

# Disability Access and Inclusion Plan Draft

## Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands

### Disability Access and Inclusion Plan

2020 – 2025

This Disability Access and Inclusion Plan is available in alternative formats upon request and includes in electronic format by email, in hard copy in both large and standard print, in audio on compact disc and on the website at <https://shire.cc/en/>

#### **Background**

The Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands is a distinctive, very remote municipality comprising the Territory of Cocos (Keeling) Islands, located in the vast Indian Ocean, 2,768 kms north-west of Perth and 3,685 kms due west of Darwin. A total of 27 islands across two low-lying atolls form the wonderful Cocos (Keeling) Islands, however only two of these are inhabited – Home Island and West Island.

Separated by the stunning lagoon in the southern atoll, Home Island and West Island are connected by a ferry service, which also transports passengers to and from Direction Island – an uninhabited island steeped in history and enjoyed by locals and visitors alike.

Travel to Cocos (Keeling) Islands is possible via twice weekly commercial flights and seasonal trade winds support the transient influx of private marine vessels.

According to data from the most recent census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the population of Cocos (Keeling) Islands in 2016 totalled 544 people. Malay was the most common ancestry identified. Around 70% of the population spoke Malay at home, while 22% spoke English-only.

#### **Disability**

A disability is any enduring condition that restricts a person's everyday activities.

Disabilities can be:

- Sensory – affecting vision and/or hearing
- Neurological – affecting a person's ability to control their movements
- Physical – affecting mobility and/or a person's ability to use their upper/lower body
- Intellectual – affecting a person's judgement, ability to learn and communicate
- Cognitive – affecting a person's thought processes, personality and memory
- Psychiatric – affecting a person's emotions, thought processes and behaviour

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (2018), 17.7% of Australians identified themselves as having some form of disability. Based on these findings and population data from the 2016 census, it is estimated there are 96 people living with disability in the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

The ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (2018) also found that disability prevalence increased with age, with almost 50% of Australians aged 65 years and over having disability. The population on Cocos (Keeling) Islands has been progressively ageing over the last four census periods, with the proportion of those aged 65 years and over increasing from 4.8% in 2001 to 15.5% in 2016.

Improving access and inclusion in the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands has wide reaching benefits, not only to those with disability in the community, but for all who spend time on these beautiful islands. Embedding these considerations into all aspects of community planning is a valuable approach which enhances the islands' experience.

### **Functions, facilities and services (both in-house and contracted) provided by the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands**

The Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands is responsible for a range of functions, facilities and services including:

#### **Services to property:**

Construction and maintenance of Shire-owned buildings and facilities; provision and maintenance of roads, boat ramps, footpaths, cycle ways and street signage; waste management including collection, disposal and recycling; maintenance of cemetery; and maintenance of public conveniences.

#### **Services to the community:**

Provision and maintenance of playing areas and playgrounds, parks and facilities for sporting and community groups; provision and maintenance of facilities for community groups and public halls; provision and maintenance of the museum and public libraries; community events; information services, provision of community grants and assistance with community projects; provision of school holiday program and youth activities; provision of a fortnightly community newsletter; citizenship ceremonies.

#### **Regulatory services:**

Planning of road systems, subdivisions and town planning schemes; building approvals for construction, additions or alterations; environmental health services; ranger services; motor vehicle registry services; compliance services; camping administration and compliance.

#### **General administration:**

Public information service; lodging of complaints; payment of fees including rates.

### **Processes of government:**

Ordinary and special Local Government and committee meetings; elector's meetings and election of Council Members; ward meetings and community consultations.

### **Legislative requirements**

It is a requirement under the Disability Services Act 1993 (Western Australia, amended 2004) that all local governments develop and implement a Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP) identifying barriers and outlining strategies to ensure people with disability have equal access to its facilities and services.

Further legislation underpinning access and inclusion includes the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (Western Australia, amended 1988) and Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA), both of which define discrimination on the basis of a person's disability unlawful.

To comply with the Disability Services Act 1993 (as amended in 2004), it is a requirement for local governments to:

- Meet the Standards in Schedule 2 of the Disability Services Regulations 2013
- Take all practicable steps to ensure that the plan is implemented by the local government, its officers, employees, and relevant agents and contractors
- Review its DAIP at least every five years
- Undertake public consultation, as specified in the regulations, when preparing, reviewing or amending its plan
- Communicate the review or amended plan to its employees and the community through the methods specified in the Disability Services Regulations 2013
- Lodge review reports, amended plans or new plans (after following consultative process required by legislation in relation to amended or new plans) with the Department of Communities
- Report to the Department of Communities annually about:
  - Progress made by the local government in achieving the desired outcomes in Schedule 3 of the regulations.
  - Progress made by any agents and contractors of the local government in achieving the desired outcomes in Schedule 3 of the regulations.
  - The strategies used by the local government to inform its agents and contractors about its plan.
- Report in its Annual Report about the implementation of its plan.

