

PART 2 (*continued*)

'Off-leash' areas -exercising principles of good governance in urban animal management

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Pretrial Study (A) summary

The results from the AEC survey clearly demonstrated that the majority of residents surveyed were in favour of trialing 'off-leash areas' in the city. In response Council resolved to introduce two (2) trial 'off-leash areas' in Townsville. The sites identified as trial 'off-leash areas' were:

1. Rowes Bay/Pallarenda Foreshore between access points 8 & 9; and
2. Philp Street, Hermit Park, (Part of Lou Lister Park).

The initiative for providing 'off-leash areas' was in itself difficult, but without a budget allocation it was going to prove near impossible for the animal management unit to implement a successful trial with a go live date of 14 November 2000. Council however, had pre-emptively resolved to trial the 'off-leash areas' anyway and a cost analysis was required immediately. Preliminary costs for trial were as follows:



Rowes Bay



Philp Street

- | | |
|---|------------|
| 1. Signage for the designated trial areas | \$4,960.00 |
| 2. Dispensers, bins, bags & recurring costs | \$8,930.00 |

It should be noted that funds were not provided for the following:

- fencing;
- parking facilities;
- supervision;
- water supply;
- maintenance; and
- special equipment.

STUDY (B) POST-TRIAL (REVIEW) SURVEY

While this pre-trial survey work, together with that done previously (See Appendix A) was valuable in meeting basic governance needs associated with setting the stage for this 'off-leash' trial project, it only went half way to doing the job properly. The second half of the governance was the post-trial survey work. The proof of the pudding is in the eating as they say. In summary, the aims of monitoring the project were as follows:

- provide an opportunity for dog owners who are users of the 'off-leash areas' to give feedback on the benefits and any issues arising in the operation of the trial areas;
- provide an opportunity for nearby residents and other (non dog-owning) users of designated areas to give feedback on their experiences of the trial; and
- provide a report to Council on the outcome of the trial period, including issues, which are relevant to the ongoing planning, and development of the 'off-leash areas'.

A series of four (4) similarly framed community feedback questionnaires (See Appendix B) was developed (in cooperation with the Animal Management Unit) for use in personal interviews, as well as in the form of a feedback sheet, which could be returned to the Department of Community and Cultural Services. A one (1) page information sheet was developed, to accompany the feedback sheet to provide residents with general information on the 'off-leash areas' and follow up telephone numbers.

Interviewers gathered feedback from people using the 'off-leash areas', as well as from people in nearby residences or using the nearby beach area. Feedback sheets were also left in letterboxes for those residents who were not available.

The Pallarenda Food-Mart displayed and distributed feedback sheets in their shop. While in Hermit Park Shopping Centre something similar was done by Centre Management.

During May-June 2000, feedback was gathered by personal interview and feedback questionnaires, from 80 users at the trial areas, and 195 residents in the nearby suburbs and at the local shopping centre.

Monitoring of the trial period was carried out over the last two (2) months of the operation of the trial off-leash areas at a cost of about \$3,000.00.

Overall, a very good response rate was achieved, which along with the nature of the comments received, suggests a high level of interest in the issue of dog management and in particular, off-leash dog exercise areas. The 100 responses obtained from residents in Pallarenda formed 31% of the total households contacted in person or in writing in the suburb (320). The 92 responses obtained from residents in Hermit Park formed 37% of the total households contacted in person or in writing in the suburb (250).

Some of the results are presented as follows:

Table 1. Suggestions for improvements by Users, Hermit Park Trial Off-Leash Dog Exercise Area

Suggestion	Percentage of Responses ¹
Better maintenance	34
Water/taps	34
More bins	11
Agility course	11
Fencing	6
Other	3
Total	10 %

Table 2. Ratings of Levels of Dog Obedience at Pallarenda and Hermit Park Off-Leash Dog Exercise Areas

Rating	% Percentage of Respondents¹	
	Pallarenda	Hermit Park
Always obedient	42	15
Most times obedient	42	63
Sometimes obedient	10	22
Rarely obedient	6	0
Never obedient	0	0
Other	0	0
Total	100%	100%

Table 3. Proposed Method of Supervision by Location (Percentage of Responses Received)

Location	Proposed Method of Supervision % Percentage of Responses Received¹			
	Dog owner	Council	Other	Total
Users at Pallarenda off-leash area	78	22	0	100
Users at Hermit Park off-leash area	79	14	7	100
Pallarenda residential area	74	22	4	100
Hermit Park residential area	74	24	3	100
Hermit Park shopping centre	88	9	3	100
Total	77	20	3	100%

Other suggestions include encouraging dog clubs to use the off-leash dog exercise areas and provide supervision, viewing all users of the area responsible for supervision and for a 'Neighbourhood Watch'.

