

ITEM 8.6	REVIEW OF THE ADEQUACY OF UNLEASHED DOG EXERCISE AREAS
REPORTING MANAGER	EXECUTIVE MANAGER PARKS & RESERVES
TRIM FILE REF	2017/067815
ATTACHMENTS	1 Unleashed Dog Exercise Areas (UDEA) Map 2 Key User Group - Manly Dogs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PURPOSE

To report to Council on the adequacy of the existing Unleashed Dog Exercise Areas (UDEAs) within the new Northern Beaches Council Local Government Area (LGA).

SUMMARY

Council resolved on 9 August 2016 to review the adequacy of current off leash areas on the Northern Beaches and that it be reported back to Council.

This review of the adequacy of the Unleashed Dog Exercise Areas within the Northern Beaches Council has now been undertaken and is presented for Council's consideration.

The review identifies that the Northern Beaches has a higher supply of UDEAs in comparison to four (4) similar sized LGAs in Sydney and that residents are able to access a UDEA with no more than 10 minutes driving time. This indicates that the availability and provision of current UDEAs in the Northern Beaches LGA is adequate. As part of the review major user groups of these areas have been interviewed and comments sought. It is considered that there are opportunities for improving Council's management of UDEAs and these recommendations are outlined in the report.

RECOMMENDATION OF DEPUTY GENERAL MANAGER ENVIRONMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE

That Council:

- A. Endorse the review of the adequacy of current off leash dog areas which found the supply of Unleashed Dog Exercise Areas (UDEA) within the Northern Beaches LGA is adequate as there is a higher supply in comparison to four (4) similar sized LGAs in Sydney and residents are able to access a UDEA with no more than 10 minutes driving time.
- B. Approve increased funding for capital and management improvements to UDEAs across the LGA with the allocation of \$100,000 per year for the next four years in Council's annual budget for improvements as outlined in this report.
- C. Approve the preparation of an integrated policy for UDEAs and dog management for the Northern Beaches LGA, requiring the new policy address:
 - a. the issue of the current trial (UDEAs) as discussed in this report
 - b. the issues discussed in this report including Mackerel Beach, McCarrs Creek Reserve, Lagoon Park and the management of professional dog walkers.
- D. Endorse the development and implementation of dog education and training programs by Council as part of this process.

REPORT

BACKGROUND

Council resolved on 9 August 2016 to review the adequacy of current off leash areas on the Northern Beaches and that it be reported back to Council.

Statistics from the 2016 Companion Animals Register show that there are approximately 43,000 registered dogs in the Northern Beaches LGA. It is unclear how many homes have dogs as many homes may have more than one dog.

Health Benefits of Dog Ownership

Research has shown that pets are good for your health (Pets in the City 2010). Owning a dog increases the likelihood of achieving recommended levels of exercise by seven times. People walking a dog are more likely to have conversations with other people whilst children with pets have been shown to have higher self-esteem and are less likely to be overweight (Pets in the City 2010).

The benefit of pets in terms of companionship for the elderly has also long been recognised. Having well designed and maintained dog exercise areas provides dogs and their owners with opportunities to exercise and socialise. Given the overall positive benefit to people and community, it is important council support pet ownership in a responsible and positive way.

As part of the process for the preparation of the Public Space & Recreation Strategy 2014 for the former Pittwater Council, a survey was sent to residents to gain input on the desired outcomes in specific recreational areas. Dog walking was ranked 13 in the participation list with many respondents requesting that existing dog exercise areas be made more aesthetically pleasing in a comfortable setting so that their dogs can better integrate into their lifestyle.

