

November 2023

To Environment Select Committee,

Please find attached DPA’s submission on Inquiry into Climate Change Adaptation

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**Introducing Disabled Persons Assembly NZ**

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

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

**We drive systemic change through:**

* **Leadership:** reflecting the collective voice of disabled people, locally, nationally and internationally.
* **Information and advice:** informing and advising on policies impacting on the lives of disabled people.
* **Advocacy:** supporting disabled people to have a voice, including a collective voice, in society.
* **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 a foundational document for disabled people which New Zealand has signed and ratified.

All state bodies in 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 4 – General Obligations

**Article 9 – Accessibility**

**Article 11 – Situations of Risk and Humanitarian Emergency**

**The Submission**

DPA welcomes the opportunity to engage in the Environment Select Committee Inquiry into Climate Change Adaptation.

The number of disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand is set to grow as our population ages.

This confluence of an ageing population and rising incidence of disability is coming at the same time as significant climate change impacts are beginning to be felt.

**Disabled people at increased risk from climate change**

A recent article published by the journal *Nature Climate Change* [[1]](#footnote-762) highlighted that governments are failing to take disability inclusive climate action and disabled people are disproportionately more at risk of higher mortality rates in climate emergencies.

This is underpinned by the fact that disabled people have been treated as lower priority in climate emergencies or other disasters and systemically excluded from receiving emergency healthcare and humanitarian support as a result.

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 all exacerbate the existing inequities experienced by disabled people.

Michael Stein, in a Harvard University Center for the Environment (2023) [[2]](#footnote-4) interview elaborated about the impacts of slow onset 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 where governments and scientists collaborate with disabled people to develop disability-friendly adaptation and mitigation policies informed by research.

**Managed Retreat a major issue for disabled people**

One of the most crucial issues facing disabled people in the New Zealand context is that of managed retreat. This is a live one in an increasing number of communities around the country, including, for example, in South Dunedin which has a substantial population of disabled people.

The South Dunedin Future Project, a collaboration between the Dunedin City and Otago Regional Councils, is facilitating the development of a community-driven plan which will address the future of the suburb, that is expected to be one of the most climate change impacted areas in the country.

DPA has been involved in the South Dunedin Future Project as a key stakeholder and has been advocating for a disability lens to be applied to all decision making around this project. We are supportive of the community-driven approach to this project and hope that this will be a consultation model replicated in other areas of the country facing similar challenges due to climate change.

Any decisions about managed retreat and building climate resilient communities must heed the views of impacted communities insofar as is reasonably practicable. This means that any decisions around building climate resilient communities and managing retreat processes must be a balance between accounting for the views of local communities and the need to heed scientific data.

From a disability perspective, there are clear positives of having disabled people and Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) involved as central stakeholders in climate change planning:

*“Climate mitigation and adaptation approaches developed without consultation with organizations of persons with disabilities create additional barriers. For example, added bicycles lanes may cause bus stops to become wheelchair inaccessible.”*[[3]](#footnote-6)

However, there are significant research gaps which still exist around disabled people and climate change and a pressing need for more research into its effects on the disabled community.

**Disabled People and DPO's must be involved**

Stein and other researchers including Schulte (2020) have made a strong case for disabled people to be one of the central groups in the response to climate change .[[4]](#footnote-7)

DPA, given the extent of overseas experience, was disappointed to see minimal reference as to how disabled people in Aotearoa would be impacted by climate change and managed in the Ministry for the Environment’s Community*-led retreat and adaptation funding: Issues and options* paper.

However, DPA was pleased to see some acknowledgement of the impact of climate change on disabled people in its first national climate change adaptation plan *Adapt and thrive: Building a climate-resilient New Zealand*.

Disabled people, including DPA members were also involved in discussions around the previous government’s Equitable Transitions Strategy (which formed part of the first adaptation plan) co-led by the Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment.

DPA would like to see Government recognise disabled people as a key population group which is at high risk from the effects of climate change and has a responsibility for ensuring that our rights are protected during this transition.

**DPA recommends that a disability lens is embedded within all central and local government climate change planning. This should be led and driven by disabled people and our Disabled People’s Organisations [DPOs] in partnership with central and local government.**

DPA recommends that climate resilience planning around disabled people is undertaken with full regard to relevant articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)[[5]](#footnote-8) : Article 4.3 (General Principles),[[6]](#footnote-9) Article 9 (Accessibility)[[7]](#footnote-10) and Article 11 (Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies).[[8]](#footnote-11)

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| **Recommendation 1:** that government recognise disabled people as a key population group whose climate change needs must be recognised and planned for. |

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| **Recommendation 2:** that a disability perspective be embedded within all central and local government climate change planning. This disability-based climate change planning should be led and driven by disabled people and our DPOs. |

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| **Recommendation 3:** that climate resilience planning around disabled people is undertaken with full regard to the relevant articles of the UNCRPD. |

Our responses to the inquiry questions that have the greatest relevance to disabled people are below.