These findings following experience of the trial off-leash dog exercise areas vary to some extent from the telephone survey that was carried out by Australian Economic Consultants in September 1999.

Slightly higher percentages of respondents suggest supervision should be the responsibility of the owner (approximately 77% of respondents) than in the previous survey (approximately 54% of respondents).

Table 4. Proposed Method of Public Liability Insurance Payment by Location (Percentage of Responses Received)

Location	Proposed Method of Insurance Payment % Percentage of Responses ¹				
	Dog-owner	Council	Other	Not sure	Total
Users at Pallarenda off-leash area	56	14	10	20	100
Users at Hermit Park off-leash area	73	27	0	0	100
Pallarenda residential area	74	13	1	12	100
Hermit Park residential area	65	13	12	10	100
Hermit Park shopping centre	84	9	0	6	100
Total	70	14	5	11	100%

Table 5. Suburbs Proposed for New Off-Leash dog Exercise Areas

Suburb	Number of Responses	Percentage of Responses
Aitkenvale	11	22
Ooonooba	5	11
South Townsville	4	9
North Ward/Rowes Bay	4	9
Mundingburra	3	7
West End	3	7
Garbutt	3	7
Annandale	3	7
Wulguru	3	7
Pimlico	2	4
Other ¹	4	9
Total	45	100%

REVIEW STUDY (B) SUMMARY

The tables above are a small sample of those generated by this review study. They reflect the value of the data and trends recorded. Following is a brief summary of the findings of the review.

Users of the trial off-leash dog exercise areas

Respondents at the Pallarenda off-leash dog exercise area tend to come from nearby inner city suburbs such as North Ward (16%), West End (10%) and Belgian Gardens (6%). In all, 20% of the respondents from the Pallarenda residential area report that they use the local off-leash dog exercise area (or 37% of the respondents who are dog owners).

The majority of respondents at the Hermit Park off-leash dog exercise area are from the local suburb (60%), or the nearby suburb of Railway Estate (17%). In all, 40% of respondents from the Hermit Park residential area, report that they use the local off-leash dog exercise area (or 81% of the respondents who are dog owners).

Information source

The main sources of information for users and other residents about the trial off-leash dog exercise areas include radio (21%), the Townsville Bulletin (19%), word of mouth (18%) and the signage, or seeing the designated areas while nearby (17%). Some residents learned of the designated areas by participating in the consultation (approximately 8%).

Users of the trial off-leash dog exercise areas tend to suggest that further advertising would be valuable (66% of responses), rather than not (34% of responses).

Further advertising in the local newspapers is the most frequent suggestion. Advertising through TV, radio and signage are also popular methods. Some residents suggest more advertising at highly frequented places such as shopping centres and the Strand. Some also suggest providing information through dog clubs and/or as part of the registration process.

Barriers to using the designated areas

The main reason given by those dog owners in Pallarenda who do not use the designated off-leash area is the distance to travel (17 respondents).

In Hermit Park, where only 19% of respondents who are dog owners are not using the area, reasons include concern about safety of their small or elderly dog, and lack of time to visit area (a total of 8 responses).

There are some reports of dog attacks and dog fights at the trial off-leash dog exercise areas. Reported incidents of attacks by dogs on other dogs include one incident reported by a user of the Pallarenda off-leash dog exercise area, and a small number of incidents two (2) reported by residents of Pallarenda. A veterinary surgeon who responded to the survey, reports witness three (3) dog fights in her various visits to the site at Pallarenda. The respondent also reports being bitten when attempting to protect her older dog (a kelpie cross) from three (3) out of control mastiff x pig dogs'.

