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**SUBMISSION FROM C4**

**ON PROPOSED DOG OFF-LEASH AREAS IN MISSION BEACH**

Cassowary Coast Regional Council (CCRC) is proposing two off-leash dog areas in Mission Beach, one in South Mission and one in North Mission.

The proposal begins: “Our favourite four-legged friends may soon have a new way to exercise with a community survey on proposed Dog Off Leash Areas (DOLA) open now. This could be good news for dog owners with six sites proposed by Council with the opportunity of four (or more) being trialled, based on feedback provided by the community. This consultation is being undertaken in response to increasing requests by local residents to have a dog off-leash area in the Cassowary Coast area.”

The wording in the survey that residents are requested to fill in seems to assume that the respondent owns one or more dogs and wants them to run free, with little acknowledgement of the rights of other beach users (whether human or bird) to not be chased, bounced on, scratched, or otherwise disturbed.

C4 accepts that the beach users in South Mission may enjoy these dog activities but the proposed area in North Mission is not acceptable, due to resident beach-nesting birds. Birds and other beach-using fauna cannot speak for themselves not read signs about beach use.

The area around the Porters Creek mouth is much used by Red-capped plovers, Beach stone-curlews and other shorebirds for feeding, resting and nesting. Some are migratory, but the Red-capped plovers are not and are regularly found there. Red-capped plovers can breed on the beach any time from July to April but always depend upon beaches and wetlands for feeding and resting areas.

Beach-nesting birds can be hard to see and the tiny chicks are flightless for about 35 days, so are very vulnerable to being trampled or chased by dogs and people.

It is known that people walking on beaches accompanied by dogs often evoke greater fear/flight responses from beach-using birds than for people alone (see Maguire 2018, attached). Dogs are probably seen by these birds as much more of a threat than people, as dogs are more likely to catch and kill them or their chicks.

It has been shown that “no dog” areas are the most effective in protecting all shorebirds, much more so than “dogs on leash” areas, mostly due to higher compliance by dog owners. The observed low compliance with leashing regulations across many studies suggests this is an ineffective approach. A good part of the solution is to ensure provision of alternative off-leash areas to keep dog-walkers away from environmentally sensitive areas.

We propose an entirely dog-free area from Miter Street past Porters Creek mouth to where Koda Street does an easterly turn at the end of the reserve. There is a creek line that follows the beach dune south to about where Koda Street joins Kwila Street – plovers will nest on the dune as well as the beach. This dog-free area will help protect the Porters Creek area from wandering dogs and will provide safety to these beach-dependent birds.

To off-set this C4 proposes that CCRC replaces this site with a large fenced dog exercise area elsewhere. There must be some suitable council property that could be used. Towns such as Cairns and Townsville allow off-lead dog exercise areas on football ovals etc, with the proviso that owners pick up their dogs’ leavings (as is not always done with dogs on beaches).

Surely CCRC wishes to protect our beach-nesting birds, that have nowhere else to go – but dogs and their owners do.