Current Supply of Unleashed Dog Exercise Areas

Currently Council provides 26 Unleashed Dog Exercise Areas (refer to Attachment 1) in the three regions as follows:

1. Hitchcock Park, Careel Bay
2. Dearin Reserve, Newport
3. South Mona Vale Headland (Robert Dunn Reserve)
4. Progress Park, Narrabeen
5. Rowland Reserve, Bayview
6. Mackerel Beach Reserve – from the public wharf north to the boundary with the National Park between sunrise to 9.30am and 5:00pm to sunset
7. McCarrs Creek Reserve, McCarrs Creek – trial unleashed dog area allowing for unleashed dogs at the western end of the reserve on weekdays (excluding public holidays) only
8. Deep Creek Reserve – Unleashed Dog Training Area
9. Forestville Memorial Playing Fields
10. Currie Road, Forestville (near Forestville Park)
11. Beverley Job Reserve, Narrabeena
12. Flora and Ritchie Roberts Reserve, Griffin Road, Curl Curl (Curl Curl Lagoon)
13. John Fisher Park, Adams Street, Curl Curl
14. Hinkler Park, Pittwater Road, Queenscliff
15. Truman Reserve, Cromer
16. Griffith Park, Long Reef
17. Frenchs Forest Showground, Frenchs Forest
18. LM Graham Reserve, Fairlight
19. Lagoon Park, Queenscliff
20. Manly Cemetery, Fairlight
21. North Harbour Reserve, Condamine Street, Balgowlah

22. Tania Park, Balgowlah Heights
23. Seaforth Oval, Seaforth

There are also three (3) Offleash Exercise Areas with restricted times:

24. Allambie Heights Oval – 12:00am-7:00am daily
25. Beacon Hill Oval – 11:00pm-8:30am weekdays and 11:00pm-7:30am weekends
26. Karl Brown Oval, Terrey Hills – 12:00am-8:30am daily.

The former Manly Council also determined that dogs would be permitted off leash in most other reserves. This was not the case in the former Pittwater and Warringah Councils. As such in the interests of consistency across the Northern Beaches LGA it is recommended that a new integrated policy for UDEAs and Dog Management be prepared.

Comparison of the provision of UDEAs compared to similar LGAs

To inform the analysis of the adequacy of current UDEAs, the number for the Northern Beaches was compared to that from four other similar sized Council areas.

The table below demonstrates that the Northern Beaches has the highest number of UDEAs per square kilometer. Based on a population/number of unleashed dog areas, Council is second to the Central Coast Local Government Area with 10,000 people per unleashed dog exercise area.

LGA	Size (km²)	Population	No. Unleashed Areas*	Population/ per unleashed area	LGA land area (km²) per unleashed area
Northern Beaches	254	260,000	26	10,000	9.7
Blacktown	250	340,000	12	28,330	20.8
Central Coast	1681	330,000	59	5,590	28.5
Hornsby	462	170,000	6	28,330	77
Sutherland	370	210,000	5	42,000	74

* Includes shared areas

Travel time by car to UDEAs

The time taken to travel to a UDEA for residents is a key consideration of the adequacy of current areas. A desktop review of the locations of UDEAs revealed that the maximum driving time for any Northern Beaches Council resident to access their closest UDEA is no greater than 10 minutes.

Feedback from key user groups

Council has contacted key user groups in all the former council areas. These key user groups included:

- Representatives from Manly Dogs, Pittwater Unleashed, Manly and District Dog Obedience and Training Club
- A spokesperson on behalf of the dog owners using Frenchs Forest Showground
- Residents adjoining Hinkler Park
- Manly Warringah Football Association
- Warringah Junior Rugby Union

- Council's Environmental Compliance and Natural Environment and Climate Change teams.