The interviewer at the Hermit Park off-leash dog exercise area also witnessed a dog attack. A resident at Hermit Park reports that her daughter was savagely attacked by the neighbour's dogs who are regularly taken to the off-leash dog exercise area, and another resident reports that a family member was attacked on their own property by a dog from the off-leash area.

Some respondents from the trial areas and residential areas have raised concerns that the trial off-leash dog exercise areas are open to any dog owner, including those who are irresponsible and/or those who own dangerous dogs. Various suggestions are made as to methods of excluding dangerous dogs from the designated areas, including: banning some owners/dogs; requiring a permit which is obtained only when an owner is able to demonstrate that they have effective control over their dog; and setting aside areas (or times) for smaller dogs.

Frequency and times of use

The Pallarenda off-leash dog exercise area is reported to be extremely well used, with some considering that it is overcrowded at popular times. Significantly less usage of the Hermit Park trial off-leash dog exercise area is reported.

Users at the Hermit Park off-leash dog exercise area are, however, visiting this area more often than those at Pallarenda. Users of the designated area in Hermit Park visit more often than 5 times per week (50%) or 2 to 5 times per week (40%). Respondents at the Pallarenda off-leash dog exercise area generally report that they are using the area 2 to 5 times per week (38%) or weekly (30%).

The most popular time for visiting the off-leash dog exercise areas is after 5.00pm on weekdays and weekends.

Sharing of public space

The area designated as an off-leash dog exercise area and its surrounds in Pallarenda are well used for a range of other activities (81% of respondents), including walking (48% of responses), picnicking (18%) and jogging (12%). The feedback gathered suggests that the new activity has been generally accommodated.

Respondents in the Hermit Park residential area are much less likely to use the designated area for other activities (29% of respondents). The main activities which are shared with those using the off-leash dog exercise area in Hermit Park are walking (40% of responses), using the area as a short cut (18%), sporting activities (15%) and jogging (12%). The feedback received suggests that generally activity in the designated area has increased with its use as an off-leash dog exercise area, with a small number of residents, however, no longer using the area for activities such as walking with children.

Locality impact

Generally the trial off-leash dog exercise area appears to be having only a small impact on residents in Pallarenda. As noted by respondents in Pallarenda, the designated area is located some distance before reaching the suburb. It also tends to be used by residents from throughout Townsville with only some dog owners from Pallarenda (37% of respondents from this group) reporting that they are using the designated area (see 2.3).

Some respondents from the residential area of Pallarenda report that many dog owners in the area continue to walk their dogs off-leash in the suburb and in the beach areas.

Some respondents who are dog owners question why they should not walk their dogs off-leash, particularly along the beach area when not used by others, as they feel that they are responsible dog owners and have good control over their dog. Key disadvantages of location (too far away) and the limited size of the designated area (or overcrowding related to the high level of usage) have largely been identified by residents in Pallarenda who are dog owners and who may be using or not using the designated area. Some respondents from the residential area suggest that consideration could be given to beach areas being made available at specific times for off-leash dog exercise (particularly early morning and evening).

A small number of residents report that dog faeces are a problem along the beach, both in the trial off-leash dog exercise area and other parts of the beach. A small number of residents also raised their concerns about illegal activities in the near vicinity of the designated area (with some negative experiences being reported).

Residents in Hermit Park identify dog faeces as a major disadvantage of off-leash dog exercise areas, and report that many dog owners are not cleaning up after their dogs at the Hermit Park off-leash dog exercise area. Telephone calls received from residents in Hermit Park further highlighted the inconvenience that dog faeces are causing to nearby residents. Some residents who live near the area report that flies are often a resulting problem, as well as dog faeces near their homes.

Some residents report that a small number of dog owners, often with more than one dog, do not seem to have their dogs under control and the dogs are running freely, at times into the residential area. A small number of residents also report that owners are removing dog leashes in the residential streets before they reach the designated area.

Some residents identify an increase in traffic and the number of cars parking in their street, and there are a small number of residents who report that they no longer use the area for other the activities. Other problems raised by a small number of residents include increased noise (from barking) and the impact on the wildlife near the creek (chasing by dogs).

Residents as well as users in Hermit Park stress the need to maintain the off-leash dog exercise areas. Residents report an urgent need for a general cleaning up of the park, more frequent mowing and a filling in of holes. More bins, trees, seating and general upgrading is suggested. A small number of respondents suggest fencing.

