

Dogs in Public Places Guidelines 2026-2029

DRAFT

Acknowledgement of Country

Bass Coast Shire Council acknowledges the Bunurong as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters, and pays respect to their Elders past, present and emerging, for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and Lore.

Bass Coast Shire Council celebrates the opportunity to embrace and empower the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island Communities in their diversity.

Bass Coast Shire Council will create opportunities for future recognition and respectful partnerships that will honour the Traditional Owners and Custodians, and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Mayor and Councillors Message

TBC

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Implementation of these Guidelines supports the broader objectives of the DAMP, which outline dog controls and considerations for responsible pet ownership.	
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Diversity and Inclusion

Bass Coast Shire Council celebrates the diversity of our communities. We acknowledge and respect the skills, insights and life experiences of all community members irrespective of gender, ethnicity, ability, religious belief, sexuality or age.

Child Safe Statement

Bass Coast Shire Council is committed to the safety and wellbeing of children and has a Child Safe Statement ([Child-Safety-Statement-signed.pdf](#))

Gender Impact Assessment

In accordance with the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, a Gender Impact Assessment has been undertaken when developing the Dogs in Public Places Guidelines 2026-2029.

I. Introduction

Purpose

Bass Coast is a community in which responsible pet ownership is a core value, and the health and wellbeing benefits of animal ownership go alongside the enjoyment and protection of the natural environment.

The Dogs in Public Places Guidelines (Guidelines) provide a consistent approach to assess the suitability and design of designated leash free and dog prohibited areas on Council managed land including inland fenced dog parks, and is a key supporting document for the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2026-2029 (DAMP).

The DAMP sets out Council’s priorities in promoting responsible pet ownership, ensuring compliance with the *Domestic Animal Management Act 1994* and other relevant legislation, maintaining community amenity, protecting our natural environment and supporting the health and wellbeing benefits of pet ownership across the Shire. The DAMP is an endorsed major initiative in the Bass Coast Shire Council Plan and the Health, Safe and Resilient Bass Coast Plan.

The DAMP is supported by the following Vision:

“To support a thriving, healthy community where responsible pet ownership and environmental stewardship go hand in hand—ensuring safe, shared spaces that protect biodiversity while enriching the lives of people and their animals.”

Access to ample, appropriate spaces for dog owners to exercise their pets supports community wellbeing and safety across the Shire, and is a cornerstone of achieving the Vision and Objectives of the DAMP. Likewise, holistic planning for on and off-leash areas ensures that key environmental and biodiversity assets are preserved while continuing to support the pet owners and their pets to thrive in the municipality.

Objective 10 of the DAMP outlines strategies and actions to develop a strategic and consistent approach to leash free and dog prohibited areas. An action of the DAMP under Objective 10 is to develop the Guidelines, alongside delivery of inland fenced dog parks on mainland and Phillip Island sites, signage audit and ongoing partnership with the Dogs Off Leash Working Group.

The Guidelines outline Council’s position on the provision, distribution and management of dog facilities in public open spaces. The Guidelines will guide decisions on the planning for all dog off-leash and dog-free areas and ensure that the provision of open space for community objectives aligned to the DAMP is included in future strategic and precinct planning. The Guidelines are part of a broader effort to ensure a positive experience for all users of public open spaces.

Key aspects of the Guidelines

Key aspects of the Dogs in Public Places Guidelines	
Consideration for all users	Balance the needs of dog owners with the needs of other residents and visitors, including those who may not be comfortable with dogs.
Demand analysis	Consider the demand for off-leash areas in different parts of Bass Coast as part of Council’s broader open space planning processes.

Key aspects of the Dogs in Public Places Guidelines

Site analysis	Establish criteria for assessing the suitability of different locations for off-leash areas, considering factors such as size, access, safety, environmental and cultural sensitivities, and potential impacts on other users.
Restrictions	Address existing restrictions, such as those related to playgrounds and beaches.
Fenced dog spaces	Support development of additional fenced dog off-leash areas.
Dog-free spaces	Support identification and designation of dog-free public open spaces.

