








16th National Urban Animal Management Conference, Hobart 30th Aug – 1st Sept 2006

Who's taking who for a walk?

Dog walking and regulation in West Australian local government






Hayley Cutt

Background

-  **Level of dog ownership high**
 -  **Health benefits of pet ownership**
 -  **Dogs provide motivation to walk**
-
-  **Dog walking levels in Australia**
 -  **Why dog walking?**



Why dog walking?





-  **Physical inactivity & poor nutrition**
-  **Obesity epidemic (in our pets too!)**
-  **Heart disease, diabetes, some cancers, mental health....**
-  **Obesogenic environments**
-  **New ways to increase community physical activity levels & improve health?**



People walking with their dog

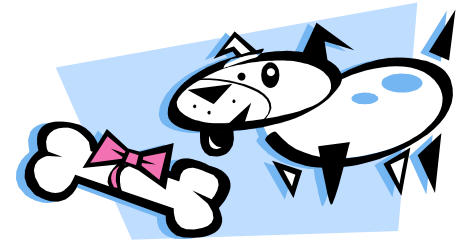


Background




-  **Motivators for owners to walk with dog**
-  **Barriers for dog walking**
-  **Effect of policy environment on people walking with dog – implications for local government**
-  **Effect of increased dog walking on local government???**



Aim



- 1. To examine the perceived role of dog ownership in the community from a local government perspective***
- 2. To examine local government issues associated with more people walking their dogs in public places***

-  Positive & negative aspects of people walking dogs
-  Regulatory issues associated with people walking dogs
-  Recommendations for future planning

Methods



Participants:

- 🐕 WALGA support → letter to CEO (n=17)
- 🐕 14 in-depth interviews & small discussion groups with LGAs in Perth (n=44)
- 🐕 Rangers, community development officers, town planners, parks and recreation officers, elected members

Methods



Procedure:

- 🐕 Discussions held at work in work time – approx 1 hour
- 🐕 Informed consent & permission to tape record
- 🐕 Pre-determined discussion guide
- 🐕 Data transcribed & analysed (using QSR-NVivo)
- 🐕 Results = common themes/issues

Results: Socio-demographics

-  **73% male**
-  **48% bachelor degree or higher**
-  **Mean age 43 years**
-  **59% current dog owners**
-  **Occupations:**
 - ranger services (59.5%)
 - parks (11.5%)
 - planning (9%)
 - community development (9%)
 - environmental health and protection (7%)
 - other (4%)



Positive factors of people walking their dog in public

Decreased nuisance barking

Important because of changing urban environment

“A lot of these complaints in relation to noisy dogs are because they are confined to a 3x3m backyard most of their lives and they are never exercised. They suffer anxiety separation the moment the owners leave, they are bored to death and any slight movement or noise gives them cause to react to it which causes unnecessary work for us. I think if they were exercised at least once or even twice a day they wouldn’t cause as many problems. It’s very rare that we get noise complaints from people that we know or find out that do regularly exercise their dogs.” (Interview 7; male; ranger)

Positive factors of people walking their dog in public

Community benefits (people getting to know each other)

“I think it would be very beneficial if we had more people on the street. While there is a downside as far as enforcement, there are upsides in regard to neighbourhood watch. People being out on the streets, crime prevention, communities coming together and being exposed to each other, neighbours talking, dogs bring down barriers. It’s the same as being a mother with kids at school.” (Interview 5; female; ranger)

Increase in compliance with local laws



Negative factors of people walking their dog in public

 **Owner lack of knowledge of dog behaviour, state and local laws & inadequate training/socialization of dogs**

 **Potential conflict with other user groups of public open space (POS)**

“In the dog exercise area they are allowed to run free and they are allowed to run off the lead. You get people that walk through there because there are walk paths and you also get cyclists. So when you put all that together there is plenty of opportunity for conflict.” (Interview 3; male; ranger)



