



Proposed changes to dog exercise areas have caused the Bay of Islands WatchDogs to challenge the Far North District Council.

BAYLEY MOOR/STUFF

# Dog lovers challenge bylaw

**BAYLEY MOOR**

With off-leash dog exercise areas threatened under a proposed council bylaw, Bay of Islands dog lovers have rallied to fight for their canine companions.

The Bay of Islands WatchDogs formed after concerns about the draft Dog Control Bylaws and draft Dog Policy released by the Far North District Council.

Residents' concerns include dogs being made to be on-leash at all times at Russell Beach and

Tapeka, where dogs were previously allowed off-leash at certain times. The only specified off-leash areas would be a small part of Long Beach and at Opua Beach.

Russell dog owner and group member Alan Wilkinson says there has to be a balance between dogs and the environment.

"Responsible dog owners are being punished, birds are still here because we have looked after them."

Wilkinson says he and wife Karen have been involved in

landcare and pointed to a graph used in the council documents which show kiwi numbers increasing in the Russell Peninsula.

The lobby group launched their Facebook page on July 22 and within two days the group had 350 members. After feedback via social media and emails Deputy Mayor Tania McInnes says she spoke with chief executive Shaun Clarke about the draft Dog Control Bylaw and Policy.

As a result the proposals for

Russell, Paihia and Opua would be looked at and the documents would not be going "in their current form" to the Strategy Committee meeting on August 30, as originally planned.

There is currently no time frame for when new consultation might begin, McInnes says.

"We need to collaboratively come to an agreement. There's two sides to it - the dog lovers and the environment protection. Dogs are a big part of who we are as New Zealanders and the environ-

ment is highly important. There is a win in there."

The council had previously undertaken consultation in November and December of 2016, receiving 234 submissions on the bylaw and policy; 43 of those submitters spoke at hearings in February and March this year.

In 2006, the current Dog Control Bylaw was adopted. Legislation requires the bylaw to be reviewed every 10 years.

■ *What do you think? Email [jenny.ling@fairfaxmedia.co.nz](mailto:jenny.ling@fairfaxmedia.co.nz)*