

## **Royal Park Protection Group Inc**

Registration No A0035478L PO Box 197 Parkville 3052  
Contact: Julianne Bell (Convenor) Phone 98184114 mobile 0408022408

Councillor Fraser Brindley  
Chair, Environment Committee  
City of Melbourne.

8 July 2008

Dear Councillor Brindley

I am making a submission on behalf of the Royal Park Protection Group (RPPG) on agenda item 5.5 of the Environment Committee meeting today, Tuesday 8 July 2008.

I wish to make the following points:

1. General comment: In considering the areas in Royal Park designated for “dogs off leash” the RPPG is of the view that sports grounds are the best areas for exercising dogs off leash, not areas designated of important habitat value. We are of the view that three (3) sports grounds in Royal Park should be added to the two (2) already proposed in the Council officer’s report as dogs off leash areas. (See photos) The arguments are:

- These are safe areas for dog walkers and their animals being on the flat and there is no danger from cyclists.
- Walkers and people enjoying the Park for passive recreation are not harassed by dogs. (Many people - elderly and parents with young children - are now too afraid to walk in Royal Park.)
- Wildlife is not at risk from attack by roaming dogs.
- Allowing dogs to exercise where they can be satisfactorily watched reduces the likelihood of dog attack and means that owners are in better control.
- Use of sports grounds increases the enjoyment of dog walkers who like to socialise. This is an important social function given this is the age of social isolation.

2 Royal Park has 14 sports grounds. Many are largely unused for lengthy periods especially over winter. They are mostly empty during the week. They are used for organised sports for a fraction of the year, University and school holidays account for about three months of the year. It is unacceptable that the City of Melbourne spends enormous amounts on the upkeep of sports grounds which are used by an elite few. We do not find it acceptable that the demands of a small group of sports organisations can tie up valuable open space. With increased densities of population it is essential that inner city residents have access to Royal Park. Residents from suburbs surrounding Royal Park - West Parkville, Brunswick, North Parkville, South Parkville and North Melbourne should be equally well served with dogs off the leash areas.

3 The City of Melbourne already has provided for dogs off leash areas in sports grounds - when organised support is not in progress - in Fawkner Park, hence why not in Royal Park? Possibly most other city municipalities provide for dogs off leash areas on sports grounds. There are few who do not do so.

4 At the meeting of the Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Advisory Committee on 15 April then again on 25 June 2008 it was agreed that an additional three sports fields be shared for dogs off leash when not in use for organised sport. These are not, however, shown on the Council officers’ plan presented to Councillors.

5. The Royal Park Dogs are a small but vocal group whose members like to gather with their dogs and socialise in the Circle area of the Park (to the north of the Royal Children's Hospital). We consider that Council would be showing undue bias if it were to accede to the demands of this small group and sacrifice the needs of a larger population.

6 We are very concerned that a significant wildlife habitat area south of Elliott Avenue along the "gully" is still given on the officers' map as a dogs off the leash area. We consider that this is patently unsatisfactory given that dogs can run down the hill to the billabong specifically a designated Duck Habitat. This area needs to be kept as a habitat area of high conservation value.

7. The City of Melbourne, under a municipal order pertaining to Section 26 (2) of the Domestic (Feral and Nuisance) Animal Act 1994, dog-owners/walkers' obligations are spelt out. Under the law as regards a dog off-leash, the dog may be exercised provided that the owner: "remains in effective voice or hand control of the dog" and "in constant sight of the dog" in order to leash it if that becomes necessary. Dogs are not allowed to threaten or worry persons or other animals in the park. Dogs should be under effective control at all times. Hugh Wirth, former RSPCA President, maintains that 80% of dog owners/walkers do not have their dogs under effective control when off leash. Dogs can be kept under better control in sports grounds.

8 We are concerned that there is ineffectual monitoring and surveillance of dogs in Royal Park. The contractor, the Lost Dogs' Home, who is supposed to police the law, is said to only turn up in Royal Park infrequently and even then only warns people breaching the law. Council apparently has requested a report from park rangers and the Lost Dogs Home but this has not been made available to the public. This is unlike other municipalities where there is regular surveillance and where stiff penalties are laid down for infringement. It appears to us that the law is breached with impunity in Royal Park. It is very rare to see dogs leashed in on lead areas of the Park or under any kind of control. It is a wonder that the City of Melbourne has not been prosecuted for dog attack. The question occurs as to whether any assessment has been made of the risk involved in having extensive areas of Royal Park designated as dogs off the leash zones. Under the Wildlife Act 1975 Clause 48 it is an offence for dogs to attack wildlife and offending animals can be seized. No cognisance appears to have been paid by Council of the obligation to protect wildlife in parks under its care.

**Recommendation:** 1 That three additional sports grounds be added to the dogs off leash areas in Royal Park as was the intention of the Royal Park Master Plan Implementation Advisory Committee. Also we ask that the "Gully" Conservation zone be deleted. 2 That no decision be made until a revised policy on the monitoring and surveillance of dogs in Royal Park be drawn up. 3. That no decision be made until the City of Melbourne's Animal Management Plan which has a section on "dogs in open space" be finalised.

Yours sincerely

Julianne Bell  
Convenor  
Royal Park Protection Group Inc.  
PO Box 197 Parkville 3052

98184114 [jbelle5@bigpond.com](mailto:jbelle5@bigpond.com)