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To veac@dse.vic.gov.au **Sub:**

cc

bcc

Subject Submission for the Investigation on the use of crown land in metro Melbourne

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No: 146

VEAC,

In relation to your current investigation on the use of crown land in metropolitan Melbourne, I would like to request that you consider dog walking, one of the most common recreational uses of public space, within your investigation.

Australia has one of the highest dog ownership rates in the world with about 40% of households owning a dog (source: . ABS) Increasingly, there is public recognition of the therapeutic benefits to society of dog ownership, such as lowering stress, alleviating loneliness, improving health and encouraging people to exercise more and enjoy the outdoors. Dog ownership contributes \$2.745 billion to the Australian economy and provides employment for 44,700 people (source: BIS Shrapnel). Numerous studies have been conducted on the social and physical benefits of pet ownership and the outcomes confirm that not only do pets make us feel good, they are actually beneficial for us, both physically and mentally, by providing companionship, increasing social interaction and encouraging exercise.

A study conducted by the Baker Medical Research Institute in Melbourne revealed that pet owners had lower risk factors for cardiovascular disease and lower cholesterol than non-pet owners. Studies have shown that after controlling for multiple factors, pet owners make fewer doctor visits each year than non-pet owners, with the main contributor to better health outcomes being identified as being due to people receiving more exercise through daily walks with their dogs. (source: Australian Companion Animal Council). A recent report from Deakin University identified that 57% of families with young children walk their dog as a family at least once a week. Another study by the University of Western Australia's School of Population Health found that over 50% of dog owners meet people in their neighbourhood as a result of their pet, and over 80% of dog owners talk to other people when out walking their dogs. In 2001, the results of a national survey on pet owners in Australia and Germany by the International Social Science Survey Australia (ISSS-A) and the German Socio-Economic Panel Survey (GSOEP), were linked to data on health expenditure. It estimated that health expenditure in Australia would increase by \$3.86billion pa (7% increase) if there were to be no pet-ownership.

Recently, the Heart Foundation together with the RSPCA, launched a campaign called "Walk the Dog" to encourage these sorts of health benefits. So, there is a considerable body of evidence to support the fact that dog ownership is healthy, makes a significant contribution to the economy and is prevalent amongst the community. Yet despite this increased understanding of the importance of pets in the health of the community and its consequential benefits on reducing health expenditure, many local councils, who are the custodians of the bulk of public space in the metropolitan area often have narrow-minded policies heavily influenced by their traditional roles in dealing with animal control issues. This is creating a situation where public space is increasingly excluding dog exercising activities, at time when there is increasing demand for exactly this activity. This issue is also often dealt with by local councils in an adversarial manner, rather than in an inclusive consultative manner.

Much of crown land is used by dog-walkers and I would urge you to respectfully consider the legitimate needs of dogs and dog-owners in the community who use crown land within your investigation. I am grateful for the opportunity to have my views put forward for consideration and I look forward to hearing more about your investigation as it progresses.

best regards,

Ivana

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