

DOGS IN OPEN SPACE STRATEGY 2022

Draft Background Report

February 2022



LAKE
MACQUARIE
CITY

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1 Introduction

This report provides an overview of the background research undertaken to inform the development of the Dogs in Open Space Strategy for Lake Macquarie City Council. It is part of a suite of documents, which together comprise the overall Dogs in Open Space Strategy project.

The documents that will be completed to inform the development of the Dogs in Open Space Strategy are:

- Background Report (this report)
- Community Engagement Report
- Analysis Report

1.1 Purpose of the Dogs in Open Space Strategy

The purpose of the Dogs in Open Space Strategy is to:

Create a 10-year strategic direction that will plan for and enhance the dogs in open space experience for dogs and carers, while balancing the broader use of open space for all Lake Macquarie residents and visitors.

Objectives

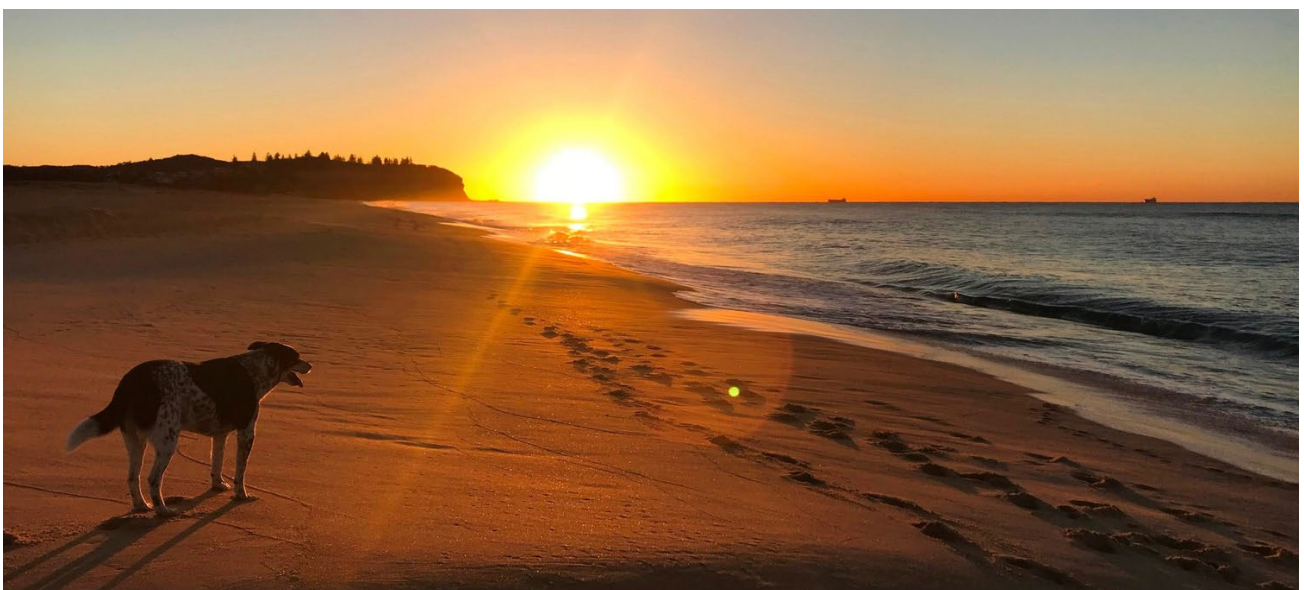
The objectives of the strategy are to:

- Balance the needs for dogs in open space with the needs of the broader community
- Provide a diversity of opportunities for dogs in open space
- Provide off-leash areas that are fit for purpose
- Plan for off-leash areas for existing and future populations
- Ensure environmental and cultural values of open space are retained
- Improve education and regulation for dogs in open space

1.2 Study Scope

The project scope incorporates:

- All Council owned and managed land used as open space
- Dog off-leash areas, on-leash areas and dog prohibited areas within these spaces managed by Council



1.3 Study Approach

The Study approach is:



1.4 Strategy Context and Alignment

The Dogs in Open Space Strategy is one of a number of strategies that underpin Lake Macquarie Council’s Community Strategic Plan. The graphic below illustrates the Dogs in Open Space Strategy within the broader Council context.



1.5 Legislative Framework

Two items of State legislation govern the management of dogs in open spaces in Lake Macquarie.

1.5.1 NSW Companion Animals Act 1998

The Companion Animals Act 1998 provides for the effective and responsible care and management of companion animals. In relation to the provision of Dog Exercise Areas, the Act states that:

A local authority can by order declare a public place to be an off-leash area. Such a declaration can be limited so as to apply during a particular period or periods of the day or to different periods of different days. However, there must at all times be at least one public place in the area of a local authority that is an off-leash area'. [Part 3, Division 1, Section 13 (6)]

Under the Act, dogs are prohibited in the following places (whether or not they are leashed or otherwise controlled):

- 10 metres of any children's play spaces in a public place
- 10 metres of any food preparation or food consumption spaces
- School grounds
- Childcare centres

Under the Act, Councils also have the authority to prohibit dogs from other public spaces including;

- Recreation spaces including sportsfields where organised games are played
- Public bathing spaces (including beach spaces)
- Shopping complexes
- Wildlife protection spaces (such as shorebird nesting habitats on the beaches and rock platforms of the LGA).

1.5.2 NSW National Park and Wildlife Act (1974)

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Act (1974) prohibits dogs from the NSW managed National Parks. The enforcement of this restriction is the responsibility of the NSW Parks and Wildlife Service. The legislation applies to Wallarah National Park, Lake Macquarie State Conservation Area, Watagans National Park, Pulbah Island Nature Reserve, Munmorah State Conservation Area, Awabakal Nature Reserve, Glenrock State Conservation Area in Lake Macquarie.

1.5.3 Lake Macquarie Dogs in Open Space Policy

Council adopted the Dog in Open Space Policy on 28 May 2018. The policy is consistent with the Companion Animals Act (1998) and provides the following key guiding principles:

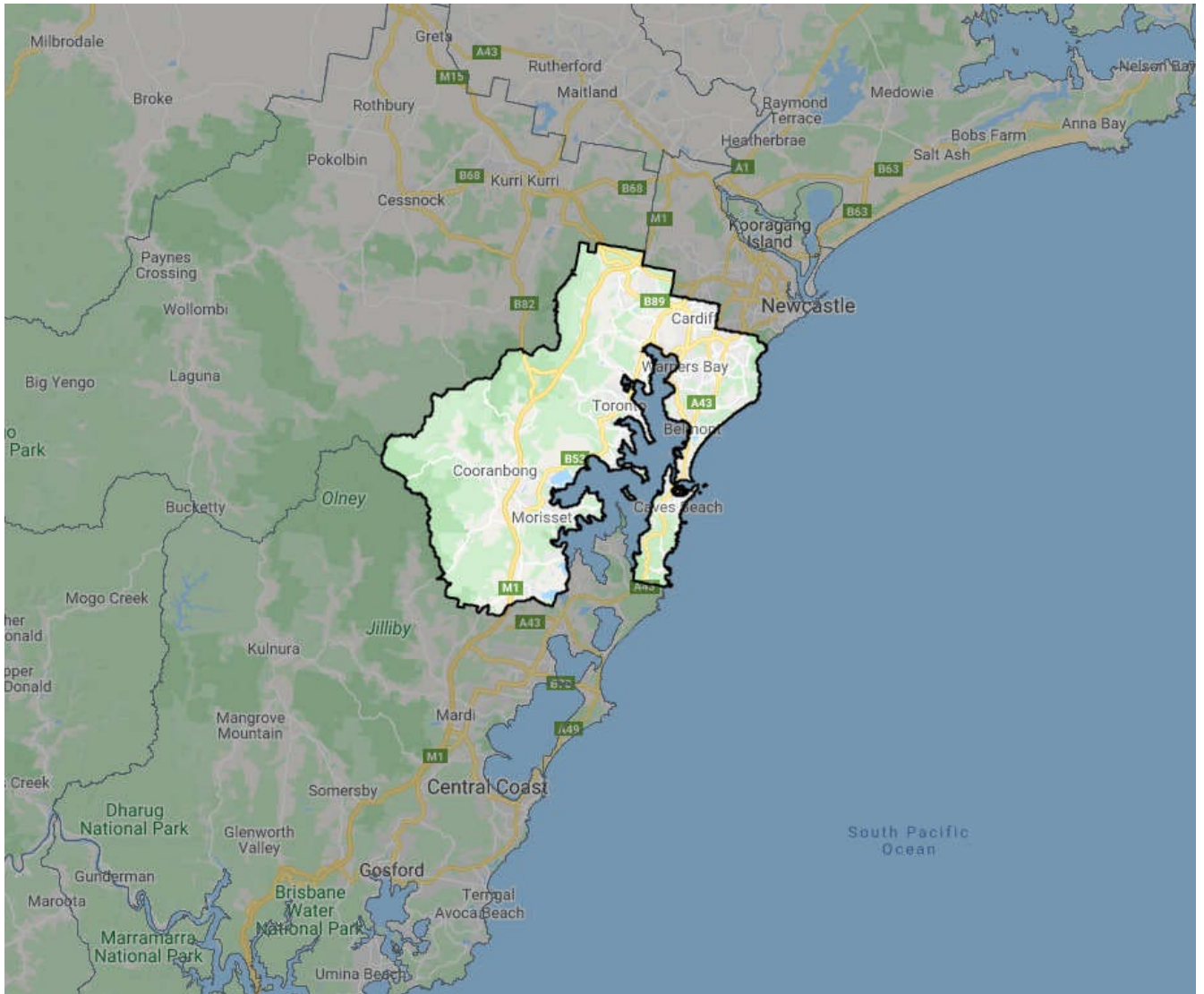
- Dogs are permitted to be exercised on-leash in all open space with the exception of:
 - Open space areas signposted by LMCC as dog exclusion/prohibited areas
 - On a sportsground during use for games or training
 - Within 10m of children's playgrounds
 - Within 10m of food preparation and eating areas
- Provision of new dog exercise areas are not to be located on sportsgrounds that are used for training or competition.
- Existing dog exercise areas located on sportsgrounds, where possible, are to be relocated to an alternate site within 1km of the current location.
- Council will provide signage clearly identifying dog exercise areas and dog prohibited/exclusion areas in open space.
- Dog prohibited/exclusion open space areas can be declared for reasons including, but not limited to, environmental protection of flora and fauna, safety of other users, and repeated complaints of dog nuisance.
- Council will publish a list of dog exercise areas and maps on its website.

2 Lake Macquarie Profile

2.1 Regional Context

The City of Lake Macquarie is located in the Hunter Region of New South Wales. It is approximately a 2-hour drive north of Sydney and around a 20-minute drive south of Newcastle. The City is made up of nine town centres circling the lake including Belmont, Cardiff, Charlestown, Cooranbong, Glendale, Morisset, Swansea, Toronto and Valentine. The largest of these population centres is Charlestown. The LGA is bordered by Newcastle to the North, Maitland to the North-West, Cessnock to the West and the Central Coast to the south.

Figure 1 – Location of Lake Macquarie



2.2 Our People

2.2.1 Population and Growth

As of 2020 there are an estimated 207,775 residents living within the Lake Macquarie Local Government Area. This is an increase of 6.4% from residents in 2010. The following table shows the comparative population growth rates for the surrounding council areas since 2010¹.

Table 1 – Population Growth Figures

Council Area	2010 Population	2020 Population	10 Yr Pop'n Change	10 Yr Growth Rate
Lake Macquarie	195,263	207,775	12,512	6.4%
Central Coast	320,361	345,809	25,448	7.9%
Newcastle	153,483	167,363	13,880	9.0%
Cessnock	51,305	61,256	9,951	19.4%
Maitland	68,561	87,395	18,834	27.5%
Port Stephens	66,447	74,506	8,059	12.1%

Lake Macquarie has experienced lower population growth over the last decade in comparison to surrounding Local Government Areas.

Recent population estimates prepared by REMPLAN indicate that the 2021 population of Lake Macquarie is 208,813².

2.2.2 Age Breakdown

The median age of Lake Macquarie as at the 2016 Census was 42, which compares to 38 for NSW as a whole.

A comparison of the Lake Macquarie age profile compared to NSW for 2016 identifies:

- The largest age group in Lake Macquarie is 50-59 years compared to 30-39 years for NSW
- Lake Macquarie has significantly less 20-39 years compared to NSW
- The Lake Macquarie population is ageing with significantly more people aged 60-79 than NSW
- The 0-19 years were similar in both Lake Macquarie and NSW.

Below is the age profile breakdown estimates from REMPLAN for 2021³.

