June 2024

**To Wellington City Council**

Please find attached DPA’s submission on the Coastal Reserves Management Plan

For any further inquiries, please contact:

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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 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 this opportunity to give feedback to the Wellington City Council (WCC) on the Coastal Reserves Management Plan 2024.

# Nature is core to the wellbeing of all people and is critical in keeping us emotionally,

# psychologically and physically healthy.[[1]](#footnote-2) Disabled people value access to our coasts

# as it is beneficial for our mental health.[[2]](#footnote-3) In addition to this, Māori disabled connect to the whenua through whakapapa[[3]](#footnote-4) which places an extra value on its importance. It is important to remember these things when understanding community values and

# connections to the coast.

# With an increasing number of disabled and older people, all Councils should plan and invest in the development of fully accessible, inclusive communities. Navigating shorelines and coastlines can be difficult or even impossible for many disabled people. It is important for the WCC as part of its coastal management plans to ensure that accessible places and spaces are created that can include disabled people.

# Climate change disproportionately impacts disabled people and older people.

# Nevertheless, disabled people could also make an impact on how this is tackled

# through acting as agents of social change by identifying areas of importance to our

# communities.

# DPA has made submissions to other councils around the country on their coastline and coastal reserve management plans. In this submission, we make recommendations for accessibility improvements for Wellington’s shorelines, especially in areas which will need to be changed to manage potential coastal erosion, inundation and flooding events.

Wellington has the additional challenge of needing to plan for seismic risk, something that became evident in the Kaikoura earthquake of 2016 which significantly impacted on many coastal parts of Wellington. This earthquake saw accessibility to parts of Wellington City and, especially, its shorelines impacted for months. Geological forecasts predict that Wellington will sustain serious damage from a magnitude 7.4 on the region’s main fault lines that will generate a significant earthquake.[[4]](#footnote-5)

# DPA recommends that the WCC make the principles of inclusion and access a high priority in the refreshed coastal reserves management plan. This means that all new buildings, developments and facilities are designed with an accessibility lens based on universal design principles.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Our submission will make some general and specific points about the need for accessibility and inclusion to be incorporated into planning for the management of Wellington’s shoreline.

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| **Recommendation 1:** that the WCC make the principles of inclusion and access a high priority in the refreshed coastal reserves management plan. |

**Areas for improvement**

If any assets and facilities, such as public toilets, public buildings and other facilities are moved as part of work to shift them away from vulnerable areas that the opportunity is taken for them to have accessibility improvements made and/or new facilities constructed according to universal design standards.

Also if any areas are being reclaimed and turned into wetland and riverbank/streambank-based parks or new beachfronts that these areas are designed and built according to Universal Design standards as well and incorporate, for example, appropriately designed walkways with features including accessible signage, accessible toilets, height adjustable seating and user-friendly tables, quiet spaces and tactile strips to enable safe navigation for blind and low vision people.

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| **Recommendation 2:** that all facilities in and around the coastal shoreline be upgraded and/or built to Universal Design standards. |

DPA recommends that the safety of the central waterfront area needs vast improvement through the removal of unnecessary barriers and better lighting. The area around Te Papa, Frank Kitts Park and TSB Arena through to the train station is generally unsafe with most of the safety barriers being around knee height making it difficult for mobility devices including wheelchairs and mobility scooters to negotiate and the lighting is poor, presenting a safety risk for everyone.

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| **Recommendation 3:** that the safety of the central waterfront area needs vast improvement through the removal of unnecessary barriers and better lighting. |

Any changes to coastlines should incorporate entry and exit points to places such as beaches and parks which can be accessed by everyone including disabled people and especially wheelchair and mobility aid users, blind and low vision people and older people.

This can be done, for example, through the placement of sufficient mobility parking spaces, drop off points for mobility vans and service vehicles, the placement of tactile strips on and around key areas, the creation of landing points where people can rest (especially if the entry or exit is steeply sloped) and the creation of suitable footpaths and walkways down into beach and coastal areas.

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| **Recommendation 4:** that accessible entry and exit points be created throughout the coastal area. |

As part of this process, Council should consider the placement of beach mats and other wheelchair and mobility aid friendly surfaces to ensure that disabled people can successfully and safely access beaches and coastlines.

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| **Recommendation 5:** that accessibility features including beach mats and other assistive equipment be placed at beaches across the area. |

As climate change is now a significant threat and with disabled people being one of the most significantly impacted groups due to it, there may be a need for either building or other activity to be banned in specific areas and the possibility of managed retreat needs to be factored in.

DPA recommends if either managed retreat and/or building bans are proposed along any part of the area covered by this plan, that any engagement around this specifically prioritise disabled people as one of the key population groups (amongst others) to be consulted with.

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| **Recommendation 6:** that disabled people be prioritised as a key population group for consultation on any managed retreat and building bans associated with climate change-based risks. |

As part of the civil defence and emergency management planning process for the Wellington coastal area, the needs of disabled people must be prioritised and that any civil defence and emergency management plans involve disabled people as a key co-design stakeholder group.

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| **Recommendation 7:** that disabled people be prioritised as a key stakeholder group for emergency planning and civil defence purposes across all of Wellington’s coastline area. |

Waste water management, particularly around Wellington’s coastlines, is a real concern, especially for immunocompromised people. One of our DPA Wellington members related to us that as a regular surfer they have swallowed water which was deemed safe to drink by the council’s website when it wasn’t. Consequently, the member got sick after having done so.

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| **Recommendation 8:** that the quality of water around Wellington’s coastline is cleaned up, especially in areas utilised by the public for recreational purposes. |

Overall, the best way to develop an effective coastal reserve management plan is through engaging with key stakeholders, including disabled people and disability organisations, around this plan.

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| **Recommendation 9:** that both local disabled people and disability organisations should be involved in planning for the future of Wellington’s shorelines. |

1. Mental Health Foundation UK. (2021) *How connecting with nature benefits our mental health*. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHAW21-Nature-research-report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Mental Health Foundation NZ. (2018). *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-3)
3. Jones, B., King, P. T., Baker, G., Nikora, L. W., Hickey, H., Perry, M., Ingham, T. R. (2024). Karanga rua, karanga maha: Māori with lived experience of disability self-determining their own identities. *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, *19*(1), 45–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1177083X.2023.2224422> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://www.gw.govt.nz/assets/Documents/2009/07/Earthquake_Hazards_fact_sheet.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Auckland Design Manual website is undergoing redevelopment, so alternative websites are - <https://www.lifemark.co.nz/news/need-universal-design/> and <https://www.branz.co.nz/universal-design/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)