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Dog owners outraged at more new changes to proposed control bylaw

By Peter de Graaf

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Some dog owners are even more outraged now than they were when they staged a protest on Opua Beach a week ago on Sunday.

More changes to the Far North District Council's proposed dog control bylaw have sparked further outrage among some Bay of Islands dog owners.

The original draft, released in November, proposed easing some of the rules around taking dogs on to beaches, especially in winter, but a second version, in June, tightened current restrictions, to protect wildlife.

Russell dog owners in particular were upset that the plan designated only one beach in the Bay of Islands, the Beechy Street waterfront in Opua, as an off-leash dog exercise area.

They formed the Bay of Islands WatchDogs, and called on the council to begin consulting again from scratch.

Last week the council released a third version of the proposed bylaw, which added a second off-leash beach, Sullivans Beach in Paihia, but WatchDogs member Leonie Exel said it was worse than the previous version in almost every other way.

There was still no off-leash beach in the Russell area, and, more alarmingly, it proposed creating a one-dog per household zone over much of the east coast, from the southern Bay of Islands to Hihi. Urban areas would retain the two-dog limit.

Group members planned to take their concerns to a meeting of the Bay of Islands-Whangaroa Community Board in Waipapa yesterday.

"To gazette a huge area of the Far North as a one-dog area in the third revision of the policy, with six days to review it before a community board meeting, is disgraceful," Ms Exel said, adding that the consultation process so far had been so abysmal that "tinkering at the edges" of the bylaw wouldn't fix it.

Bay of Islands Watchdogs, which as of last week had 600 members, was planning to urge the community board to recommendation that councillors to halt the process and carry out further consultation. If the new bylaw was introduced in October as planned there would be "huge non-compliance," she said.

FNDC district services manager Dean Myburgh said the draft bylaw had already been consulted on extensively, and many people supported the effort to balance the needs of dog owners with other beach users and wildlife.

"However, the council is aware that a number of dog owners in Russell, Opuia and Paihia have recently voiced strong views. It is therefore asking the community board to give further consideration to the draft bylaw," Dr Myburgh said.

The council could not reopen submissions, but had asked the community board to consider whether the draft bylaw should be amended. The draft is due to be considered by the council's Strategy Committee on August 30, and the full council on September 14.

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