Table 2 – Lake Macquarie Age Profile Breakdown 2021

Age Cohort	2021 Population	% of Population
0 to 9 years	25,479	12.2%
10 to 19 years	25,384	12.2%
20 to 29 years	23,674	11.3%
30 to 39 years	25,104	12.0%
40 to 49 years	25,609	12.3%
50 to 59 years	25,949	12.4%
60 to 69 years	25,077	12.0%
70 to 79 years	20,223	9.7%
80 to 89 years	9,630	4.6%
90 and over	2,684	1.3%
Total	208,813	100.0%

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated figures retrieved from each Council's website February 2022

² Population Estimates, REMPLAN, 2021 retrieved February 2022

³ Age Profile Breakdown Estimates, REMPLAN, 2021, retrieved February 2022

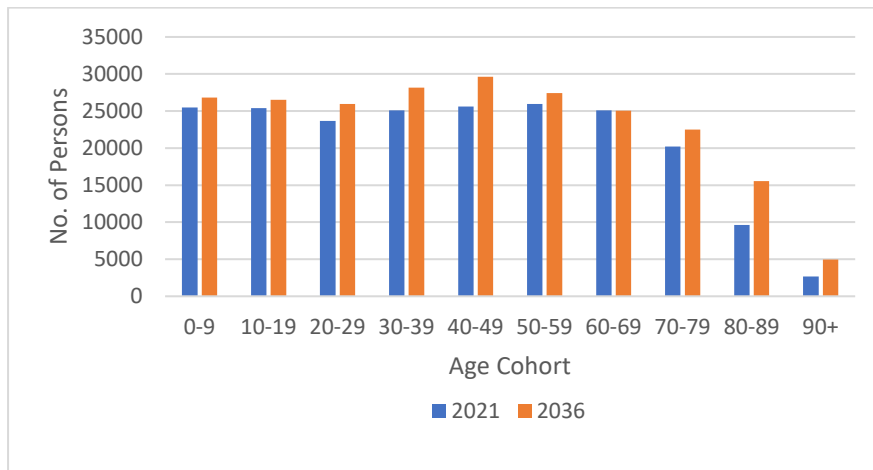
2.2.3 The Next 15 Years

According to REMPLAN population forecasting⁴, by 2036 the Lake Macquarie population is expected to increase to an estimated 232,543 people.

REMPLAN forecasts indicate:

- Between 2021 and 2036 an increase of 23,730 people is expected
- The largest growth is expected in the age cohorts of above 80 years, with the 90+ cohort expected to increase by 85.5% or 2,295 people. The 80-89 age cohort will increase by the most number of people at 5,903 or growth by 61.3%.
- Overall, these forecast estimates reflect the ageing population of Lake Macquarie.

Figure 2 – Age Projections for Lake Macquarie 2021-2036



⁴ REMPLAN Lake Macquarie Forecasting 2021 to 2036, retrieved February 2022

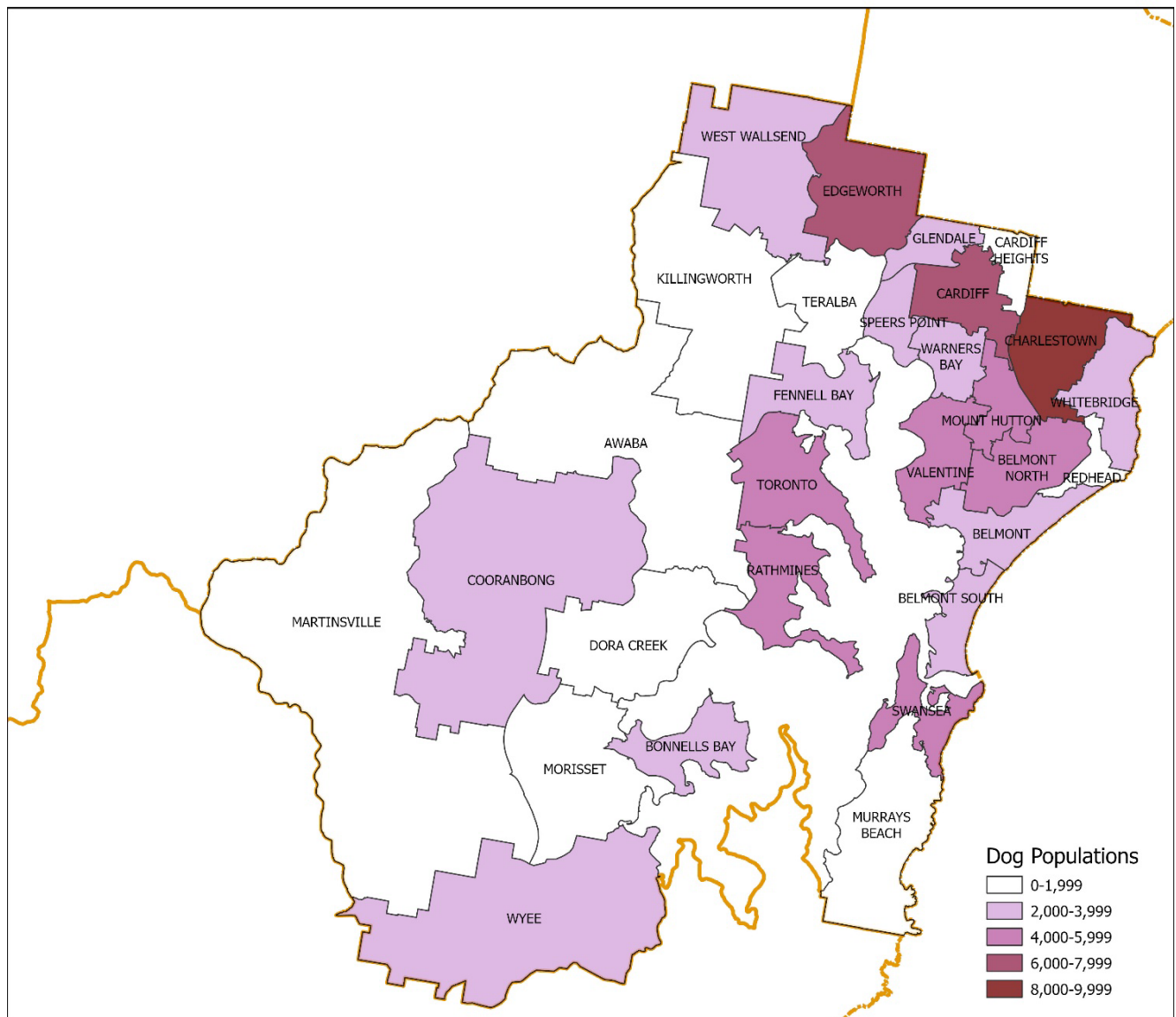
2.3 Our Dogs

2.3.1 Dog Populations

In 2021 Lake Macquarie housed 92,336 registered dogs⁵. With a people population of 208,813, this equates to 0.44 dogs per person. It is believed that there are significantly more than 92,336 dogs actually living in households in Lake Macquarie due to a high number of unregistered dogs that are found during inspections by Council rangers. However, without firm statistics to substantiate this, the official registered dog population figure of 92,336 will be used in this strategy.

The dog population is spread throughout the LGA, and while rural areas tend to have a higher proportion of dogs to people, the concentration of dog populations tends to be in highly urbanised areas. Figure 2 below identifies the dog populations within combined suburbs through heat mapping. The darker the colour, the higher the dog population. Figure 2 highlights that the highest dog populations are located in the combined suburbs of Charlestown (8,852), Edgeworth (6,120), Cardiff (6,064) and Toronto (5,866) with the lowest populations in the suburbs of Martinsville (299), Awaba (475) and Killingworth (641). Merged suburbs have been used to provide comparison of similar land areas, with the exception of rural areas. Table 2 below identifies the actual suburbs contained within each merged suburb.

Figure 3 – Dog Populations by Merged Suburbs 2021



⁵ Lake Macquarie Registered Dog Figures by Suburb, NSW Companion Animal Register, retrieved 27 October 2021

Table 3 – Merged Suburbs

Merged Suburbs Name	Suburbs Included
Morisset	Morisset
Wyee	Wyee, Wyee Point
Bonnells Bay	Bonnells Bay, Yarrowonga Park, Balcolyn, Silverwater, Sunshine, Mirrabooka, Brightwaters, Windermere Park, Morisset Park
Martinsville	Martinsville, Mandalong
Cooranbong	Cooranbong
Dora Creek	Dora Creek, Eraring, Myuna Bay
Rathmines	Rathmines, Fishing Point, Balmoral, Buttaba, Arcadia Vale, Wangi
Awaba	Awaba, Ryhope, Freemans Waterhole
Toronto	Toronto, Carey Bay, Kilaben Bay, Coal Point, Blackalls Park
Fennell Bay	Fennell Bay, Fassifern, Bolton Point, Woodrising, Marmong Point, Booragul
Teralba	Teralba
Killingworth	Killingworth, Wakefield
West Wallsend	West Wallsend, Holmesville, Barnsley, Seahampton
Edgeworth	Edgeworth, Cameron Park
Glendale	Glendale, Argenton
Speers Point	Speers Point, Boolaroo
Warners Bay	Warners Bay, Lakelands
Cardiff	Cardiff, Cardiff South, Macquarie Hills, Hillsborough
Cardiff Heights	Cardiff Heights, Rankin Park, New Lambton Heights, Garden Suburb
Charlestown	Charlestown, Kotara South, Adamstown Heights, Highfields, Kahibah
Whitebridge	Whitebridge, Dudley
Redhead	Redhead
Mount Hutton	Mount Hutton, Windale, Tingara Heights
Valentine	Valentine, Croudace Bay, Eleebana
Belmont North	Belmont North, Floraville, Jewells, Bennetts Green
Belmont	Belmont
Belmont South	Belmont South, Marks Point, Pelican, Little Pelican, Blacksmiths
Swansea	Swansea, Caves Beach
Murrays Beach	Murrays Beach, Pinny Beach, Cams Wharf, Nords Wharf, Catherine Hill Bay, Moonee, Crangan Bay

2.3.2 Dog Breeds

There are a large number of dog breeds in Lake Macquarie. The top five breeds in the 92,336 registered dogs are identified in Table 3 below⁶. These figures include pure breeds and cross breeds. These top five breeds make up 29,450 dogs or almost 32% of the registered dog population.

Table 4 – Dog Breeds in Lake Macquarie

Dog Breed	Number	Size	% of Dog Pop
Maltese	7,599	Small	8.2%
Bull Terrier (Staffordshire)	7,008	Medium	7.6%
Labrador Retriever	5,303	Large	5.7%
Border Collie	4,989	Medium	5.4%
Australian Cattle Dog	4,551	Medium	4.9%

The size of dogs within Lake Macquarie have been broken down into small, medium, and large breeds, according to the weight of dogs. Small breeds make up the highest proportion of registered dogs equating to over 40% of the dog population.

Table 5 – Dog Size in Lake Macquarie

Breed Size	Weight	% of Dog Population
Small	up to 12kg	40.1%
Medium	12kg - 24kg	30.7%
Large	25kg+	29.2%

