

December 2024

**To Auckland Council**

Please find attached our submission on Let’s Protect Our Environment

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# Introducing Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

**We work on systemic change for the equity of disabled people**

Disabled Persons Assembly NZ (DPA) is a not-for-profit pan-impairment Disabled People’s Organisation run by and for disabled people.

**We recognise:**

* Māori as Tangata Whenua and [Te Tiriti o Waitangi](https://www.archives.govt.nz/discover-our-stories/the-treaty-of-waitangi) as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand;
* disabled people as experts on their own lives;
* the [Social Model of Disability](https://www.odi.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/guidance-for-policy-makes/) as the guiding principle for interpreting disability and impairment;
* the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html) as the basis for disabled people’s relationship with the State;
* the [New Zealand Disability Strategy](https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/) as Government agencies’ guide on disability issues; and
* the [Enabling Good Lives Principles](https://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/about-egl/egl-approach/principles/), [Whāia Te Ao Mārama: Māori Disability Action Plan](https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/whaia-te-ao-marama-2018-2022-maori-disability-action-plan), and [Faiva Ora: National Pasifika Disability Disability Plan](https://www.moh.govt.nz/notebook/nbbooks.nsf/0/5E544A3A23BEAECDCC2580FE007F7518/$file/faiva-ora-2016-2021-national-pasifika-disability-plan-feb17.pdf) as avenues to disabled people gaining greater choice and control over their lives and supports.

**We drive systemic change through:**

**Rangatiratanga / Leadership**: reflecting the collective voice of disabled people, locally, nationally and internationally.

**Pārongo me te tohutohu / Information and advice**: informing and advising on policies impacting on the lives of disabled people.

**Kōkiri / Advocacy**: supporting disabled people to have a voice, including a collective voice, in society.

**Aroturuki / Monitoring**: monitoring and giving feedback on existing laws, policies and practices about and relevant to disabled people.

# The submission

DPA welcomes the opportunity to give feedback on the Auckland Council Let’s Protect Our Environment submission to protect our natural environment. However, our role is to highlight this from the perspective of our disability community based in Tamaki Makaurau.

DPA commends Auckland Council on providing accessible formats in NZSL and Easy to Read for this consultation document. We also acknowledge the many iwi and hapū, community conservation volunteers, organisations and individuals that invest a lot of time and effort to activities to protect our environment.

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| **Recommendation 1:** that Council disseminate the accessible formats to disabled peoples’ organisations, disability service providers and their Disability Advisory Panel |

# An accessibility lens on our natural environment

Ka ora te whenua, ka ora te tangata; When the land is well, we are well

As tangata whaikaha (disabled) are a part of the community and tangata whaikaha Māori (Māori disabled) are tangata whenua, we all have a part to play in protecting our natural environment in Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland.

The whakataukī (proverb) above is relevant to both tangata whaikaha and tangata whaikaha Māori. According to Mental Health Foundation statistics, the positive impact that spending time in nature has on the mental health of New Zealanders has been quantified. Approximately 95% said that spending time in nature during the week made them feel good and 75% said they intended to spend more regular time in nature.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Healthy environments are an important for keeping everyone healthy and well as highlighted by the Auckland floods where people, including from within the disability community community, were not able to access the food in their gardens due to contamination from flood waters. The reduction of access to natural food reserves greatly impacted disabled people.[[2]](#footnote-3)

# Tangata Whaikaha Māori as mana whenua

Tangata whaikaha Māori are mana whenua and play their part to protect Māori cultural values holding the knowledge and wisdom passed down to them in roles such as kaitiaki (guardians) of our ngahere (forests), repo (wetlands), roto (lakes), and moana (oceans), and the indigenous species that inhabit them.

Mana whenua of Te Kawerau ā Maki in an interview[[3]](#footnote-4) shared their story on the fight to save Kauri with mātauranga Māori. The change in birdsong told Māori the forest was sick. Closing the Waitākere Ranges with a rāhui slowed the spread of the fatal Kauri dieback disease. Now traditional knowledge of soil is rebuilding the forest’s resilience. The importance of using mātauranga Māori is beneficial for the wellbeing of all people and further research and collaboration would benefit everyone.