2. About Bass Coast Shire

Bass Coast Shire is located on the traditional lands of the Bunurong people. A predominantly coastal municipality, Bass Coast boasts a stunning and diverse natural environment—from rugged coastlines and iconic beaches to rich farmland and bushland.

Home to over 43,000 permanent residents, the population increases significantly during holiday periods. Bass Coast continues to grow as a place where people come to live, work, invest and visit—attracted by its lifestyle, natural beauty, strong community spirit, and future-focused approach.

Bass Coast's population is forecast to grow to 47,408 by 2036.¹ Increased resident population and visitors to Bass Coast has a flow on effect on the number dogs in the Shire and being walked in public open spaces.

Proactive patrols are undertaken, including increased patrols during the busy peak summer period, however Council relies on community education and voluntary observance of signage and regulations for animal management compliance.

The Shire has several designated beaches and reserves where dog owners can exercise their dogs off leash. Some of these areas are season and time dependent. There are also a number of dog-prohibited areas.

The Guidelines seek to support the health and wellbeing benefits of responsible pet ownership, enhance compliance and environmental protection and balance community and stakeholder needs.

¹ ABS population forecast.

3. Dog controls in Bass Coast

These Guidelines establish a consistent and holistic framework for assessing the suitability and design of designated leash free and dog prohibited areas on Council managed land. Implementation of these Guidelines supports the broader objectives of the DAMP, which outline dog controls and considerations for responsible pet ownership.

Dogs on / off leash

In Bass Coast, Dogs must always be on leash in public places, unless otherwise signed in a designated 'off leash area'.

Council Orders provide for designated off leash areas such as, inland reserves and beaches.

In designated off-leash areas (including select beaches and inland reserves) dogs are required to be under effective voice control.

Designated off-leash areas are subject to location-specific, seasonal, and time-based restrictions, as indicated by signage.

Additional restrictions apply in high-use, environmentally sensitive, and shared path areas to manage safety, amenity, and environmental impacts.

Dogs must be registered, microchipped, and wear identification when in public.

Owners are responsible for ensuring dogs are securely contained on private property and do not wander.

Collection and appropriate disposal of dog waste is mandatory in all public spaces.

Compliance is supported through active ranger patrols and enforcement, with penalties applying for leash breaches, nuisance behaviour, and waste offences.

Non-Council managed land

Land tenure across the municipality is managed across Council, Parks Victoria, Phillip Island Nature Parks, DEECA and Committees of Management. These Guidelines support collaboration and enhanced alignment across partner agencies for a consistent approach to enforcement of regulations across the Shire.

4. Our consultation

Previous Consultation

Consultation to support development of the Guidelines was done in tandem with the DAMP consultation process, where we heard from more than 900 people.

There was significant support for the development of the Dogs in Public Places Guidelines - to set a consistent future-focussed framework for establishing new inland dog parks and setting beach regulations to achieve a balance between recreational dog use and wildlife protection.

Dog Off Leash Working Group

The Dogs Off Leash Working Group were engaged to support development of Dogs in Public Places Guidelines for Bass Coast Shire, with a focus on compliance, off-leash provision, wildlife protection, signage, and community expectations. This group brings together Council officers, dog organisations, conservation groups, land managers and community representatives.

The group emphasised the importance on delivering visible, timely outcomes to meet community needs, strengthen alignment across community groups around the Vision of the DAMP, improve compliance, and balance community use with environmental protection.

Process to Develop the Guidelines

These Guidelines were developed and informed by community consultation, research and benchmarking, and in consultation with relevant Council departments and the Dog Off Leash Working Group.

Consultation on these Guidelines

TBC

5. Guidelines

Key considerations for identifying leash free and dog prohibited areas

The following principles guide the development of criteria for planning, designing and managing dog access across public open space. These considerations help balance the needs of dog owners, the wider community, and the natural environment:

- Alignment with relevant site-specific management plans, Council strategies, and policy directions.
- Community demand, land availability and overall suitability of potential sites.
- Evidence-based assessment of potential impacts of dogs on the natural environment and wildlife.
- Impacts on other open space users, including shared recreational use.
- Public safety, risk management and amenity outcomes.