**Q.1: The current approach to community-led retreat and adaptation funding, its strengths, risks and costs**

**a.) Need for disabled led research**

DPA believes that disabled community led climate change responses, created by and for disabled people, are important.

As we pointed out earlier in this submission, when it comes to planning for climate change adaptation, the voices of Aotearoa’s disabled community have not been fully included.

Disabled people's input is crucial to helping this country plan its climate change response at both the national and local levels.

The needs of Tāngata Whaikaha Māori (disabled Māori) must be explicitly responded to given the multiple disadvantages faced by tāngata whaikaha and the need for a Te Tiriti-based response to be fully inclusive of everyone.

High priority should be accorded to undertaking New Zealand-based disabled people-led, culturally appropriate research on climate change impacts and what inclusive adaptation responses are needed locally.

Disabled people-led research is essential if all stakeholders including central government, local government, private sector and community actors are to gain a better understanding of how the risks and costs of climate change will impact disabled people and as to what can be done to make responses fully inclusive.

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| **Recommendation 4:** that central government fully fund disabled people-led and driven research on climate change impacts and what adaptation responses will work for this country’s disabled community. |

**b.) Need for systemic and individualised funding to support climate change resilience for disabled people**

Climate change adaptation funding mechanisms should recognise the need for disabled people to live in accessible, universally designed, climate safe communities.

DPA supports the development of government funding models that recognise the upfront costs of building fully accessible, climate resilient infrastructure including streets, roads, parks/reserves, playgrounds, community facilities and housing to universal design standards in places where climate adaptation is undertaken.

Providing universally designed accessible spaces in communities which need to be adapted or moved will be an important investment in creating places and spaces where disabled people can feel truly included, empowered and at home.

Disabled people who may need to move due to managed retreat will need additional support and funding from central government to enable successful transitions. To this end, disabled people and their whānau/support networks need adequate funding and support that takes full account of their needs when relocating.

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| **Recommendation 5:** that central and local government funding mechanisms for climate change adaptation should account for the need to build climate resilient, fully accessible, universally designed infrastructure. |

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| **Recommendation 6:** that central government provide disabled people required to move due to managed retreat with adequate funding and support to successfully manage any relocation. |

**Q.2: Lessons learned from severe weather events and natural disasters in Aotearoa New Zealand for community-led retreat and funding climate adaptation**

**a.) The impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle and Auckland Anniversary Weekend storms**

There are considerable learnings that can be deduced from the anecdotal experiences provided by disabled people who have recently experienced climate emergencies within the New Zealand context.

DPA, in the immediate aftermath of the Auckland Anniversary Weekend flooding events and before Gabrielle struck, reached out to our members in the affected areas to ascertain what their experiences had been like.

While many disabled people were resilient and had withstood the floods well, others had not. We heard stories about the impact that weather-enforced homelessness had on disabled people, especially given the lack of accessible housing.

We also heard that there was some difficulty accessing support especially when it came to assisting with property clean ups and disruption of disability support services and activities.

We note that the new Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People initiated a response aimed at Auckland’s disabled community over both storm events by providing essential information and a coordinated response with disability organisations and service providers during these periods.

The eventual availability of funding from central government aimed at disabled people and their whānau and disability organisations also assisted during the clean-up and recovery period.

DPA understands that while Whaikaha did initiate a response, it took time for a disability responsive approach to be embedded within some other organisations, at both central and local government level.

These extreme weather events reinforced the need for an informed disabled people/disabled community-led response from a civil defence perspective in future climate-related (and other) emergencies.

**Disruption to Disability Support Services**

One of the impacts of the adverse weather events for some disabled people was the disruption to disability support services which resulted after the storms. Support services including personal assistance, home help and other supports were impacted for a period of time and coming on top of difficulties encountered during peak Covid in accessing these same supports caused some additional stress to disabled people.

The work of Whaikaha and other agencies helped with resolving these problems.

And for this reason, DPA would like to see Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People take a lead role in supporting coordinating the emergency response for disabled people in national emergencies, including those related to climate change.