Negative factors of people walking their dog in public

 **Dogs off-lead in conservation areas**

 **Limited availability/access to POS**

 **Provision of dog litter bags and bins**



Dog walking regulatory issues

 **Non-compliance with state and local dog-related laws**

 **Education & enforcement through fines**

 **Consistent regulation across LGAs (e.g. signage)**



Dog walking regulatory issues

Responsible dog owners, social norms, improved compliance




“It is a social group for them and they talk to each other and with humour they will say ‘don’t let your dog do this or don’t let them do that’ and there are a couple of people down there who are called the ‘sheriffs’. So through humour and a sense of place and belonging to this community they uphold those informal rules that they have set.” (Interview 5; female; ranger)



LGA-related perceived barriers to walking the dog

 **Other uncontrolled/untrained dogs**

LGA-related perceived barriers to walking the dog

-  **Limited access to off-leash dog exercise areas**
-  **No provision of dog-related infrastructure in POS (e.g. dog litter bags & bins, fencing, water)**
-  **Insufficient support from within LG & elected members**

“If they (council) want to bring in and adopt new local laws then they should give us the backing to enforce these laws.” (Interview 14; male; ranger)



LGA role in increasing dog walking



Off-leash dog exercise areas



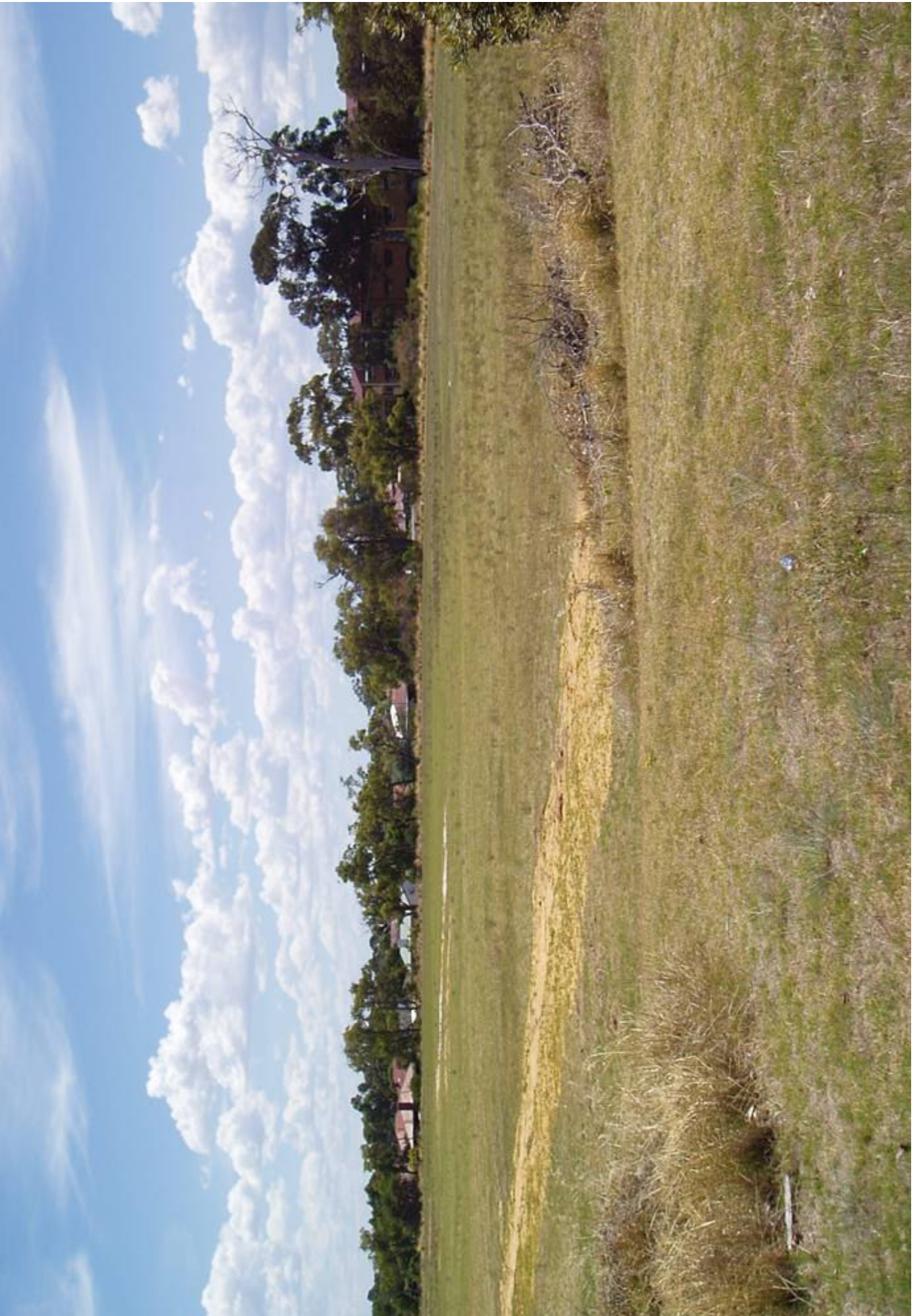
Appropriate dog-related infrastructure & signage