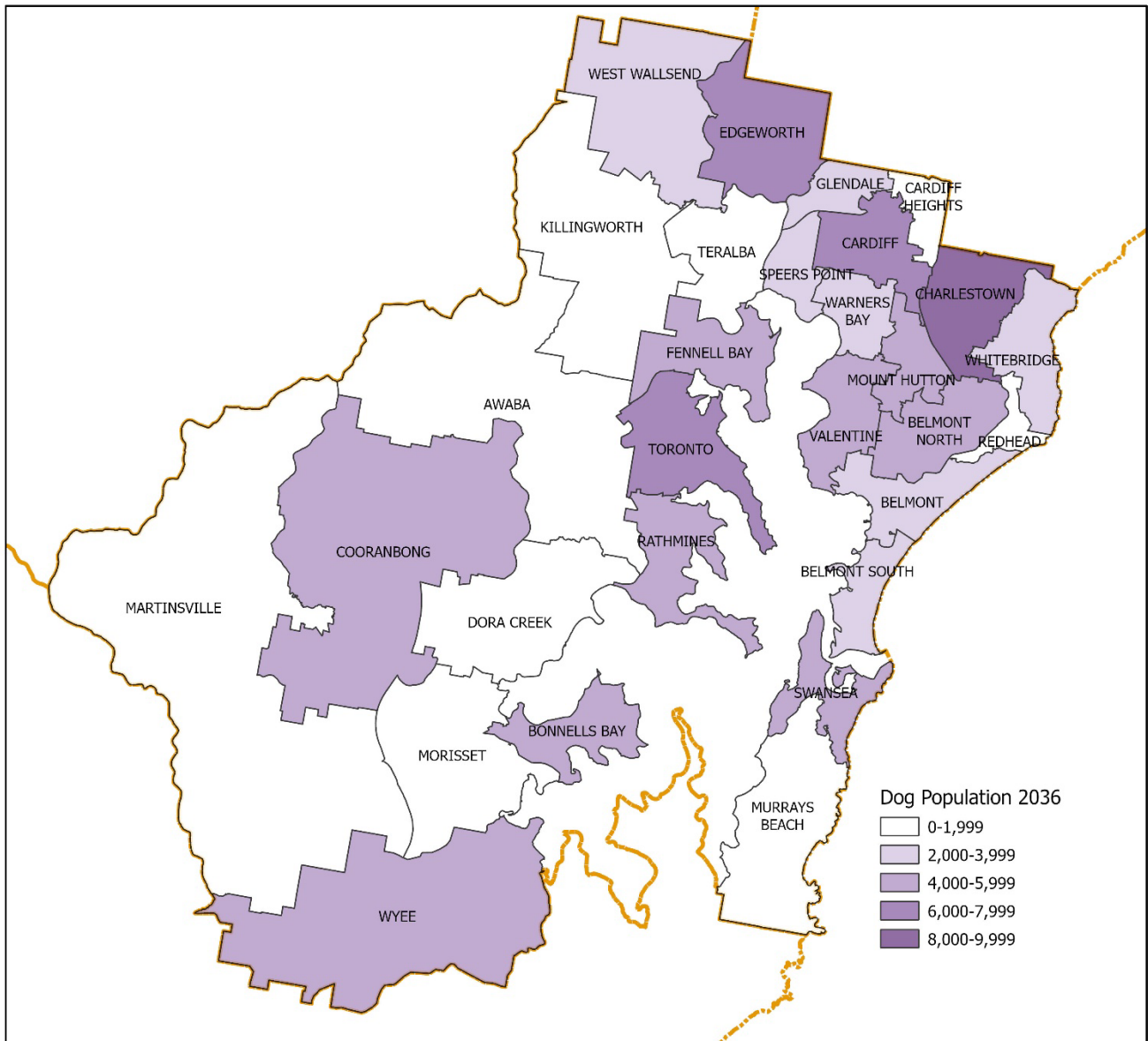


⁶ Lake Macquarie Registered Dog Figures by Breed, NSW Companion Animals Register, retrieved December 2021

2.3.3 The Next 15 Years

Based on the REMPLAN population forecasting, by 2036 the Lake Macquarie population is expected to increase to an estimated 232,543 people. To provide an estimate of dog populations for 2036, the proportions of people to dogs from 2021 have been extrapolated for each of the merged suburbs against the 2036 people population forecast. By 2036 it is expected that the dog populations will be 103,640. Figure 4 below identifies the forecasted dog populations to 2036 within combined suburbs through heat mapping. The darker the colour, the higher the dog population.

Figure 4 – Forecasted Dog Populations by Merged Suburbs 2036



Forecasts for the Lake Macquarie dog populations from 2021 to 2036 indicate:



Registered dogs to 2036:	Increase by 11,304 to 103, 640 dogs	
Highest percentage growth:	Cooranbong	81.1%
	Murrays Beach	65.2%
	Wyee	63.9%
Highest growth dog populations:	Cooranbong	2,679
	Wyee	1,971
	Edgeworth	1,801
Highest Dog Population in 2036:	Charlestown	9,041
	Edgeworth	7,872
	Toronto	6,819



Lowest percentage growth:	Rathmines	0.2%
	Cardiff Heights	0.9%
	Martinsville	1%
Lowest growth dog populations:	Martinsville	3
	Awaba	9
	Rathmines	10
Lowest dog population to 2036:	Martinsville	302
	Awaba	487
	Killingsworth	712



Negative percentage growth:	Valentine	-5.7%
	Belmont South	-1.4%
Reduced growth dog population:	Valentine	-286
	Belmont South	-33

2.4 Planning Catchments

The Lake Macquarie Local Government Area is divided into five planning catchment areas as shown below in Figure 5. Table 6 identifies the 2021 dog populations in each catchment compared to the forecasted 2036 dog populations.

Figure 5 – Map of Planning Catchment Areas

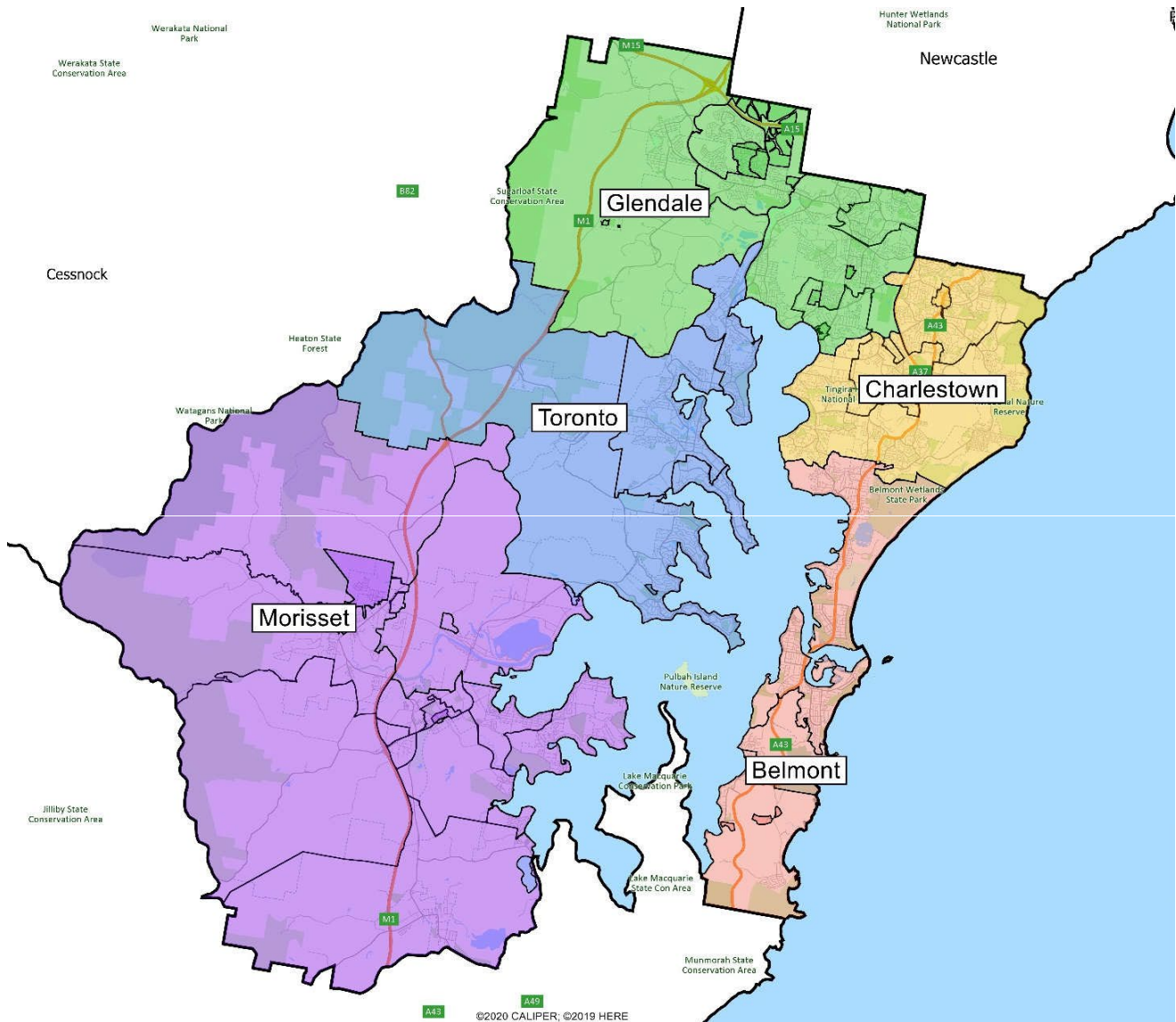


Table 6 – Dog Populations by Planning Catchments

Planning Catchment	2021 Dog Population	2036 Dog Population	Population Change
Morisset	13,573	18,826	5,253
Toronto	15,765	17,303	1,538
Glendale	26,919	29,957	3,038
Charlestown	25,895	26,637	742
Belmont	10,184	10,917	733

The Morisset catchment will experience the largest growth in dog populations over the next 15 years by more than 27% to the next highest catchment in Glendale. The Charlestown catchment will experience the lowest growth in dog populations. The Glendale catchment will be home to the most dogs, housing almost 29% of the total dog population in Lake Macquarie.

Figure 6 - Dog Population by Planning Catchment Forecast Growth

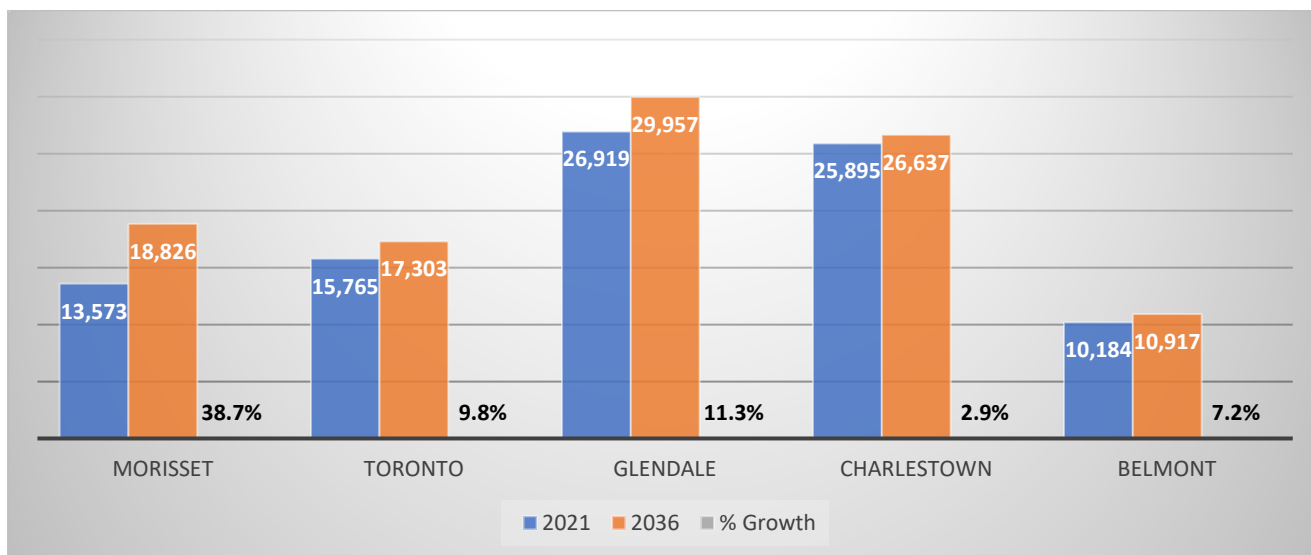
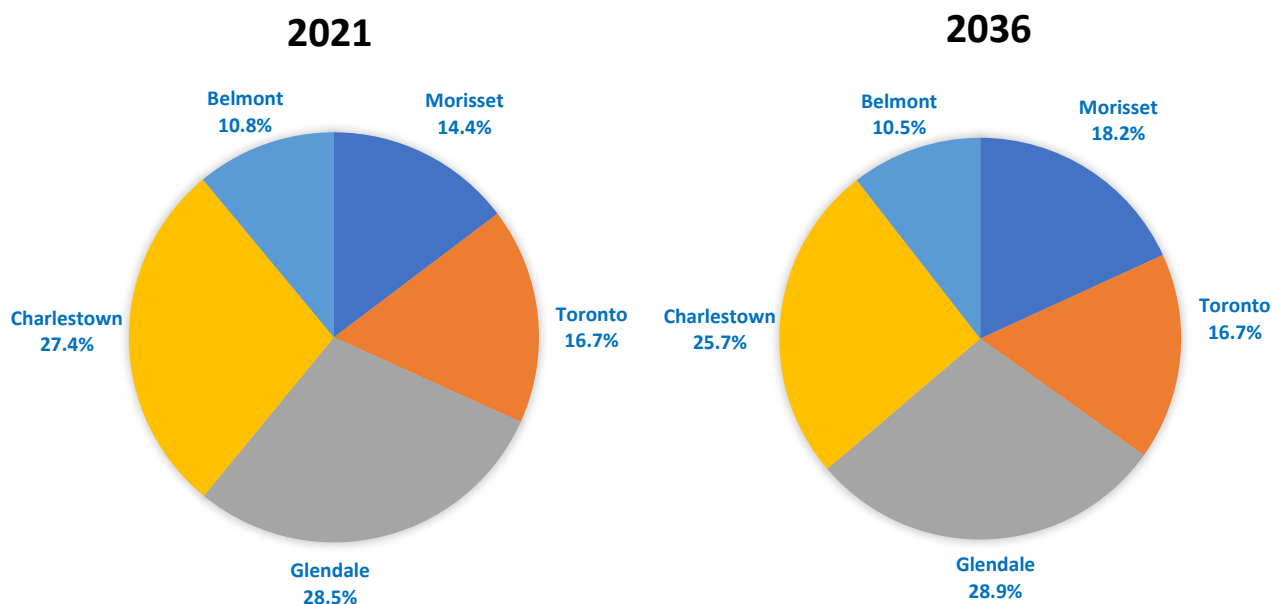


Figure 6 below illustrates the distribution of dogs between the five planning catchments in 2021 compared to 2036.

