

**DOG OFF LEASH AREA POLICY AND GUIDELINES REVIEW**

L&C | 52/8/1 | #7800520

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**That Council adopts the Dog Off Leash Area Policy and Dog Off Leash Area Guidelines.**

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**INTERESTED PARTIES:**

Nil

*Note: The identification of interested parties is provided on a best endeavours basis by Council Officers and may not be exhaustive.*

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The Dog Off Leash Area Policy (the Policy) is the key policy that sets Council’s overarching position and objectives with respect to dog off leash areas and prohibition of animals in public places. The associated guidelines (the Guidelines) set out standards and provisions to ensure that Council provides an appropriate number of dog parks to meet the needs of the community. The Guidelines also provide guidance on minimum area and improvement standards for dog off leash areas.

The Policy and Guidelines were originally adopted in 2014 and have been reviewed every 4 years with minor changes made. The Policy and Guidelines have been implemented successfully with eight new dog off leash areas being introduced in 2019 and five more opened to the public since, totalling 54 dog off leash areas in the Council area.

The review of the Policy and Guidelines has determined that no changes are required, and the recommendation of this report is to readopt the Policy and Guidelines.

**BACKGROUND:**

The Policy was adopted by Council at the Ordinary Meeting on 25 June 2014 and has been reviewed on several occasions in accordance with Policy review timelines, from a performance and governance perspective.

The Policy and Guidelines have performed successfully since their inception in 2014. Since this time, thirteen new dog off leash areas have been introduced across the region with the most recent ones being introduced at Babinda, White Rock, Stratford and Gordonvale.

The Policy and Guidelines provide a framework to determine:

- Locational requirements
- Minimum area requirements
- Standard minimum improvements
- Fenced dog off leash area requirements
- Prohibition and restriction of animals in public places
- Implementation practices
- Public consultation
- Removal of a dog off leash area.

This framework enables Council to assess requests for new dog off leash areas and respond to management issues that arise.

### **COMMENT:**

Dog off leash areas perform a vital role in providing many health benefits for dogs and their owners. They allow dogs the freedom to run without constraint, play, sniff, chase and interact with other dogs. This helps alleviate problems associated with dogs that are restless and bored by being contained on a property. Problems such as barking, digging and poor behaviour can often be solved by providing dogs with the opportunity to exercise. For dog owners, it also provides the benefit of offering a great chance to get some exercise as well as socialising with other dog owners and locals in the neighbourhood.

There are 24,000 registered dogs in the council area and 54 dog off leash areas are provided. Whilst fencing is **not** mandated in the Policy, 14 dog off leash areas are fully fenced.

The Policy and Guidelines provide the foundation to enable the implementation of new dog off leash areas ensuring that they have adequate area, improvements and are located in appropriate locations.

A review of the Policy and Guidelines has indicated that no changes are required. It is noted that minor changes were made to the Policy and Guidelines in the 2018 and 2022 reviews, and these changes remain relevant.

The Guidelines also refer to Prohibition and Restriction of Animals in Public Places, which are specified in the Local Laws. Animals are prohibited in cemeteries, at stinger nets, swimming enclosures, areas of high biodiversity, areas of potential significant human/animal conflict and areas where high numbers of people congregate.

Management and enforcement of dog related issues are a separate matter from this policy and guidelines and are governed by relevant Local Laws for animal management.

### **OPTIONS:**

#### Option 1: (Recommended)

That Council adopts the Dog Off Leash Area Policy and Dog Off Leash Area Guidelines.

## Option 2:

That Council does not adopt the Dog Off Leash Area Policy and Dog Off Leash Area Guidelines.

## **CONSIDERATIONS:**

### Risk Management:

The Policy and Guidelines mitigate risk by ensuring that dog off leash areas are:

- Carefully planned to ensure that they are located, improved and built to relevant Standards and meet community needs.
- Safe and accessible spaces for the community and dogs.
- Managed and maintained in accordance with the endorsed Levels of Service.

