

## Case Study Hobsons Bay City Council

**Going to and enjoying the beach is part of Australian life – yet for one in five of the population it is not accessible.**

Going to the beach is a chance to explore, play, exercise, meet and connect with family, friends and community. Something that many people take for granted. Hobsons Bay is changing that picture, creating the opportunity for people with a disability and their families to be spontaneous.



Hobsons Bay is a picturesque seaside municipality approximately 10 kilometres west of central Melbourne's CBD. It boasts more than 20 kilometres of clean, uncrowded beaches and foreshore areas. Hobsons Bay hosts vibrant cafes, restaurants and retail village shopping strips without the hustle and bustle of the city. Williamstown and Altona beaches are key destination points for many people who live, work, study and visit Hobsons Bay.

Following a successful trial in 2015-16, Hobsons Bay beaches will continue to be more accessible to people with mobility needs.

### Matting

During the trial Council sourced and laid 40 metres of recycled rubber matting across the soft sand at Williamstown Beach to provide a firm supportive base for wheelchairs, prams, walking and mobility aids. It allowed a continuous step-free path of travel to the hard sand, close to accessible parking, accessible toilets, café and the Williamstown Swimming and Lifesaving Club.

The recognisable blue matting provides access opportunities for everyone, especially independent wheelchair users, electric wheelchair users, people who use mobility aids, frames and sticks, pushers, prams, bikes and scooters. It has been used by young people, older adults, families and friends. It gives people with a disability the opportunity to be spontaneous and actively use the beach rather than having to sit in a car or watch from the sidelines.

### Beach wheelchair

During the trial Council provided a free accessible beach wheelchair at Altona Beach. The chair was able to be used for a range of ages and was designed to allow access on soft sandy surfaces including very shallow water, where conventional wheelchairs are unable to go. The accessible beach wheelchair was located at the Altona Life Saving Club, close to accessible parking, accessible toilets, a cafe and the lifesaving club amenities.



## Locations

Williamstown Swimming and Life Saving Club is located at Williamstown Beach, on the corner of Victoria Street and Esplanade, Williamstown VIC 3015

Altona Life Saving Club is located at Altona Beach, 139 Esplanade Street, Altona, VIC 301

## Trial successes

The accessible beach trial run by Hobsons Bay City Council in partnerships with lifesaving clubs and traders noted a number of successes for people with disability, the wider community, local businesses and Council:

- \* Over the summer period sixteen community members and their families used the beach wheelchair at Altona – one third were from Hobsons Bay, while two thirds travelled from Greater Melbourne as well as a visitor to Melbourne from India. Countless people used the matting at Williamstown Beach.
- \* The response on social media was positive. Council's Facebook page posts alone attracted a total of 1,479 likes with a reach of over 15,000. Many other individuals, local businesses, parent and community groups shared photos of the use of matting and beach wheelchair illustrating how far the trial reached outside of immediate users, their families and carers, raising disability awareness and supporting attitudinal change beyond the beach.
- \* Partnerships were formed and strengthened with local traders especially the two local cafes, resulting in growth in customer base and raised disability awareness and acceptance within the community. Access Tourism currently represents 11% of the total global tourism market. It is also the fastest growing sector estimated to be worth 22% of total tourism expenditure by 2020. Accessibility empowers the community to be spontaneous and enables accessible tourism. Accessible beaches will continue to support growth in the local economy.
- \* The trial has become a vehicle for positive change and increased advocacy for beach access across Australia. During the trial five Victorian councils have enquired as to how Hobsons Bay City Council have gone about making the beaches more accessible. This is a positive step towards seeing more accessible beach infrastructure across Australian beaches.

## Testimonials

"Two happy kids and one happy Mum going to the beach today. No more having to carry Thomas who is nearly 20kgs across the sand. Thank you. So much easier. Can't wait until next time." **Sarah, Altona North**

"It was an absolutely incredible experience for my mom at the Altona beach. She had possibly the best time since she has been here. I have never seen her enjoying herself so much before."

**Supriya and her mum, from Dandenong and Delhi**

"If we can remove some of the physical barriers that people face, then we are that little bit closer to an inclusive community where everyone can enjoy recreational activities without restrictions," **said Cr Colleen Gates**

"The Accessible Beaches Trial gave many people with a disability their first opportunity to go to the beach – a simple pleasure that many of us no doubt take for granted," **said Mayor Cr Peter Hemphill**

## The future

Hobsons Bay City Council is currently exploring the feasibility of other options to continue to improve the accessibility of its beaches and connecting businesses. The aim is to create two fully accessible beaches by 2020, kicking off with matting and a beach wheelchair at both beaches in the summer of 2016-17. Other access initiatives that will be further explored include:

- \* increasing the availability of the matting over summer
- \* increasing the range of accessible beach wheelchairs available: independent chairs, water chairs, and children's chairs
- \* installing a Changing Places toilet at both beaches

The beaches have provided the perfect back drop to consider access issues in the public domain whilst challenging negative attitudes and raising disability awareness and education. The trials' sphere of impact has travelled well beyond Hobsons Bay and has proved to be a beach access catalyst around Victoria and Australia. Hobsons Bay City Council is looking forward to more accessible summers.

## Contact Information

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Read more information on the Hobsons Bay City Council website.