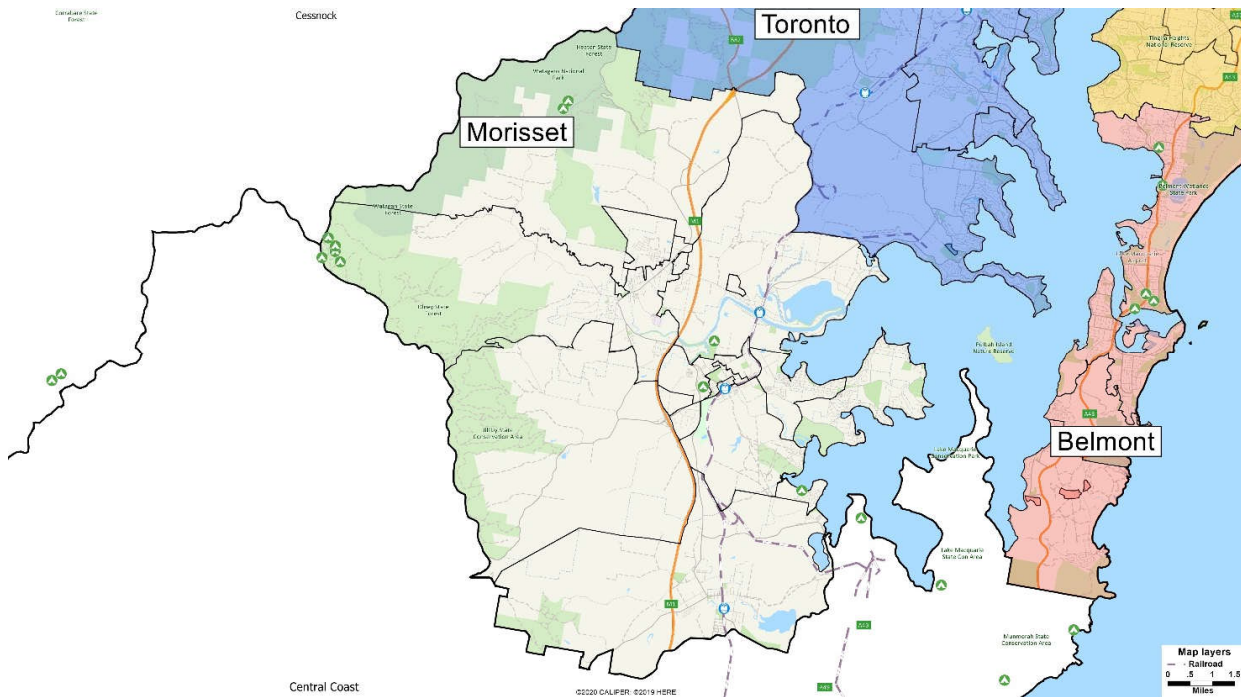
Figure 7 – Dog Population Distribution by Planning Catchments 2021 to 2036



These figures identify:

- In 2021, the Glendale and Charlestown catchments house 28.5% and 27.4% of the Lake Macquarie dog population respectively and combine to almost 56%.
- The Belmont catchment only houses 10.8% of the Lake Macquarie dog population in 2021 and this decreases in 2036 to 10.5%
- Morisset catchment will grow from having 14.4% of dogs in Lake Macquarie in 2021 to 18.2% in 2036
- Charlestown will decrease from having 27.4% of Lake Macquarie’s dogs in 2021 to 25.7% in 2036.

2.4.1 Morisset Catchment



Morisset is the south-western most planning area in Lake Macquarie. It includes the suburbs of Cooranbong, Martinsville, Mandalong, Wyee, Wyee Point, Morisset, Dora Creek, Eraring, Bonnells Bay, Brightwaters, Sunshine, Mirrabooka, Silverwater, Morisset Park, Windermere Park, Yarrawonga Park, and Balcolyn.

In 2021 the Morisset Catchment had a people population of 26,408 and a registered dog population of 13,573. The catchment has the highest proportion of dogs to people at 51.4%, or 0.51 dogs per person in Lake Macquarie. Table 7 below shows the 2021 people and dog populations, proportion of dogs to people, and the forecasted change between 2021 and 2036 dog populations for each of the merged suburbs

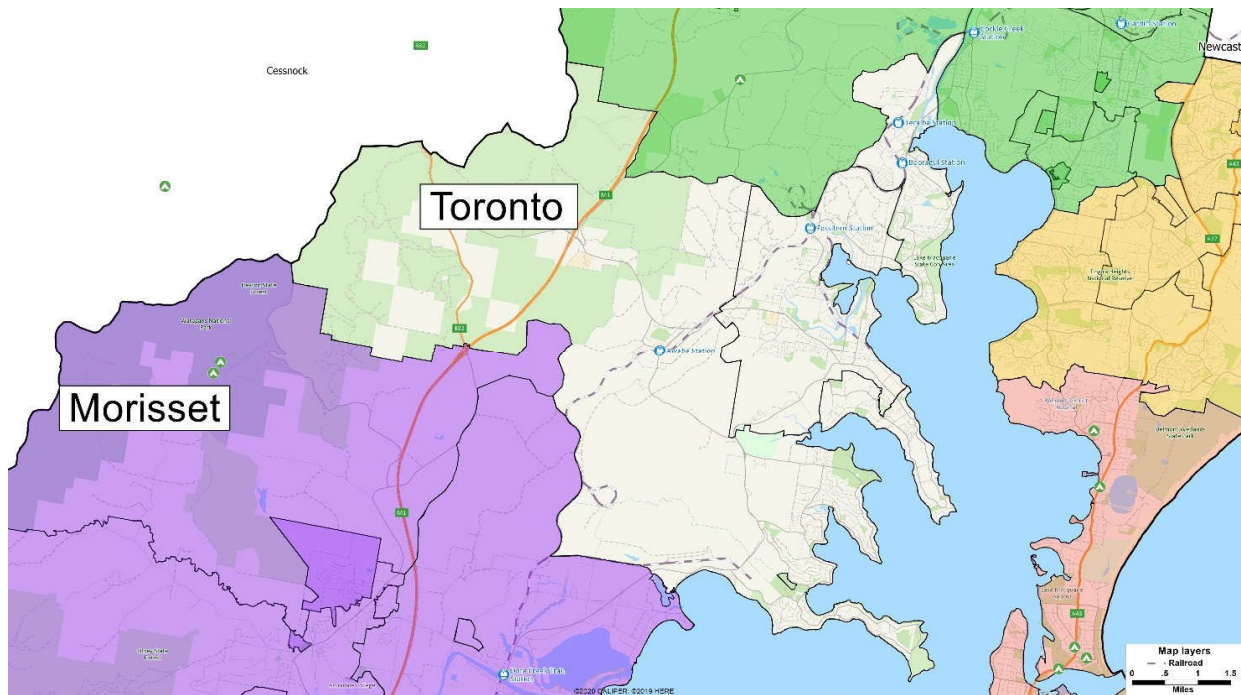
Table 7 – Morisset Catchment Dog Population 2021 to 2036

Merged Suburb	2021			2036	
	People Pop	Dogs Pop	% Dogs to People	Dogs Pop	Growth to 2036
Bonnells Bay (Morisset Peninsula)	9,444	3,985	42.2%	4,157	4.3%
Morisset	3,965	1,507	38.0%	1,703	13.0%
Martinsville	812	299	36.8%	302	1.0%
Cooranbong	6,471	3,302	51.0%	5,981	81.1%
Dora Creek	1,891	1,397	73.9%	1,629	16.6%
Wyee	3,825	3,083	80.6%	5,054	63.9%
Morisset Catchment Total	26,408	13,573	51.4%	18,826	38.7%

Dog population data indicates:

- Bonnells Bay (Morisset Peninsula) area has the highest existing dog population, accounting for 29% of the catchment
- Cooranbong is forecasted to have the most significant growth in dog population to 2036 at 81.1% and the highest dog population in 2036, accounting for almost 32% of the total catchment.
- Wyee area will also see significant growth to 2036 at 63.9% and will have the second highest dog population
- There will be minimal growth in dog populations to 2036 in the Bonnells Bay and Martinsville areas at 4.3% and 1% respectively.

2.4.2 Toronto Catchment



Toronto is the northern most planning area in Lake Macquarie. It includes the suburbs of Freemans Waterhole, Ryhope, Awaba, Blackalls Park, Toronto, Fennell Bay, Marmong Point, Booragul, Bolton Point, Woodrising, Fassifern, Kilaben Bay, Coal Point, Carey Bay, Rathmines, Balmoral, Fishing Point, Arcadia Vale, Buttaba, Myuna Bay and Wangi Wangi.

In 2021 the Toronto Catchment had a people population of 32,186 and a registered dog population of 15,765. The catchment has the second highest proportion of dogs to people at 49%, or 0.49 dogs per person in Lake Macquarie. Table 8 below shows the 2021 people and dog populations, proportion of dogs to people, and the forecasted change between 2021 and 2036 dog populations for each of the merged suburbs.

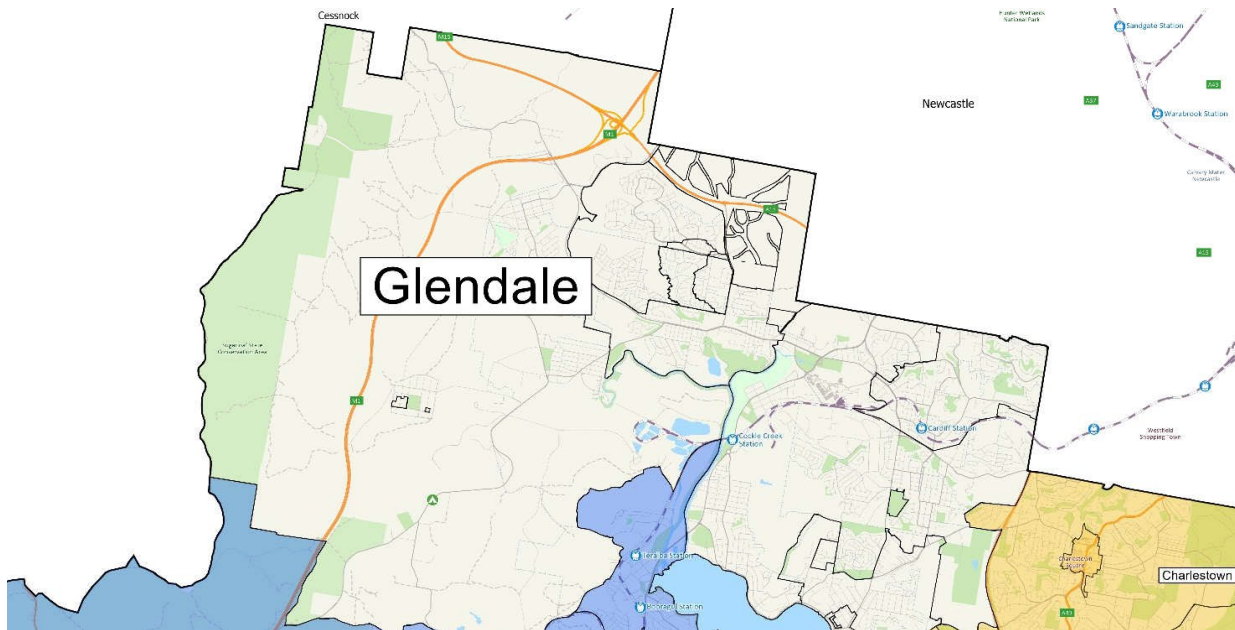
Table 8 – Toronto Catchment Dog Population 2021 to 2036

Merged Suburb	2021			2036	
	People Pop	Dog Pop	% Dogs to People	Dog Pop	Growth to 2036
Rathmines	9,089	4,435	48.8%	4,445	0.2%
Toronto	12,873	5,866	45.6%	6,819	16.2%
Fennell Bay	7,588	3,978	52.4%	4,395	10.5%
Teralba	2,101	1,008	48.0%	1,157	14.8%
Awaba	535	478	89.3%	487	1.9%
Toronto Catchment Total	32,186	15,765	49.0%	17,303	9.8%

Dog population data indicates:

- Toronto area has the highest existing dog population, accounting for 28% of the catchment
- Toronto area is forecasted to have the highest growth in dog population to 2036 at 16.2% and the highest dog population in 2036, accounting for almost 39% of the total catchment.
- There will be minimal growth in dog populations to 2036 in the Awaba and Rathmines areas at 1.9% and 0.2% respectively
- Awaba area has the highest proportion of dogs to people at 89.3%, consistent with the Lake Macquarie finding of rural areas having a higher proportion of dogs compared to more urbanised area.