### Council Finance and the Local Economy:

The Policy and Guidelines assist in determining and prioritising new, upgrades and renewal of assets which informs the capital and operational budgets as part of routine processes.

### Natural Environment:

The Policy and Guidelines are a mechanism for Council to ensure that dogs are provided with separate and safe exercise areas in appropriate locations that will not adversely impact on natural areas. Specifically, animals are prohibited in important natural areas to ensure that wildlife is not adversely impacted by dogs.

### Corporate and Operational Plans:

The Policy and Guidelines align closely with the key Focus Areas of the Corporate Plan, in particular:

- Focus Area Two – Natural Assets. Promoting, protecting and enhancing our iconic natural environment now and for generations to come
- Focus Area Three – Design for Liveability. A place-based approach that celebrates our community
- Focus Area Four – Community & Culture. Fostering a vibrant, healthy and inclusive community

### Statutory:

The Policy and Guidelines assist to inform the Local Laws. The Policy and Guideline are used to inform updates to the Local Government Infrastructure Plan where relevant. Enforcement with respect to dog related matters is governed by Local Laws.

### Policy:

The Policy and Guidelines are designed to meet the requirements of the Public Open Space Policy.

**CONSULTATION:**

Internal stakeholders were given the opportunity to give feedback on the performance and application of the Policy. Community Spaces routinely receive and respond to feedback from the community on the network of dog off leash areas.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1 – Dog Off Leash Policy and Dog Off Leash Policy Guidelines



Tim Dendle  
Executive Manager Community Spaces



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Director Lifestyle and Community

# Attachment 1 – Dog Off Leash Policy and Dog Off Leash Policy Guidelines

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CAIRNS REGIONAL COUNCIL



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General Policy

## DOG OFF LEASH AREA POLICY

- Intent** To provide Council with a framework for the establishment, provision and improvement of dog off leash areas, fenced dog exercise areas, and prohibition and restriction of animals in public places to meet community needs and maintain public and animal safety.
- Scope** The policy applies to all existing and proposed dog off leash areas, fenced dog exercise areas and prohibition and restriction of animals in public places over land owned and/or controlled by Council.

### OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Ensure that a suitable number of dog off leash areas and fenced dog exercise areas are provided to meet the needs of the community.
- Provide minimum area and improvement standards to meet user needs.
- Provide standards to inform consideration of new dog off leash areas.
- Locate dog off leash areas in suitable areas to minimise adverse safety and environmental impacts.
- Provide parameters to inform decision making regarding prohibition and restriction of animals in public places.
- Ensure the safety of people and dogs in public open spaces.

### Standards

The standards required to meet this policy are set out in the document titled *Dog Off Leash Area Guidelines*. The standards can be amended as required at the discretion of the Executive Manager Community Spaces.

### Implementation

This policy will be implemented as stipulated in the *Dog Off Leash Area Guidelines*.

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This policy is to remain in force until otherwise determined by Council.

Director Responsible for Review:

Lifestyle and Community

**ADOPTED: 25/06/2014**  
**CURRENT ADOPTION: 23/02/2022**  
**DUE FOR REVISION: 23/02/2026**  
**REVOKED/SUPERSEDED**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Miaa-Martin Ken Gouldthorp".

**Miaa-Martin Ken Gouldthorp**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

## DOG OFF LEASH AREA GUIDELINES

The following document provides the framework and criteria to enable Council to make decisions to achieve the objectives of the Dog Off Leash Area Policy.

### **DEFINITIONS**

**Dog Off Leash Area** – refers to a designated area where dogs are permitted to be off leash from a person that has effective control of the animal as stipulated by the relevant Local Law.

**Fenced Dog Exercise Area** – refers to a fenced dog off leash area. Dogs are permitted off leash in these areas by a person that has effective control of the animal as stipulated by the relevant Local Law.