The rubbish left by people gathering in the park was also raised as a general concern.

A small number of residents suggest that a letterbox drop informing residents of the beginning of the trial or opening of an off-leash area would be appreciated.

General advantages and disadvantages of off-leash dog exercise areas

The main advantages identified by users of the trial off-leash dog exercise areas are the benefits which are perceived to be gained by their pet, including the opportunity for the dog to exercise and socialise with other dogs, to get out of the yard and have a change of scenery. Respondents from the residential areas identify exercise for the dog as the major benefit, along with benefits to owners and to the community (that is, improved safety).

The main disadvantages which are perceived by users at the trial off-leash dog exercise areas and nearby residents are primarily aggressive dogs, uncontrolled dogs and irresponsible owners.

As the trial off-leash area in Pallarenda is located a distance before reaching the residential area, there are less impacts on residents. Some resident's report that others in the suburb are not using the designated area and continue to allow their dogs off-leash on the beach and throughout the suburb.

Some residents who are dog owners suggest that they should be able to use the length of the beach area for walking their dogs off-leash.

General ratings of satisfaction are high amongst users of the trial off-leash areas, with most respondents at the Pallarenda off-leash dog exercise area rating their satisfaction between 4 to 5 (on a scale of 1 to 5), and respondents at the Hermit Park off-leash dog exercise area rating their satisfaction between 3 to 5.

Respondents in the residential areas report lower levels of satisfaction, with lower ratings being recorded in Pallarenda than Hermit Park.

Positive aspects of design and possible improvements to trial areas

The positive aspects of design identified by users at the Pallarenda trial off-leash dog exercise area include the natural setting, the bags/bins provided, the size of the designated area and the availability of a car park.

The main suggestions for improvements to the Pallarenda trial off-leash dog exercise area are to increase the size of the designated area and to provide lighting for the car-park.

The positive aspects of design most often identified by users of the Hermit Park off-leash dog exercise area are primarily the large size or area provided, the provision of bags/bins and the location of the area (including being away from roads, close to a creek and close to home).

The main suggestions for improvement made by users of the Hermit Park off-leash dog exercise area (as well as residents in the nearby area) are primarily concerned with upgrading and maintenance of the park, including more frequent mowing, filling in of holes, cleaning up the creek and generally upgrading the appearance of the area.

High levels of satisfaction are recorded from users of both trial off-leash dog exercise areas, with slightly higher levels being reported by users of the Pallarenda off-leash dog exercise area in comparison to Hermit Park. The assessments made by users of their general level of satisfaction with the provision of off-leash areas is slightly higher than their rating of amenity and design of the trial area in the case of both trial off-leash dog exercise areas.

Management issues

Those using the trial off-leash dog exercise areas tend to report that their dogs have not received dog obedience training (33% of respondents at Pallarenda and 48% of respondents at Hermit Park report that training has occurred).

Those using the trial off-leash dog exercise areas estimate their level of obedience at generally between mostly to always obedient.

Generally respondents suggest that the dog owner should be responsible for supervising their dog when using the off-leash dog exercise area.

Generally respondents suggest that dog owners should be responsible for the cost of public liability insurance.

Establishing further off-leash dog exercise areas

Most respondents suggest that more off-leash dog exercise areas should be provided, with the highest percentage response being received from the respondents at the Hermit Park off-leash dog exercise area.

Of those respondents in the Pallarenda and Hermit Park residential areas who do not believe that further off-leash dog exercise areas are needed (20% and 27% respectively), the majority do not own a dog (76% and 75% respectively).

The most frequent suggestions for further off-leash dog exercise areas include a continuation or new area along the beach between Pallarenda (including north of the existing area) and Rowes Bay, and the South Townsville reclamation area. Other suggestions include Bicentennial Park (particularly by respondents from Hermit Park), Brazier Park (particularly by Pallarenda residents) and areas along Ross River.

