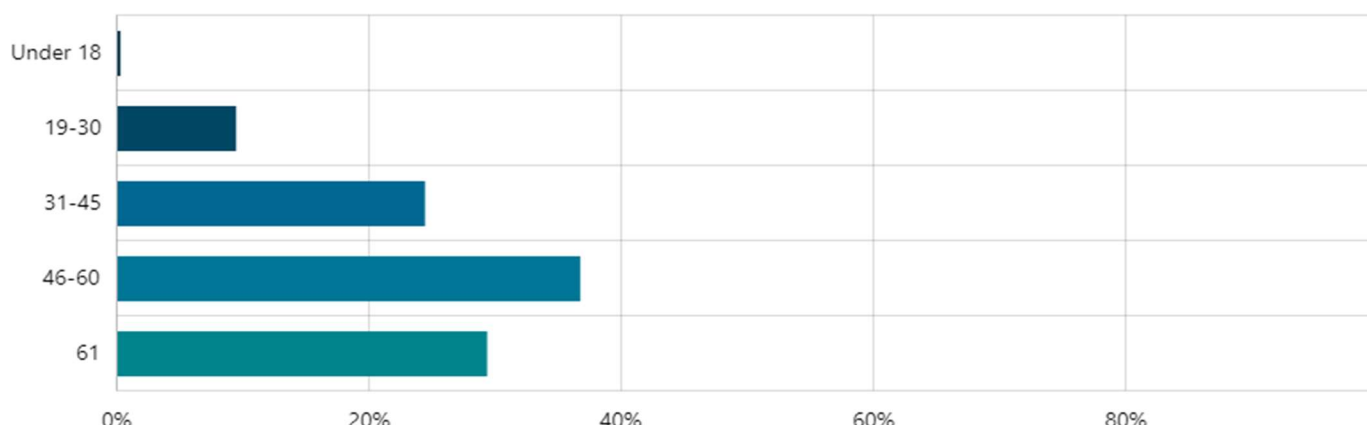
Key findings that Council received from this consultation were:

- Importance of education in dog and owner behaviour;
- Consideration for facilities in the proposed locations;
- Concern regarding potential impacts to flora and fauna;
- Support for the trial; and
- Support for further locations or alternate locations.

4. Your Say – Key Findings

The Your Say survey included 19 questions.

Question One: Age of respondent. A broad range of ages over 18 responded to the survey. The primary age of respondents were between the 45-60 age bracket.



Question Two: What suburb do you reside in?

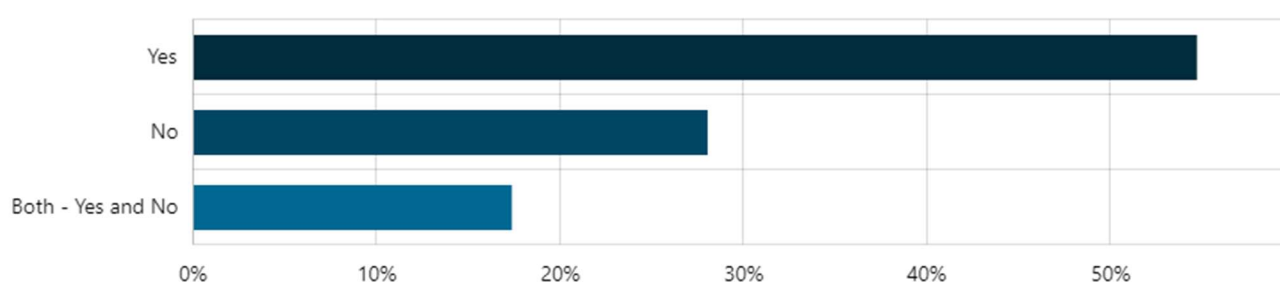
Respondents were from across the Cassowary Coast but also from Atherton, Babinda and suburbs throughout the Cairns area.

Notable response areas are as follows:

- Cardwell- 25 respondents
- Mission Beach- 67 respondents
- South Mission Beach 107 respondents
- Tully- 29 respondents
- Wongaling Beach- 78 respondents

Question Three: Are you in support of Dog Off Leash Areas?

Almost 55% of respondents were in favor of DOLA's. 28% were against DOLA's and 17% were undecided or would support the DOLA trial with further facilities in place or alternate locations.



Question Four: Why?

This question expanded on why the respondent was in favour of DOLA or not.