**Prohibition and Restriction of Animals in Public Places Area** – refers to a designated area where certain animals, as specified in the relevant Local Law, are prohibited or restricted.

### **STANDARDS**

#### **Dog Off Leash Areas**

Dog off leash areas shall be distributed evenly across the local government area and be located within easy access of most neighbourhoods.

Dog off leash areas are to be located:

- not less than 1km from another dog off leash area.
- In drainage areas (where practicable), suitable natural areas and locations that are not already highly embellished for recreation purposes.

Dog off leash areas are not to be located:

- On land that is leased or regularly used for organised sport;
- On land that has significant environmental or conservation value and/or contains wildlife habitat; or
- On land that is embellished for recreation purposes that attract significant use.

Dog off leash areas shall preferably have a minimum area of 5,000 sqm.

Dog off leash areas must contain the following improvements as a minimum:

- Tap with dog bowl;
- Signage indicating the space is a dog off leash area;
- Suitable seating (minimum of two seats, but determined by need); and
- Dog disposal bags and a bin.

### **Fenced Dog Off Leash Areas**

Dog off leash areas are not required to be fenced. However, in some circumstances may trigger the need for fencing. Instances which may trigger fencing include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Proximity to existing playgrounds or other recreation facilities that attract significant use and may cause a safety issue for users;
- Proximity to areas which may cause a safety issue for dogs, such as busy roads, drains and hazardous areas,
- Proximity to areas with significant conservation value or wildlife habitat, and
- Any area deemed unsuitable without fencing.

Fenced dog off leash areas shall be considered in locations:

- Where suitable off-street car parking is available (where practicable);
- Where other sufficient and suitable land, such as a drainage reserves, does not exist;
- Where there is significant threat to the safety of dogs, such as a busy road;
- Where there is a potential conflict with other users, such as a playground; and/or
- Where Council deems there is a need.

Fenced dog off leash areas are required to contain the following improvements as a minimum:

- Tap with dog bowl;
- Signage indicating the space is a designated dog off leash area;
- Suitable seating (minimum of two seats, but determined by need);
- Dog faeces disposal bags and a bin;
- Shade for seating (either with a shade shelter or by suitable available tree shade); and
- Off-street car parking or suitable on street car parking

In areas subject to significant flooding, dog off leash areas shall not be fenced.

### **PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

Suitable public consultation is required prior to approval of any proposed new dog off leash area, except where there is an administrative mapping error or omission that requires amendment.

### **REMOVAL OF A DOG OFF LEASH AREA**

Council may remove a dog off leash area (fenced or unfenced) at its discretion, in instances where:

- There is an oversupply of dog off leash areas;
- There are records of significant and repeated animal/human conflict; or
- Any other reason deemed necessary at Council's discretion; if
- Appropriate public notification has occurred.

## **PROHIBITION AND RESTRICTION OF ANIMALS IN PUBLIC PLACES**

Prohibited and restricted animals are prescribed in the relevant Local Law.

Animals may be prohibited or restricted in cemeteries, adjacent to swimming enclosures (stinger nets) at beaches, recreation parks and sporting areas where large numbers of people may congregate, natural areas of high biodiversity, natural areas where large numbers of people congregate for swimming or other activities, or any other area at Council's discretion where there is significant concern regarding human/animal conflict.

Appropriately located and designed signage is required indicating that certain animals are prohibited or restricted in an area.

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementation shall occur in the following manner:

- Review existing dog off leash areas as required and provide improvements to ensure the minimum standards in this Guideline are met. Improvements will be considered on an annual basis in the capital works budget.
- Fenced dog exercise areas are to be provided in accordance with the requirements of this guideline and will be considered on an annual basis in the capital works budget.

A register of dog off-leash areas and prohibition and restriction of animals in public places will be maintained by Council.

Council will provide information regarding dog off leash areas and animal prohibition and restriction areas on Council's website and through appropriate on-site signage.