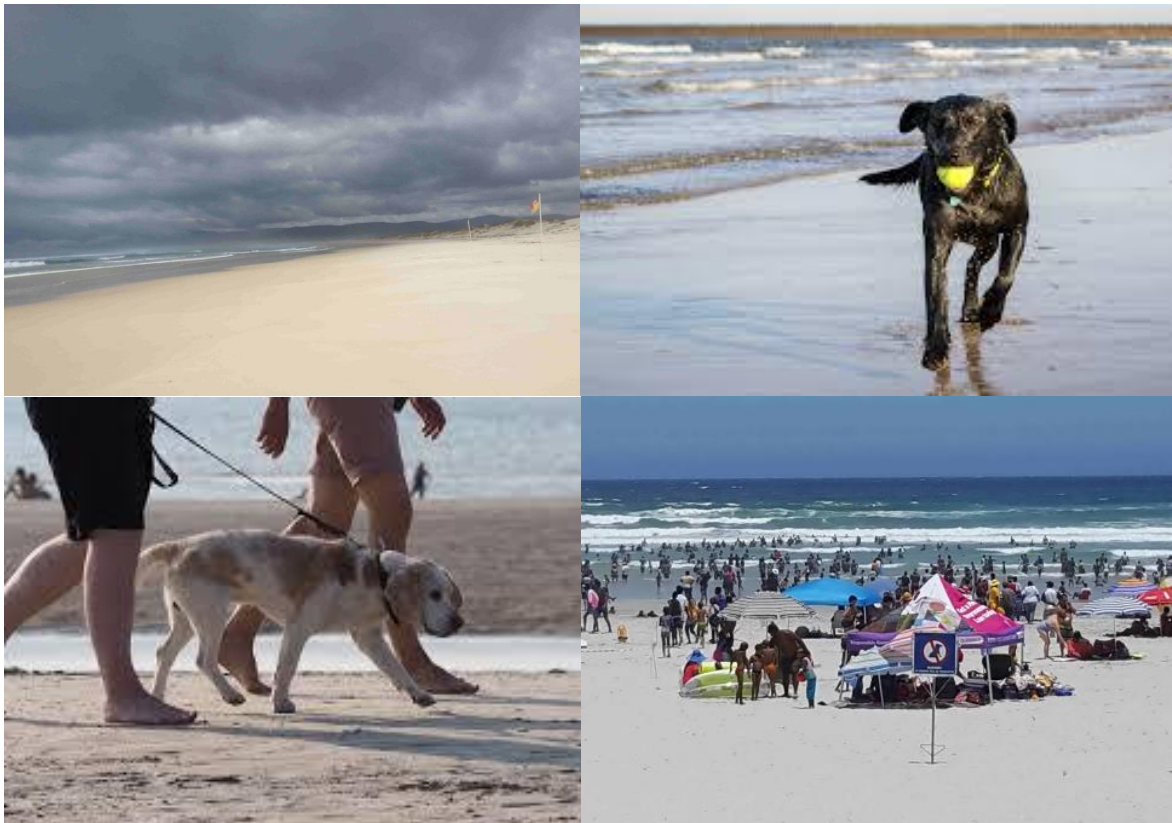




# PROPOSAL FOR DOG ZONING IN THE OVERSTRAND





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## **INTRODUCTION**

Executive Mayor Dudley Coetzee, asked Natures Valley Trust (NVT) to assist us with a pilot study on the impact of dogs on our various beaches.

Overstrand Municipality is to introduce three zones: red, orange and green starting at beaches in Gansbaai (Pearly Beach), Grotto and Kleinmond (Main Beach).

The red zones will be where dogs are not allowed, the orange zones will ask owners to keep dogs on leads and the green areas are where dogs can be let off leads but must be kept under control.

The first round of discussions with relevant stakeholders took place towards the end of 2019, and a second round of public meetings were held on 30 and 31 January 2020 to introduce the concept to the general public.

The final 'proposal' is now open for public comment for 21 days before the proposal will be taken to council for consideration.