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| **Recommendation 2:** that Council collaborates with mana whenua, which includes tangata whaikaha Māori, to further research the use of mātauranga Māori for the natural environment |

Water is an important part of our natural environment. Northland Regional Council released a discussion document recently highlighting the interconnection of cosmologies with the importance and life of water.[[4]](#footnote-5)

# Topic one: Responsible cat ownership

DPA recently submitted on the Far North District Council’s draft bylaw on the Keeping of Animals.. DPA’s aim was to highlight that some cat owners are disabled people who own cats for mental and physical wellbeing reasons [[5]](#footnote-6) and practical reasons, including pest management .

Pet owners that do not responsibly care for or manage their domesticated cats or people who abandon cats can impact on disabled people’s health and/or cause other problems, especially for people who are immunocompromised as outlined below:

* Cat noise and odours impact on disabled people and people with health conditions that are sensitive to noises and odours.
* Cats getting into rubbish or gardens can create more work for disabled people if their support workers or caregivers’ hours are limited and they cannot clean up the mess created by any animals themselves.
* Feral, wild, and abandoned cats can cause issues through attacking disabled people, domestic cats or creating additional work in terms of the need to remove fleas from infected animals on properties.

Aucklanders are facing cost of living challenges, but living costs for many people in the Auckland disability community are higher with extra costs and this on top of government funding cuts. Many disabled people due to the lack of accessibility to education or employment[[6]](#footnote-7) live on low, fixed incomes[[7]](#footnote-8). For these reasons, costs such as vet fees, transport fees, medical exemption and animal registration fees can be very costly for disabled people.

We are pleased that Auckland Council, SPCA and local vets provide free desexing and microchipping to communities living near threatened species sites.

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| **Recommendation 3:** that Council provide information on desexing, microchipping and responsible cat ownership is made available in accessible formats including New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), Braille, large print, captioned video, audio and easy read. |

# Topic two: Pest-free islands and peninsulas – what next?

DPA supports the Mai Taonga objective for desexing to be made mandatory for all owned cats on the island (whether resident or visiting from the mainland), and that only island residents should be allowed to transport cats to Aotea. As mentioned above, disabled people living or travelling to Aotea need to be made more aware of the free services for desexing cats.

In Predator Free 2050 , the safe trapping of cats to check if they are domestic or feral is important to ensure that it is only feral cats from the island who are euthanised . This ensures that disabled owners and their domesticated cats are not harmed by feral cats and the safe trapping ensures that their domesticated cats are not wrongly killed or injured. .

The national Predator Free 2050 vision to remove rats, stoats, ferrets, weasels, possums, hedgehogs and feral cats is important. They present a health and safety risk for disabled people that are immunocompromised along with the importance of protecting our wildlife from predators.

# Topic three: Protecting our moana from Caulerpa seaweed and other marine pests

DPA supports introducing a rule requiring anchors, chains and other gear to be clean of visible dirt, seaweed and animals before moving to a new location. We raise below the importance of protecting our natural environment as overdevelopment and extraction of natural resources can lead to severe weather events that disproportionately impact on disabled people.

# Topic four: Our freshwater bodies are under threat from existing and new invaders

DPA supports banning motorised boats from Lake Tomarata.. It would manage the contamination to a priority lake, stop vessels moving at speed, stop churning up lakebed sediments, disturbing bird nesting sites and contaminating the lake water with fuel. Motor boating may be a valued recreational experience but the expense of managing contamination and damage, and the safety of others needs to be prioritised. It also would increase safety for disabled people swimming and kayaking although some natural environments remain inaccessible to many disabled people due to lack of accessible equipment or open spaces to recreational activities.

# Climate change and severe weather events for the disability community

Auckland Council raised the question of how we should improve the resilience of our threatened species and ecosystems. DPA’s focus on tackling climate resilience should be a high priority when managing our natural environment as disabled people will be - and already are - one of the most at risk groups from climate change impacts.[[8]](#footnote-9)

In our submission to Environment Canterbury on climate change, we discussed the need to focus on how it should be mitigated. We also wanted to ensure the development of effective climate change responses incorporating disabled people. . It is relevant both regionally and nationwide.

A recent article published by the journal *Nature Climate Change*[[9]](#footnote-10) highlighted that governments werefailing to take disability inclusive climate action and that disabled people are disproportionately more at risk in climate emergencies.

This is underpinned by the fact that disabled people have been accorded lower priority in climate emergencies or other disasters and systemically excluded from receiving emergency healthcare and humanitarian support as a result.[[10]](#footnote-11)

The article also highlighted that slow onset climate change, including sea level rise, more damaging weather events, as well as rising water and food scarcity which will all exacerbate the existing inequities experienced by disabled people.

