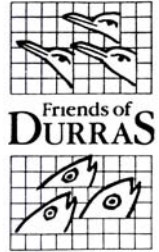


FRIENDS OF DURRAS

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The General Manager
PO Box 99
MORUYA 2537.

RE: Submission to Council on the Draft Companion Animals Policy and Code of Practice

SUMMARY

The Friends of Durras organisation supports the aims and contents of the Draft Companion Animals Policy and Code of Practice as these apply to access to beaches and other areas in South Durras and the surrounding National Park. In summary:

- **dogs are to continue to be prohibited at all times from access to Cookies Beach, South Durras and from the north of the Lakeside Caravan Park to the National Park;**
- **dogs are to continue to be allowed off-leash access at stipulated times to Main Beach, South Durras, in the area falling between 100 metres north of the Durras Drive bridge and the Lakeside Caravan Park; and**
- **dogs are to be prohibited access to National Parks at all times.**

We request that, in Section 8: Dog Exercise Areas: Prohibited Areas of the policy, which identifies areas prohibited to dogs by legislation, it is specifically noted that dogs are prohibited from entering Murramarang National Park, and that dogs are excluded by legislation from Mill Beach, which falls within Murramarang National Park.

Although Main Beach, South Durras, is not nominated for 24 hour unleashed dog access during the 'off-season' (1 May – 31 October) in the draft policy and code of practice, we have no objection to extending 24 hour unleashed access during this period to the Main Beach area defined above.

Friends of Durras commends all education initiatives proposed and undertaken by the Eurobodalla Shire Council, and offers its support in these endeavours where appropriate. Friends of Durras also commends and encourages Eurobodalla Shire Council Rangers in their efforts to police Shire rules and regulations in relation to dog access and dog behaviour generally.

SUPPORTING DETAIL

1. Continued prohibition of dogs from Cookies Beach, South Durras.

Cookies Beach is a safe, popular beach and is used throughout the year for recreational purposes. There would be a very strong local and visitor reaction to any proposition that the beach be opened to dogs, leashed or unleashed, at any time of the year. About 18 months ago the potential for locals to use the beach for walking their dogs during winter was raised in a local progress association meeting, and this suggestion attracted an extraordinarily negative response from members both of this association and of the Friends of Durras. It was argued that (a) Main Beach provides an generous area for exercising dogs and that Durras residents and visitors are well catered for in this respect, and (b) Cookies Beach must be retained as a dog free area for the following reasons:

- (i) *safety of users and general amenity* - Cookies Beach is very popular, both among people wanting a safe swimming area and peaceful beach outing generally, and with families with (young) children in particular. Potential health and safety dangers associated with dog access, such as dog attacks, exposure of children to dog faeces and risk of infection, etc, and potential nuisance/disruption of ambience generally, should be avoided;
- (ii) *environmental protection* - Land Care has undertaken comprehensive sand dune restoration work along Cookies Beach, and dogs playing and digging among the dunes would put this under threat; and
- (iii) *protection of wildlife* - Cookies Beach attracts a variety of wildlife, particularly kangaroos, which come down to the beach in the early morning and then withdraw to doze in the grassy 'barbeque area' at the southern end of the beach. These animals are very popular with all visitors (local and non-resident) to the beach, and are an integral part of the Durras experience. Additionally, several bird and animal species inhabit the wetlands situated immediately behind the Cookies Beach area. All such wildlife would be potentially put at risk if dogs were to be allowed access to the beach.

Furthermore, Friends of Durras note that the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service strongly recommend that dogs be prohibited from access to beaches adjoining National Parks, to avoid potential 'drift' of dogs into these conservation areas. Our organisation fully supports this recommendation as further reason for retaining the Cookies Beach 'dog free' status (please also see point 3 below).

2. Prohibition of dogs from the area north of the Lakesea Caravan Park.

The area north of the Lakesea Caravan Park, taking in the Durras Lake entrance and surrounding dunes and associated vegetation, is well-established as prime shorebird habitat. It is an important area for ground nesting shorebirds, for example the Hooded Plover, which with only 46 individuals left in NSW is listed as critically endangered; the Pied Oystercatcher, which is listed as a threatened species; the Red Capped Plover and the Double Banded Plover. The Double Banded Plover is Australia's only east-west migratory wading shorebird; it breeds in New Zealand arrives in NSW during our winter to feed and build up fat reserves. This latter bird species is a good example of why it is important to maintain an all-year round 'dogs prohibited' policy in this area.

In past years Friends of Durras has cooperated with local rangers and the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service to ensure that nesting areas are clearly signposted, monitored and otherwise protected to the extent possible. Dogs pose a major potential threat to breeding pairs, and it is therefore very important that the policy of excluding dogs from the area north of the Lakesea Caravan Park be retained.

3. Specific identification of Murramarang Park and Mill Beach as 'no go' zones for dogs.

It is suggested that these areas be specifically identified as dog exclusion zones in the policy and code of practice in the same way that some of the other 'prohibited areas' are identified, in order that there is perfect clarity on this matter. A number of people are still taking their dogs into the Murramarang National Park and claiming ignorance of the fact that they are not allowed to do so. Clearly, inclusion of the information regarding the prohibition of dog access to Murramarang National Park will not change this irresponsible behaviour on its own, but it is one further step in removing excuses for such breaches of National Parks legislation.

4. Twenty four hour access to the dog exercise area of Main Beach, South Durras, during the 'off season' months

There is very little recreational use of Main Beach, South Durras, by locals or visitors during the May to October period for purposes other than exercising dogs. Friends of Durras is unaware of any problems arising from current practice. Dog owners are behaving responsibly, and there is no reason to deny them the option of exercising their pets on the beach during the warmer parts of the day throughout the colder months of the year. We would therefore support 24 hour unleashed dog access to Main Beach during the 'off-season', even though Main Beach has not been identified for this purpose in the draft policy and code of practice

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Draft Companion Animals Policy and Code of Practice. Friends of Durras would be happy to supply further information on any of the points above upon request.

Yours sincerely

Geoffrey Bartram
Convenor
Friends of Durras

28 May 2006