## PROPOSAL

NVT proposed simple, yet effective interventions, based on sound ecological data to assist with companion-animal conflicts on beaches and consequently alleviate wildlife impacts. The Overstrand Municipality, which includes the coastal towns of Kleinmond, Hermanus and Gansbaai, is an ideal region for implementation of the #SharetheShores programme. In light of the contentious issue around dogs off leash on beaches and public areas, we would like to recommend a trial period for colour coded beaches (dog zonation) in these three areas, as the Overstrand Municipality would benefit largely from a more controlled canine presence, both in terms of beach visitors and wildlife. A colour coded system, where blue flags, swimming beaches and beach-nesting birds are taking into accounts, will allow for accurate zoning of beaches. The zones will include no dog beaches (red), leashed beaches (orange) and off-leash beaches (green) – which should satisfy all stakeholders and reduce risk to the municipality. Birdlife Overberg is a good local partner to conduct the research with regards to beach-nesting birds – this data will inform the zoning process further, allowing us to accurately allocate areas for the best outcome. NVT also offers the means to address the needs that exist, whether it may be to upskill stakeholders, implement fisherman’s bins, cigarette buckets, awareness and social media campaigns, shorebird breeding interventions, signage, etc.



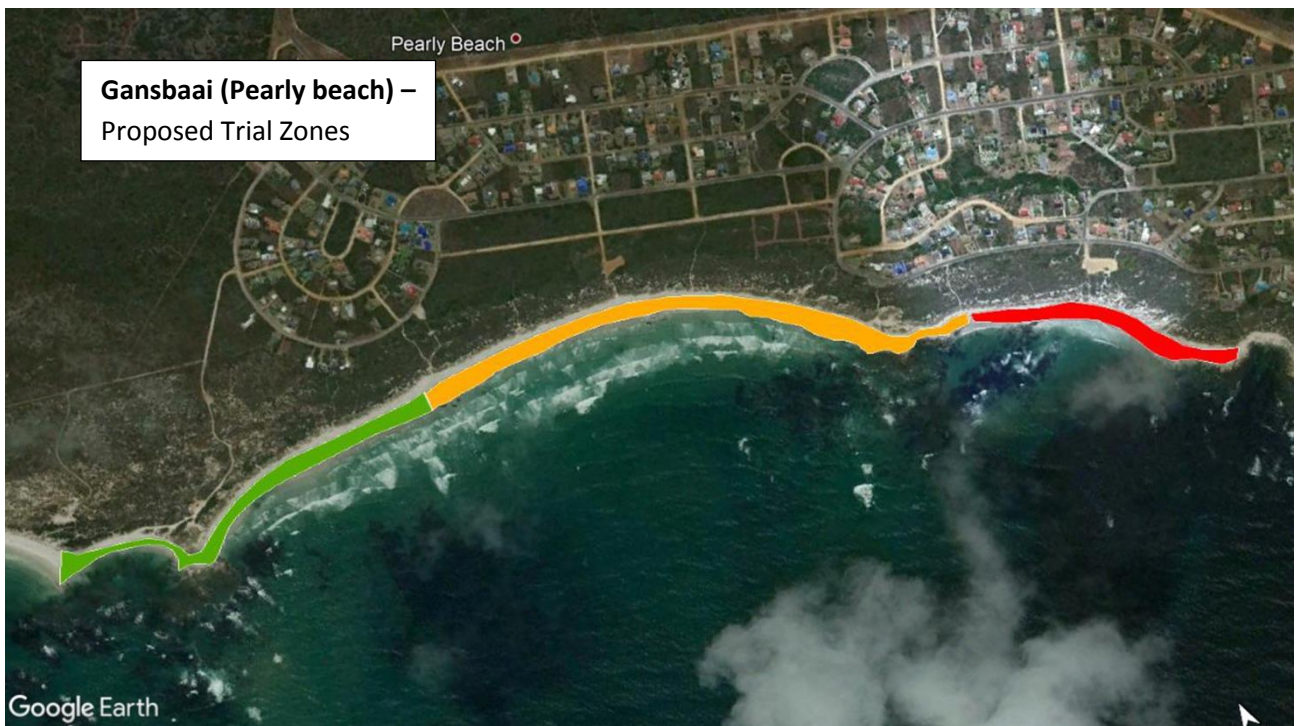
**RECOMMENDED ZONED AREAS**

**Green zone (dogs allowed off leash under owners control),**

**Orange zone (dogs on leash)**

**Red zone (no dogs allowed)**







## SOURCE DOCUMENT

*Proposal for implementation of the #ShareTheShores programme on beaches within the Overstrand Municipality: managing dog impacts on beach-users and wildlife*

### Problem Statement

Coastal human settlements are the fastest growing areas worldwide, leading to a dire need for sustainable conservation of these important natural areas. With high levels of development, increased tourism and attraction of coastal areas, numbers of beach users are predicted to rise significantly in the near future.