## Policy Statement

The Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands:

- Is committed to advocating for an accessible and inclusive community for all people. An accessible and inclusive community is one in which people with disability are afforded equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities as other people in the community, ensuring all Shire functions, facilities and services (both in-house and contracted) are open, available and accessible.
- Is committed to the community's aspirations and vision set out in the Strategic Community Plan 2016 – 2026, working together to advance its islands. The Shire believes that supporting an inclusive and accessible community embodies that vision and upholds community aspirations.
- Recognises the rich contributions to local social, economic and cultural life made by people with disability, and believes that recognising diversity and supporting participation and inclusion promotes an involved, healthy community.
- Is committed to consulting with people with disability, their families and carers to address barriers to access and inclusion.
- Will ensure its agents and contractors work towards the desired outcomes in the DAIP.
- Is committed to furthering the principles and objectives of the Disability Services Act 1993 (amended 2004) and achieving the seven desired outcomes of its DAIP. These are:
  1. People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the services of, and any events organised by, a public authority.
  2. People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the buildings and other facilities of a public authority.
  3. People with disability receive information from a public authority in a format that will enable them to access the information as readily as other people are able to access it.
  4. People with disability receive the same level and quality of service from the staff of a public authority as other people receive from the staff of that public authority.
  5. People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to make complaints to a public authority.
  6. People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to participate in any public consultation by a public authority.
  7. People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to obtain and maintain employment with a public authority.

## **Development of the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan**

### **Responsibility for the planning process**

This is the first Disability Access and Inclusion Plan for the Shire. The planning process was undertaken by an external policy consultant working with the Community Development Coordinator on behalf of the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The final plan [is to be] endorsed by the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Shire Council.

It is the responsibility of all officers to implement the relevant actions set out in this plan.

### **Consultation Methods**

In 2020 the Shire undertook to develop its initial Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, consult with key stakeholders and draft a DAIP to guide improvements to access and inclusion.

This process included:

- Review of key Shire plans to identify access barriers previously highlighted in community consultations;
- Consultation with key staff;
- Consultation with the community; and
- Consultation with school and health representatives.

The following consultation methods were used:

- In February 2020, a review of the Shire's Strategic Community Plan 2016 – 2026, Corporate Business Plan 2018/19 – 2021/22, and Cocos (Keeling) Islands Masterplan Report 2019 was undertaken for the purposes of identifying previously highlighted barriers to access, community aspirations and a vision for Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The outcomes of this review contributed to the development of the DAIP.
- In February 2020, Shire employees and Elected Members of Council were informed of the development of the DAIP via internal email. They were invited to participate in the process by identifying barriers to access and inclusion in the Shire and promoting the development of the DAIP to the community. No internal feedback was received.
- In March 2020, the community was informed that the Shire was developing a DAIP to address barriers to access and inclusion in the community for people with disability, their families and carers. This was advertised in the Atoll newsletter, on the Shire website, Shire and local community social media pages, on posters displayed at the Shire office, and word of mouth via key community members and Shire employees.
- Anonymous surveys and submission boxes were made available at the Shire office receptions on both Home Island and West Island. Alternative formats including large print, over the phone or face-to-face with a support person

were available upon request and noted in the advertisements. The surveys invited people to identify any barriers to access and inclusion under each of the seven desired outcomes for the DAIP. They also provided the opportunity for additional comments regarding the development of the DAIP as well as the consultation process. No completed surveys were received.

- Community forums were scheduled to be held in March 2020 however these were required to be cancelled due to government restrictions on public gatherings in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Alternative means of contributing including over the phone or via email were subsequently advertised however no public submissions were received.
- Meetings were held with representatives from the Cocos Islands Districts High School and Indian Ocean Territories Health Service. Barriers to access in the community were identified during these consultations.

Once this draft is completed, it will be available for public comment for a period of time and this will be advertised on the Shire website and in the Atoll newsletter. This will be noted in this section to reflect this process.

