April 2024

**Ki Te Kaunihera o Te Hiku o te Ika Far North District Council**

Please find attached DPA’s submission on the Te Kaunihera o Te Hiku o te Ika Far North District Council Long Term Plan 2024–2037.

Noho ora mai,

For any further inquiries, please contact:
Patti Poa
Policy Advisor – Auckland/Northland
Disabled Persons Assembly Aotearoa New Zealand
Email: policy@dpa.org.nz

# Introducing Disabled Persons Assembly

**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 [Aotearoa 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/%24file/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.

## United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

DPA was influential in creating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD),[[1]](#footnote-2) a foundational document for disabled people which Aotearoa New Zealand has signed and ratified, confirming that disabled people must have the same human rights as everyone else.

All state bodies in Aotearoa New Zealand, including local and regional government, have a responsibility to uphold the principles and articles of this convention. There are a number of UNCRPD articles particularly relevant to this submission, including:

* Article 5: Non-discrimination
* Article 9: Accessibility
* Article 13: Access to justice
* Article 19: Living independently and being included in the community
* Article 20: Personal mobility
* Article 29: Participation in political and public life.

## Aotearoa New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016–2026

Since ratifying the UNCRPD, the Aotearoa New Zealand Government has established a Disability Strategy[[2]](#footnote-3) to guide the work of government agencies on disability issues.

The vision is that Aotearoa New Zealand be a non-disabling society, where disabled people have equal opportunity to achieve their goals and aspirations, and that all of Aotearoa New Zealand works together to make this happen.

The Strategy identifies eight outcome areas contributing to achieving this vision. There are a number of Strategy outcomes particularly relevant to this submission, including:

* Outcome 5 – Accessibility
* Outcome 6 – Attitudes
* Outcome 7 – Choice and Control
* Outcome 8 – Leadership

# The submission

*He* Moana Pukepuke *e ekengia e te Waka*

A choppy sea can be navigated.

DPA would firstly like to acknowledge the community and its recovery efforts after Cyclone Gabriel and other severe weather events. DPA recognises that Council’s main focus is on recovery and rebuilding after these weather events and the extra work they created.

DPA’s goals are disabled communities that are proud, vibrant, healthy, safe, connected, sustainable, resilient and prosperous, living in an environment that recognises tangata whenua as kaitiaki and celebrates our unique culture and history.

DPA supports Kaunihera o Te Hiku o te Ika Far North District Council promoting economic, social, cultural, and environmental wellbeing for current and future generations.

## System Outcomes: Accessibility

Accessibility is a core principle of the UNCRPD, and a key outcome of the Aotearoa New Zealand Disability Strategy. It affects every area of disabled people’s lives, from the homes we live in, the places we work and the extent to which we can move around our communities. It also has a major impact on disabled people’s level of risk and ability to recover following severe weather events.

DPA supports appropriate development within sustainable environmental limits to protect the health, wellbeing, and economic opportunities of the disabled community in Aotearoa New Zealand.

It is essential that disabled people have input into the decision-making processes on the rating system becoming a district-wide rating for water supply and wastewater once the coalition government outlines how infrastructure will be funded.

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| **Recommendation 1:** that disabled people have input into the decision-making processes on the rating system becoming a district-wide rating for water supply and wastewater. |

## Te Hiku o te Ika

Te Tai Tokerau Northland is unique and often reminds the rest of North Island that it is the tail of the fish that gives direction as the head of the fish, Te Upoko o te Ika, often forget in their dealings whether it be in relation to funding, policy, infrastructure requirements or advocating for the communities we live in.

DPA’s role is to remind people and organisations of the importance of accessibility for our disability communities. Even when we have a seat at the table, our voices often go unheard or are not listened to. This is an opportunity with new builds to ensure that they are accessible for all with an ageing population in Northland.

### Climate resilience

Disabled people are one of the groups most at risk from climate change[[3]](#footnote-4). Many examples exist of disabled people being highly impacted by urban planning failing to provide for the impact of climate change occurring across low-lying communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our infrastructure is already degraded from severe weather events and a shortage of central government funding for infrastructure investment. Far North is facing major risks from climate change.