Low impact

An area where dogs may have a minimal impact on the community or surrounding residents, community infrastructure, environment, access and amenity.



Medium impact

An area where dogs may have a moderate impact on the community or surrounding residents, community infrastructure, environment, access and amenity.



High impact

An area where dogs may have a significant impact on the community or surrounding residents, community infrastructure, environment, access and amenity.

Community need and demand

Council will work towards a fair and well-distributed network of dog off-leash areas throughout the municipality. Planning will be informed by both current usage patterns and anticipated future demand, as part of Council's broader open space planning processes.

Off-leash areas should be located in places that are appropriate for the expected level of activity and that support positive outcomes for dogs, while minimising impacts on surrounding environments and other visitors.

Site assessment will consider factors such as:

- The amount of accessible public open space available in the local area.
- Existing dog off-leash reserves and beach areas nearby.
- Current and projected growth in both residential and dog populations.
- Planned urban development and changing community needs.
- Environmental suitability based on available wildlife data and evidence-informed impact assessments.

Leash free areas – inland reserves

Council will use the following criteria when identifying and assessing suitable inland reserves for leash free access:

- a) A recommended minimum size of 0.3 hectares, where feasible.
- b) Compatibility with surrounding activities and other park users to minimise conflict, site damage and safety risks.
- c) A minimum 20-metre separation from playgrounds, barbecue facilities and picnic areas.
- d) Leash free areas will not be supported at reserves containing playgrounds unless fencing or adequate separation is provided.
- e) Safe access from roads, avoiding high-traffic locations unless fencing is in place.
- f) Accessible design that supports inclusion for people with mobility needs.
- g) Capacity for ongoing servicing and maintenance, including waste management.
- h) Leash free areas will not be located next to dog prohibited areas unless securely fenced.
- i) Appropriate buffers from conservation zones and sensitive habitat areas.
- j) Consideration of spacing and proximity to other leash free locations.
- k) Consideration given to amenity of residential areas with regards to noise/barking.

Leash free areas – beaches

The following criteria will guide assessment of suitable leash free beach areas:

- a) Preference for locations connected to formal beach access paths.
- b) Ability to support maintenance activities such as waste collection and site servicing.
- c) Leash free access applies only to the sanded beach area only (i.e. from the edge of the dunes to the water), not in the dunes or vegetation.
- d) Adequate separation from environmentally sensitive areas, including species habitat and roosting and nesting habitat for migratory and resident shorebirds. Site suitability will be assessed with input from relevant specialists.
- e) Consideration of accessibility and proximity to other designated leash free beaches.

Dog prohibited areas

Dog prohibited areas may be established in locations where evidence-based assessments identify significant safety, environmental or cultural impacts. Criteria include:

- a) Protecting the safety and enjoyment of other open space users and preventing damage to sensitive sites.
- b) Restricting dogs in conservation, environmentally protected or culturally significant areas unless supported through consultation with the land manager.
- c) Priority will be given to protecting sites of recognised cultural heritage value.

On leash areas

Dogs must be kept on a leash in all public open space areas unless the site is designated as leash free.

Consistent timings for dog control regulations

Council will collaborate with the Dogs Off Leash Working Group to achieve greater consistency in the timings of seasonal restrictions on Council-managed land. This will improve the experience of all open space users, and increase understanding and communicability of regulations.

Signage requirements

Dog control signage will be applied consistently across all Shire-owned and managed land. Signage will clearly identify whether dogs are permitted on leash, allowed off-leash, or prohibited within each area.

Signage will:

- Be highly visible and positioned at key entry points and prominent locations throughout the site.
- Clearly communicate user responsibilities and reinforce expected behaviours.
- Use a consistent design and format across all Shire-managed public open space.
- Where appropriate, include additional information such as conditions of use, interpretive messages, or other regulatory requirements.
- Where an area is not clearly signed as leash free or dog prohibited, dogs must be kept on leash at all times.

Procedure

Prescribing new or amending existing dog control regulations

The *Domestic Animals Act 1994* allows for Council to make Orders that prescribe Shire owned or managed land as leash free or dog prohibited.