## **Findings of the consultation**

Although the consultation process was unable to be undertaken to its full extent in light of the coronavirus pandemic restricting public gatherings, the consultation process nevertheless identified a variety of barriers to access and inclusion within the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands. While some of the barriers identified extend beyond the remit of the Shire, opportunities for advocacy and partnerships with other organisations servicing the Cocos community may support the advancement of access and inclusion on the islands, together.

There may be opportunities to improve access and inclusion in areas identified during the consultation process and the Shire is committed to working towards an accessible and inclusive community.

## **Access barriers**

The access barriers identified during the consultation process included:

- Shire buildings and public amenities may not always be as accessible as they could be.
- Some pedestrian, recreational and public areas may not be accessible and inclusive of all users.
- Existing disability access equipment may not be meeting the requirements of all users.
- Awareness of disability may not be as widespread as it could be in the general community.
- Disability services may not be available locally.
- Public transport may not be accessible to all users.

## **Responsibility for implementing the DAIP**

Implementation of the DAIP is the responsibility of all areas of the Shire. This includes taking all practicable measures to ensure that the DAIP is implemented by Shire officers, employees, agents and contractors, as required by the Disability Services Act.

## **Communicating the DAIP to staff and people with disability**

- [In May 2020] the community [is to be] informed of the availability of the **draft** DAIP in the Atoll newsletter and on the Shire website with copies of the plan available upon request and in alternative formats if required. These include hard copy in standard and large print, electronic format including via email, and audio format on compact disc. Once endorsed by Council, promotion of the adopted DAIP will be undertaken using the same abovementioned methods.
- Key stakeholders who contributed to the planning and consultation process will be made aware of the DAIP.
- All staff and contractors will be made aware of the existence and availability of the DAIP.

## **Reviewing the DAIP**

In line with legislation, the Shire's DAIP will be reviewed at least every five years. Whenever the DAIP is amended, a copy of the amended plan will be lodged with the Department of Communities.

**The employee with responsibility for the DAIP will analyse progress in its implementation and provide a report to Council on progress annually.**

## **Reporting on the DAIP**

The Shire will report on the implementation of its DAIP through its Annual Report and progress reporting to the Department of Communities each year outlining:

- Progress towards the desired outcomes of its DAIP
- The strategies used to inform agents and contractors of its DAIP

## Strategies to improve access and inclusion

As a result of the consultation process the following strategies will guide the direction for the Shire to improve access and inclusion in the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands. The seven desired outcomes provide a framework for focused strategies.

Outcome 1: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the services of, and any events organised by, the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands	
Reference	Strategy
1.1	Monitor Shire services to ensure access and inclusion considerations are embedded into processes
1.2	Ensure events, whether organised or funded, are accessible to people with disability
1.3	Ensure contractors and agents providing services on behalf of the Shire are aware of the Shire's commitment to an accessible and inclusive community
1.4	Advocate on behalf of people with disability to improve access and inclusion in the community
Outcome 2: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the buildings and other facilities of the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands	
Reference	Strategy
2.1	Continue to support universal accessibility to all Shire buildings and facilities as outlined in the Corporate Business Plan 2018/19 – 2021/22
2.2	Ensure that all new or redevelopment works provide access to people with disability, where practicable
2.3	Ensure ongoing support for improving accessibility of shared pathways and public areas
2.4	Inform the community of any improvements to Shire buildings and facilities
Outcome 3: People with disability receive information from the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands in a format that will enable them to access the information as readily as other people are able to access it	
Reference	Strategy
3.1	Ensure that Shire information is available in alternative formats upon request
3.2	Ensure that the community is aware that Shire information is available in alternative formats upon request



Outcome 4: People with disability receive the same level and quality of service from the staff at Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands staff as other people receive	
Reference	Strategy
4.1	Ensure that Shire staff and Elected Members of Council are aware of disability and access barriers
Outcome 5: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to make complaints to the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands	
Reference	Strategy
5.1	Ensure that processes for complaints made to the Shire are accessible to people with disability
5.2	Ensure complaints made to the Shire by people with disability are acted upon
Outcome 6: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to participate in any public consultation by the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands	
Reference	Strategy
6.1	Ensure that people with disability are supported to provide input on disability issues and participate in any other public consultations
6.2	Ensure consultation processes are widely promoted
Outcome 7: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to obtain and maintain employment with the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands	
Reference	Strategy
7.1	Promote inclusive recruitment practices when advertising for new positions within the Shire
7.2	Ensure advertisements for employment opportunities are available in alternative formats upon request
7.3	Ensure employees with disability are supported to maintain employment with the Shire