DPA supports FNDC’s approach to developing climate resilience through focussing on infrastructure.

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| **Recommendation 2:** that the impact of climate change on disabled people is considered when focussing on infrastructure. |

### Flood Protection

Low-lying areas are often at greater risk from flooding, sea level rise and/or liquefaction in an earthquake but because they are often more accessible and affordable, a higher proportion of disabled people live in these areas.

Given that 40% of Kainga Ora clients are disabled in some way, this means that in many places social housing, and disabled people, are being effectively placed in harm’s way. So those least able to avoid or recover from a natural disaster are most at risk of losing everything.

Preventing this situation re-occurring in the future will require planning for climate resilient communities and places that are also accessible for disabled people. As a recent news article states “Floods are inevitable. Flood disasters are not”.[[4]](#footnote-5)

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| **Recommendation 3:** that the FNDC include in their planning the feedback from the FNDC Disability Advisory Group and the disability community after the severe weather events. |

### Housing

DPA is very concerned by proposals to divest housing for elderly as often many older people are impaired or have a form of disability with the added issues of increased homelessness and the cost of housing.

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| **Recommendation 4:** that FNDC consult with both disability organisations and age care organisations before making any decisions around divestment of the stock of housing for elderly. |

### Water Health

DPA supports Council confirmed a partnership with Te Tai Tokerau Water Trust which is building a mid-North water storage reservoir and delivery system as it develops water security. It also supports Taumata Arowai standards of keeping drinking water safe for the health and wellbeing of disabled residents within Te Tai Tokerau.

With the FNDC concerns with water quality in Northland especially during storm events and central government plans to fast track approvals, water security is an important factor for the health and wellbeing of the disabled community.

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| **Recommendation 5:** that FNDC discuss water health with the disability advisory group as it impacts on the health and wellbeing of the disabled community. |

### Emergency Preparedness and Natural Hazards

There is a need for all decision makers to take steps to uphold the wellbeing of our disabled community who are affected by natural disasters. Severe weather events also cause substantial infrastructure damage. The impact that weather-enforced homelessness has had on disabled people is further exacerbated by the dire shortage of accessible housing.

DPA requests that FNDC establish a voluntary register for people with disabilities to identify special requirements in case of emergency or evacuation (e.g. medical, pets, equipment, mobility or sensory) with support from WDC, NRC and CDEM. People also need to know where their nearest or most appropriate accessible evacuation centre is, who to contact, and how to contact or mobilise themselves and others if access is blocked and/or phones are down with this information being publicised through WDC, disabled persons organisations, Tai Tokerau disability providers and personal networks.

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| **Recommendation 6:** that the FNDC factor into their emergency preparedness and planning for natural disasters the current shortage of accessible emergency housing for disabled people.  |
| **Recommendation 7:** that FNDC establish a voluntary register for disabled people to identify special requirements in case of emergency or evacuation and publicise information about emergency preparedness for disabled people through NRC, disabled persons organisations, Tai Tokerau disability providers and personal networks. |

### Open Spaces

DPA highlights the importance of sporting facilities and keeping them open as several Northland disability sports groups, organisations and community groups use these facilities.

FNDC has a diverse range of facilities including pump tracks, playgrounds, parks and reserves (including sports fields), cemeteries, playgrounds, motor camps, benches, bollards, signs, tables and playground shade sails.

DPA requests that with the rebuild of new spaces that accessibility be at the forefront of the conversation for environmental planners and landscape architects. Many disabled parent/s with non-disabled children, disabled children with non-disabled parents or disabled parents and disabled children find the community spaces to be inaccessible for them.

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| **Recommendation 8:** that FNDC ensure that all their facilities are accessible and built on universal design principles. |
| **Recommendation 9:** that the concept of universal design is regularly discussed when FNDC work with their environmental planners and landscape architects. |

### Built Spaces

DPA supports improvement of safety and inclusiveness for community buildings, community halls, Council offices, iSites, hubs, satellite offices, libraries, mobile library, museums, and public toilets.

