

Mr M Stretton
Chief Executive Officer
Hobart City Council
Macquarie Street
Hobart TAS 7000

By email: coh@hobartcity.com.au

Re: Proposed closure of South Hobart Oval as an off-lead dog exercise area

Dear Mr Stretton

COTA Tasmania writes regarding the current consultation on proposed amendments to the City of Hobart's declared dog exercise areas, including the proposal to make South Hobart Oval a dog-restricted area at all times from 1 July 2026.

COTA Tasmania recognises that Council must balance competing uses of public space and that South Hobart Oval has an important role in the city's sporting infrastructure. We do not dismiss the importance of quality facilities for soccer, including state and national level competition.

However, we are concerned that the proposed removal of off-lead dog access at South Hobart Oval may have unintended and disproportionate impacts on older residents and others in the local community who rely on the oval as a familiar, centrally located and accessible place for routine exercise, social connection and daily wellbeing.

For many older people, dog walking is not simply recreation. It is one of the few regular forms of physical activity that is practical, affordable and sustainable. Just as importantly, it provides social contact, routine, companionship and a sense of safety and belonging. In an ageing community, those things matter. They are protective factors against loneliness, declining mobility and social isolation.

We note that Hobart City Council previously acknowledged the long-standing shared use of the oval by both the South Hobart Football Club and the local dog-walking community, and described the site as a vital centrally located off-lead space in a suburb lacking suitable, well-located open space for dog exercise purposes. That remains highly relevant to this decision.

From COTA Tasmania's perspective, the key question is not simply whether another dog area exists somewhere else on paper. The question is whether there is a genuinely comparable and accessible alternative for older people and others with limited mobility, confidence, transport options or time. Accessibility includes proximity, gradient, path quality, seating, safety, familiarity, ease of parking, and the ability to use the space as part of an established daily routine.

On the information presently available, we are not persuaded that this question has been adequately addressed.

We are also concerned that the current proposal appears to move too quickly from a long history of shared community use to a permanent restriction, without sufficient evidence that all reasonable alternatives have been exhausted.

In particular, we encourage Council to give further consideration to:

- whether a managed shared-use arrangement remains possible, including stronger maintenance, supervision, education, booking visibility and clearer operating protocols;
- whether any transition should be deferred until a truly comparable and accessible alternative is established, tested and demonstrated to work for local users, including older residents;
- whether the social and wellbeing impacts on older people have been explicitly assessed as part of Council's decision-making;
- whether the proposal aligns with Council's broader commitments to inclusion, liveability and age-friendly planning.

COTA Tasmania is concerned that decisions of this kind can unintentionally privilege organised, formal and high-profile uses of public space over informal, everyday community use. Yet it is often these everyday uses that matter most to older residents' quality of life. A daily dog walk close to home can be the difference between connection and isolation, activity and decline, confidence and withdrawal.

We therefore urge Council not to proceed with the proposed closure of South Hobart Oval as an off-lead dog exercise area in its current form.

At minimum, COTA Tasmania asks Council to pause the proposed restriction until it can demonstrate that:

- the impacts on older people and accessible local amenity have been properly assessed;
- meaningful options for managed coexistence have been fully explored; and
- any replacement arrangement offers a genuinely accessible, practical and equivalent alternative for the community members who currently depend on this space.

This is not only a dog management issue. It is also a healthy ageing, social inclusion and equitable access issue.

We would be pleased to discuss these matters further if helpful.

Yours sincerely



Brigid Wilkinson
Chief Executive Officer

18th March 2026