2.4.3 Glendale Catchment



Glendale is the northern most planning area in Lake Macquarie. It includes the suburbs of Warners Bay, Wakefield, Killingworth, West Wallsend, Seahampton, Cameron Park, Edgeworth, Holmesville, Barnsley, Teralba, Speers Point, Hillsborough, Garden Suburb, Cardiff Heights, Glendale, Argenton, Boolaroo, Cardiff South, Lakelands, Macquarie Hills, Cardiff, and New Lambton Heights

In 2021 the Glendale Catchment had a people population of 61,685 and a registered dog population of 26,919. The catchment has the second highest proportion of dogs to people at 43.6%, or 0.44 dogs per person in Lake Macquarie. Table 9 below shows the 2021 people and dog populations, proportion of dogs to people, and the forecasted change between 2021 and 2036 dog populations for each of the merged suburbs.

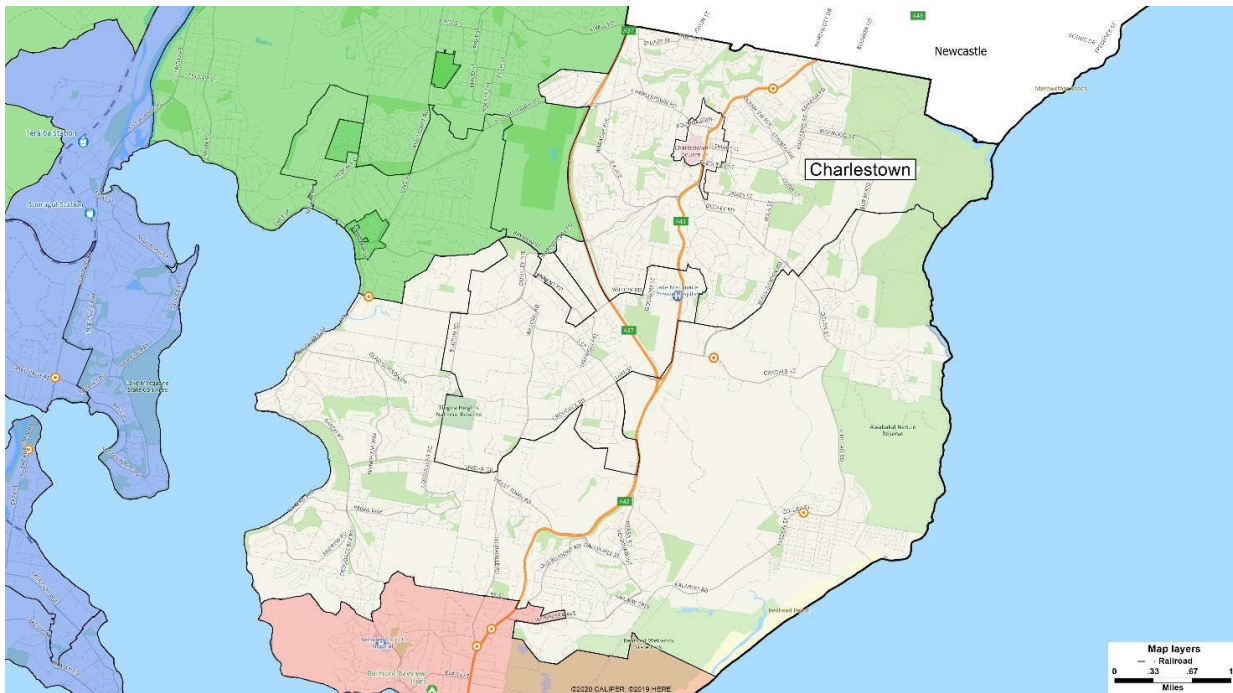
Table 9 – Glendale Catchment Dog Population 2021 to 2036

Merged Suburb	2021			2036	
	People Pop	Dog Pop	% Dogs to People	Dog Pop	Growth to 2036
Killingworth	818	641	78.4%	712	11.1%
West Wallsend	6,058	3,786	62.5%	3,973	4.9%
Edgeworth	16,274	6,064	37.3%	7,872	29.8%
Speers Point	5,253	2,189	41.7%	2,710	23.8%
Warners Bay	9,241	3,902	42.2%	3,986	2.2%
Cardiff	13,428	6,120	45.6%	6,393	4.5%
Glendale	4,624	2,343	50.7%	2,419	3.2%
Cardiff Heights	5,989	1,874	31.3%	1,890	0.9%
Glendale Catchment Total	61,685	26,919	43.6%	29,955	11.3%

Dog population data indicates:

- Cardiff area has the highest existing dog population, accounting for almost 23% of the catchment
- Edgeworth area is forecasted to have the highest growth to 2036 at 29.8% and the highest dog population in 2036, accounting for 26% of the total catchment.
- Speers Point area will also have significant growth to 2036 at 23.8%
- There will be minimal growth to 2036 in Warners Bay and Cardiff Heights areas at 2.2% and 0.9% respectively
- Killingworth area has the highest proportion of dogs to people at 78.44%

2.4.4 Charlestown Catchment



Charlestown is the north-eastern most planning area in Lake Macquarie. It includes the suburbs of Belmont North, Floraville, Valentine, Eleebana, Tingira Heights, Mount Hutton, Charlestown, Kotara South, Highfields, Whitebridge, Kahibah, Redhead, Jewells, Bennetts Green, Windale, Gateshead and Dudley.

In 2021 the Charlestown Catchment has a people population of 63,366 and a registered dog population of 25,895. The catchment has the second lowest proportion of dogs to people at 40.9%, or 0.41 dogs per person in Lake Macquarie. Table 10 below shows the 2021 people and dog populations, proportion of dogs to people, and the forecasted change between 2021 and 2036 dog populations for each of the merged suburbs.

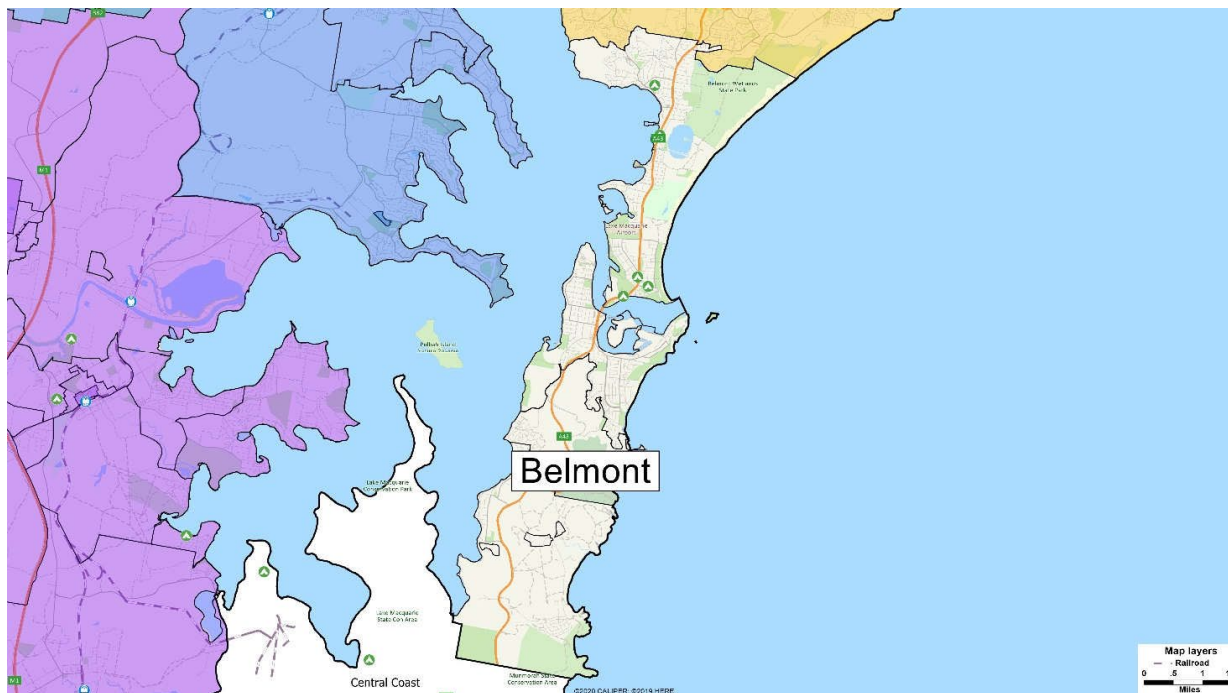
Table 10 – Charlestown Catchment Dog Populations 2021 to 2036

Merged Suburb	2021			2036	
	People Pop	Dog Pop	% Dogs to People	Dog Pop	Growth to 2036
Charlestown	22,291	8,825	39.6%	9,047	2.5%
Whitebridge	5,221	2,150	41.2%	2,356	9.6%
Mount Hutton	9,241	4,462	48.3%	4,695	5.2%
Valentine	12,098	5,009	41.4%	4,723	-5.7%
Belmont North	10,907	4,152	38.1%	4,290	3.3%
Redhead	3,608	1,297	35.9%	1,526	17.7%
Charlestown Catchment Total	63,366	25,895	40.9%	26,637	2.9%

Dog population data indicates:

- Charlestown area has the highest existing dog population, accounting for 34% of the catchment and is forecasted to have the highest dog population to 2036, remaining at 34% of the catchment
- Redhead is forecasted to have the highest growth to 2036 at 17.7%, followed by the Whitebridge area at 9.6% growth
- Valentine area will experience negative growth at -5.7%
- There will be minimal growth to 2036 in Belmont North and Charlestown areas at 3.3% and 2.5% respectively
- The proportion of dogs to people is fairly evenly distributed throughout the catchment.

2.4.5 Belmont Catchment



Belmont is the eastern most planning area in Lake Macquarie. It includes the suburbs of Belmont, Belmont South, Moonee, Nords Wharf, Catherine Hill Bay, Pinny Beach, Murrays Beach, Swansea, Caves Beach, Blacksmiths, Pelican, Marks Point, Swansea Heads, Little Pelican and Cams Wharf.

In 2021 the Belmont Catchment has a people population of 25,168 and a registered dog population of 10,184. The catchment has the lowest proportion of dogs to people at 40.5%, or 0.41 dogs per person in Lake Macquarie. Table 11 below shows the 2021 people and dog populations, proportion of dogs to people, and the forecasted change between 2021 and 2036 dog populations for each of the merged suburbs.

Table 11 – Belmont Catchment Dog Populations 2021 to 2036

Merged Suburb	2021			2036	
	People Pop	Dog Pop	% Dogs to People	Dog Pop	Growth to 2036
Belmont	7,274	2,846	39.1%	3,042	6.9%
Belmont South	5,606	2,352	42.0%	2,319	-1.4%
Swansea	9,684	4,174	43.1%	4,214	1.0%
Murrays Beach	2,604	812	31.2%	1,341	65.1%
Belmont Catchment Total	25,168	10,184	40.5%	10,916	7.2%

Dog population data indicates:

- Swansea area has the highest existing dog population, accounting for almost 41% of the catchment and will continue to have the highest dog population to 2036, at almost 39% of the catchment
- Murrays Beach area is forecasted to have the highest growth to 2036 at 65.1%
- Belmont will have the second highest growth to 2036 at only 6.9%
- Belmont South area will experience negative growth of -1.4% to 2036
- There will be minimal growth to 2036 in Swansea area at 1%
- The proportion of dogs to people is fairly evenly distributed throughout the catchment.

3 Literature Review

A number of documents were reviewed to provide background information and context for the Dogs in Open Space Strategy. These documents and their potential implications are summarised in Table 12 below.

