



Overview of consultation:
off-leash beach areas in
San Remo and Phillip Island
October 2019

Background

Council's current Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) 2017-2021 has an action to consult with land managers and the community to identify potential off-leash areas in San Remo and on Phillip Island. During 2018 Council has worked with Phillip Island Nature Parks and the San Remo Foreshore Committee of Management to try and identify potential off-leash dog walking areas on the beaches in San Remo and on Phillip Island.

The proposed off-leash locations are in San Remo Cape Woolamai, Newhaven and Cowes. The locations have the potential to provide an off-leash option through shared beach usage that will provide for fair and equitable use of the beaches in these locations while taking into account amenity and environmental considerations.

During January and February 2019, Council completed community consultation in relation to the proposed potential dog off-leash beach locations. This included an online survey, place-based pop ups to collect community feedback on the proposed locations and the receipt of numerous written submissions from community members, groups and organisations.

Overview of survey results and consultation

A total of 1,817 survey responses were received. 70% of people who completed the survey were local residents. A further 20% were holiday home owners. The largest number of respondents came from Cowes, followed by Cape Woolamai. A total of 1,336 people who completed the survey came from Phillip Island. Around 80% or 1,451 respondents of completed surveys were by dog owners.

The people who completed the survey provided overwhelming support for having designated off-leash beaches in San Remo, Cape Woolamai, Cowes West, Newhaven and Ventnor – with the preferred locations being:

- San Remo – Foots Beach
- Cape Woolamai (Cleeland Bight) - Seaspray Avenue access track 520 metres north to Cleeland Road access track
- Cowes West - The Yacht Club access track 340 metres to McKenzie Road access
- Newhaven - From Phillip Island Bridge 200 metres towards Cape Woolamai
- Ventnor – Existing location with removal of time restrictions

In each location the longest off-leash area was the preferred location.

Council received 187 written comments as part of the process, most of which were included on hard copy surveys. Council also received a number of detailed written submissions.

Key themes of the comments supporting off-leash areas included:

- General support for provision of suitably designated off-leash beach areas;
- A need for more off-leash beach areas in San Remo and Phillip Island;
- Longer time-frames when dogs can be walked off-leash on designated beaches
- Larger off-leash areas; and
- More options for dog owners to use beaches on Phillip Island and San Remo during the summer.

The Off-Leash Cowes/Cape Woolamai Group provided a submission supporting off-leash areas on Phillip Island. They are seeking two more areas where dogs can be walked off-leash on the beach on Phillip Island. They would like to see changes made to the dates/times when dogs are allowed on beaches, similar to Inverloch's restrictions, providing more access for dogs. Their submission identified they do not support dogs being off-leash near Hooded Plover nesting areas.

Key themes of the comments opposing off-leash areas included:

- Dogs should not be allowed off-leash on any beach in Bass Coast due to the impact on native wildlife, in particular Hooded Plovers at Cleeland Bight and Ventnor;
- Safety concerns, due to dogs interacting with people on 'swimming' beaches;
- A need to improve enforcement of regulations; and
- A need for a fenced off-leash area on the Island.

Birdlife Bass Coast's submission identified concerns in relation to off-leash dog areas having a negative impact on the welfare of the coastal birds on Phillip Island.

Phillip Island Conservation Society's submission did not support the provision of more off-leash dog beaches on Phillip Island. They recommended that aside from the current off-leash area at Ventnor, all other Council-managed beaches should be on-leash beaches. They also recommended that further consideration be given to creating inland off-leash areas.

San Remo

Currently in San Remo, dogs are allowed on-leash on the beach from 1 December to 30 April, except between 10.00am and 6.00pm when no dogs are allowed. 57% or 472 respondents did not support these current regulations. More than 85% or 723 of respondents supported a designated off-leash beach in San Remo and 703 respondents supported Foots Beach as the location (with time and date regulations).

Cape Woolamai

Over 85% or 949 respondents indicated they would support a designated off-leash beach in Cleeland Bight in line with current dog regulations. Seaspray Avenue access track, 520 metres north to Cleeland Road access track, was the most popular option for an off-leash beach area in Cleeland Bight with 64% or 651 respondents. Palm Beach Avenue access track, 350m south to Southport Avenue access track, was the next most popular with support from 22% or 232 of respondents; Seaspray Avenue access track, 170 metres north to Grofam Court access track, was the least popular, supported by 13% or 134 of responders.

Council received a submission from Bird Life Bass Coast identifying significant concerns in relation to off-leash dog areas having a negative impact on Hooded Plover nesting areas and on other shore birds that use the rock platforms in Cape Woolamai for feeding. Birdlife Bass Coast's submission recommends that any off-leash area in Cape Woolamai should have no rock platforms.

Newhaven

85% or 1,371 of respondents would support a designated off-leash beach in Newhaven in line with current dog regulations. The preferred off-leash beach option for Newhaven is from Phillip Island Bridge, 200m towards Cape Woolamai, with 86% or 1,284 respondents supporting this location.

Birdlife Bass Coast's submission identified potential impacts by off-leash dogs on Hooded Plovers and also shore birds that use the rock platforms in Newhaven and Cleeland Bight for feeding. They did not support an off-leash area in Newhaven.

Cowes West

Over 85% or 1,350 respondents indicated they would support a designated off-leash beach in Cowes West in line with current dog regulations. Of the two options presented, the Yacht Club access track to 340m McKenzie Road access track, was the preferred option with 84% or 1,225 respondents.

Ventnor

69% or 1,132 of respondents would support a designated off-leash beach in Ventnor, being available through the year with no time restrictions. 20% of respondents would like no change to times and 11% do not want it to continue as an off-leash area. Birdlife Bass Coast did not support the Ventnor off-leash area being 24/7.

Hooded Plovers

The Hooded Plover is a vulnerable species in Australia and endangered in Victoria. Hooded Plovers nest on many of the Bass Coast beaches from August to March each year. Council works together with Parks Victoria, Phillip Island Nature Parks and the community volunteer groups Friends of the Hooded Plover and Hooded Plover Watch to help protect the birds.

The Bass Coast and Phillip Island Hooded Plover Strategy 2016 was adopted by Council and seeks to find balanced and sustainable public access to beaches during Hooded Plover breeding season, while also increasing the protection of Hooded Plover habitat. Hooded Plovers and known nesting spots were taken in to consideration when identifying potential locations for off-leash areas.

This year, for the first time in several years, Hooded Plovers nested on Cleeland Bight, in between the Cleeland Road access track and the end of the proposed off-leash areas in Newhaven. The chicks were unsuccessful. Hooded Plovers also nested in the off-leash beach area in Ventnor for a number of days before moving back to their usual nesting spot in Elizabeth Cove, Ventnor. One of the chicks fledged at this site.