Beaches are used for various reasons, including but not limited to outdoor recreation, connection to nature and a source of 'restoration' and it is often also a space we share with loved ones and family. Dogs, as pets, occupy an 'in between' space in society, where they are both perceived as animals that need to run free but are also seen as a family member or close companion (Bowes et al. 2015). It is undeniable that dogs play a pivotal role in the lives of modern society, but in some scenarios, this comes with significant drawbacks. An issue that has gained growing traction over the last while is increased dog ownership in conjunction with overcrowding on beaches leading to human-dog conflicts as well as dog-wildlife conflicts. When issues like this arise, they have real implications for tourism, health and the environmental integrity of beaches. This includes the health risk of dog faeces on beaches that can directly affect other users or be leached into the marine environments, dogs urinating on children and their sandcastles and even unleashed dogs attacking other dogs and beach users such as runners or toddlers. Additional to the direct and indirect human-conflicts, dogs have high documented impacts on wildlife in these natural spaces.

Overstrand Municipality by-law relating to the keeping of dogs and cats clearly states that **"...no dog may be in a public place unless on a leash and under control of a person."** (Page 1079, Provincial Gazette 6540, 27 June 2008).

Public comment on this by-law has been controversial and has evoked a plethora of public responses both against and for dogs on leashes in public areas. Major concerns included the safety of joggers, cyclists and young children as well as unleashed dogs running in front of cyclists or motorists and causing accidents. There was also a major outcry for the right to exercise dogs off leash. Additionally, the beach breeding birds are of concern to some who recognise that dogs do have a major impact on birds that nest on sandy beaches. This is an extremely emotive topic which is complex but can be addressed effectively with a solution that is inclusive and should satisfy majority of stakeholders in any given area.



### **Nature's Valley Trust**

The Nature's Valley Trust (a section 18A registered NPO (025-306-NPO)) was established in 2001. Its mission is to enable an integrated stakeholder effort, that is proactively involved in issues that impact on the environmental resilience of the area. Over the past 19 years the NVT has established an award winning environmental education (EE) programme and catalysed the Bitou EE Forum, a platform for cooperation for schools based EE program in the region. In 2012, in collaboration with SANParks, the Nature's Valley Trust's Integrated Ecological Research and Interpretive Program (IERIC) was launched. The aim of this program is to provide integrated research capacity and technical support to local, regional and national conservation initiatives that are working to facilitate sustainable development on the Garden Route, jointly identifying sustainability challenges and co-designing integrated needs driven research across 6 core thematic areas. This proposed project combines; well-designed ecological research projects; the skills, credibility and networks built over 19 years of EE; a network of skilled stakeholders; to facilitate the provision of appropriate conservation education to beach and estuary users to reduce their ecological impact while ensuring sustainable utilization of beaches for all stakeholders.

### **Team profile**

Programme Convenor

Dr. Mark Brown

Director: Nature's Valley Trust

Honorary Researcher: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, School of Life Sciences

Head researcher: #ShareTheShores

Brittany Arendse

MSc Pollination Biology

Research Ecologist: Nature's Valley Trust

### **Case Study from Plettenberg Bay**

The Garden Route is one of South Africa's most bio-diverse 'outstanding places'. Juxtaposed with this are impoverished communities, high unemployment rates, tourism pressure, water shortages and an unprecedented rate of development. Underline the above with limited knowledge, capacity and skills to sustainably manage and utilise these resources for improved livelihoods and we have a microcosm of South Africa's conservation and biodiversity challenges. With high levels of development, increased tourism and the attraction of the area, numbers of beach users are predicted to rise in the future. Despite this, authorities have limited reliable research data on the impact of beach and estuary users on the animals that co-exist in those ecosystems, both inside and outside protected areas.