Future directions

It was proposed that the future direction of off-leash areas in the Townsville City Council municipality (based on the review of the review, pre trial and cooperation of the Townsville City Council Animal Management Section) should include:

- a. the two (2) trial off-leash dog exercise areas in Pallarenda and Hermit Park be established as designated areas for this activity;
- b. consideration be given to extending the designated area at Pallarenda (by approximately 200 metres at each end);
- c. discussions occur with Parks Services in relation to improvements to Lou Lister Park (including general upgrading and increased maintenance);
- d. animal management staff increase their presence in Pallarenda, with a view to encouraging residents who walk their dogs off-leash to use the designated area;
- e. an information sheet on the off-leash dog exercise areas be prepared for distribution, including an outline of the responsibilities of dog owners;
- f. the role of the Animal Management Education Officer include encouraging use of the off-leash dog exercise areas through strategies such as organising events or sessions, involving groups such as kennel, obedience and dog owners associations, and exploring interest in a "friends" of the local off-leash area; and
- g. investigating ways of recognising responsible use of the off-leash areas and dog ownership generally (for example, developing a code of responsible pet management and a certificate of competency).

It was also suggested that where new areas are under consideration, the following should be considered:

- the area having a pleasant location and a well designed and maintained site, which takes into account the needs of owners and their dogs, as well as the impacts on the nearby area, are important features in the establishment of new areas for off-leash dog exercise;

- an integrated cross departmental approach be taken to the planning of future sites to be designated as off-leash dog exercise areas;
- this approach also include liaison with relevant groups such as the Regional Pet Management Technical Committee, and other interest groups;
- this approach also take into account the information available on the preferences of users and other residents, as well as other considerations such as environmental and traffic concerns;
- consideration be given to allocating sites as off-leash dog exercise areas at specific times (for example early mornings and evenings);
- prior to the designation of any new areas, consultation occurs with residents in the immediate vicinity to determine their concerns and/or potential issues;
- consideration be given to including a specified amount as part of the dog registration fee as a contribution towards the provision of off-leash dog exercise areas (including public liability insurance);
- the potential for sponsorship of further designated areas and/or facilities within those areas be investigated.

OVERALL SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

At the conclusion of the six (6) month trial period Community Services were asked to report back to Council on a the review of the trial 'Off-leash Dog Exercise Areas'.

That report was presented to Health Services in mid June and has been circulated to Deputy Mayor, Director Environmental Services, Acting Manager Health Services, Acting Principal Environmental Health Officer, Technical Officer Animal Management, Manager Environmental Planning. The document was further distributed to all Animal Management Officers within the unit. Comment has been sought from all these staff.

The views of staff, including Animal Management Officers, Senior staff in Health Services, the Risk Assessment Manager and the Manager Legal Services in relation to Council ratifying the trial 'off-leash areas' from trial to designated 'off-leash areas' can best be summarised by -if 'off-leash' areas are to progress, consideration should be given to adequately providing fenced areas, adequate signage alerting users of the potential harm and appropriate supervision.

The current ethos of animal management in Townsville is to ensure that animals are effectively contained within a property or if taken from that property, they are under the effective control by means of a leash or similar.

'Off-leash' areas and risk is an unknown factor in Townsville. What is known is animals on a leash or behind a fence don't create problems.

The overall findings of the report suggest that the concept of 'off-leash exercise areas' continues to be popular with the community and that the trial areas have been generally well accepted. The report suggests ideas for future direction and what should be considered in the development of future off-leash dog exercise areas.

It is interesting to note that the issue of a levy has been put forward as a suggestion in the development of future 'off-leash areas'. The levy could form an additional part of dog registration or could include a levy against all ratepayers for animal management capital expenditure for such areas.

The views of the Regional Pet Management Technical Committee in relation to 'off-leash areas' have been documented. The Committee had strong reservations regarding 'leash free areas', but acknowledge that there is some community support for providing these areas and as such made a number of recommendations regarding:

- community consultation;
- trialing off-leash areas;
- review of off-leash areas after 6 months;
- conducting an education campaign; and
- funding for these facilities.

The results of the telephone survey conducted in September 1999 point out the most important requirement of those persons surveyed in relation to 'off-leash areas' were:

- fencing -69%;
- open spaces -42%;
- signage -39%;
- parking -29%; and
- supervision -26%.