Michael Stein, in a Harvard University Center for the Environment (2023)[[11]](#footnote-12) interview elaborated about the impact of climate change on disabled people:

*“Climate change amplifies the marginalization experienced by persons with disabilities negatively affecting health, reducing access to healthcare services, food, water, and accessible infrastructure. People with psychosocial disabilities have triple the rate of mortality in heatwaves.”*

For all the above reasons, we need disability-inclusive climate adaptation in terms of mitigation policies informed by research.

DPA has been inspired by the model provided by the Bristol Disabled People’s Forum in the UK where the local council in that city has engaged (and continues to engage in) climate change planning and dialogue with the local disabled community through the forum. The city council co-developed a plan with the Disability Equality Forum (a Bristol-based disabled people’s organisation which is cross-impairment based like DPA) around climate change and its impact on disabled people.

DPA views the use of deliberative, decision-making structures like the Bristol Disabled People’s Forum as one means through which Auckland’s disabled community along with the Auckland Council Disability Advisory panel could dialogue on the development of disability responsive climate change plans.

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| **Recommendation 4:** that Council, the Auckland disabled community (including Disabled People’s Organisations) and Disability Advisory Panel partner together to develop accessible climate resilience strategies |

1. Mental Health Foundation. (2018, Mar 23). *Survey shows strong link between time spent in nature and positive mental health.* <https://mentalhealth.org.nz/news/post/survey-shows-strong-link-between-time-spent-in-nature-and-positive-mental-health> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Shivas, O. (2023, Feb 4). *'Life or death' for disabled people caught in Auckland floods, improvements needed.* Stuff website. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/auckland/local-news/131128910/life-or-death-for-disabled-people-caught-in-auckland-floods-improvements-needed> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Re: News. (2021, Jul 8). *The fight to save kauri with mātauranga Māori.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C5mIDmJqUbc> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Shortland, T., & Armstrong, K. (2022). *Te Mana me te Mauri o te Wai: A Discussion Document for Te Tai Tokerau.* Prepared for the Northland Regional Council’s Tangata Whenua Water Advisory Group by Awatea Organics. <https://www.nrc.govt.nz/media/lxcnbe0w/stage-1-report-te-mana-me-te-mauri-o-te-wai-a-discussion-document-for-te-tai-tokerau-final.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Cerebral Palsy Society. (n.d). *Disability and Pets.* <https://cerebralpalsy.org.nz/disability-and-pets/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Statistics. (2023, Jun). *Labour market statistics (disability): June 2023 quarter.* <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/labour-market-statistics-disability-june-2023-quarter/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Office of Disability Issues. (n.d). *Key facts about disability in New Zealand.* <https://www.odi.govt.nz/home/about-disability/key-facts-about-disability-in-new-zealand/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Bhatia, R. (2023, Jan 29). *Tāmaki Makaurau flood response put disabled at risk, advocate says.* Stuff website. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/pou-tiaki/131090636/tmaki-makaurau-flood-response-put-disabled-at-risk-advocate-says?rm=a> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Stein, J.S., Stein, M., Groce, N. & Kett, M. (2023). The role of the scientific community in strengthening disability-inclusive climate resilience. *Nature Climate Change 13*, 108-109. [https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-022-01564-6.epdf?](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-022-01564-6.epdf?sharing_token=WG7FDIwxm9EdrpxLpip75tRgN0jAjWel9jnR3ZoTv0OlD0JgJ93tTQjFULmdry3BVlmuGxD5onmsJt996nkMEGAr2tCBsveYWZXhgtd709bHCKwbcstWptPivtOz4U34R-phYAWEgIDvEDGs0fzjPHcHM0ng8l0DWIje7vQzL10%3D) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Bhatia, R., Shivas, O., & Doyle, K. (2023, Feb 1). *Concerns for Māori and disabled as state of emergency declared in Northland.* Stuff website. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/pou-tiaki/300796156/concerns-for-mori-and-disabled-as-state-of-emergency-declared-in-northland?rm=a> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Harvard University Center for the Environment. (2023, January 19). *Disability in a Time of Climate Disaster*. Retrieved from [https://environment.harvard.edu/news/disability-time-climate-disaster#](https://environment.harvard.edu/news/disability-time-climate-disaster#:~:text=Climate%20change%20amplifies%20the%20marginalization,rate%20of%20mortality%20in%20heatwaves) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)