A summary of comments from key user groups is as follows:

- **Manly Dogs** (refer to Attachment 2 for more details)
 - Dog owners felt disenfranchised
 - Maintenance of UDEA was lacking
 - Additional signage required at all UDEAs
 - Better management of professional dog walkers needed.
- **Pittwater Unleashed**
 - Rowland Reserve Bayview was a great location but was lacking in maintenance
 - Hitchcock Park is the only park north of Newport and is full of ticks, trees need to be thinned and bare areas returfed
 - Council should identify less popular reserves that could be used as UDEAs
 - Need to improve the relationship between dog owners and Council Rangers
 - Council needs to implement a dog education policy.
- **Manly and District Dog Obedience and Training**
 - Dog owners not picking up dog faeces and allowing their dogs to interrupt dog training classes
 - Club would like to install training enclosures at their cost
 - Dog owners believe that Deep Creek Reserve is an UDEA where as it should only be for dog training
 - Would like to progress their Development Application to carry out renovations to their clubhouse but are having difficulty progressing due to flooding issues
 - Request improved signage.
- **Frenchs Forest Showground**
 - Dog on dog attacks
 - Dog owners not understanding their responsibility
 - Requested improved educational and advisory signage
 - Allocated area for small dogs
 - Request a community noticeboard
 - Increased Ranger presence to monitor dog behaviour
 - Professional dog walkers need to be managed by council where they are either issued a permit to control numbers and maybe only be permitted to operate within certain hours.

- **Local Residents Hinkler Park**
 - High use by professional dog walkers causing excessive noise
- **Manly Warringah Football Association**
 - Concerned that the following sports fields are currently used as UDEAs under a trial basis: Terrey Hills Oval, Allambie Oval, Beacon Hill Oval, Truman Reserve, Tania Park and Seaforth Oval. Request that this arrangement be formalised
 - Shared usage of sports fields, as UDEAs outside MWFA allocation times is not a preferred option for any future sports fields due to the health concerns
 - Strongly object to future sports fields being shared as UDEAs
 - Unleashed dogs are a problem at Cromer Park.
- **Warringah Junior Rugby Union**
 - Unleashed dogs are a problem at North Narrabeen Reserve and Porter Reserve Newport
- **Council's Environmental Compliance Unit**
 - Presence of unleashed dogs in areas outside of designated UDEAs is an ongoing problem
 - 167 reported dog attacks across the Northern Beaches Council LGA in the last 12 months, of these, 28 were in "off-leash" areas. It should be noted that all reported attacks are not necessarily a 'biting' incident and not necessarily on humans.
- **Council's Natural Environment and Climate Change Unit**
 - Where natural bushland areas (including National Parks) adjoin areas designated for unleashed dog exercising, there is a significant potential for adverse impact
 - The impact of free roaming dogs on native wildlife, particularly ground fauna such as wallabies and bandicoots, is significant and entry of dogs into bushland areas should be discouraged
 - The boundaries need to be well defined (clear signage), fenced where possible
 - Unleashed dogs are known to disturb wading birds and waterfowl even at significant distance and should be discouraged where there is known habitat and roosts
 - There have been complaints from residents at Mackerel Beach about dogs free roaming within the National Park lands as the boundary is unclear. Moving the dog exercise area to the south of the jetty would be desirable
 - At McCarrs Creek, the UDEA runs to the western end of the reserve which abuts the National Park. It would be desirable to move the dogs to the east and make the western end of the reserve 'dog free'.

Audit of the standard of existing facilities at UDEAs

UDEAs across the Northern Beaches Council LGA are visited by thousands of people each week. Facilities at the UDEAs across the region vary greatly with some being fully fenced with shade, seating, taps/water, bins, dog bag dispensers, toilets, signage and adequate parking, whilst others are lacking in basic facilities.

As a basic principle, if Council determines that a reserve is to be declared as UDEA, then it is considered the basic facilities should be provided at a minimum.

Fencing is a major priority in many areas, particularly if the 'dog park' is located adjacent to a busy road. In some areas, playing fields are also in close proximity such as Griffith Park, Long Reef and Hitchcock Park, Careel Bay which should be fenced to prevent unleashed dogs from entering these areas. In others, there are existing playgrounds within the UDEA. Under State legislation, dogs are prohibited from coming within 10 metres of playgrounds and these areas should be a priority for fencing.

