

Stuff Northland – 15th August 2017

Far North dog owners register feedback on dog bylaw

BAYLEY MOOR

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Leonie Exel of the Bay of Islands WatchDogs addressing Far North District Council chief executive Shaun Clarke.

Bay of Islands dog owners have had a small win regarding the new dog control bylaw - but the consultation process won't be reopened as they demanded.

A tense meeting of the Bay of Islands-Whangaroa Community Board saw more than 120 people gathered in Waipapa, where speakers challenged the proposed "draconian" changes to the council's dog control bylaw and policy.

The board members voted to recommend to councillors to adopt the new bylaw, subject to public feedback recorded during the meeting.



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The Waipapa Hall was packed with more than 120 people to hear the proposed dog control bylaw discussed.

The modified bylaw will be considered at the October council meeting, rather than September as originally planned to give staff time to consider changes.

Waipapa dog owner Jan Graham said an inclusive discussion with dog owners and conservation groups was needed to come up with a "win-win" situation.

Other concerns included significant changes from the first draft to the latest one, such as a restriction from two dogs per household down to one (along the East Coast) and a "faulty" consultation process.

Bay Bush Action's Brad Windust supported the bylaw, saying that it "guts" him to see dogs flying through endangered dotterel.

Windust - who owns two species dogs - says he supports setting aside specific dog-free areas to help protect the birds.

While the speakers were passionate but civil, shouting was directed at council staff member Neil Miller, who drafted the bylaw and policy.

He said 6500 letters were sent to registered dog owners, of which two in the room said they had received.

Miller said that the proposal to restrict households to one dog in some areas, could be dropped or increased to two and that they were also looking at identifying potential dog exercise areas.

Council chief executive Shaun Clarke said the council had to find a compromise between dog owners' needs and wildlife protection.

He said there was a limit to how much the council and ratepayers would tolerate spending on consultation.

He told the audience: "We have heard you."

BOI WatchDogs spokesperson Leonie Exel said after the meeting that the group was "blown away by the number of attendees, and relieved that some of our elected representatives on the community board seem to genuinely want to fix this draconian bylaw and dog policy".

"We are now focused on getting real answers from council about what appears to be - at the very least - a faulty consultation process, alongside further recommendations for change on the bylaw and policy."

- Stuff