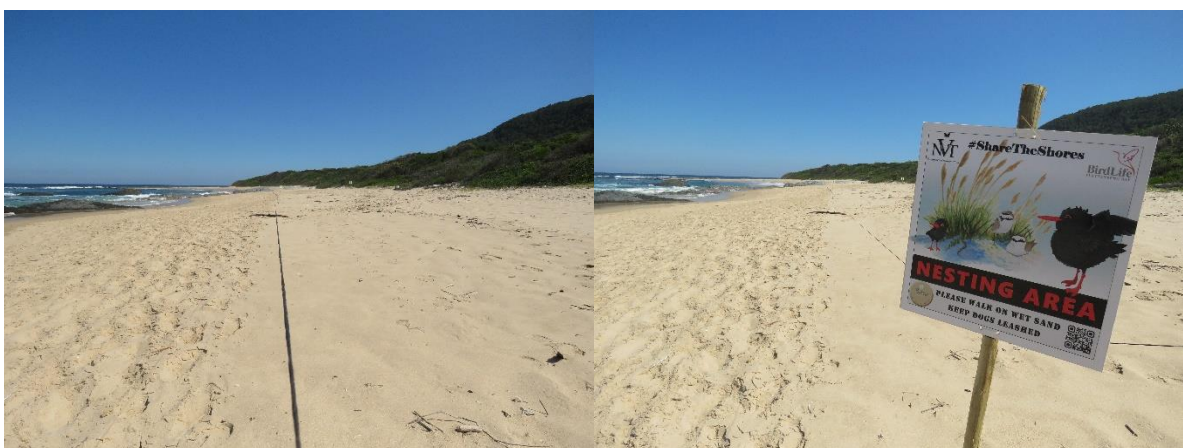


Over the last five years data collection by Nature's Valley Trust have shown that in the wake of increasing human settlement there are always impacts on the natural environment. The two main threats being improper waste management with related knock on effects on wildlife, and secondly as direct impacts to wildlife. For example, recent research has shown that breeding African Black Oystercatchers are negatively impacted by anthropomorphic disturbance at several beaches in Plettenberg Bay. Of more concern, a relatively common species, the White-fronted Plover, has had an estimated 40-60% decline in numbers in the last 20 years, with little to no understanding of the cause until our recent work. In addition, numbers of animals being reported with entanglement issues due to negligent waste disposal on beaches is on the rise.

Over the last three years NVT has developed and implemented an integrated, highly successful coastal impact programme, covering marine debris issues, dog- and human-shorebird conflicts, to the needs of the area. Investigating the marine debris issue, NVT recognised that 39% of the debris deposited on the beach is fishing related, in majority, fishing line but also other fishing related items, like bait cotton reels, sinkers, hooks, etc., despite fisherman making up only 10% of the beach users locally. Fisherman's bins were installed at beach entrances to reduce the amount of line and fishing related debris that are left behind on the beaches. Since the inception of this initiative we have collected approximately 2.65 kg of fishing line off the Nature's Valley Beach, to be recycle into usable items PlasticsSA. Post intervention research shows fishing related litter now down to below 10%, indicating a successful program with tangible results.



Our #ShareTheShores program also assesses the effects of human and companion animal disturbance on breeding output of shorebirds breeding on beaches. The initial results for two beaches along the Greater Plettenberg Bay area suggested a very low breeding success for the White-fronted Plover. In fact, Lookout Beach had a success rate of 10.6% for 2015 breeding season, while Nature’s Valley had a success rate of 8.6%. After three years of the #ShareTheShores awareness and intervention program the breeding success has been increased to 14.3% for Lookout Beach and 30.5% for Nature’s Valley.



In December 2017, NVT, in partnership with local municipal authorities, also implemented dog zones for all the high-use beaches in the Greater Plettenberg Bay area. Green (off-leash), orange (leashed) and red (no-dog) zones have been launched to support the needs of all types of users, from the individual or mother with toddler who goes to the beach to enjoy a quiet day without dogs to the avid dog person who would like to allow their dog to

run freely. These zones are based on scientific data identifying the hotspot bird breeding areas as well as the location of Blue Flag areas. Since December 2018, we have already recorded less dogs on red zones and this will surely assist in the shore nesting birds' breeding success, which we will continuously assess with the following breeding seasons. Public feedback has been very positive, with the majority of dog owners indicating they are grateful to now have areas to let their dogs' off-leash.