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| **Recommendation 7:** that disabled people/community-led responses to climate change and other related emergencies should be fully recognised, embedded within all relevant central and local government organisations, and jointly funded by central and local government. |

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| **Recommendation 8:** that Waikaha – Ministry of Disabled People take a lead role in supporting coordinating the emergency response for disabled people in national emergencies, including those related to climate change. |

**b.) Need for accessible housing in emergency situations**

One of the most serious post-2023 storm event impacts in Auckland and other affected parts of the North Island was the need for accessible housing to live in if houses were damaged. One wheelchair user had to sleep in their wheelchair for three nights after their house became flooded in the Anniversary Weekend floods.

Following Gabrielle, there were stories about disabled people not being able to return to their homes due to delays on the part of service providers in getting supported accommodation re-opened.

One prominent example was that of Wairoa resident, Gavin Jones, a 69-year-old man with learning disability who only returned to his IDEA Services run home in June 2023, nearly four months after the cyclone.[[9]](#footnote-13)

DPA has stressed in various submissions to councils around the country about the need for more universal design, accessible housing to be consented and constructed.

The 2023 storms highlighted the double whammy of the ongoing housing crisis fand the lack of accessible dwellings so that when emergencies strike, there are few alternative options for disabled people to turn to, especially if their homes are rendered uninhabitable.

In the longer term, accessible, universal designed housing and communities will be an essential component of building climate resilience across the motu.

In the short to medium-term, support for disabled and older people who need to be re-housed after severe weather events will become even more of an issue.

One solution to this problem is the development of a co-design process between government and disabled people that would examine the issue of providing accessible temporary housing in post-emergency situations.

Solutions developed through such processes could be quickly implemented in a post-disaster scenario anywhere in the country through the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment’s Temporary Accommodation Service.

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| **Recommendation 9:** that central government and disabled people engage in a co-design process to develop solutions for accessible emergency housing in post-disaster situations. |

**Q.3: Effective mechanisms for community-led decision making**

DPA adheres to the disability rights movement maxim, ‘nothing about us, without us.’ DPA have emphasised in recent submissions to councils around Aotearoa about the need for disabled people to be at the centre of locally based climate change discussions.

Incorporating the voices of disabled people at the local, national and international levels in climate change discourse is pivotal if we are not to be left behind in the battle against global warming.

We have been inspired by the model provided by the Bristol Disabled People’s Forum in the UK[[10]](#footnote-14) 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 disabled people, central government, local authorities and relevant stakeholders could engage in open dialogue leading to the development of climate change plans aimed at disabled people.

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| **Recommendation 10:** that national and local climate change response plans for disabled people, developed by and for disabled people in partnership with central and local government be developed. |

**Q.6: Alignment and integration with existing legislation and regulatory framework, including the reformed resource management system and any changes needed to regulatory powers and potential economic or other incentives needed to support adaptation actions (both before and after extreme events).**

DPA recommends that climate adaptation planning legislation recognise the need for Māori, local communities and highly impacted population groups, including disabled people, to be involved in all planning processes and decisions through the appointment of statutory advisory committees.

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| **Recommendation 11:** that climate change adaptation legislation recognise the need for Māori, local communities and other highly impacted population groups, including disabled people, to be involved in all planning processes and decisions. |

1. 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?sharing_token=WG7FDIwxm9EdrpxLpip75tRgN0jAjWel9jnR3ZoTv0OlD0JgJ93tTQjFULmdry3BVlmuGxD5onmsJt996nkMEGAr2tCBsveYWZXhgtd709bHCKwbcstWptPivtOz4U34R-phYAWEgIDvEDGs0fzjPHcHM0ng8l0DWIje7vQzL10%3D> [↑](#footnote-ref-762)
2. 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#:~:text=Climate%20change%20amplifies%20the%20marginalization,rate%20of%20mortality%20in%20heatwaves>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
4. 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-7)
5. 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-8)
6. Ibid. Article 4.3: In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
7. Ibid. Article 9.1: To enable persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life, States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure to persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to, inter alia:

   a) Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces;

   b) Information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
8. Ibid. Article 11: States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
9. Hawkes Bay Today. (2023, June 6). Displaced Wairoa Gavin Jones returns home with mayor after four months. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/hawkes-bay-today/news/displaced-wairoa-man-gavin-jones-returns-home-with-mayor-after-four-months/MR73LUB5ZBA63ALQKL6XDW32YQ/> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
10. Bristol Disability Equality Forum. (n.d.) Climate Plan and Resources: Climate Plan. Retrieved from <https://bristoldef.org.uk/climate-plan-and-resources/> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)