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SA20/80

Arguments have been put forward for rights. In this case, the right to have dogs on Narrawallee Beach, both with or without a leash.

With rights must come responsibilities.

Council had a trial. An area was defined. The southern end was removed and a clear area from Victor Ave steps to the off shore island was to be the only area to take dogs on Narrawallee Beach. For those unable to walk down the steps, beach entry could be from the parking area and bushland track at Matron Porter Drive Reserve, opposite Bangalow St, Narrawallee.

Dogs were prohibited north of the island as that is a bird sanctuary. Dogs were prohibited south of Victor Ave steps as that is the main swimming area.

Hence the dog owners had the right to use a section of beach at all times and the same section off-leash after 6pm. Alas, the rights were not coupled with responsibilities.

Dogs have been off leash at all times. Council spent ratepayers' money on signage then new signage, then more new but different signage, as Council varied rules.

The last variation occurred in December 2019 with no consultation with the entire community. It's believed some meetings were conducted with a very small section of the community that was demanding access from Surfers Ave. This was agreed to at a Council meeting last December as a trial. Dogs could enter on leash by walking down the track and then keeping at the rear of the beach with an access space of ten metres. Ten metres! Even a footpath isn't as wide!

Did that appease the agitating group? With that right, was there the responsibility of following the rules? It doesn't appear so. Were your Council rules obeyed? No! Were the signs followed? No! Footprints on the sand were clear evidence of failure to keep the responsibility.

The issue of dogs off-leash on Narrawallee Beach is not a matter of numbers. It's a matter of safety. All people have the right to feel physically and emotionally safe and to actually be safe. It's a fact that many people have avoided going to Narrawallee Beach after 6 o'clock because of dogs off-leash. That was a wonderful time to stroll along the water's edge with the family after the evening meal. We strolled till dark, about 8.15pm - 8.30pm in summer. I eliminated that tradition and chose not to go, for fear of meeting dogs off leash.

Now Council changed that summer time from 6pm to 4pm, even though the beach has surf patrol until 5pm.

In the peak holiday season, the southern end of Narrawallee is crowded. It should be crowded, as it's the area where the surf patrol is and the flags are set up. "Swim between the flags!" From the water's edge to the rear of the beach, there are people seated on the sand, on towels, on chairs, strolling, standing and appreciating the beauty. Umbrellas are set up as well as other sun shelters. To create a 10m wide strip would definitely affect the amenity of the recreational area. The beach wasn't crowded last summer as we all know

due to the bushfire threat. However, it normally is filled with people. Informal cricket is played and children sit and play with balls or dig the sand. If people are seated in that rear area, especially in the afternoon when there is some shade, dogs would be walked through groups of people. However, there were many dog owners who ignored that rule and simply walked down the southern steps and straight through the patrolled area, some with dogs off-leash. Who has priority? A vocal, demanding group who want dogs on the beach, or the majority of the people, many of whom also own dogs but would not consider taking them to the beach? Who has rights and who demonstrates responsibilities?

I loved the two working dogs I minded. The enclosed yard gave them plenty of space for running freely. They were taken for walks but never to the beach. I don't believe they were psychologically affected by not having the experience of jumping on others unawares, scratching someone's bare limbs, endeavouring to snatch a ball from a child or shaking a wet body over a walker

Some dogs are driven to the beach. These could be taken to Victor Ave or the reserve, rather than parking in Surfers Ave. Dogs could be walked from Tallwood Ave left into Surfers Ave and walked around the the Victor Ave steps. From Tallwood Ave down the hill in Surfers Ave, most of the properties numbered 9 - 31 appear not to have permanent residents. Dogs could also be driven to Collers Beach or the Northern Harbour Beach or other off-lash areas.

Dogs could be banned from any beach that is patrolled at any time in the year.

Council rules state dogs "must be under the control of a competent handler at all times." I don't believe the dog is under control if the owner is swimming or seated at a distance from where the dog is running. The former Mayor, Clr Gash endorsed this when she stated, "It was imperative that dog owners maintained control of their pets at all times." That is their responsibility.

Your Council rules state that "Dogs are prohibited in the following places throughout the Shoalhaven (whether or not they are leashed or otherwise controlled):

- *Children's play areas* (meaning any public place, or part of a public place, that is within 10 metres of any playing apparatus provided in that public place or part for the use of children)."

This means no dog should be in the vicinity of the children's playground at the northern end of Matron Porter Drive. No dog should be on the path that runs beside the playground to Normandy St. No dog should be in the bbq area. Regularly, dogs are seen both on leash and off leash in this region.

The former Mayor also said, "It is extremely important that dogs in off-leash areas do not harass an individual."

Many people have felt harassed when dogs have come near them. While I was strolling recently, two dogs seated on the beach stood and approached me. Two men were in the water. One came out and held up his hand in a stop signal. I had to stop, yet the man made no attempt to hold the dogs or put on a leash. I simply turned and walked south. I had been harassed and my enjoyment of the beach was not only interrupted, but curtailed.

The former Mayor also proclaimed, "It is vitally important that these sorts of facilities, do not interrupt the wider community from enjoying the beach."

That is exactly what has happened at Narrawallee. The wider community's enjoyment has been interrupted. Various people have stated they no longer stroll along Narrawallee Beach. I no longer go in the evening and I'm wary about going alone in the day. I don't want to have a repeat of Bawley Point, Collingwood and other places where people have been killed, companion dog killed and others left with injuries.

Who has benefitted from the trial? Has it been the majority of Narrawallee beach users? No! The majority go to the beach without dogs. Benefits for the majority have been eradicated.

I am not opposed to dogs. I am opposed to dogs being where they shouldn't be. I'm opposed to dogs not being under control. I'm opposed to further concessions being given to those who haven't bothered to follow the current Council regulations, your regulations. I'm opposed to those given rights but haven't taken responsibilities.

Yes, dog owners have rights and many need to be educated to comply with Council rules and so keep those rights. Failure to implement responsibility with rights is a reason for removing rights.

The issue of dogs off-leash on Narrawallee Beach is not a matter of numbers. It's a matter of safety. All people have the right to feel physically and emotionally safe and to actually be safe. Council has a duty of care to facilitate this at Narrawallee.