If these comments are to be used as a guide as to what the community expect in relation to 'off leash areas' and add into the equation, knowledge that has now become available since the six month trial, the list would now include:

- water supply for animal and carer;
- refuse facilities;
- park maintenance;
- signage specific to risk; and
- park equipment.

If the existing two 'off-leash areas' are used as a guide to installing facilities of a standard that are demanded by the community the following costing would apply.

	Lou Lister Park	Pallarenda Beach
Fencing	<p>This park has a circumference excluding the creek line of 1600m.</p> <p>Pool fencing installed is \$60.00/m.</p> <p>Chain wire top and bottom rail fencing, installed is \$30.00/m.</p> <p>Chain wire top rail fence, installed is \$25.00/m</p> <p>To fence entire park would cost</p> <p>Pool fence: \$96,000</p> <p>Chain wire top and bottom rail: \$48,000</p> <p>Chain wire top rail: \$40,000</p> <p>Fencing of an area that measures 75m x 50 m (250m)</p> <p>Pool fence: \$15,000</p> <p>Chain wire top and bottom rail: \$7,500</p> <p>Chain wire top rail: \$6,250</p> <p>Sufficient gates will need to be provided for pedestrian and car access. These costs are not included in the above figures.</p>	<p>It would be impractical to place fencing on the beach. The area adjoining the area with the road reserve is already fenced.</p>
Open space	<p>There is sufficient open space for users to gain full benefit of walking the dog off leash</p>	<p>There is sufficient open space for users to gain full benefit of walking the dog off leash</p>
General Signage	<p>Sufficient signage exists in relation to identifying that the area is an off leash area. Signage includes 4 signs valued at \$360.00 each</p> <p>Total \$1440.00</p>	<p>Sufficient signage exists in relation to identifying that the area is an off leash area. Signage includes 4 signs valued at \$360.00 each. An additional 8 signs have been placed in and around this location to advise users of the off leash area and where the off leash area is. 8 @ \$260.00 each.</p> <p>Total \$3520.00</p>
Parking	<p>Sufficient parking is available for all users on the perimeter of the park</p>	<p>Sufficient parking is available for all users on the main road, which abuts the beach area.</p>
Supervision	<p>Animal Management Officers regularly patrol the area and surrounding areas. Estimated cost per year \$750.00</p>	<p>Animal Management Officers regularly patrol the area and surrounding areas. Estimated cost per year \$750.00</p>

Water supply for animal and carer	To supply a drinking fountain for humans with a drinking bowl facility for dogs installed would cost approximately \$2600.00 if the water pipes are near to the site. Total \$2600.00	To supply a drinking fountain for humans with a drinking bowl facility for dogs installed would cost approximately \$2600.00 if the water pipes are near to the site. Total \$2600.00
Refuse facilities	4 wheelie bins have been place within the park. Each bin is valued at \$150.00. In addition, 4 dog tidy dispensers @ \$78.50 have been purchased to supply bio degradable dog faeces bags. Total \$914.00	12 wheelie bins have been place within the park. Each bin is valued at \$150.00. In addition 4 dog tidy dispensers @ \$78.50 have been purchased to supply the bio degradable dog faeces bags. An additional 10 dispensers @ \$78.50 have been purchased to be placed along the Pallarenda road. Total \$2899.00
Parks Maintenance	Limited parks maintenance is done to this park. This could include additional mowing, garden design and maintenance, tree planting and maintenance.	Limited parks maintenance is done to this park.
Signage specific to risk	Signs would be required at all entrance points to alert users to the rules of the area. Such signs would be dependent on the number of entrances that are at the park. Signs are estimated at \$1000.00 each. I would imagine each park having at least 4 entrances. Total \$4000.00	Signs would be required at all entrance points to alert users to the rules of the area. Such signs would be dependent on the number of entrances that are at the park. Signs are estimated at \$1000.00 each. I would imagine each park having at least 4 entrances. Total \$4000.00
Recurring costs	Supply of approximately 20 rolls of 500 bags per year @ \$40.00 per roll Citiwaste can maintain these bins at a cost of \$3.50 per bin per week. Total \$1528.00	Supply of approximately 72 rolls of 500 bags per year @ \$40.00 per roll. Citiwaste have advised that they can maintain these bins at a cost of \$3.50 per bin per week. Total \$5064.00
Park equipment	Equipment like park benches, shade structures and play equipment for animals may need to be considered.	Equipment like park benches, shade structures and play equipment for animals may need to be considered.

