

**BEFORE THE COMMISSIONERS APPOINTED ON BEHALF OF
OTAGO REGIONAL COUNCIL**

Under	The Resource Management Act 1991 (the Act)
In the Matter	of an application to alter and extend existing structures and to occupy the common marine and coastal area (RM22.550)
Between	ONUMAI ENTERPRISES LIMITED Applicant
And	OTAGO REGIONAL COUNCIL Respondent

BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF SANDIE GRANT (ABILITY ADVENTURES)

DATED 26 AUGUST 2025



GALLAWAY COOK ALLAN LAWYERS

Bridget Irving/Gus Griffin

bridget.irving@gallowaycookallan.co.nz

gus.griffin@gallowaycookallan.co.nz

PO Box 143

Dunedin 9054

Ph: (03) 477 7312

Fax: (03) 477 5564

BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF SANDIE GRANT (ABILITY ADVENTURES)

Introduction

1. My full name is Sandra (Sandie) Grant.
2. I am the owner of Ability Adventures. I am a highly experienced New Zealand trained Occupational Therapist with over 30 years in the healthcare sector.
3. I have spent more than two decades specialising as a clinical wheelchair and seating therapist, which gives me a deep insight into the real-life accessibility challenges many travellers face.
4. I began my tour guiding journey at 19, working for an environmental tour company during a summer break. Since then, I have combined my passion for travel with my clinical expertise – initially guiding with Eco Tours and later supporting Ability Adventures during peak seasons before taking ownership of the business in 2024.

Context

5. I think it is important to provide some initial context for the challenges that those with disabilities face and what they seek.
6. As a travel agent specialising in accessible travel, I regularly see the barriers people with disabilities face when trying to enjoy even the most basic experiences that many of us take for granted—like sitting by the water, watching birds and sea life from a wharf, or simply being able to stay somewhere that feels welcoming and dignified. People with disabilities—whether physical, sensory, cognitive or neurological—seek the same meaningful, joyful, and restorative experiences as anyone else. Unfortunately, suitable accommodation is severely lacking,

especially in waterfront areas where access and safety are often compromised or completely overlooked.

7. In New Zealand, accessible rooms are often located at the back of buildings, disconnected from the views and experiences that draw people to these destinations in the first place. We also lack unique and thoughtfully designed accommodation that caters to the specific needs of these travellers—places that don't just meet minimum compliance but truly include.
8. There is a growing demand for this. We have an ageing population, and more people—both domestically and internationally—are living with disabilities and actively seeking opportunities to travel and holiday. A purpose-built, accessible accommodation facility on the water would not only meet this increasing need but would support inclusive tourism, enrich local communities, and ensure that everyone has the chance to enjoy the beauty and experiences New Zealand has to offer.
9. These significant limitations and short comings continue to exist despite increased awareness and strategic direction at Government level. The New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026 sets a vision where *“New Zealand is a non-disabling society – a place where disabled people have an equal opportunity to achieve their goals and aspirations, and all of New Zealand works together to make this happen”*.
10. One of the 8 identified outcomes within the strategy is Outcome 5 – Accessibility. Which states – *“We access all places, services and information with ease and dignity”*.
11. Since the establishment of the strategy there are certainly gains being made towards this outcome. But there remains a long way to go. In my view projects such as this one are a tangible step towards achieving this outcome. Leaving the achievement of them to public entities and

government projects is not adequate and will continue to place severe limitations on the ability for disabled people to live full lives with equal opportunity to achieve their goals – which may be as simple as spending time at the water while on holiday, being able to bob around in the water safely. This is particularly so in the more remote, less urban parts of our environment where large government entities and projects are less likely to operate or occur.

12. As a result of my work, I see on a day-to-day basis the significant benefits that disabled people obtain from being able to fully participate through the provision of access to our most beautiful places. Currently, access to the coastal environment remains very limited for people with disabilities. A project such as this one represents a significant opportunity to address that within Otago.

