

**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 JOHN MARRABLE

DATED 26 AUGUST 2025



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BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF JOHN MARRABLE

1. My full name is John Marrable. I am an Access Consultant and Educator at the Livingwell Disability Resource Centre in Dunedin as well as having my own business.
2. Livingwell Disability Resource Centre provides a range of services including:
 - (a) Free disability and health information and advice.
 - (b) Directories for accessible accommodation and activities in Otago.
 - (c) Access advice and education specialist information.
 - (d) Range of assistive products that support daily living.
3. I originally worked at Livingwell (when it was known as Disability Information Service) for 10 years, leaving 2015, and returned in 2018 to take up the role of Access Consultant and Educator. I am passionate about ensuring the built environment is accessible for people for all abilities and passing on skills I have learned from negotiating the world from a wheelchair since 1967.
4. I have experience working with local and NZ wide Councils on accessibility issues in the City to educate, problem solve and help with creating solutions. I also undertake access audits on plans for new builds and renovations at universities, schools and public facilities like swimming pools, libraries and public toilets throughout New Zealand.
5. Although this is not an Environment Court hearing, I have read and agree to comply with the Code of Conduct for Expert Witnesses (Environment Court Practice Note 2023). I confirm that the opinions that I express in this evidence are on matters within my expertise.

Scope of evidence

6. I have been asked to assess the Onumai proposal against my background understanding of access issues and education for disabled people in Otago and New Zealand, with particular emphasis on the coast and specifically Taieri Mouth.
7. My evidence addresses:
 - (a) Barriers to access for disabled people in the coast including for accommodation near to the coast.
 - (b) The need for this facility to develop this access in Otago and benefits that it will have for the disabled community.
 - (c) The requirements of the NZ Building Act and Code to ensure that disabled persons are able to use the facilities for its normal activities and procedures safely and without endangering their health.
 - (d) The rights of the disabled community and obligations of Councils.

The Onumai proposal

8. I understand that the Onumai proposal includes the upgrade of an existing wharf and construction of a new building for recreation activities, including an accommodation facility with a floating pontoon and use of a crane to act as a hoist. The proposal includes a new accessible ramp to provide access to disabled people to the wharf and pontoon below.
9. The floating pontoon can rise and fall with the tides providing wheelchair access to it and from that point access to small boats and other watercraft.

10. There is no wheelchair access to the wharves in this area, which is of concern to the Applicants who have a close friend in a wheelchair.
11. They propose to make this wharf wheelchair accessible to enable people with disabilities to have access to boating, fishing, swimming opportunities and simply sit and experience being in proximity to the coast. It is intended that the facility will be available to the public (in a managed way) to facilitate this.

Barriers to access for disabled people in the coast including for accommodation near to the coast.

12. The disabled person has the same interests as a non-disabled person and there are many who would enjoy the opportunity to go fishing, off a wharf or boat, try scuba diving, or go kayaking etc. For some people with disabilities this is not possible, and so simply having an accessible place to get over the water is extremely valuable to enable them to experience the coastal environment.
13. There is currently only one location in Otago that a hoist is being considered to assist disabled access a boat and that is at the Broad Bay boat club.
14. Sport New Zealand's strategy for disabled people focuses on creating a more inclusive and equitable sporting system where disabled people have equal opportunities to participate and thrive.
15. The New Zealand Disability Strategy aims to create a non-disabling society where disabled people have equal opportunities. For the disabled person to undertake activities such as fishing off a wharf or boat, or scuba diving, or even getting out on a boat the facilities being proposed here including any accommodation must, to comply with the New Zealand Building Code, be "approachable, accessible, and usable" to ensure facilities are safe and easy for everyone to use,

including those with disabilities. This encompasses the entire experience, from approaching the building to using its facilities, ensuring that there is an accessible route.

- (a) **Approachable:** This focuses on the external environment and how people approach the building. It includes considerations for pedestrian circulation, vehicle circulation and parking, and building entrances.
 - (b) **Accessible:** The Building Act (section 118) mandates "reasonable and adequate" access to and within buildings for people with disabilities. This means buildings should be designed so that people with disabilities can use them in the same way as others. That is for the building's normal activities and procedures.
 - (c) **Usability:** This encompasses the internal layout and features of the building, ensuring ease of use for all occupants. This includes things like internal circulation, accessible kitchens and bedrooms, and accessible reception and service counters.
 - (d) **Accessible Routes:** The Building Code (Clause D1 Access routes and NZS4121:2001) specifies requirements for accessible routes, including features like ramps, paths, and doors, to ensure they are safe and easy to navigate for everyone.
16. For a person with a disability, it can be difficult or time consuming to undertake activities that non-disabled take for granted. Some of the issues that arise for disabled people include:
- (a) **Time:** it may take the disabled person significantly longer to get ready to undertake the activity before leaving home – simple tasks such as getting dressed etc can be much more time-consuming. There may also be additional tasks associated with getting prepared such as putting on braces, prosthetics, or

changing an ostomy bag. Having accessible accommodation on site reduces travel time allowing adequate time during the day to undertake the desired activity.

