

# Dr Kingfish

Dr Chris Reid

## Out walking the dog

In the last few days a Facebook page has been set up by Russell locals to counter draft council bylaws that would appear to be antagonistic to say the least to caring dog owners. Its membership is already above 300.

Councillors will claim they are stuck in the middle between the dog-loving fraternity and the wildlife conservationists. The reality is, like myself, most of us care about protecting our endangered species but also enjoy man's best friend.

Over the last few years I have sensed a growing culture of negativity towards dog owners, an undercurrent set on making dog ownership nigh on impossible. I feel this is akin to a ban on all cars from our roads because some drivers are irresponsible.

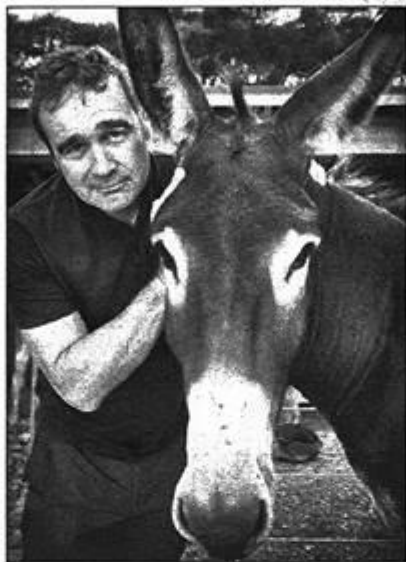
Far North District Council have Controlled Dog Areas where permits are only issued for management or recreational hunting and cannot be issued for recreational dog walking.

So let me get my head around this — I can go pig hunting with dogs off a lead but I can't walk a dog on a lead for my own exercise ... work the logic out on that one!

Ok, time for some doggy health facts. Studies show that having a canine companion is linked to lower blood pressure, reduced cholesterol, which contribute to better overall cardiovascular health and fewer heart attacks.

Dog owners are much more likely to hit the recommended target of 2.5 hours of moderate exercise per week, losing on average 6.5kg.

Research also suggest those over 65



**"Dog owners are much more likely to hit the recommended target of 2.5 hours of moderate exercise per week, losing on average 6.5kg."**

who own a dog require fewer GP visits by up to 30 per cent.

But the most significant facts around your pooch are in respect to your mental health. Stress, anxiety, loneliness and isolation can all be mitigated by Frodo. They can help maintain your cognitive function and can calm those with Alzheimers.

Perhaps if we were to take a whole of system look at the cost of healthy living, Northland DHB should be handing out dogs (and leashes) and working with FNDC to create a labyrinth of walking tracks.

Well cared-for dogs will give unconditional love and loyalty. Children growing up with dogs can learn about responsibility, caring, mortality and bereave-

ment.

But before you all rush off to the rescue centre to rehome Muttley and improve your health, dogs can be hard work, not to mention the cost of feeding and veterinary care.

Then there is the potentially devastating impact of dog bites especially in children. I have dealt with too many over the years mainly after hours involving children playing outside and encountering a stray dog.

So it comes back to the importance of responsible dog owners, making sure their dogs are well cared for and thus not a risk to wildlife or neighbour.

And finally, can you stop tripping over them. ACC every year report many injuries attributed to 'tripped over my dog'. Mind you, horses and cattle aren't exactly innocent either ... that's why I prefer donkeys ...