

People and Dogs in Parks Plan

Preliminary Community
Engagement Report

May 2025



Acknowledgement of Country



Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nation peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these lands and waterways. We pay our respects to all Elders, past, present, and emerging, who have been, and always will be, integral to the story of our region. We proudly share custodianship to care for Country together.

Project background

Council currently provides 23 dog off-leash areas. However, Council has not previously had a plan or standards for dog off-leash areas, resulting in uncertainty regarding where they should be provided, and to what standard they should be constructed and maintained.

In response, a draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan has been developed. It applies to existing and future dog off-leash areas owned or managed by Yarra Ranges Council and outlines standards for the provision, development, enhancement, and management of dog off-leash areas across Yarra Ranges over the next 10 years.

This Plan aims to achieve a balance between the diverse use of open spaces by all Yarra Ranges residents and visitors, catering to both dog owners and non-dog owners. The vision of the Plan is “people and dogs can enjoy public open space in Yarra Ranges, in harmony with each other and the environment.”



Community engagement

In preparing the Draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan, we engaged with the community to understand issues and opportunities concerning dog off-leash areas in the municipality. Dog owners and non-dog owners were encouraged to contribute.

Community engagement was conducted between 11 July – 13 August 2024, deploying a variety of methods to ensure ample opportunities for the community to participate. These included online surveys, on-site drop-in sessions at dog off-leash areas, and promotion via social media and newsletters.

How we engaged

Community engagement activities



Project page on
Shaping Yarra Ranges

2,256 views

125 page followers

25% of visitors returned to
the page more than once.

Dates 2024

11 July — 13 August



Online survey

223 contributions

50 responses to
budgeting activity

Dates 2024

11 July — 13 August



Pop ups

60 conversations
with park users

50 good dogs
patted!

Dates 2024

29 July Wesburn Park,
Wesburn

30 July Elizabeth Bridge
Reserve, Kilsyth



6 August Coronation Park,
Healesville

13 August Belgrave Lake
Park, Belgrave



Direct emails and phone calls

5 direct emails
and phone calls

How we engaged

Communications and marketing activities



Facebook

1,542 Total engagement 4 Total number of posts

14,297 Total reach 120 Total link clicks

Dates 2024

15 July 1 August
25 July 6 August



Instagram

2,254 Total engagement 4 Total number of posts

2,020 Total reach 14 Total link clicks

Dates 2024

15 July 1 August
25 July 6 August



YR Local e-newsletter

175 Total link clicks 11,793 Total reach

3 Newsletters sent

Dates 2024

12 July
26 July
9 August

What we heard

We asked about dog ownership and use of existing facilities

93%

of respondents were dog owners.

“

More females (61%) than males (53%) walk / exercise dogs, particularly those under 40 years old.

“

Dog ownership amongst respondents was concentrated in the Urban area where there is also a higher density of people, but similar percentages of people in the Hills, Valley and Upper Yarra areas report walking their dogs for their physical activity.

65%

of the dog owners who responded currently use off leash areas.

What is working well with off-leash areas across Yarra Ranges?

56%

of respondents use dog off-leash areas to enable their dog to socialise with other dogs.

60%

believe that the spaces provided are a good size.

“

The ability to connect with nature in some of our spaces was also highly rated.

“

Off-leash areas were recognised for their importance to owners, with several respondents stating that is how they socialise or meet people.

Challenges or barriers currently preventing use of off-leash areas

34%

of respondents who were dog owners do not currently use off-leash areas. There were a variety of explanations provided, including:

“

Uncontrolled/aggressive dogs.

Unsocialised or poorly socialised dogs.

Poor recall of their own dog/s.

Etiquette from other owners is lacking.

Other owners are not paying attention to their dog/s or other dogs and people in the area.

Owners not picking up faeces after their dog/s.

Off-leash areas are too far from home / not easily accessible.

Location of off-leash areas is not known.

!