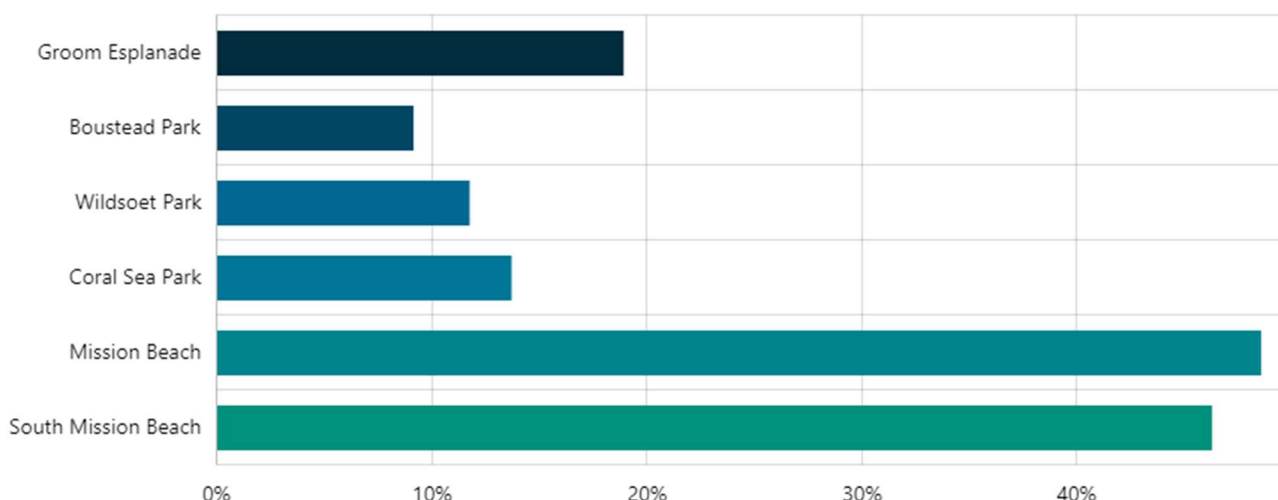
Responses to this question requested increased presence of Council Local Law Officers, the potential impacts to nearby properties that are not fenced, further infrastructure requested; such as fencing, shade, water, dog bag dispensers and bins.

Other notable comments included potential wildlife and fauna impacts, concerns over dog owner behaviour; such as not picking up dog waste, not having full control of their animals and taking unsocialised dogs to the DOLA's. Several responses noted that they would be in support of the trial with the DOLA in a different location.

The commentary in support of the DOLA's included their animals enjoying being off leash, the areas providing further opportunities for their dogs and owners to exercise and socialise.

Question Five: If applicable, which location will you be attending with your dog/s?

307 respondents answered this question. The most popular location was Mission Beach with 149 respondents advising that they would attend this location. The second most popular option was South Mission Beach with 142 of respondents indicating that they would attend this location. This data may be skewed based on the identified suburbs from Question One.



Question Six: Why this particular location?

Majority of respondents indicated that they have chosen their preferred site due to proximity to their place of residence.

Question Seven: Do you support the proposed size and facilities offered at each proposed Dog Off Leash Area?

Key themes throughout the mixed responses indicates that they would support the proposed locations if more facilities, such as fencing, bins, dog waste bags, parking and so on are provided by Council. Numerous comments stated do not support the locations due to potential wildlife impacts.

It is noted that between the positive and negative sentiments that there is competing viewpoints that the proposed locations are either too small or too large.

Sentiment



Question Eight: Do you currently utilise any of the suggested off-leash areas for other activities? If so, what activities do you undertake at these locations?

The respondents who currently utilise the proposed locations undertake a variety of activities from spending time with their family, exercise, using nearby playgrounds and outdoor activities.

Question Nine: If applicable, will a Dog Off-Leash area impact your current use of the area? If yes, how so?

Respondents who advised that their use of the area would be impacted indicated reasons mainly due to wildlife impacts, impacts to other animals who use the areas (such as horses), previous dog attacks, fear of dogs and owners not having control of their pets.

Respondents who advised that they would continue to frequent area advised that it would be beneficial to their current use of the area and as long as dog owners were responsible, they would continue to attend the location.

Question 10: If you could propose a Dog Off-Leash site location- where would you propose one to be installed?

The most popular responses included preference for fenced off leash areas, Bingil Bay, Wongaling Beach, Frog's Hollow, Warrina Lakes and Marc's Park.

Question 11: How many dogs do you own?

427 respondents answered this question.

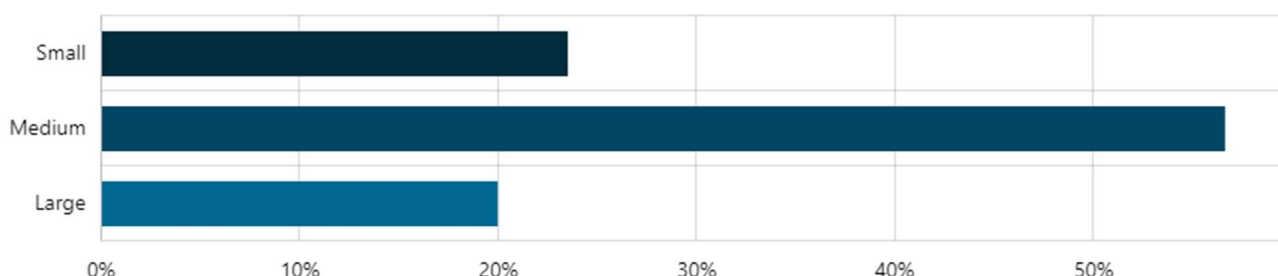
The most popular responses were 184 respondents who own one dog, and 132 respondents own two dogs.