To prescribe new or amend existing dog control regulations at a site, the Shire will:

- When new leash free or dog prohibited areas are to be implemented as per development plans or site master plans, assess these as required.
- Consult with all relevant Shire teams, external stakeholders, and the community.
- Work collaboratively to reach agreement on the prescribed leash free or dog prohibited area.
- Introduce and gazette relevant Council orders.

Implementing new or amending existing dog control regulations

Once a new or amended dog control regulation has been prescribed at a site, the Shire will:

- Ensure appropriate communications to affected stakeholders and the public.

- Provide signage clearly identifying the area and regulations in place.
- Identify the prescribed area on the Shire's leash free and dog prohibited area maps.
- Provide other appropriate support, information, or resources.

Enforcement

Once a new or amended dog control regulation has been prescribed at a site, the Shire will focus on educating and raising awareness, as well as undertaking regular patrols and enforcement activities.

Transition period

The Shire will undertake targeted and carefully planned community engagement to support any proposed changes to dog control regulations. The scope, methods and approach to engagement will be determined on a site-by-site basis and will be consistent with the Community Engagement Policy.

In addition, the Shire will establish separate, longer-term transition processes for individual sites. These may include staged implementation of regulatory changes and, where relevant, the development of supporting capital works or site improvement plans.

Exemptions

Dangerous, menacing and restricted breed dogs

Dogs that have been declared as dangerous, menacing or restricted breed must be muzzled and always remain on leash, even when present in leash free areas (as per provisions of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*).

Greyhounds

Greyhounds must always remain on leash, even when present in leash free areas (as per provisions of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*).

Assistance dogs

Assistance dogs are permitted to be present in dog prohibited areas but must always remain on leash.

Dogs on the playing surface of sporting grounds while in programmed use

No dogs will be permitted on the playing surface of sporting grounds whilst organised sport or training is taking place.

6. Leash free area categories and facility standards

Bass Coast Shire provides a range of leash free areas to meet different community needs. Sites are grouped into three categories based on their scale, location, and level of supporting infrastructure.

Local	Local leash free areas designed to support nearby residents with simple facilities for everyday dog exercise and social interaction.
Township	Larger leash free spaces that serve multiple neighbourhoods, offering improved amenities and catering for higher visitation.
Regional	Major destination leash-free areas providing a broader range of facilities and drawing users from across the Shire. These sites are typically larger and more highly developed.

Facility and Feature Guidelines for Inland Dog Parks

The following table outlines typical infrastructure expectations for each leash free area category.

Facility / Feature	Local	Township	Regional
Indicative minimum size (where feasible) *	Up to 0.3ha	0.3ha to 0.5ha	0.5 to 1.0ha
Clear boundary and regulatory signage	✓	✓	✓
Waste disposal bins	✓	✓	✓
Dog drinking water access	Optional	✓	✓
Informal seating	✓	✓	✓
Shelter structures	Optional	Optional	✓
Dog agility or enrichment features	Optional	✓	✓
Public toilets nearby	Optional	Optional	✓
Perimeter fencing (site dependent)	Optional	✓	✓
Gated entry points	Optional	✓	✓
Internal separation fencing (if required)	Optional	Optional	✓
Pathway and access connections	✓	✓	✓
Natural shade provision	Optional	✓	✓
Built shade structures	Optional	Optional	✓
On-street parking availability	Optional	Optional	✓
Designated accessible parking bays	Optional	✓	✓
Accessible for people with mobility needs	Optional	✓	✓
Access for servicing and ongoing maintenance	✓	✓	✓

*Site size recommendations may vary depending on land constraints, environmental sensitivity and local demand.

7. Review

Review of these Guidelines

These Guidelines will be reviewed every four years.

Administrative updates

It is recognised that, from time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this document. Where an update does not materially alter this document, such a change may be made administratively. Examples include a change to the name of a Shire department, the change to an existing policy or document referred to in this policy, and minor updates to legislation and the like which does not have a material impact. However, any change or update which materially alters the document must be by resolution of Council.