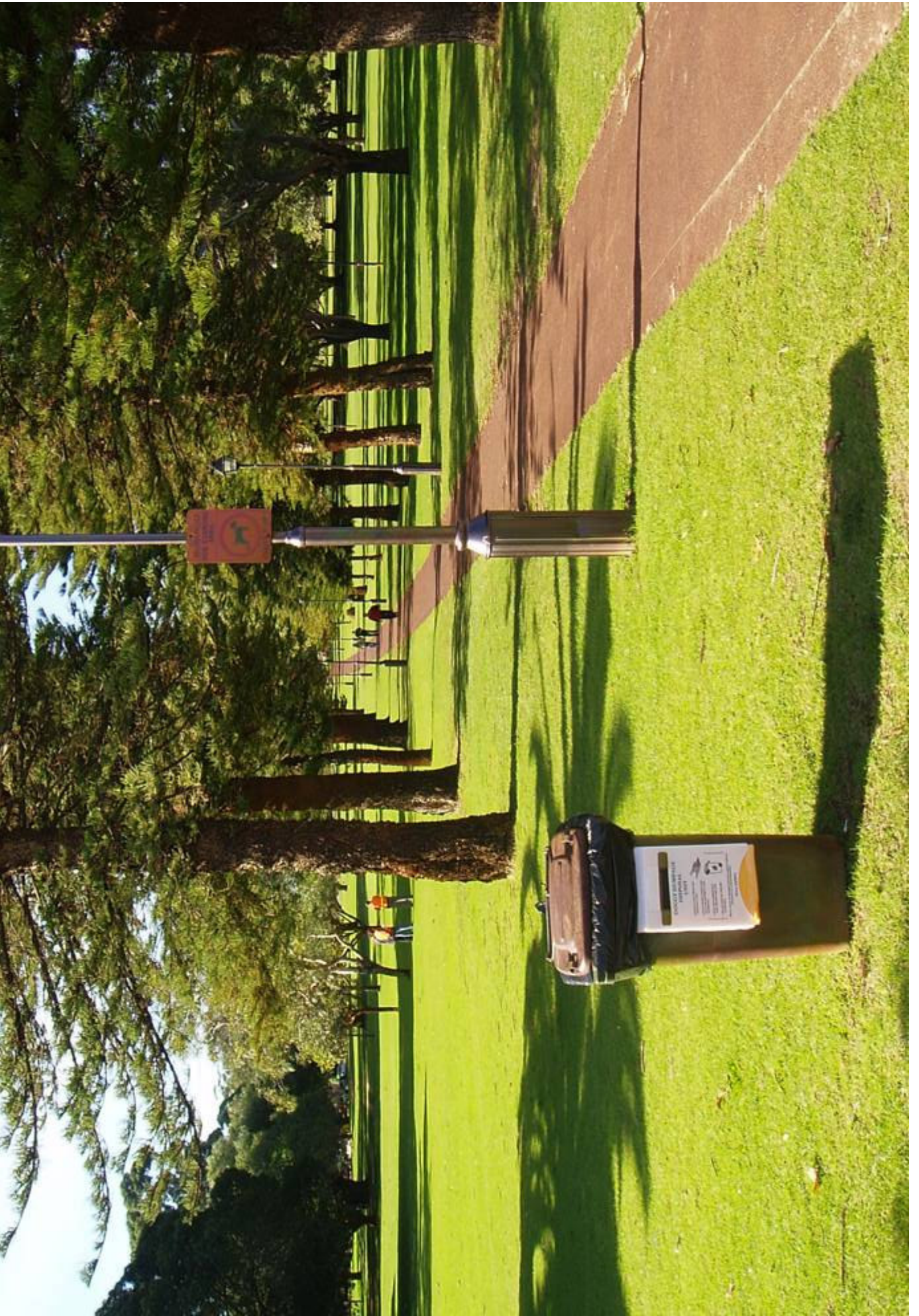


Attractive POS











LGA role in increasing dog walking

“A dog owner wants the same facilities as a non-dog owner. So if they are going to take their dog to the park they may wish to combine it as a family outing and take their dog. If it is an exercise area they think ‘well that’s even better’ because the dog can run around and play and they can still enjoy nice surroundings.” (Interview 2; female; ranger)



“I think if you are going to take your dog out and exercise it, it needs to be exercised at a certain rate. To get your heart rate up you need a hard, straight walking surface. You need lighting as well and you need the other elements of safe design.” (Interview 15; male; town planner)

LGA role in increasing dog walking

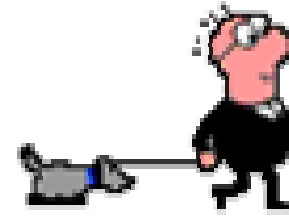
-  **Support & encouragement of local dog owner groups (formal and informal)**
-  **Facilitate & foster building sense of community through local dog owners**







“There is a lady that lives by herself and one night there was a thunderstorm and her electricity cut off and one of the walkers came to us and said ‘Can you help this lady?’. We only knew her from the dog park. She was very frail and we just helped her out. But if she didn’t come to the park no one would have known she was in trouble and she didn’t have anyone else... So people sort of watch out for each other and everyone knows each other. You can’t really replace that. I mean you wouldn’t have that if you didn’t have the ability to walk your dog, I mean if we didn’t walk our dogs we wouldn’t know that.” (Interview 9; female; community development)



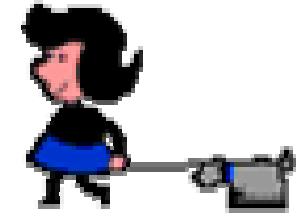
**Gee dad a bit slower on the acceleration
next time please.**

Discussion



-  **Increase in the potential benefits of dog ownership**
-  **Need to plan for dog owners in the community now and in the future**
-  **Need to plan for dogs in public places**
-  **Balance between benefits of increased dog walkers & adverse effects of dogs in community**
