

Stuff Northland – 11th August 2017

'Draconian' dog controls anger canine lovers



BAYLEY MOOR/STUFF

Jan Graham says the community should have been more involved during changes to the proposed Dog Control Bylaw. She is pictured at the Waitotara Reserve with her five-year-old blue heeler named Pearl.

Significant changes to the Far North District Council's draft dog control bylaw and policy have riled dog owners throughout the Bay of Islands.

The latest draft which will be presented to the Bay of Islands-Whangaroa Community Board on August 14, proposed the removal of all off-leash exercise areas in Russell and a limit on one dog (over three-months-old) per household for Russell (previously two adult dogs) and coastal areas including Te Tii, the Purerua Peninsula, Totara North and Matauri Bay.

Working dogs are exempt from the household restrictions.



Supplied/Ruth Lawton Photography

Around 60 dog owners met at the off-leash area for dogs in Opuia, to protest the proposed changes to the council's Dog Control Bylaw.

A previous draft included a part of Long Beach in Russell to be used as an off-leash area for dogs and two dogs per household.

Following concerns raised by Bay of Islands dog owners, the council revisited the draft, and made changes from the documents in July.

Dog owner and environmentalist Tony Dunlop, who lives in Russell for the majority of the year, says he couldn't see the existing rules - which allowed for off-leash access to some beaches at certain times - for Russell being a problem.

Dunlop is on the national board for the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society and the Northern New Zealand Seabird Trust. He owns one dog.

"The problem isn't responsible dog owners.

"Cats, rats, stoats and possums are far more of a problem for wildlife.

"There should be clear education around what's appropriate and what isn't - rules created and those enforced. That would be a much better solution.

Dunlop says there is very little evidence that dogs are causing problems [in Russell].

"The whole thing has been badly consulted on, if people had realised how draconian the changes are there would have been more feedback.

"I personally think that the existing rules in Russell were fine, but any irresponsible dog owner or unsupervised dogs should be reported to council."

When asked whether there were problems with dogs chasing birds on beaches while off-leash, Dunlop says, responsible dog owners should have their dogs under control.

"Dogs should not chase wildlife - it's against the law. Those dogs should not be allowed off a leash."

Dunlop says it's also nonsense to go to Opuia [the nearest off-leash area for Russell].

Waipapa-dog owner Jan Graham says she is disappointed in the lack of consultation.

"When there are major changes to the original statement of proposal then it is their [the council's] obligation to open up for community feedback.

"The community should be involved in each process."

She also says there is no signage at the council-provided dog exercise area at Wiroa Rd, which she says sometimes has cattle in it.

Around 60 dog-owners from Bay of Islands WatchDogs met at the off-leash Opuia Beach on August 6 to protest the bylaw changes.

The council first consulted the community on the draft policy and bylaw in October 2016.

Council district services manager Dr Dean Myburgh says the council is aware that a number of dog owners in Russell, Opuia and Paihia have recently voiced strong views about the proposed bylaw.

The council is therefore asking the community board to give further consideration to the draft bylaw at its meeting, Myburgh says.

"We are unable to reopen submissions and we need to follow due process.

"However, we aim to be a council that listens to its communities, so have asked the board to consider whether to amend the draft Dog Control Bylaw and Policy."

The Strategy Committee will consider the draft bylaw and policy on August 30 and make recommendations to the council for consideration in September. The 2017 Dog Control Bylaw is due to come into force by October 1.

- Stuff