Table 12 – Lake Macquarie Strategic Planning Document Review

Document	Considerations for the Dogs in Open Space Strategy
<p>Draft Greener Places Design Guide, Government Architect NSW</p>	<p>The Draft Greener Places Design Guide framework provides information on how to design, plan and implement green infrastructure in urban areas.</p> <p>The Guide includes off-leash dog exercise area as a recreational opportunity and criteria to facilitate solutions for encouraging communities to participate in a range of recreation opportunities.</p> <p>The Guide offers the following planning considerations for neighbourhood-level access to dog off-leash facilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suitable in all open space areas, provided fencing or other natural barriers are in place to minimise impact on adjacent park users - Connected to active transport network - Offer diversity by combining linear walking trail opportunities with local fenced areas - Not all off-leash facilities need to be fenced - Aim for local opportunities and destination dog walking locations - For higher density areas where space is limited, consideration should be given to separate areas for small and large dogs - Provision of shade including seating areas - Minimum 0.04 ha area for fenced off-leash area
<p>Our Future in Focus: Lake Macquarie City Community Strategic Plan 2017 – 2027</p>	<p>The Community Strategic Plan outlines a vision for Lake Macquarie and the strategies that Council will undertake to contribute to achieving this. The vision is that <i>Lake Macquarie is a City with a lake at its heart and encircled by distinctive towns and villages. We balance our cherished environments with our need for great spaces to live and visit, smart transport options and a thriving economy; which adapt and strive to be fair for all.</i></p> <p>The Dogs in Open Space Strategy aligns closely to the Plan’s Lifestyle and Wellbeing value, notably the goal of public spaces that help us to feel healthy and happy.</p>
<p>Lake Macquarie City Local Strategic Planning Statement (2019)</p>	<p>The Lake Macquarie City Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS) describes how the City’s vision will be achieved and community values upheld, through strategic planning.</p> <p>The planning goal is for the City to be one of the most productive, adaptable, sustainable and liveable places in Australia.</p> <p>To accommodate a growing and diverse population, a focus of the Plan is to facilitate development of medium to high-density housing such as apartments and townhouses. This is coupled with a vision for a City encompassing an abundance of high-quality outdoor spaces to connect with others, enjoy nature, relax or get active.</p> <p>Opportunities for urban intensification are centred around the Strategic Economic Centres of Morisset, encompassing Cooranbong and Wyee, Glendale, incorporating land between Speers Point, Edgeworth and Cardiff and the area from Charlestown to Belmont.</p> <p>Adopted principles in achieving a City of progress and play include:</p>

Document	Considerations for the Dogs in Open Space Strategy
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide safe, comfortable, social and engaging public spaces that support a variety of uses located within and close to centres, and that are well connected to residential areas • Provide a variety of public space in and around centres, incorporating green spaces that provide comfort, attractiveness, shade and natural habitat.
Disability Inclusion Action Plan (2021 – 2025)	The Disability Action Plan outlines Council’s commitment to ensuring that local services, facilities and programs are inclusive to all members of the community. A key aim of the Plan is to provide infrastructure and services to enable people with a disability to fully participate in community life.
Parks and Play Strategy 2021	<p>The Parks and Play Strategy provides a long-term vision and framework for the provision, enhancement and use of the City’s parks and playspaces network. It aims to guide Council decision-making where, when and how parks and playspaces are developed in the future to ensure an improved park and play experience for Lake Macquarie residents and visitors.</p> <p>A playspace is identified in the strategy as a defined space purposely developed for children’s play and includes the area and facilities surrounding the play equipment such as unstructured spaces for informal ball games, adult and family area for passive monitoring if children.</p> <p>The guiding principles include provision for a range of parks to support a diverse range of current and future outdoor recreation activities, access to park opportunities within walking distance of all residential areas and management and maintenance of parks to agreed levels of service, to keep users safe and protect the investment in the asset.</p> <p>The Strategy establishes a ‘hierarchy’ of provision of parks and playspaces in the City based on a combination of qualitative performance criteria and quantitative guidance.</p> <p>One of the objectives of the Strategy is to undertake additional planning to enhance parks and playspaces and their role in contributing to active lifestyles. The Dogs in Open Space Strategy provides an opportunity to further contribute to active lifestyles through the provision and appropriate management of dog off-leash facilities across the City’s network of open space.</p>
Lake Macquarie Sports Strategy 2021 - 2031	<p>The Sports Strategy provides a 20-year strategic framework including key recommendations that will enhance the sporting experience for current and future residents and visitors of Lake Macquarie.</p> <p>An Infrastructure Hierarchy identifies the level of infrastructure required to adequately support the level of sport accommodated at the site.</p>
Lake Activation Strategy	<p>The Lake Activation Strategy seeks to proactively support community use and enjoyment of the lake. The vision is <i>‘Our lake inspires our community to explore, connect, relax and be active.’</i></p> <p>The Strategy is underpinned by a set of principles which seek to guide Council’s approach to future use, management, enhancement and promotion of Lake Macquarie, its foreshore areas and supporting infrastructure. The guiding principles include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieve a balance between recreational use, tourism opportunities and environmental management

Document	Considerations for the Dogs in Open Space Strategy
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase participation opportunities in aquatic and lakeside recreation to enhance the health and well-being of our community • Protect important cultural places <p>Scale of lake activation is aligned to three levels of place; local, district and regional. Local foreshores provide low-key and equitable access to the lake and its foreshore, supporting lifestyle of local communities. District foreshores and lakeside centres provide distinctive district-level lakeside and on-water experiences and destination: major recreation, events and tourism sites provide large, flexible and well-equipped spaces suitable for innovative and creative waterfront attractions and events. Destination places include Speers Point Park and Rathmines Park.</p>
<p>Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan 2020-2027</p>	<p>The Environmental Sustainability Strategy and Action Plan aims to guide how Council's Community Strategic Plan Vision for the City to <i>'balance our cherished environments with our need for great spaces to live and visit, smart transport options and thriving economy; which adapt and strive to be fair for all.'</i></p> <p>The Strategy establishes Council's role for environmental sustainability for the City and the incorporation of the global United Nations Sustainable Development Goals into planning processes.</p> <p>Targets have been developed around four strategic themes. <i>Enhancing our natural landscapes</i> is most pertinent to the Dogs in Open Space Strategy, the aim of which is to 'sustain and enhance our City's natural ecosystems, which include our lake, waterways, bushland, wetlands and open coast. Working to achieve the environmental sustainability targets will help protect and enhance the City's natural landscapes by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring ecosystems are connected • Protecting habitat of high conservation value <p>Encouraging land use practices that support high water quality in the aquatic environment</p>
<p>Dogs in Public Open Space Procedure 2018</p>	<p>Council undertook community consultation in 2018 to inform the development of Dogs in Public Open Space Procedure. The draft procedure was not formally adopted by Council.</p> <p>The purpose of the draft Procedure is to guide the provision, location and infrastructure requirements of dog exercise areas within the LGA and proposes the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of one fenced Dog Exercise Area (DEAs) per catchment (5) and one district facility per ward (3) • Where possible, DEAs are to be located in walking distance from apartment/flat/units or medium density residential around centres, away from busy roads, within easy drive for low-density residential development • New local DEAs to be minimum of 0.5ha • New district DEAs to be a minimum of 1ha , with the aim of 2ha • Separated areas of active or quiet dogs, or larger and smaller dogs will be considered at district facilities <p>Recommended minimum infrastructure based on unfenced DEA and fenced DEA. An unfenced DEA will have a basic level of infrastructure whereas a district fenced DEA will have a higher level of infrastructure in accordance with the expected high level of use.</p>

Document	Considerations for the Dogs in Open Space Strategy
<p>Plan of Management for Community Land 2011</p>	<p>Council manages community land in accordance with the generic Plan of Management (PoM) for Community Land. A small number of community land parcels are addressed by specific PoMs e.g. Rathmines Park and Speers Point Park.</p> <p>In accordance with the legislative requirements, a PoM outlines the appropriate use and management of community land in accordance with its categorisation.</p> <p>In respect to dogs in open space, the generic Community Land PoM identifies walking a dog on a leash as a permissible activity in all land categories, unless otherwise indicated by a prohibited sign. Exercising a dog off-leash in a designated DEA in accordance with a sign is permitted on land categorised as natural area – foreshore, sportsground, park and general community use.</p>
<p>Developer Contribution Plans</p>	<p>Section 7.11 Contribution Plans have been prepared to satisfy legislative requirements, enabling Council to levy contributions from development for the provision of community infrastructure that is required to meet the demands of that development.</p> <p>The contributions plans identify locations within the contribution catchments, where additional dog exercise will be required over the life of the plan, based on population projections and recommended standards.</p> <p>Proposed reforms to the infrastructure contributions system will have potential implications for the types of infrastructure that can be levied for through contribution plans.</p>



4 Trends in Dogs Ownership and Use of Open Space

4.1.1 Dog ownership

Australia has one of the highest rates of pet ownership in the world.

According to a national survey⁷, approximately 40% of Australian households included at least one dog in 2019, a figure that has remained largely unchanged since 2016 (38%). During this period, there has been a noticeable shift towards single-dog households (led by a skew towards smaller dwelling types and inner-city areas) – with 75% of those with a dog now only having one (up from 69% of all dog owning households in 2016).

The pandemic has had a noticeable impact on dog ownership with research⁸ indicating 47% of Australian households owning a dog in 2021, compared to 40% in 2019. Companionship was identified as by far the most common reason for acquiring a dog (42%), with breed temperament and size also deemed relatively important. Those most likely to have acquired a dog since the onset of the pandemic were inner-city dwellers (28%, vs 17% other areas) and households with primary school-aged children.

Pet relations are also changing, with dogs more and more, considered to be part of the family. It is likely that the dog-as-family-member will continue to drive demands for access to a range of desirable public spaces.

4.1.2 Changes in planning and providing for dogs in open space

The NSW Companion Animals Act 1998 requires that all dogs must be on-leash and under the effective control of a competent person at all times in public areas, unless at a designated off-leash area. The impetus of the legislation was a changing pattern of pet ownership, partly as a result of urban consolidation and a change in community expectations about what is required of a responsible dog owner.

Increased urban density means that access to larger backyards is becoming increasingly rare and subsequently, the demand for public open space to provide appropriate spaces for people to exercise and socialise their dogs is growing.

Dog owners are a substantial group of park users. A national survey undertaken by Animal Medicines Australia (2017) found that 74% of dogs are taken on walks in their local neighbourhoods. Whilst a proportion of these are just walked in local street, 52% are taken to 'parks and other public places.'

The NSW Companion Animal Act 1998 requires local councils to provide at least one off-leash area. However, with rising dog ownership levels and dogs increasingly being viewed as legitimate users of public open space, councils need to strategically plan and invest in infrastructure that support pet dog friendly spaces.

Use of public open space by dogs raises issues such as dog aggression, defecation and impact on environmentally sensitive areas which need to be managed. Strategies typically employed by councils in shaping how open spaces are used by dogs include the installation of physical infrastructure such as fencing and through the formal allocation of particular uses to spaces:

- Off-leash areas where dogs are permitted to exercise off the lead (timed and un-timed)
- Fenced dog parks designed specifically for dogs
- Dog prohibited spaces

Fencing of dog-off-leash areas is increasingly being used as a method to manage conflicts between incompatible uses of public open space. There is debate in the literature as to the efficacy of spatial segregation and the position that the dog is a problem to be managed. The merits of fencing as a tool in providing for dogs in open spaces vary, with questions raised as to whether such requests are for the benefit of the dogs or their owners. Fencing is advocated by some as including potentially conflicting uses and encouraging sharing of public open space among different user groups. On the other hand, fencing is exclusive of different users as it segregates particular activities to take place in certain areas to the real or apparent exclusion of others.

⁷ Animal Medicines Australia. Pets in Australia: A national survey of pets and people, 2019

⁸ Animal Medicines Australia. Pets and the Pandemic : A social research snapshot of pets and people in the Covid-19 era, 2021.

To set aside public space for dogs is to potentially exclude others, so the challenge is complex in how to include dogs and their owners whilst not reasonably reducing the freedoms of others.⁹

Table 13 – Dog Off-leash Area Types

Facility Types	Details
Off-leash area (beaches)	Sections of beaches where dogs are permitted off-leash. Includes timed access.
Off-leash area (unfenced)	Open space where dogs are permitted off-leash within a designated unfenced area in which other activities may occur. Includes timed access.
Off-leash area (fenced/partially fenced)	Open space where dogs are permitted off-leash within a designated area demarcated by a fence or partial fence in which other activities may occur. Includes time access.
Dog Park	Exclusive spaces designed just for dogs and their owners with a range of support facilities. Complete separation from other park activities
Dog prohibited	Dogs not permitted on or off-leash



⁹ Simon Carter, Jennifer Day and Ole Fryd. Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, The university of Melbourne. Don't Fence me in: Understanding local government decisions to allocate and fence public open space for dogs in Melbourne, Australia

5 Value of dog ownership

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that pets can help improve a person's mental and physical health, reduce the effects of stress, facilitate social interaction between people and build a sense of community.¹⁰ Studies are revealing a wealth of physical and psychological advantages to pet ownership including improved cardiovascular health, physical fitness, immune system development and longer lifespan.