Fencing priorities (lineal metres required) are as follows:

Manly Cemetery	Segregate UDEA from playground (65m)
North Harbour Reserve	Segregate UDEA from playground Fence along Condamine Street (75m)
Seaforth Oval	Segregate UDEA from playground (65m)
Careel Bay (Etival Street)	Fence along Etival Street and also on the south side to segregate dog area from playing fields and road
Progress Park, Narrabeen	Fence along Garden Street to prevent dogs straying onto busy road
Rowland Reserve, Bayview	Fence between dog park and adjoining carpark area which carries heavy traffic at times
Griffith Park	Fence between dog area and playing fields Fence along frontage to Pittwater Road

Signage at most of Council's UDEAs is inadequate, unclear and/or poorly positioned. An audit of existing signage should be undertaken and new signage installed as soon as possible.

A site specific issue has been identified following complaints concerning dog usage of Manly Lagoon at Queenscliff Bridge. The boundary between the two former Councils at this location was the centre of the Lagoon. The southern bank of the Lagoon formed 'Manly Lagoon Park' which was a designated UDEA. Dogs enter the water at this location and encroach onto the northern bank and private properties at this location. There is also a playground, barbecue facilities and a cycleway at this location. All of these uses conflict with the appropriateness of a UDEA in this location. This requires further investigation.

Health Impacts through Shared Use

A significant issue is the potential health impacts on residents from shared use of UDEAs. The former Pittwater Council did not allow unleashed dogs on playing fields for health reasons (Report to Council 'Careel Bay Playing Fields – Shared Usage for Unleashed Dog Exercise' – 28 February 2000.).

The report quoted a paper titled 'Guidelines for Designing and Managing Public Open Space' by Virginia Jackson and was referred to Council by the then Minister for Local Government.

In part, the paper summarises the health risk related to dog faeces as follows:

"Roundworm is a prominent health concern in relation to dogs' faeces. Roundworm eggs are passed to the outside environment in the dog's faeces. The eggs take two weeks to a month

to become infective so there is no risk from fresh faeces. However the eggs may remain infective in the soil for years.

Humans do not develop adult roundworms, however migration of larvae through the tissues and organs can cause disease. The primary transmission to humans is through contamination of the hands by eggs and subsequent ingestion of the eggs. Direct contact between humans and infected dogs does not play a role in disease transmission.

Young children have the greatest risk of exposure. They may inadvertently eat dirt or grass or touch their mouths with hands contaminated with old dog faeces containing infective roundworm eggs. People in hand activated wheelchairs and active sports players may also be at risk."

Roundworms or ascarids are a common intestinal parasite in dogs and cats. The disease caused by the migration of larval forms of roundworm (*Toxocara* spp) in human organs and tissues is known as Toxocariasis. The disease may take the form of ocular larva migrans (OLM) an eye disease that can cause blindness or visceral larva migrans (VLM) a disease that can affect the body's organs and central nervous system. In most cases, the disease is asymptomatic or mild and is rarely fatal (Benenson, 1995).

When accidentally ingested by humans, the roundworm eggs hatch in the intestines and the infective-stage larvae migrate through the liver to the lungs and other organs and tissues where they produce damage and induce allergic responses. Whilst the parasites cannot replicate in human hosts, viable larvae may remain in human tissues for years. Children's play habits put them at high risk for roundworm infection (CDC, 1996).

Northern Sydney Health advises that Toxocariasis is not a notifiable disease in Australia and its rate of occurrence in the community is difficult to ascertain. The National Centre for Infectious Diseases in Atlanta, Georgia, estimates that 10,000 cases of Toxocariasis occur in humans annually in the United States. A similar rate of prevalence of the disease probably occurs in Australia given the high rate of pet ownership and cultural similarities. Based upon this rate of occurrence, Toxocariasis would not appear to be a significant problem in the general community.

Given that players and spectators, particularly children, are frequently in contact with the soil during games and training, a higher risk of infection does exist for this group of recreational users if the soil is contaminated with roundworm eggs. The risk is directly related to the extent of faecal contamination of the playing fields and their surrounds. Based on the information at hand, there is sufficient doubt about the extent of the risk to warrant further investigation.