It was also highlighted that Council needs to consider appropriate provision in the Upper Yarra and Valley areas. A misconception has been that these residents will have homes on larger blocks of land and therefore are able to exercise their dog/s off-leash on their property.

However, this has overlooked the positive social aspects of off-leash areas for both dogs and owners, especially as these residents may often feel physically and socially isolated.

What we heard

What could be improved regarding dog off-leash areas?



Clearer signage within parks and reserves and at boundaries of the off-leash area.



Natural/constructed/visual barriers and landscaping.



More fully fenced opportunities.



Education regarding owner responsibilities, location of off-leash areas, and non-dog owner responsibilities.



Provision of waste disposal within parks and reserves.



Areas have poor drainage or are in poor condition.



A recurrent idea several respondents shared was along the lines of dedicated dog parks with fencing, as currently the lack of fencing is creating a barrier for letting dogs off the leash, deterring owners.

This was considered no longer fair or equitable given the size of the property now being built (i.e., limited/no garden area). Well-exercised and socialised dogs are less likely to bark or have behavioural problems.

Anything else we should know



Half of respondents were in favour of more off-leash areas within the municipality.



Better drainage so areas are usable year-round.



Education and etiquette for dog owners and non-owners alike.



More seating within off-leash areas.



More accessible areas for older owners, owners with a disability, or owners with mobility issues.



Better mapping and information available on the Council's website.



Clearer identification of boundaries within open space, not just fencing.



Greater embellishment of off-leash areas, rather than just a designated patch of grass.



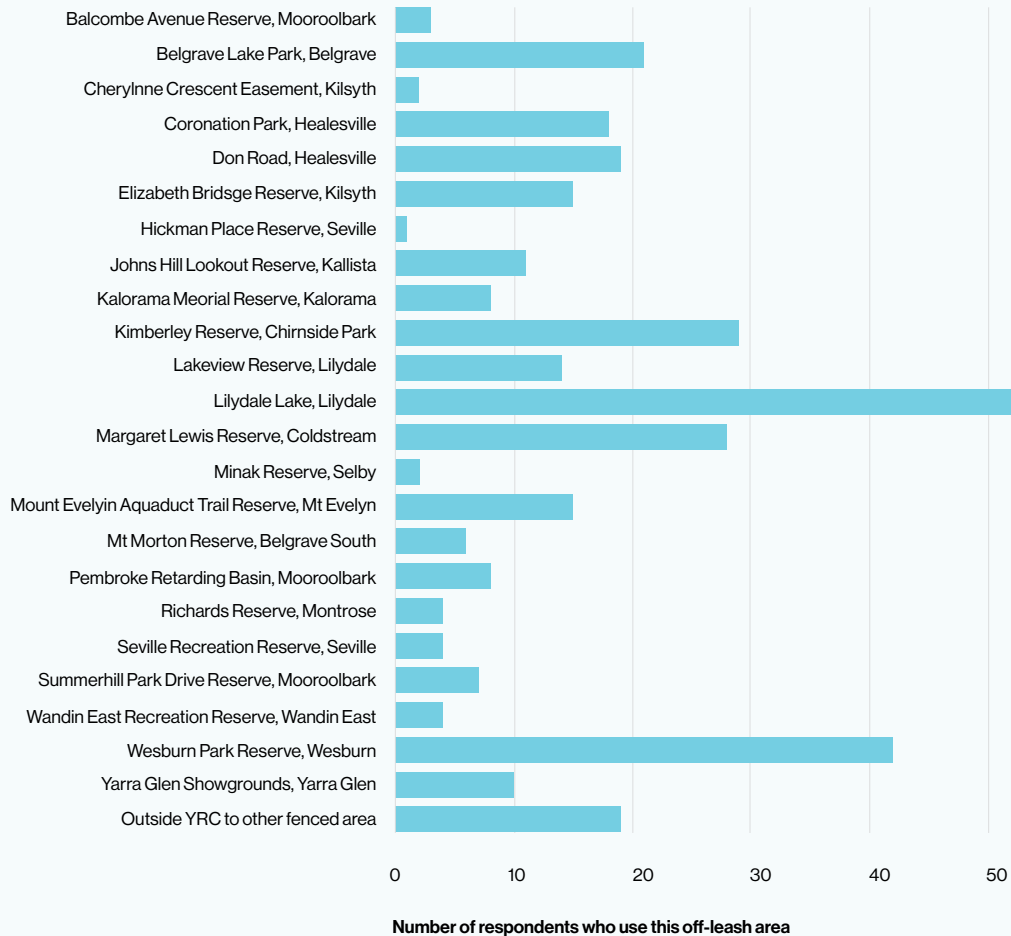
Better monitoring and enforcement to encourage owners to be more responsible, particularly around picking up after their dog/s.



