April 2024

**Ki te Kaunihera ā Rohe o Te Taitokerau Northland Regional Council**

Please find attached DPA’s submission on the Kaunihera ā Rohe o Te Taitokerau Northland Regional Council Long Term Plan 2021-2031.

Noho ora mai,

For any further inquiries, please contact:

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**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. It 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

Toitū te Whenua

Toitū te Moana

Toitū te Tangata

If the land is well. If the sea is well. The people will thrive.

DPA supports disabled people thriving, so we support Kaunihera ā Rohe o Te Taitokerau Northland Regional Council achieving environmental, social, economic, and cultural wellbeing in partnership with our community.

**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 a natural disaster.

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 can have input into the decision-making processes of projects that impact on our health and wellbeing.

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| **Recommendation 1:** that disabled people can have input into the decision-making processes that impact on our health and wellbeing.  |

## Taiao - Our Environment

Northland taiao is truly outstanding with the land, forests, excellent air quality and an abundance of freshwater. NRC’s aim to increase planted forests and tackle non-native invasive animal and plant species is important in maintaining our taiao. Our taiao is already degraded from decades of inappropriate development and unsustainable practices and is also facing major risks from climate change and the cumulative effects of existing land and resource use. We need to restore and protect what we have left.

1. **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.

DPA supports NRC’s approach to develop climate resilience through undertaking adaptive pathways planning and establishing a zero-carbon transition plan.

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| **Recommendation 2:** that the impact of climate change on disabled people is required when considering proposed works. |

1. **Flood Protection**

These 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 NRC include in their planning the learnings from natural disasters and extreme weather events. |

1. **Water Health**

DPA supports plans to improve waterways and water health as it is key component of climate resilience. With the NRC concerns with river-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 4:** that NRC discuss climate resilience with the disabled community including impacts on water security and water health especially during storm events. |

1. **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. Adverse 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 NRC 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 5:** that the NRC include in their emergency preparedness and planning for natural disasters the current shortage of accessible emergency housing for disabled people.  |
| **Recommendation 6:** that NRC 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 WDC, disabled persons organisations, Tai Tokerau disability providers and personal networks. |

1. **Regional sporting facilities**

DPA highlights the importance of regional sporting facilities and keeping them open as several Northland disability sports groups, organisations and community groups use these facilities. NRC also needs to make sure sporting facilities are accessible and available with all new facilities and existing facilities built on the principles of universal design.

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| **Recommendation 7:** that NRC ensure that all sporting facilities are accessible and built on universal design principles. |

1. **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.

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| **Recommendation 8:** that the Far North Passenger Transport Services, Whangarei Bus Passenger Services and CityLink Whangārei services be accessible. |

1. **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).

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| **Recommendation 9:** that NRC make their rates rebates process more accessible for disabled people to apply. |

1. **Recreational spaces**

DPA supports improvement of safety and inclusiveness for Hatea Walkway Reserve and Central Park addressing accessibility for elderly and young who wander or run when taken out. We support the following as it would improve accessibility for disabled people and children:

* to allocate an area of Hātea River walkway to be fenced, providing a basketball hoop with concrete pad to allow for young disabled children to have a safe space.
* to install fencing around Central Park as it has a large-grassed area, accessible toilets, parking, and a playground.

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| **Recommendation 10:** that NRC improve the safety and inclusiveness for Hatea Walkway Reserve and Central Park and address accessibility for older people, disabled people and children.  |

1. **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 11:** 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)