A survey of Australian households in 2019¹¹ highlighted the positive impact of pet ownership on both physical and mental health including the benefit to meet neighbours, other dog owners while out walking and a common point of conversation with like-minded people.

The Dog and Cat Management Board in their 2014 publication *Unleashed: A Guide to Successful Dog Parks* identify a range of benefits associated with dog parks, including:

- **Physical and mental exercise for dogs** – well exercised dogs are less likely to behave in a destructive or annoying way, such as excessive barking.
- **Socialisation for dogs** – well socialised and exercised dogs are healthier and happier as well as less likely to be aggressive.
- **Outlet for dog owners to socialise** – a public space where dog owners can interact with each other and form community bonds.
- **Social well-being and mental health** – a space where dog owners can feel connected, improving mental and emotional health.
- **Responsible dog ownership** – dog parks can reduce the likelihood of dogs being exercised off-leash in non-designated areas and provide opportunities to educate dog owners about animal health and welfare and dog etiquette.



¹⁰ Australian Companion Animal Council, 2010; Petcare Information and Advisory Service, 2012.

¹¹ Animal Medicines Australia, *Pets in Australia: A national survey of pets and people*, 2019

6 Council's Existing Provision for Dogs in Open Space

6.1 How does Council currently manage dogs in open space?

Dogs permitted on-leash

Unless open spaces are prohibited, dog can be walked on a leash throughout Council's public spaces.

Dog exercise areas

There are currently 30 dog exercise areas provided across the City:

- 17 are leash free at all times
- 10 have restricted hours e.g. sunrise to 10am
- 8 are restricted to week days only
- 4 are subject to events (monthly, annual, intermittent)
- 7 provide access to the lake
- 3 are located on the beach
- 2 are fenced with one incorporating dog agility equipment

Dog Prohibited Area

In accordance with the Companion Animals Act 1998 and the Lake Macquarie City Council Dogs in Public Open Space Policy, dogs are prohibited in the following places:

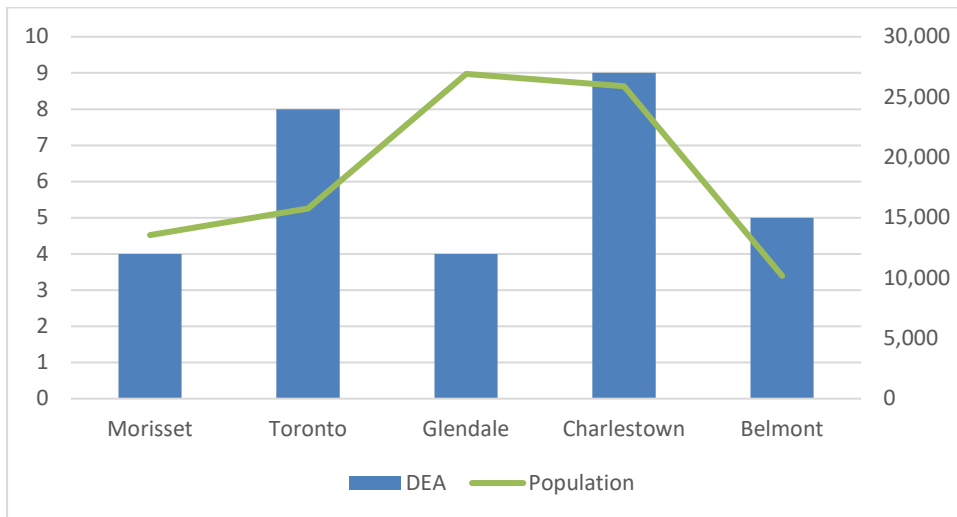
- 10 metres of any children's play spaces in a public space
- 10 metres of any food preparation or food consumption spaces
- On a sportsground during use for games or training
- Public swimming areas
- Open space areas signposted by LMCC as dog exclusion /prohibited areas:
 - patrolled beach areas (Blacksmiths, Catherine Hill Bay, Caves Beach and Redhead Beach)
- Green Point Foreshore Reserve

6.2 What are the current levels of provision?

6.2.1 Distribution

The Toronto and Charlestown Catchments, with 8 and 9 locations respectively have the highest number of dog exercise areas (DEA), followed by the Belmont Catchment that has 5 dog exercise areas and Glendale and Morisset with 4 each respectively. Figure 8 below compares the dog exercise areas in each catchment to the 2021 dog populations. This identifies that Glendale has significantly lower provision of DEA to dog populations, compared to Toronto and Belmont that have a much higher provision of DEA to dog populations.

Figure 8 – Dog Exercise Area Provision compared to Dog Populations 2021



6.2.2 Facilities

Speers Point and Thomas H Halton provide the only fenced dog exercise areas (dog parks). Speers Point provides facilities specifically intended for use by dogs and their owners, including dog agility equipment, shaded seating area and water fountains for dogs and owners. At Thomas H Halton, a small fenced area is incorporated as part of the broader unenclosed dog off-leash area and similarly, includes an agility station for dogs, shaded picnic table and seating.

The other 28 dog exercise areas (off-leash areas) are not provided specifically for use by dogs and in most cases incorporate facilities not directly associated with off-leash exercise such as playgrounds, skate facilities and sportsgrounds.

Table 14 - Dog Off-leash Areas

No.	Location	Suburb	Hectares (ha)	Facility Type	Sub-type
Belmont Catchment (5)					
1.	Hams Beach	Caves Beach	3.5	off-leash (beaches)	All times
2.	Thomas Humphreys Reserve	Swansea	1.3	off-leash (unfenced)	All times
3.	Dobinson Reserve	Blacksmiths	2.0	off-leash (unfenced)	All times
4.	Nine Mile Beach	Blacksmiths	5.5	off-leash (beaches)	All times
5.	Cnr Haddon Cr & Docker St	Marks Point	0.7	off-leash (unfenced)	All times
Charlestown Catchment (9)					
6.	Lenaghan Park	Belmont North	2.7	off-leash (unfenced)	Sunrise to 10am weekdays
7.	Nine Mile Beach	Redhead	12.4	off-leash (beaches)	All times
8.	Molly O'Connor Park	Redhead	2.2	off-leash (unfenced)	All times

9.	Cnr Ruston Ave & Crusade Cl	Valentine	1.9	off-leash (unfenced)	All times
10.	Thomas H Halton Park	Eleebana	6.6	off-leash (unfenced)	Sunrise to 10am daily 4.30pm to sunset Mon to Fri
11.	Thomas H Halton Park	Eleebana	0.2	Dog Park	All times
12.	Bahloo Reserve	Windale	4.4	off-leash (unfenced)	Sunrise to 10am weekdays
13.	Goundry St Oval (Willow Rd)	Gateshead	1.6	off-leash (unfenced)	Sunrise to 10am weekdays

No.	Location	Suburb	Hectares (ha)	Facility Type	Sub-type
14.	Adjacent Charlestown Netball Courts	Charlestown	0.9	off-leash (unfenced)	All times except when netball in progress
Glendale Catchment (4)					
15.	Cardiff Park	Cardiff South	1.7	off-leash (unfenced)	Sunrise to 10am weekdays
16.	Speers Point Park	Speers Point	1.0	Dog Park	All times
17.	Gregory Park	West Wallsend	6.1	off-leash (unfenced)	Sunrise to 10am weekdays
18.	Taylor Park	Barnsley	3.1	off-leash (unfenced)	Sunrise to 10am weekdays
Toronto Catchment (8)					
19.	Booragul Foreshore Reserve	Booragul	2,0	off-leash (unfenced)	All times
20.	Cnr Bay Rd & Quigley St	Bolton Point	2.8	off-leash (unfenced)	All times
21.	Toronto Lions Park	Toronto	3.2	off-leash (unfenced)	Sunrise to 10am daily, except 1 Sunday a month
22.	Blackalls Park Reserve	Blackalls Park	1.9	off-leash (unfenced)	All times
23.	Hampton Street Reserve	Carey Bay	4.1	off-leash (unfenced)	All times (except during pony events)
24.	Gurranba Reserve	Coal Point	1.5	off-leash (unfenced)	All times
25.	Rathmines Park	Rathmines	2.9	off-leash (unfenced)	All times (except when booked for events)

26.	Foreshore Reserve	Buttaba	2.1	off-leash (unfenced)	All times
Morrisset Catchment (4)					
27.	Pendlebury Park	Bonnells Bay	1.6	off-leash (unfenced)	All times
28.	Bernie Goodwin Memorial Oval	Morrisset	3.6	off-leash (unfenced)	Sunrise to 10am weekdays
29.	Douglas Street	Dora Creek	0.6	off-leash (unfenced)	Sunrise to 10am weekdays
30.	Wyee Oval	Wyee	3.2	off-leash (unfenced)	All times

6.3 Benchmark to Surrounding Councils

The existing provision of dog exercise areas in Lake Macquarie has been benchmarked against the lower Hunter and Central Coast Councils according to 2020 ABS Estimated Population Figures.

Table 15 – Dog Off-leash Area Comparison to Other Councils

Council – people population	Shared Dog Exercise Areas (Unfenced)	Shared Dog Exercise Areas (fenced/ partial fenced)	Dog park	Beach	Total	Total per capita
Lake Macquarie City Council – 207,775	25		2	3	30	1:6,926
Newcastle City Council – 167,363	14	1	1	1	17	1: 9,845
Central Coastal Council – 345,809	44	3	2	10	59	1: 5,861
Maitland City Council – 87,395	6	1			7	1: 12,485
Cessnock City Council – 10,209	6				6	1: 10,209
Port Stephens City Council – 4,657	9	4		3	16	1: 4,657

As illustrated in Table 13, Lake Macquarie with 1 dog exercise area per 6,926 people has higher provision standards than 3 of the 5 councils benchmarked.

Cessnock City Council recently adopted the Off-Leash Dog Exercise Plan 2021 which identifies the provision of a number of new off-leash areas including some fenced. The implementation of this plan will see the provision ratio considerably reduce compared to the ratio identified in Table 13 above.



6.4 Best Practice Dog Off-leash Areas

There are no recognised standards for the provision of dog exercise areas. A review of recent guidelines on the planning of dog exercise areas and strategies developed by local authorities has been undertaken to understand current best practice in planning and management of dogs in public open spaces.

6.4.1 Literature

The following publications were reviewed

- Unleashed A Guide to Successful Dog Parks. Dog and Cat Management Board, 2013.
- Public Open Space and Dogs, A design and management guide for space professionals and local government. Prepared for the Petcare Information Advisory Service by Harlock Jackson Planning and Development Consultants, 1995
- Paws4play: Planning for People and Dogs

Key take outs from the literature for consideration

- Understanding the needs of dogs – including the need for a diversity of experiences (sights, sounds, smells, textures, other dogs) often not achieved in specially designed dog parks.
- Understanding the needs of owners – recognising that dog owners are not universally prescribed in terms of age, mobility, time constraints, housing and family type. Range of opportunities should be considered to accommodate varying needs of dog owners.
- Fully fenced off-leash areas should be considered the minority in the overall provision for dogs in public spaces, generally in urban parks to manage the interface between on and off-leash areas and not because owners cannot control their dogs.
- Design is considered more critical in fenced off-leash areas because of the potential for a large group of dogs in a confined area. Design should consider opportunities to create visually separate spaces, encourage dogs and their owners to move around the site and include a variety of sitting areas around the site rather than one congregation point.

- Consideration can be given to separately fenced areas for quieter or more timid dogs (not designated for 'small dogs')

6.4.2 Standards and Development

A review of other Council strategies for dog off-leash areas was undertaken to provide analysis of current standards and development associated with these. A summary of the key directions from these strategies can be found in Appendix A.

Provision ratios

There are no recognised population standards for the provision of dog exercise areas.

The most commonly adopted standards are based on a 'walkability' metric of 1.5 - 2km or walking distance of 20 minutes. Newcastle adopted a standard of 1:8,000 pop and 1:30,000 pop as a guide for unfenced and fenced dog-off-leash areas respectively.

Hierarchy

The literature suggests that the aim should be to provide a hierarchy of opportunities that provide dogs and their owner with daily, regular and occasional opportunities. In this scenario, daily use would be within walking distance of home, regular within a 30-minute walk or short drive and attractive to those dogs requiring more access and occasional on a regional scale. The higher in the hierarchy, the greater the priority given to dogs in planning, layout, landscape and design features.

A number of strategies have adopted a hierarchical framework to guide the level of provision at each site and to ensure that a range of facilities and experiences are available across the local government area.

This approach adopts standards for dog parks based on their catchment i.e. Regional, District and Neighbourhood e.g. Canterbury and Cessnock Council. Other strategies structure provision according to type i.e. dedicated dog exercise area, unfenced dog exercise area.