Roundworm eggs when passed to the external environment are highly susceptible to UV radiation and desiccation.

A consistent approach needs to be taken across the whole of the Northern Beaches. It would be extremely difficult to rescind unleashed dog access at these designated areas given that they have enjoyed access for many years with no major issues.

That being said, there is a minor risk of infection from roundworms as previously outlined and it is therefore recommended that no further playing fields should be made available as UDEAs.

Support for and management of UDEAs

All representatives consulted were in favour of continuing with the practice of Council supplying doggie bags at Council's UDEAs. Methods of stocking the reserves with doggie bags vary across the Council area due to different practices in the former Council areas. Council staff in the south and north supply and volunteers in the central area supply the bags. Problems sometimes occur when volunteers are unavailable and the bins can be left empty. This has a flow on effect as dog owners who do not carry bags with them, are unable to 'pick up' after their dog.

Council supplies bio-degradable bags that are environmentally friendly and also uses bio-degradable bin liners for the collection bins. Pittwater Unleashed believes that all dog owners should be forced to carry 'doggie-bags' with them with non-compliance being a finable offence. Fines to do with dog control however are legislated by State Government, not Council.

Issues have also arisen with professional dog walkers using UDEA to walk/exercise multiple dogs. The issue became such a problem at LM Graham Reserve that former Manly Council resolved to issue permits to professional 'Dog Walkers' and limit the number at LM Graham Reserve to three at any one time.

Council has also received complaints from local residents at Hinkler Park, Queenscliff about over use of the park by 'professionals' and a large increase in noise disturbance as a result of this significant increase in usage.

Issuing permits to professional dog walkers would reduce over-crowding and also assist with control problems. Often professional walkers are not trained in dog behaviour/management, are handling a large number of dogs at any one time and often unfamiliar with the dogs in their care. This makes it particularly difficult for them to manage when they come into an area with a large number of free roaming dogs.

CONSULTATION

Consultation was undertaken with the following:

- Manly Dogs
- Manly and District Dog Obedience Training Club
- Manly Warringah Football Association
- Pittwater Unleashed
- Frenchs Forest Showground Users
- Warringah Junior Rugby Union
- Various internal stakeholders (including the Natural Environment and Climate Change Unit and Environmental Compliance)