We would support a multi-purpose centre for each ward while also ensuring that the physical centres are accessible. It is also important to consider that some online services are not accessible for Northlanders as they have intermittent or non-existent internet connectivity.

We also highlight the importance of having an accessibility lens for any development of newly built spaces.

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| **Recommendation 10:** that FNDC improve the safety and inclusiveness for its built spaces and ensure an accessibility lens is used for any future builds. |

### Transport

The provision of accessible public transport services is important for disabled people in terms of the ability to undertake social connection, inclusion and participation in their communities.

Northland has major transport network repairs ahead and its repair is a number one priority to ensure disabled people are not isolated in rural areas far from many necessary services.

DPA supports resilient roads and addressing the causes of damage, such as drainage issues. It is also important to remember that the structures on these roads such as seawalls, bridges, cycleways, and other infrastructure are accessible and developed based on the concept of universal design.

We support the Hokianga Ferry Replacement in 3 years with the reminder that accessibility to this service needs to be a part of the discussion.

We know the importance of Kaitaia Airport remaining as it is a key transport connection for people in rural areas, an example is that doctors from other hospitals are flown for Kaitaia Hospital and other Northland Hospitals. For the disability community, this is a more accessible easier to use service then driving up to 2 or more hours to get to Whangarei Hospital. Far North Passenger Transport Services also needs to be more accessible for disabled people travelling from rural areas.

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| **Recommendation 11:** that the development of any new transport infrastructure be designed based on universal design principles. |
| **Recommendation 12:** that the Hokianga Ferry Replacement, Kaitaia Airport and Far North Passenger Transport Services be more accessible. |

### Rates

Disabled people in Northland face an increased risk of living in poverty largely due to lower incomes and extra resource requirements compared to non-disabled people[[5]](#footnote-6). Statistics also show that disabled New Zealanders are grossly overrepresented in unemployment rates; two-thirds of disabled people earn less than $30,000 per annum, increasing the likelihood of poor socio-economic outcomes[[6]](#footnote-7).

DPA supports Option 2 for Issue 1 for Stormwater and Drainage change to a targeted rate based on land use and introduce a public good rate, with the stipulation that disabled people on low incomes will not be impacted by high rating systems.

DPA supports Option 2 for Issue 2 for Wastewater change to district-wide rates for those connected to / could connect to water supply and / or wastewater services. Again, with the same stipulation that disabled people on low income be considered in this selection.

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| **Recommendation 13:** that FNDC make their rates rebates process more accessible for disabled people to apply. |
| **Recommendation 14:** that FNDC consider that disabled people tend to be low income so ensuring the rating system and rates are equitable and fair. |

### Leadership

DPA asks that all council decision-making bodies consider the needs of disabled people and that engagement processes consult with disabled people and their representative organisations.

Partnership of Māori disabled in the space of mana whenua and kaitiakitanga is key as Northland is the birthplace of our nation where Te Tiriti o Waitangi was first signed.

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| **Recommendation 15:** all council decision-making bodies be required to consider the needs of disabled and Māori disabled people and that engagement processes consult with disabled people and their representative organisations. |

1. United Nations. (2006). *United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.* Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Office for Disability Issues. (2016). *Aotearoa New Zealand Disability Strategy.* Retrieved from: https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Schulte, C. (2020, March 28). People With Disabilities Needed in Fight Against Climate Change. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/people-disabilities-needed-fight-against-climate-change#:~:text=People%20with%20disabilities%20are%20at,said%20in%20a%20recent%20report>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Smith, R. (February 2023, 3). *Floods are inevitable, flood disasters are not.* Stuff website. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/opinion/131138570/floods-are-inevitable-flood-disasters-are-not> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Wilkinson-Meyers et al. (2015). To live an ordinary life: resource needs and additional costs for people with a physical impairment. Disability & Society, 30(7), 976-990. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. King, P. T. (2019). Māori with Lived Experience of Disability Part II. Commissioned by the Waitangi Tribunal. Retrieved from <https://forms.justice.govt.nz/search/Documents/WT/wt_DOC_150473583/Wai%202575%2C%20B023.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)