The composite image includes several key elements:

- Top Left:** A photograph of a dog on a sandy beach with people in the distance.
- Top Right:** A green sign that reads "DOGS ALLOWED at all times" with the Bitou logo.
- Middle Right:** A black sign with a green dog silhouette that reads "No leads necessary but dogs must be under command of their owners at all times. Failure to comply may result in a R500.00 fine".
- Bottom Right:** A black box containing emergency numbers, a QR code for "Nature's Valley Trust", and the NVT logo.
- Bottom Left:** A legend for the map listing locations: Beach Entrances, The Wreck Beach, Solar Beach, Sanctuary Beach, Robberg Beach, Beacon Island Resort, and Central Beach.
- Bottom Center:** A map of the coastline with zonation zones 1 through 7, color-coded from green to red.

**Phased Approach**

We propose a phased pilot study at three locations in the Overstrand Municipal area, to introduce the dog zonation system in the region, while engaging stakeholders to ensure all concerns and requests are taken into consideration:

1. Stakeholder workshop to ascertain needs of the areas in question. Engagement with relevant coastal management and conservation organisations to adopt and implement NVT's #ShareTheShores program or part thereof to reduce anthropogenic effects on the coastal environment. This means public stakeholder meetings in all three identified areas, to introduce the #ShareTheShores program, present data on its effectiveness in Bitou, and to enable stakeholder input and concerns to be raised.



2. Implement this conservation intervention program to change behaviour positively, without developing negative perceptions of conservation. This includes locally relevant, simple info packs for beach users, improved awareness of birds breeding on beaches through awareness campaigns and signage. The key will be training staff and volunteers in like-minded organisations along the coast, to increase the positive impact and reach #ShareTheShores has had to date. Key local stakeholders that could facilitate monitoring and awareness are BirdLife Overberg and Dyer Island Conservation Trust.
3. Train local municipal staff and interested stakeholders to monitor the impact of the intervention program.

### **Proposed trial in three areas in Overstrand Municipality**

NVT proposes simple, yet effective interventions, based on sound ecological data to assist with companion-animal conflicts on beaches and consequently alleviate wildlife impacts. The Overstrand Municipality, which includes the coastal towns of Kleinmond, Hermanus and Gansbaai, is an ideal region for implementation of the #SharetheShores programme. In light of the contentious issue around dogs off leash on beaches and public areas, we would like to recommend a trial period for colour coded beaches (dog zonation) in these three areas, as the Overstrand Municipality would benefit largely from a more controlled canine presence, both in terms of beach visitors and wildlife. A colour coded system, where blue flags, swimming beaches and beach-nesting birds are taking into accounts, will allow for accurate zoning of beaches. The zones will include no dog beaches (red), leashed beaches (orange) and off-leash beaches (green) – which should satisfy all stakeholders and reduce risk to the municipality. Birdlife Overberg is a good local partner to conduct the research with regards to beach-nesting birds – this data will inform the zoning process further, allowing us to accurately allocate areas for the best outcome. NVT also offers the means to address the needs that exist, whether it may be to upskill stakeholders, implement fisherman’s bins, cigarette buckets, awareness and social media campaigns, shorebird breeding interventions, signage, etc.

The proposal would be to hold public workshops in August, or early September, while working with Municipal staff to pre-identify possible sites to trial the zonation system. Once public meetings are held, and locations finalized, signage for these areas can be developed and installed by end November, early December. Stakeholder groups and municipal staff that agree to assist with monitoring of the effectiveness of the program should take place in September, prior to signage being erected. Basic monitoring should include regular counts of dogs in the various zones, and of bird breeding in bird “hot spot” areas. We propose



further follow up stakeholder meetings after season, in late February, early March 2020 to give feedback on the pilot program and to receive input from the public.

### **Conclusion**

We appreciate the opportunity to submit this proposal. Based on our extensive experience in the Bitou region, we are confident we can engage the public in the Overstrand Municipal region with a positive, proactive approach to solving the ongoing dog issue on beaches in the region. If the pilot is successful, we would be able to submit a revised proposal to implement at a larger scale throughout the region.