FINANCIAL IMPACT

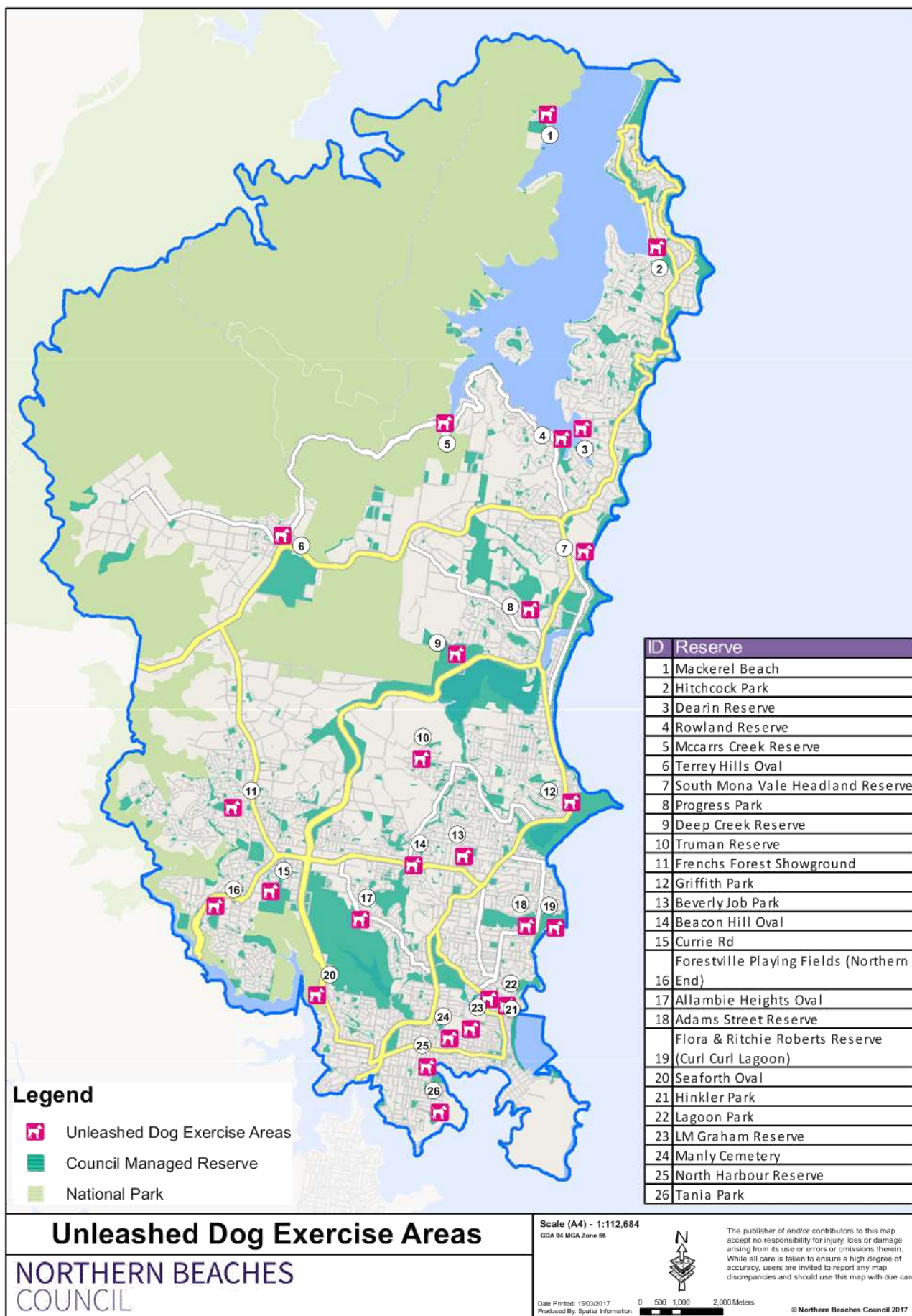
There are a number of issues that are recommended to be resolved in UDEAs to improve the condition and standard as outlined in this report. It is recommended that Council review the current S94 and S94A Development Contribution Plans with the intention to allocate \$100,000 annually for the next four years for improvements and additional maintenance for UDEAs as outlined in this report. It is noted that dog educational programs will have an impact on future budgets.

SOCIAL IMPACT

Dog owners make up a significant proportion of the local population. Provision of good quality, well-managed UDEAs provides these people and their dogs opportunities to both exercise and socialise in pleasant surroundings. In comparison with other LGAs, the provision of UDEAs is high.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Recommendations for reducing the impact of UDEAs on the local environment are contained within this report.



Suggestions from Manly Dogs

- Install noticeboards at all major UDEAs and keep them regularly updated.
- Organise dog trainers to run regular (quarterly) obedience classes for new owners at nominated UDEAs.
- Host an event chaired by a vet and a dog trainer for both dog owners and non-owners to meet and discuss relevant issues and learn about the benefits of responsible dog ownership.
- Discuss with organisations such as 'Dog Rescue' the need to provide compulsory dog training to potential owners BEFORE they adopt their dog.
- Provide a section on Council's website which offers an educational and information hub for dog owners in a positive environment.
- Host regular meetings between Council rangers and dog user groups to discuss problems/issues and develop a strong working relationship between these two parties.
- Provide fenced off small dog only areas in UDEAs to reduce the incidence of dog attacks.
- That professional dog walkers who use the UDEAs should be managed better by Council through the use of a permit system.