Total

\$107,232 Entire park pool fenced
 \$59,232 Entire park chain wire top bottom
 \$51,232 Entire park chain wire top
 \$26,232 Part park pool fenced
 \$18,732 Part park chain wire top bottom
 \$17,732 Part park chain wire top

Three local authorities were canvassed regarding 'off-leash areas'.

- Brisbane City Council;
- Thuringowa City Council; and
- Cairns City Council.

Brisbane has gone about 'off-leash areas' in a big way with 80-100 existing 'off-leash areas' and the animal management unit looking at setting up an additional 30-50 in this financial year. To keep things in perspective, Brisbane has a total of 1800 parks which incorporates 12,500 hectares of park land. Brisbane's population is in excess of 1 million people.

If we were to use a comparison of 1,000,000 people to 100 off-leash areas, that would give an equation of 1 park per 10,000 people.

Brisbane has advised that each 'off-leash area' does not necessarily use the entire park, most of the 'Off-leash' areas are contained within existing parks. Such areas are determined on the size of the park and can range from (50m x 20m to 75m x 50m)

The criteria for setting up such areas is:

- area must not be a playground, or sporting oval;
- community support must be gathered prior to setting up the area;
- demographics of dog owners determine the areas that should be looked at; and
- ward councillors must give support.

All areas are fenced with the exception of those areas where natural barriers provide such a boundary. Eg creek line. A small amount of areas are fenced with pool fencing, but a majority of the areas are fenced with chain wire fence. The areas are stocked with a water supply for the dog and its handler, bins with disposal dog bags, and bench seating. Signage is also provided, stating the rules and risks of entering the parks. These signs are located at all gates entering the park.

The average cost of setting up each area is \$11,500.00. This figure in some instances will vary and the economy of scale factor assists in keeping this fee to a minimum.

Using the figures provided from Brisbane, one park should service approximately 10,000 people. Given that they are looking at setting up an additional 30 ñ 50 this financial year, that figure could be substantially lower. If this was equated to Townsville, Townsville could adequately sustain 6ñ10 'off-leash areas'.

Determining suitable locations could be scientifically determined by plotting all dogs in Townsville and then looking for the biggest densities of animals.

Another solution could be to allocate one 'off-leash area' to each division.

Thuringowa City Council has only one 'off-leash area'. This area is a vacant parcel of land on Thuringowa Drive, Kirwan that abuts residential land. No facilities are provided within the park. Thuringowa do not have a policy on the creation or maintenance of such parks.

The issues of implementation in relation to 'off-leash areas' need serious consideration. The process should include:

- ward councillor identifies a park in their area that is suitable;
- community consultation is undertaken by a private company in conjunction with the Ward Councillor and District Animal Management Officer (AMO). Such consultation should include discussions with other Departments within Council, especially Parks Services, Environmental Planning etc. (A company was engaged to do a similar survey prior to implementing the existing two 'off-leash' areas. For that service)
- if the community is in favour, a budget is put together for setting up the facility. The area should include:

-fencing

-water supply

-signage

-park furniture

-refuse facilities

-sufficient parking for users

-budget submission put to council for approval

-once approved, area is established.

- Facility is put on to the list of areas to be inspected by District Animal Management Officer.

The costs of providing 'off-leash areas' will fluctuate depending on the location and facilities that exist in the park. Additional resources could come from a capital program associated with levies. Levies could be placed on all registered dogs, or on all ratepayers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REFERENCES

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Footnotes

¹ 3 users did not respond to this question

² All interviewees responded to this question

³ Only 3 respondents from the residential areas did not respond to this question

⁴ Respondents from the Pallarenda residential area and 4 respondents from Hermit Park did not respond to this question

⁵ Other suburbs include Railway Estate, Cranbrook, Currajong and Alligator Creek

[Appendices A, B and C](#)

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Dick and Shane have worked together for many years now in the field of Urban Animal Management. Both authors devote much of their time to promoting research and development in Animal Management. Shane is at present in transition to a new position as Local Laws Officer with Caloundra City Council. The work will continue.

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