

Speech to District Plan, Otiria Marae

Tena Kotou, Tena Kotou, Tena Kotou Katoa.

I would like to acknowledge Ngati Hine, the traditional kaitiaki of this land on which we stand, and to thank Ngāti Te Ara and Ngāti Kōpaki, the hapu of this stunning marae.

I am Leonie Exel, the coordinator of The Bay of Islands Watchdogs, a group of 1,900 dog-owning members and volunteers. Our key issue with the District Plan relates to the banning and restricting of pet dogs, via resource consent conditions. FNDC has been doing this for over 25 years.

So where are we at, today, with dogs and kiwi and FNDC?

The s42a report on sub-division which was posted online on 30.9.25 summarised our position relating to sub-division, kiwi and dogs beautifully:

“The BOI Watchdogs advocate for an immediate pause on dog bans or restrictions within subdivisions until thorough consultation and evidence gathering occurs. The submitter (us) recommends legal, academic, and policy reviews, inclusive of community input, to assess current bans, explore 20 responsible alternatives, and evaluate the broader social, housing and conservation impacts.”

Sadly, the same s42a report goes on to say that the author agrees with the writer of the Indigenous Biodiversity s42a report posted in July 2024, paragraphs 215-222. That report recommends, effectively, ‘business as usual’.

That is, that FNDC staff will continue to place conditions relating to pet dogs and pet cats, at their discretion. Pet dogs and pet cats – not feral dogs and feral cats – will be classified as ‘pests’ in some instances in the District Plan, regardless of how responsible their owner is, or whether the pet is contained effectively.

So if I want to put a granny flat on our 1/3rd acre in Jacks Bay, I will send documents to FNDC and ask them if I can do so. But FNDC will not want me to have any pets, because we live in a kiwi area. FNDC will tell me that if I want to sub-divide, I cannot replace my dog and cat when they die. They will tell me that any granny in my flat will be pet-free, because both the old property and the new one will have pet conditions on it. FNDC will email DOC, who will support their actions and provide them with a specially prepared 'Support document to the Bay of Islands Kiwi Distribution Map' to show that FNDC is right.

If I wanted to object to that decision, my subdivision would be delayed. I would have to find the money to fight in Court against the might of a District Council known to be litigious and often rumoured to be vexatious, and DOC, a huge government department. Both are determined to ban and limit pet dog and cat ownership in the Far North, and have fought for over a quarter of a century to be able to do so.

That is where we are today.

Let's step back for a moment and forget about IB-P9 or s42a reports and the huge District Planning process. Let's just look at the potential issues which may arise if FNDC elected members follow those recommendations, and keep on banning and restricting cats and dogs in subdivisions as they have been doing quietly for a quarter-century.

To do that we have to make some assumptions.

One of those assumptions is that The BOI Watchdogs will continue to fight this battle for the right to responsibly own a pet, in our own homes and on our land.

A second assumption is that our group will stop trying to influence and lobby FNDC directly, and just go to regulators like the Ombudsman, and to central government, and to the general public.

What will the public and the regulators and the political parties hear, and what will they ask?

1. **FNDC's refusal to advise the extent of the bans and restrictions:** 4 times over 7 years, including ignoring the motion passed at the elected council requiring them to gather that data. When we complain to the Ombudsman about this, it is probable that they will try to force FNDC's hand, given the significance of this issue to so many households.
2. **No consideration of systemic racism:** Because the household most likely to own a pet dog is a Māori household, so this decision disproportionately disadvantages Māori.
3. **No consultation with iwi or hapu:** Because despite having an elected council which is majority Māori – the new council and our last one - there has been no consultation with the nine iwi, and hundreds of hapu in this district, about this issue.
4. **No consideration for cultural issues:** Because this is the region where the Dog Tax War occurred, where the then colonisers tried to force Māori to pay registration for the dogs which they cherished and which they needed to feed and protect their families.
5. **No consultation with dog owners,** despite over 9,000 of us being registered on the dogs database at FNDC.

6. **No consideration of the impact on the housing crisis:** FNDC is continuing to exacerbate that crisis, forcing pet owners to move. The statistics we provided on properties available online to pet owners demonstrates this clearly.
7. **No consideration of the economic impact:** what is the resale value of a home if FNDC chooses to ban the right to own pets on that land? Who do you drive out of your district when you ban or restrict pet ownership? Impact on developers, real estate agents, anyone selling their home, home buyers, renters.
8. **No analysis of Pets vs Pests:** what is the impact of choosing to label pet dogs and cats as 'pests'? What is the knock-on effect of that decision?
9. **Proportionality:** Is the harm done to kiwi, or any animal for that matter, so bad that it is proportionate to ban and restrict dogs and cats?
10. **Cars vs Dogs:** Has FNDC or DOC worked to ban cars given that they are the most likely cause of death for kiwi? CARS kill more kiwi than dogs every year up north.
11. **Pre-determination**
 - **at FNDC:** Sean Clark asking environmental enthusiasts to organise protests to counter The BOI Watchdogs; continuing refusal to provide information on this issue; 2016/7 papers stating that dogs would be banned from the Russell Peninsula within 10 years; many resident dog owners not receiving consultation documents on the last dog bylaw.
 - **Pre-determination at DOC:** many letters and documents showing they have been trying to influence councils like this for years; FNDC's supporting information is prepared by and thus funded by DOC; false statements from DOC about dogs and kiwi persisting over many years (smell of kiwi, kiwi killed by dogs were not, false statements to media)

12. **Community impact:** what happens in communities when children are not taught how to be responsible pet owners by their families? What happens to elderly people when they lose the comfort of a dog or cat by their side in their last years?
13. **Resident outrage:** Because when residents actually discover what has been happening, and what is happening, the 50-60% of households who own dogs and/or cats will be shocked, and furious with FNDC for having chosen to make their homes, their land, into a giant aviary for flightless birds.

In closing, I would like to ask that all those able to influence this decision choose to stop, listen, and advise FNDC that they have a great deal more work to do if they want to be seen as fair, evidence-driven, and honest in their dealings with the pet owners in our communities.

Please, do not ban our pets from one more acre!

No Reira, Tena Kotou, Tena Kotou, Tena Kotou Katoa.

1. How much
land has been
banned or
restricted to
dogs and cats,
and where?

2. Systemic
racism -
which
ethnicity is
affected?

3. Iwi and
hapu
consultation?

4. Were the
Dog Tax War,
the status of
dogs in te ao
Māori, or
cultural issues
considered?

5. Were dog
owners
consulted?

6. What is the
impact on
housing
availability?

7. What is the
economic
impact?

8. Knock-on
effect of
classifying
'pets' as
'pests'?

9. Is this
decision
proportional
to the risk?

10. What is
the greatest
killer of kiwi?

11. Was this
decision pre-
determined
by FNDCC?
How about
DOC?

12. What is
the likely
impact on the
community?

13. How will
residents of
the Far North
react?