Question 12: If applicable, what breed/s of dog/s do you own?

Dog breeds are varied on the Cassowary Coast. Prominent breeds include Border Collies, Cavoodle, Kelpie, Labrador, Staffordshire Bull Terrier, and cross breed dogs.

Question 13: If applicable, what size is your dog?

311 respondents indicated their dog size.



Question 14: Have you (as a dog owner) attended an off leash area previously?

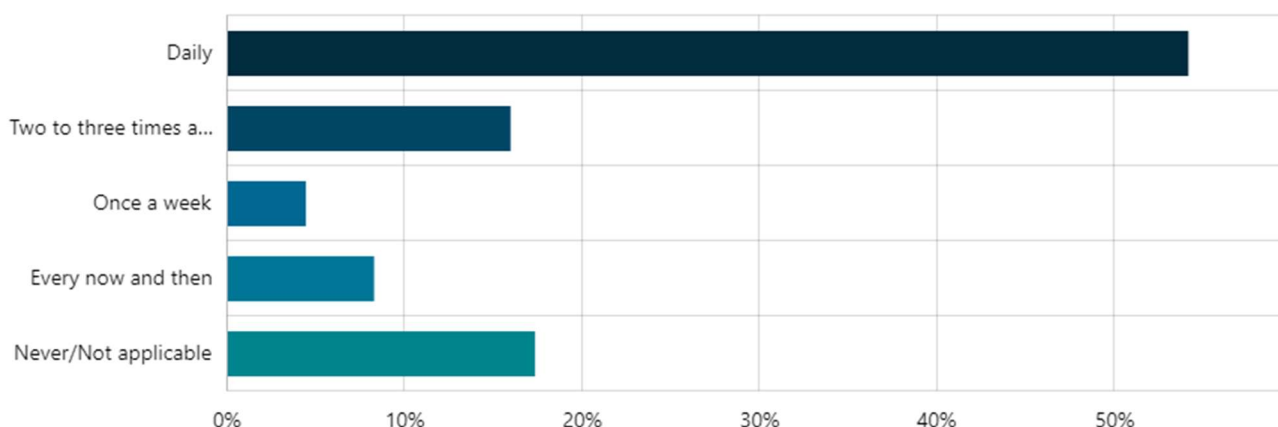
Out of 352 respondents, who answered this question, 65% indicated that they had attended a DOLA previously.

Question 15: Where do you generally exercise your dog now?

Respondents indicated that they exercise their dogs across many locations. This includes: in their backyards, pathways, streets and across Cassowary Coast beaches and foreshores

Question 16: On average, how often do you exercise your dog in public areas (such as footpaths, parks, beaches)?

54% of respondents indicate that they exercise their dog daily in public areas.



Question 17: If the trial is successful, what dog facilities/locations would you like to be considered as part of future projects?

The most suggested facilities and locations were fenced areas, bins, water fountains, dog waste bags, agility course, more locations across the entire Cassowary Coast.

Question 18: Do you have any other comments or feedback?

Feedback provided from respondents included enforcement, education, management of dog owners and dogs, consideration for flora and fauna, upgraded facilities, concerns about locations and risk to other people utilising the areas.

Question 19: Please enter your email address below to be kept up to date on the Dog Off-Leash Trial.

319 respondents provided their email address to be provided updated on the trial.

5. Feedback provided to Council via alternative methods

Submissions were received by Council in a number of ways. As indicated above, majority of responses came in via the Your Say website. Alternative submissions were received via the Snap, Send, Solve app, emails sent to Councillors and to Councils enquiries email address.

Summary of the feedback provided by alternative methods included opposition to the trial, one in support, proposals for green (conservation), orange (dog on lead) and red (dogs off leash) areas, and proposal for alternative dog free and off-leash areas.

Submitters provided feedback on environmental and wildlife impacts, cassowary and wildlife sighting, concerns about risk to horse riders and other beach users, previous dog attacks and impacts, fears from uneducated owners and untrained dogs. Submissions also included requests for facilities such as fencing, waste disposal, parking and increased enforcement.

6. Next Steps

The Community Engagement report will reach key internal and external stakeholders and will be accessible via the December Council report and on Council's Your Say website. Project updates will be provided at key intervals, such as at commencement of trial, to identified key stakeholders and project registered email addresses.

Key insights were identified and summarised in this report. From these insights Cassowary Coast Regional Council could consider and implement recommendations and identify next steps for implementation of the DOLA trial, how they engage with stakeholders and the topics which require further attention.

7. Acknowledgement

This document has been prepared by Cassowary Coast Regional Council – Communications Team. All information presented in this report has been presented in an accurate and unbiased manner and makes no recommendation on any project actions going forward. This report has been approved by the Chief Executive Officer. For further information, please contact Council at 1300 763 903 or email enquiries@cassowarycoast.qld.gov.au.