

# **Minutes of Meeting of BOI WatchDogs, Church Hall, Russell**

Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2017 : 3.00pm – 4.30pm

62 members present, 12 dogs (inside & outside), 1 Seven Sharp cameraman (Dean Whitehead)

Welcome from John Russell, introduced Leonie Exel

## **Leonie Exel – Our story so far presentation**

Asked where everyone was from (Waipapa, Kerikeri, Opua, Paihia, Auckland, most from Russell)

Went through “Our story so far....” From 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2017 when a few of us were sent a copy of the dog bylaw that had been passed through the community boards with the comment that started it all – “Dog Control Bylaws - Time to Panic”. The Facebook page started, a deluge of letters was sent to council members, we helped to stop the bylaw going through & now it is back on the agenda with changes, there was a BOI Community Board meeting with 120 members present, our conflict of interest complaint appears to have been listened to, and there is now a new person leading the dog bylaw and dog policy team in the council.

Explained different groups working on different aspects of the dog bylaw. If anyone has an interest in particular aspect of dog bylaw please contact a member of our Coordinating Committee (Alan Wilkinson, Leonie Exel, Debbie Hinton or Kate Burdekin) and come forward to help – even if only for an hour doing some research on something, we need you!

## **Update from the group investigating the consultation process - presentation**

The team have been going through the flawed and biased consultation process the council undertook to produce the dog bylaw and policy. They have been busy going through all the relevant Acts that affect the dog bylaw. They want to make sure it doesn't happen again, either on the dog issues

They have a letter to the Mayor and Chief Executive “Request for Service” in with the council asking for further information – for example, proof of who the 6,500 registered dog owners were that the council said they notified, and other elements of the process, to try to get the facts. No response yet – the group is only a week old though, so give it time!

One member of the group has been through the questionnaires and the responses & produced a detailed report. This showed a very poor response to the survey itself, that many responses were ‘deemed incomplete’ and not used, and – multiple times - that even where the survey showed that residents wanted council to do something in particular that didn't translate to the policy. The survey itself was biased – lots of trigger words used which demonised dogs. There was no mention of wildlife at all in survey.

This group have been in touch with the Auditor General to get advice on how we can best ensure that this kind of thing never happens again with our council.

This group will be following up the legal side of the flaws in the consultation. Members at the meeting suggested we look into talking to the lawyer who worked on Rintol case, Peter Jones and/or Richard Mark in Kerikeri.

## **Alan Wilkinson presentation – Science, birds, and dogs**

Alan has a background in science. He has been through the supporting documents to the dog bylaw produced by the council and is concerned that their arguments are flawed. He is working with other scientists via email.

The Local Government Act 2002 specifies what can be included in a bylaw – which does NOT include wildlife protection. This issue was raised repeatedly by our Councillors in February 2017, but their objections were ignored by the then policy writer.

Kiwi argument – Kiwi is symbolically powerful in NZ & activists are trying to use that symbolism to protect other birds by pushing the kiwi protection. In fact Kiwis are doing fine in Russell and the Eastern Coast. Can't use kiwi as a basis of tightening up control of dogs.

In respect of the seabird's argument – dotterels have been nesting on the beaches since people have been around. Need proper research into the seabird issue, or we will make 'dog rules' that aren't useful.

In regards to the endangered bird list – Statistics NZ rates the list as "case study" quality, i.e. poor quality, incomplete data.

However, we can't and don't want to ignore the wildlife issue and need to harness a solution within all the community. We need to understand how to look after the birds, where they are nesting, and how to protect them.

Alan Wilkinson would welcome help from anyone with a scientific understanding / interest to help with the wildlife research critiques.

## **Website**

The group thanked Joshua Kosmala-George from Northland Technology for offering to do a very comprehensive web site for the group. At this stage though as we are busy focusing on the council matters, we are going to use a simple web site for posting up documents so they can be easily found. We will keep the facebook as a discussion tool. Web site details will be sent out later in the week.

## **Media**

To date the BOI Watchdog group have had 14 media articles in Northland Age, Advocate, NZ Radio and Bay Chronicle. Seven Sharp have been filming around Russell and Alan Wilkinson and a council representative are being interviewed on Monday 28<sup>th</sup>. We think it will be aired this week, maybe Tuesday, and will holler when we know the timing. THANKS to everyone and their dogs for being filmed and interviewed!

## **Conflict of Interest- Complaint update**

On 11 August we sent a complaint to the Mayor and Chief Executive about a conflict of interest. The Mayor got back to us and advised us that this was the responsibility of the CE. We did not hear back from the CE. So we then sent a "Request for Service" via the Council website asking for acknowledgement, but we have neither an acknowledgement, or an RFS number, which we thought we were supposed to get.

Despite the above silence we understand that the policy writer is no longer working on the bylaw and has now been replaced by Mr Darren Edwards.

Letter being sent to new policy writer Darren Edwards, introducing BOI WatchDog & that we would like to be involved in the working group sorting out the dog bylaw.

## The Future

Lots of interest in setting up groups to tackle other dog issues in the future – ie finding lost dogs, re-homing dogs etc. We need to get the dog bylaw sorted first then can look at working on other issues and having a long term dog group, formal structure etc.

## Where now with the dog bylaw? Brainstorming Session

In order to get an idea what the members at the meeting wanted most, each member wrote down their goals, strategy & solutions. These were all written up and members choose the 3 items that were most important to them. Unfortunately this was at the end of the meeting and we only had 24 voters left by this time, which is only 3% of our membership! But this gives a bit of a picture of what those who stayed till the end would like from the council:

Goals		Strategy		Solutions	
Dogs not to be demonised - humans' best friends	7	Pet owners and conservation working together	5	Define dog areas - no go, onleash, offleash	9
Policy to recognise tradition of exercising dogs on beaches	6	Encourage partnership with council	4	Clear simple rules	4
Ensure that from now on consultation is fair and honest	5	Russell a dog friendly town	3	Good signage	3
Write our own policy	4	Develop a formal group	3	Encourage community to enforce	1
Get good science	3	Communication with conservation and education	2	Reduce speed limit	
Stop threat of expanding kiwi zones	3	Get council involved in group meetings	2		
Ensure FNDC policy that reflects fact and public opinion	3	Community working together	1		
Change Russell Signage	2	Stay with 2006 bylaw and drop other until sorted	1		
No cat/dog ban covenants on properties	2	Clear, simple rules	1		
Diversity of dog walking choices both in number and proximity	1	Ensure council respond to RFS	1		
Increase confidence of dog-deprived people		Separate groups for each area			
Dog training that works - kiwi aversion doesn't		Don't get locked into dog exercise areas			
Pet friendly tourism - FNDC to promote		Survey to watchdog group			
Help find solutions for dogs that are a problem		Ensure consultation with all groups - working dogs, domestic, hunters.			
Sign on beach - dog friendly town					