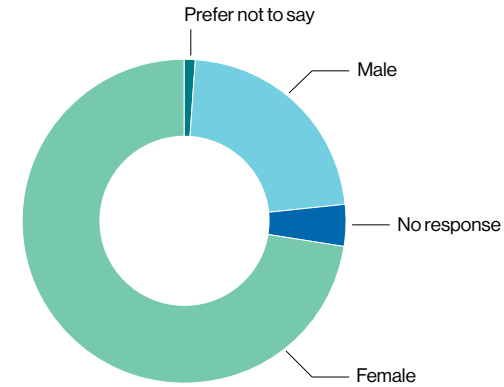
A good mix of fenced and un-fenced areas so owners can choose what suits them and their dog/s.

What we heard

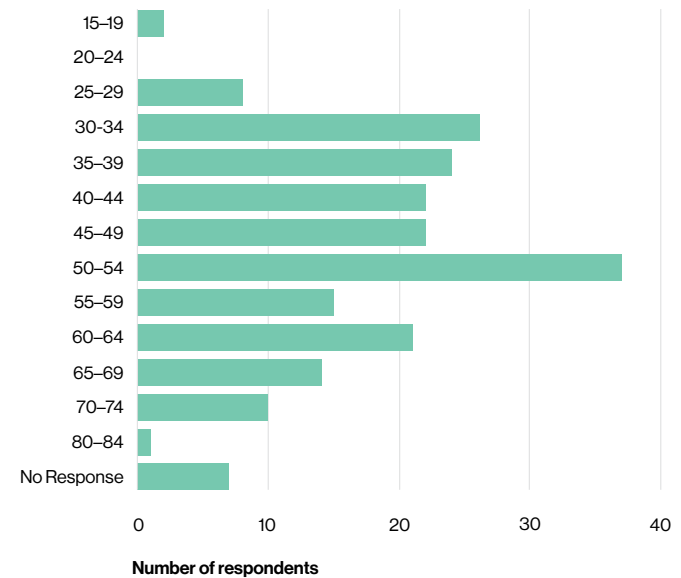
We also asked which dog off-leash areas the community currently uses:



Gender of respondents



Age of respondents



Next steps

The community insights received during this round of engagement have been used to develop the draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan. The draft Plan will be provided to Council for consideration, and then publicly exhibited.

How to get involved

The community will be invited to provide feedback regarding the draft Plan, and its proposed principles and standards. A preliminary assessment of all existing dog off-leash areas will also be presented to the community, to outline what the proposed principles and standards may look like in practice.

Necessary amendments will be made following public exhibition, before presenting the final People and Dogs in Parks Plan to Council to seek adoption.

Should Council adopt the draft Plan, any specific projects may be subject to additional, site-specific community engagement.

01

Community engagement

July - August 2024

02

Development of draft People and Dogs in Parks Plan

Ongoing

03

Community engagement on draft Plan

August 2025

04

Review feedback

September 2025

05

Council consideration of final People and Dogs in Parks Plan

Late 2025 / Early 2026

06

Actions from the People and Dogs in Parks Plan and site-specific engagement

2026+

Contact us

Yarra Ranges Council
PO Box 105
Lilydale VIC 3140

1300 368 333

www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au

mail@yarraranges.vic.gov.au

