



KOoyongKOOT ALLIANCE

KooyongKoot Alliance Position Statement

Managing Dogs in Parks and Reserves

The KooyongKoot Alliance (KKA) represents about twenty groups acting collectively as a voice for biodiversity, among other values, in a future Strategic Masterplan for management of KooyongKoot (Gardiners Creek) and its tributaries as critically important community assets. This Plan will commit to a holistic approach to managing the creek, hopefully realizing its true potential.

The KKA has identified the KooyongKoot /Gardiners Creek Catchment as a system in need of urgent care as a key biodiversity corridor. Tree canopy and biodiversity losses are critically impacting the quality of life in our suburbs for both humans and native fauna as population density and housing density relentlessly increase in suburbs along KooyongKoot and climate change impacts increase.

The issue

- Increased density/ human population. As densities increase so does population and so will dog numbers. This will lead to even more pressure on our parks and gardens.
- Further increased dog ownership during and since the Covid crisis.
- Strong lobbying by dog owner groups swung the balance of power.
- Off leash areas and the increased risk for Council.
- Loss and degradation of a good quality undisturbed bushland, and declining small bird populations.

Dogs off leash have the following impacts:

- The dogs can tear up and trample existing plants, this is especially true of dogs that are playing with other dogs or are chasing a thrown object. Also hunting dogs i.e. Labradors which are heavy dogs have a searching action that is especially disruptive to flora.
- Dogs exacerbate erosion on the creek banks. There is a strong tendency for many dogs to run down the banks to reach the water, again this is especially prevalent with hunting dogs.
- Dogs urinate and quite often defecate in revegetation areas and because it is not so open the waste is occasionally not picked up. The urine/faces affect soil acidity, it can wash into waterways and is a warning to fauna 'to stay away'.
- Dogs spread weeds. Dogs carry weeds on their coats when they pass through weed infested areas and these can drop off in revegetated areas.
- Dogs have negative impacts on fauna through their sheer presence exacerbated by dogs often hunting through the undergrowth and as discussed leaving their scent through urine/ feces.
- Small birds, so important for the health of our eucalypts, are disproportionately impacted as many use understory planting for a refuge.

The KKA regards the creek and its green spaces as shared resources to be subject to balance between dogs and native flora and fauna. As dog owners ourselves, we believe most owners agree with the need for such balance and compromise and that education is key. Now is the time to set a standard to balance dogs' needs and biodiversity that encourages fun

experiences for dog owners and their dogs, as well as optimal restoration of Gardiners Creek and its tributaries.

Many off leash park users drive to off leash parks with their dogs to give them the benefit of being off leash indicating the high value that they put on them.

It is certainly noticeable that the prevalence of dog feces is more frequently left/unnoticed than a dog on leash area.

Often dogs pose a very real risk to bike riders with the risk of serious injury to both dog and cyclist from collision.

Rarely do you see families or anyone else picnicking in off leash parks. Put off by the risk of dog intervention.

We see an urgent need to protect our few remaining remnant areas from dogs.

Off leash parks do not allow other potential park users to use the park. Most notable young children whether walking cycling or playing are often afraid to go to off leash parks to play because of the fear of big or aggressive dogs as well as the very real risk of contact with dog feces.

An interesting case study is that of Damper Creek where council has recently established a dog on leash policy in the reserve. Importantly it has followed this up with signage and an enforcement/education officer patrolling the area. The feedback from the local Friends Group is positive with most walkers complying with the change.

The KKA position

The KooyongKoot alliance advocate for dogs to be excluded from such areas. In certain circumstances it may be acceptable to allow access for dogs on leash. Where sites of biological significance or remnant areas are identified no dogs should be allowed. Areas should be fenced off if the area of remnant bush is small otherwise signage should be Ok.

As dog owners ourselves we understand the desire to have dogs off leash, chasing a ball etc. and we feel that this can be done more safely in an enclosed/fenced dog park as has been established in many parts of the city.

By providing these high activity centers, in fenced off areas, it allows the dog the opportunity to free range, fetch balls and interact with other dogs etc. but this will allow owners the opportunity to walk their dog on leash in the remainder of the park allowing flora and fauna to flourish and hopefully bring back biodiversity back to our Reserves and green spaces.

We believe that this will allow dogs needs to be met, but not to the detriment of biodiversity.