-  **Harm minimization approach**
-  **Ongoing assessment & evaluation**






Discussion



-  **Effects of the changing urban environment on ownership and provisions for dog owners**
-  **Access to dog-friendly public open space**
-  **Collaboration, communication & more collaboration**
 - within council**
 - between councils**
 - with outside organisations**

Conclusion



-  **Community benefits of dog ownership & walking the dog**
-  **Dog walkers contribution to creation of social capital & sense of community**
-  **Improvement in knowledge & compliance with local laws**
-  **Self-policing**
-  **Need to foster this resource in the community**



 **Effective risk management = planning for dogs in our communities now and in the future**

 **Factors to consider when planning for dog walkers in the future** (see Table 2 for more detail)

- Access to dog exercise areas
- Provision of dog-related infrastructure in POS
- Quality of POS provided (attractive!)
- Collaboration at all levels of government & non-government

Conclusion

Cost benefit of supporting, encouraging and promoting local dog walking groups:

- *community benefits*
- *improved compliance rates*
- *decrease in resources required for enforcement*
- *HEALTH benefits*



THANK YOU!



Collaborators



Department for Planning and Infrastructure
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Physical Activity Research Group



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Investigators:

- Prof Billie Giles-Corti (*Supervisor*)
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Physical Activity Research Group

Research Staff:

- Ms Claire Ruxton (Project Administration)
- Ms Andrea Lange (Research Assistant)
- Mrs Kathy Sheridan (Research Associate)
- Mrs Judy Maloney (Interviewer)
- Survey Research Centre

Students:

- Ms Hayley Cutt (PhD – APAI) *Industry partner*
- Ms Sarah Foster (PhD)
- Mr Ryan Falconer (PhD)
- Ms Jacinta Francis (PhD)
- Mr Vince Learnihan (Masters)



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