Barriers to access for disabled people in the coastal marine area

13. The coast is an integral part of the New Zealand psyche. People derive significant enjoyment and wellbeing from spending time at the coast and engaging with the environment there. People with disabilities are no different in that respect, but for a variety of reasons they can find engaging in these experiences very difficult.
14. This can be as simple as the fact that most wheelchairs are not equipped to cope in the sand, and can be damaged if taken into the sandy/salty environment at the beach. Or that beach access is very uneven and often does not include handrails etc. To get to the beach itself (something that most of us just do without even thinking about) it is necessary to arrange a beach wheelchair, ensure you have someone with you to assist etc. John Marrable explains how limited access to these resources are within Dunedin. They are generally non-existent in remote locations like Taieri Mouth.

15. These same access challenges are exacerbated further when trying to engage in water-based activities. Access to the coast for these purposes is already limited to a degree through wharf facilities, boat ramps, yacht clubs etc. Very few of those facilities in my experience have been designed with accessibility for disabled people in mind. I also agree with the observations made by Mr Marrable which points to the lack of support facilities that are often necessary (but absent) even where access to the coast may be available.

Opportunity presented by this proposal

16. The Onumai proposal is unique in my experience. I am not aware of any other facility like this one within Otago. It would be a very attractive option for the types of people who I organise trips for. The location is unique, the facility would enable unique experiences to be offered that are simply not available elsewhere. This obviously includes the accommodation option, but it would also be very attractive as part of a day trip from Dunedin. Where the Hoist or all-tide pontoon can provide an opportunity for an on-water experience without the risk or lack of dignity that generally arises from having to be man-handled.
17. I think it is difficult for able bodied people to understand the sense of empowerment that a disabled person can feel when they can get to these places, under their own steam without requiring troops of people to assist them. It is a source of confidence, and contributes hugely to a disabled persons sense of worth and wellbeing. This is particularly so when they are holidaying. Because new environments present new and unanticipated challenges.
18. I would also echo the point made by Mr Marrable regarding the importance of two rooms so that disabled people who rely on a carer can utilise the accommodation. This is often not available in accessible accommodation requiring two rooms to be booked doubling the

accommodation costs and making it financially unobtainable for people.

Benefits of accommodation and access at the site

19. As mentioned above there is very limited accessible accommodation available in coastal locations such as Taieri Mouth. Large scale hotels often have facilities but are generally located in urban centres which mean they do not offer the same 'coastal experience'.
20. Engaging in coastal activities presents a range of challenges for disabled people. Access, is one aspect, but there are also practical challenges including hygiene management associated with wheelchair use, prosthetics etc that require careful management. For example – if a prosthetic liner gets damp and rubs the residual limb it might prevent the prosthetic being used again without significant pain or discomfort for several days. This proposal with the accommodation space will provide a perfect location for managing these challenges enabling the disabled person to get clean and dry, treat any issues quickly and with dignity. It is difficult to express how significant this type of opportunity is, and the extent to which these challenges may impact on an individual's willingness to try something or go somewhere new.
21. The facility would open up a world of new options and opportunities for disabled people to engage in sport and recreation both active and passive.
22. From a business point of view, I also see it is a significant opportunity to expand the tour offerings within Otago. Taieri Mouth presents a great opportunity as a day trip option and an overnight option depending on the desires and characteristics of the individual. I would echo the discussion from Mr Marrable regarding the challenges faced by disabled people regarding timing and travel difficulties. For this

reason, the flexibility to offer day use and overnight options would be hugely valuable to cater for a wider range of people.

23. If this facility was available, I can see us looking to work with other tour operators in the area, such as the fishing charters to see what opportunities can be developed for our most intrepid travellers.
24. Disabled people relatively rarely travel alone and so I can see there being significant financial upside for Taieri Mouth in having such a facility that would attract people to the area. I am aware of families who struggle to find locations that cater for their disabled members and would jump at the opportunity to go to a location where there were high quality facilities available for their loved one.

Dated 26 August 2025

Sandie Grant