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Please find attached DPA’s feedback on MfE Plastics Consultation

## Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

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# Introducing Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

The Disabled Persons Assembly NZ (DPA) is a pan-impairment disabled person’s organisation that works to realise an equitable society, where all disabled people (of all impairment types and including women, Māori, Pasifika, young people) are able to direct their own lives. DPA works to improve social indicators for disabled people and for disabled people to be recognised as valued members of society. DPA and its members work with the wider disability community, other DPOs, government agencies, service providers, international disability organisations, and the public by:

* telling our stories and identifying systemic barriers
* developing and advocating for solutions
* celebrating innovation and good practice

# General Comment

DPA acknowledges that waste generally, and single use plastics specifically, are a major and growing concern. Like the wider population, many disabled people are keen to play their part in reducing the impact of waste and plastics on the environment.

However, we would like to highlight that there are a number of significant accessibility barriers for disabled people wishing to avoid single-use plastics and recycle and reduce their waste responsibly. These include lack of educational information in accessible formats about recycling and alternatives, physical and sensory barriers to being able to identify and sort items for recycling, difficulty finding suitable affordable and accessible alternatives for many every-day single use items (for example many re-useable coffee cups are very difficult to get the lids on and off compared to single use coffee cups) and that many products subsidised for disabled people such as continence pads are not re-useable.

# Feedback on Proposal to phase out of Single-Use Plastic Straws

DPA has significant concerns about the MfE proposal to phase out plastic single-use straws as this will have a disproportionately negative impact on disabled people who rely on straws to drink.

There are currently no alternatives that provide the access features that single-use plastic straws provide. Paper straws in particular are a very poor substitute and are unsuitable for the large majority of disabled people who use straws[[1]](#footnote-2). Re-useable steel and Silicone straws are also not suitable for some disabled people.

For this reason, DPA is opposed to any phase out of plastic single-use straws. While we note that the consultation document proposes that there may be exemptions for disabled people, there is no detail around how such exemptions would work. Poorly designed exemptions can be both stigmatising and discriminatory for disabled people.

Of particular concern for DPA is that disabled people are already more likely to face abuse on multiple fronts. For example over-zealous members of the public may verbally abuse disabled people with hidden disabilities when they use disabled facilities such as accessible toilets or parking spaces.

# DPA’s recommendations

At present DPA is opposed to any phase out or ban on plastic straws. However, if MfE does decide to proceed with a ban on single use plastic straws then, as an absolute minimum, an exemption scheme for disabled people must be in place first. The exemption scheme must be designed in partnership with disabled people and meet the following criteria;

1. It must be simple and easy to access for disabled people
2. It must ensure that plastic straws remain widely and reliably available despite a greatly reduced supply.
3. There should be no requirement for disabled people to ‘prove’ ( such as a medical certificate) that they need plastic straws.
4. It must not impose extra costs on disabled people who are already less likely to report having adequate income for every-day needs[[2]](#footnote-3).
5. It must be non-stigmatising for disabled people so that they are not criticised or abused in public for using plastic straws
6. Any exemption scheme must also be supported by an awareness campaign to educate the wider public that some people need access to plastic straws

1. <http://disabilityorganizing.net/uploads/donet-straw-report-012319-ACCESSIBLE.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/assets/resource-files/The-State-of-wellbeing-and-equality-FINAL-ONLINE.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)