Infrastructure

A review of the literature and current best practice generally classifies dog off-leash infrastructure as either 'core/standard' infrastructure or 'desirable/optional' facilities. Standard/core facilities include drinking water for dogs, shade (natural), signage, waste bins, pathway connections to the off-leash area

Desirable/optional facilities include fencing (double gates), shelters, lighting, seating, agility equipment, small/large dog separation. Application of desirable facilities is considered on a case by case basis, taking into account available resources, site conditions and community input.

Criteria for new off-leash dog areas often note a preference for co-location with other parkland infrastructure such as toilets and footpaths, on or off-street parking.

Location

The literature indicates that a well-located dog park:

- Is accessible by road
- Has adequate space for off-street parking
- Is connected to existing pedestrian paths and trails
- Is within walking distance of residential areas
- Has good surveillance from public areas

Other considerations include:

- Proximity to compatible uses/activities
- Some natural vegetation and topography
- Good drainage

These elements are reflected in site selection criteria in a number of the strategies, notably within walking distance to residential areas, surveillance and accessible to vehicles and pedestrians.

Proximity to main road

The starting point for most strategies/ policies is to not locate off-leash areas adjacent to high traffic road. In cases where proximity to roads cannot be avoided, mitigation measures include a sufficient buffer (space or vegetation) or fencing between the off-leash area and road. The acceptable proximity to a road and the type of road is prescribed by

some and includes not within 50 metres of any main or collector road unless fenced and not within 25 metres to a road greater than 60km/hr without safety fencing.

Shared pathways

There are no standards with regards to the use of shared pathways by dogs either on or off-leash. A number of strategies however do identify the requirement for dogs to be on-leash within a certain distance to a shared path. Melbourne City Council recently adopted an Order pursuant to section 26(2) of the Domestic Animals Act 1994 including that a dog must be brought under effective control by means of leash within 5 metres of a shared pathway (designated and identified for use by both pedestrians and bike riders). In the case of Monash Dog off-leash Policy the prescribed distance for dogs to be on-leash is within 10 metres either side of a major shared trails. Proximity to shared paths are considered more generally in site suitability criteria, notably the need to reduce conflict with adjoining reserve users including cycle trails.

Size

The literature suggests that the size of dog exercise areas is generally less important than its location and suitability for dogs' use. Ideally, a dog park will be large enough to meet demand without becoming degraded from overuse. The potential drawback of a small area is the increased potential for conflict amongst the dogs, whilst dog owners may be less observant of their dog's behaviour in larger spaces.

Most strategies adopt a minimum area ranging from 0.3 to 0.5 hectares. Newcastle have distinguished between dog exercise areas (0.3ha) and fenced dog parks (0.5ha).

Layout

The literature highlights the benefits of linear or irregular shaped dog exercise areas, offering more opportunities for dogs and their owners to disperse, and create spaces to avoid high energy dogs. Natural vegetation and topography also add amenity and interest to the experience for people and their dogs.

Hornsby, as part of its selection criteria, includes a variation of landscape settings such as lawn, vegetated and 'rough' areas and flat and sloped areas.

Delineation

Fencing can be used for restraint, as a slowing down mechanism for free-running dogs and for visual legibility in multi-use park space.

The literature supports the need to make clear *on the ground*, where off-leash dog areas start and stop, rather than relying on explanatory maps and brochures. Obvious features include paths, planting, topography with fencing as a final option. Further, consideration should be given to the provision of buffer or transition zones between different parts of the park to minimise over-spill.

The inclusion of fenced dog-off-leash areas is considered in all but a few strategies, only to be necessary and/or appropriate where an audit identifies potential conflicts with adjoining uses i.e. where off-leash areas have to be located close to incompatible parkland areas or uses or there are roads or commuter bicycle trails.

Another approach is to link the provision of fencing to the park hierarchy classification (Geelong, fencing is only deemed suitable in regional and district parks).

Ryde stipulates in its criteria that boundary requirements are flexible, but that there must be a sufficient buffer (space/vegetation) or fencing between off-leash areas and major roads.

Signage

The literature promotes the implementation of clear and consistent signage.

Segregation

Separation of large and small areas are increasingly part of the mix of off-leash facilities provided by local councils. Provision of these facilities is sometimes linked to hierarchy or a site by site basis, Hornsby Council stipulates puppies (under six months), small dogs (under 6kg) and elderly dogs (10+ year).

Environmental

Sites with high natural value including sites with are typically identified as unsuitable as dog off-leash areas. Environmentally sensitive areas include sites with high biodiversity, wetlands, coastal vegetation, endangered ecological communities and threatened species habitat.

Prohibited areas

Dog prohibited areas are outlined in the Animal Companions Act and further prescribed in council policies. The following prescriptions to dog prohibited area included in a number of strategies/ policies:

- **Recreation areas:**

Best practice planning for off-leash dog areas seek to exclude the use of sportsgrounds (Newcastle, Cessnock, Whittlesea)

- **Public bathing areas:**

Some policies prescribe prohibition zone for patrolled beach e.g 10, 20, 100 metres of the flagged areas.

- **Wildlife protection areas:**

Sites identified as dog prohibited on the basis of environmental sensitivity include nesting sites of vulnerable migratory and shorebirds



Appendix A Review of Other Council Dog Off-leash Strategies

Strategy	Facility Type	Key Directions
City of Newcastle, <i>Dogs in Open Space Plan, 2019</i>	on-leash off-leash, unenclosed (timed and un-timed) off-leash, fenced	Adopts indicative provision standard of one dog off-leash area per 8,000 people and one fenced dog park area per 30,000 and at least one fenced dog park in each Ward. Site suitability criteria developed to determine location of new off-leash areas and review existing sites. Criteria includes profile and access, size, character, impacts on people, impacts on site character and impacts on natural environment. Design and management principles address size, delineation, (basic) infrastructure, infrastructure for fenced dog areas, signage and community education.
Cessnock City Council, <i>Off-leash Dog Exercise Plan, 2021</i>	Local Off-leash Dog Exercise Area District Off-leash Dog Exercise Area	Seeks to provide a mix of off-leash areas including enclosed and open facilities. Each of the four Planning Areas to have a minimum of one off-leash dog area. Adopts design specifications for local (2km catchment) and district level (Planning Area) off-leash dog areas which includes, size, surface, delineation, water, shade, seating, signage, bins, car parking, pathways and separate small dog area. The Strategy proposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 new fenced off-leash facilities based on forecasted population growth, demand and community engagement. . - decommissioning of existing off-leash dog area based on inherent site constraints including the presence of Endangered Ecological Communities and the proximity of a planned fenced facility. - Installation of fencing to a number of existing off-leash facilities to address safety concerns/ delineate from broader reserve. - Reduction in the size of one off-leash area on the basis of adopted provision standards
Maitland City Council, <i>Off-leash Dog Exercise Area Strategy, 2013</i>	Off-leash areas	Adopts a provision standard of a minimum of 1 off-leash dog area in each of the 10 planning areas. Provision standards consider pet ownership levels, community consultation and projected population growth. Design guidelines address 'core' and 'additional' infrastructure. Core infrastructure is considered to be double entry gates, bins, signage, seating, water, open ball play area and natural shade. In addition to these facilities, fencing, internal and approach pathways, tables, shade structures, off-street parking, rock scramble area, agility equipment and drainage will be considered on a case by case basis.

Strategy	Facility Type	Key Directions
Blue Mountains Council, Dogs in Public Spaces Strategic Plan, 2017	Off-leash (fenced and unfenced)	<p>Dog off-leash site standards to guide the provision of infrastructure. Level of service based on primary infrastructure provided at all facilities and secondary, provided as needed.</p> <p>Retention of current supply of off-leash facilities (provided in all planning areas). No further off-leash sites to be provided until improvements to existing sites have been implemented.</p> <p>Commitment to design and develop dog signage and re-brand off-leash areas.</p>
Hornsby Council, Off-Leash Dog Park Strategy, 2021	<p>Level 1: Dedicated off-leash</p> <p>Level 2: Unfenced/ shared</p>	<p>Recommends two levels of hierarchy for off-leash dogs to provide a range of experiences across the Shire.</p> <p>Applies general standard of 2km (approx. 20 min walk) catchment to identify gaps in provision.</p> <p>Level 1 feature a dedicated off-leash area, fenced, double access gate, proximity to parking, drinking water, seating and shade, signage, dog waste bags and garbage bins.</p> <p>Level 2 facilities feature drinking water, seating and shade, signage, dog waste bags, garbage bins and may be shared with other users, fenced or partially fenced. Provision of a separate area for puppies, small and elderly dogs at selected off-leash dog parks.</p> <p>Design principles talk to park size (guided by available space), layout, fencing, surface materials (including synthetic grass in high wear areas), landscaping, amenities, signage.</p> <p>Essential criteria for the selection of new off-leash dog parks include land classification, excluded land uses, equitable distribution and impacts on neighbours, other park users and the natural environment. Desirable criteria includes size, character, amenity and equitable access.</p>
Canterbury Bankstown, Off-leash Dog Park Action Plan, 2020	Regional, District, Neighbourhood off-leash (fenced) dog parks	<p>Three-tiered hierarchy; regional, district and neighbourhood facilities. Facilities differ in size from a minimum of 5000m² and a catchment of 3 to 5km for regional facilities to 1500m² and 1km for neighbourhood.</p> <p>A standard dog park design criteria for the design of new, and upgrades of existing, off-leash dog parks. The criteria includes minimum land size, fencing, water station, bin, shade, signage, landscaping, pathways to access points, exercise and agility course, seating, lighting (where appropriate), separate large and small dog area (regional and district facilities), floodlighting (regional and district facilities).</p>

Strategy	Facility Type	Key Directions
<p>City of Greater Geelong, Fenced Dog Parks; Siting, Design and Management Guidelines, 2019</p>	<p>Designated fenced dog park</p>	<p>Selection criteria for new fenced dog parks includes location in a regional or district park, size, location, site qualities including topography, good drainage and mature trees for shade, site access, adjacent activities, environmental sensitivity, site infrastructure and visibility.</p> <p>Core infrastructure for fenced dog parks include perimeter fencing, entry and exit points, ground surfaces, drinking taps, shade, seating, signs, waste disposal. Desirable amenities include separate areas for call and large dogs, activity zones and activity zones. Optional amenities include park lighting, toilets and noticeboard.</p>
<p>City of Ryde, Dog Recreation Needs Study, 2020</p>		<p>Establishes a criteria for the planning and design of the off-leash network to ensure the desired types and quantities of dog leash areas and the optimal distribution of facilities in terms of hierarchy and equitable access for all dog owners.</p> <p>Criteria includes a network of off-leash facilities within 20 minutes (approx. 1.5km) walk of residences and prioritisation of suburbs/precincts with high dog populations. Specific site criteria includes social impacts, park size, park boundaries, host park natural features and environmental sustainability.</p> <p>Prospective additional off-leash facilities identified based on catchment area gaps (walkability analysis) and sites assessed in accordance with criteria.</p> <p>Core facilities identified as signage, waste bin, waste bag dispenser, drinking water, shade and seating.</p>
<p>Shellharbour City Council, Dog Friendly Spaces Strategy, 2019</p>	<p>Dog off-leash spaces Dog Agility Parks</p>	<p>Recommendation to develop selection criteria to assess potential dog friendly spaces including community preference, a network approach, emphasis on District and Citywide reserves (on the basis that they provide ample space and often the opportunity to share existing infrastructure), proximity to areas of high dog ownership, size, shape and configuration of the park, site accessibility, consideration of adjacent park activities, consideration to Spaces of Conservation or Environmental significance, park usage levels, appropriate zoning and land classifications.</p> <p>Site design and infrastructure to include (subject to space and budget); separate areas for large and small dogs, time out areas for dogs, range of activity spaces, natural features, surfaces that stand up to wear and tear, fencing and gateways, landscaping, car parking, access for all abilities.</p>

Strategy	Facility Type	Key Directions
<p>Dog Off-leash Area Policy and Management Plan , Whittlesea 2016</p>	<p>Open unstructured off-leash (unfenced)</p> <p>Confined unstructured (fenced)</p> <p>Confined structured (fenced with agility equipment)</p>	<p>Adopts provision standard of open unstructured off-leash area provision within 2km (20-minute walk). Confined unstructured off-leash areas generally be limited to 1 per suburb. Confined structured off-leash areas to be provided on a regional basis and ideally incorporated into a precinct or site master plan.</p> <p>Criteria for off-leash land allocation and planning includes siting of areas in close proximity to high dog population density, 2km catchment (considering access barriers), minimum size, exclusion areas and site assets including path network, shade, seating, tables, car parking and landscape features.</p> <p>Specific design guidelines for each of the facility types addressing delineation, surfaces, agility/play, drinking water, seating, tables, shade, bin, bag dispensers and car parking.</p>