- (b) Having accessible accommodation on site means that the disabled person can clean up and not have to travel home or to their accommodation in dirty and possibly wet clothes. It provides a warm, clean space in case something unexpected happens. Currently the closest accessible accommodation is 27km (Milton) 29km (Mosgiel) 35km Dunedin. This means at least a half hour trip home in dirty and possibly wet clothes which can cause pressure areas or issues with temperature regulation.
- (c) Disabled individuals can face significant challenges with temperature regulation due to various factors, including physical limitations, underlying medical conditions, and medication side effects. These challenges can make them more vulnerable to heat stress and cold-related illnesses.
- (d) Driving long distances in a wheelchair accessible van can be very uncomfortable as the wheelchair user is sitting in their wheelchair strapped to the floor. When in this position you feel every bump and can easily get motion sickness. Not fun if you are on your way to an activity. Being able to do this the day before would make it a lot easier to manage for some people.

17. Having wheelchair access to the pontoon will:

- (a) enable a person in a wheelchair to safely access the pontoon from the car park area, a requirement under the NZ Building Code.
- (b) access the pontoon to undertake the normal activities be it fishing or accessing a boat.

- (c) provide a hoist that allows the wheelchair user or ambulant person the opportunity to access the boat and enjoy activities on the water the same as a non-disabled person. This is their right under the NZ Disability Strategy and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). New Zealand signed the convention on the 30 March 2007.
18. There is a lack of areas in the Otago region where a disabled person, especially in a wheelchair can safely access a boat or go fishing easily:
- (a) **Access to a boat:** Sailability Otago sail out of Broad Bay and they are working on having a hoist installed. Sailability is a global movement and identity adopted by volunteer-based organisations, that provides sailing opportunities to people with disabilities and promotes accessible sailing for all. It fosters independence, increases self-confidence, builds skills, and offers the freedom and adventure of being on the water, often using specialised adaptive equipment like Hansa yachts. Currently, to provide access to a boat the wheelchair user must be manually lifted out of their chair and lifted onto the boat. Their wheelchair is then left on the wharf, unless the vessel is large enough to accommodate the person sitting in their wheelchair. This is a health and safety issue for both the disabled person and those lifting them. As well it can have a demeaning effect on the disabled individual. A dedicated hoist facility would represent a significant improvement in accessibility and reduce barriers for disabled people. Even if one was also installed in Broad Bay there would remain very limited access to the water for disabled people in Otago.
 - (b) **Access to beaches:** While you may be able to access some beaches in Dunedin such as Saint Clair or Brighton this is usually by arranging to hire a beach wheelchair from the Esplanade Surf School. There is another beach wheelchair available from

Watercooled Sports Ltd, at 9 Kitchener Street in Dunedin. These can be very hard to hire at times due to demand. There are no beaches in Otago that have “beach matting” that allow a standard wheelchair (not a beach wheelchair) to access the beach.

- (c) **Barriers** to access the use of boats, kayaks and other recreation by disabled people include, but not limited to:
 - (i) **Inaccessible ramps and docks:** Steep slopes, lack of handrails, no ramps, narrow pathways and no hoists make it difficult or impossible for some disabled individuals to access boats and docks/pontoons
 - (ii) **Lack of adapted equipment:** Difficulty finding or using specialized kayaks, paddles, or lifting equipment to assist with getting into and out of boats
 - (iii) **Uneven surfaces:** Loose gravel, grass, or other uneven terrain can make it challenging for individuals with mobility impairments to navigate to and from the water.
 - (iv) **Unsuitable toilets and changing rooms:** Lack of adequate accessible facilities at boat launches or nearby areas can create practical problems for disabled individuals.
 - (v) **Limited access to amenities:** Inadequate parking, pathways, or other amenities can make it difficult for disabled individuals to participate fully. As I discussed above for various reasons it may be important for a disabled person to be able to change out of wet gear quickly, so a lack of facilities on site means that participation is not possible, even where access might be.

- (vi) **Lack of awareness and understanding:** Some individuals or organisations may not be aware of the needs of disabled people or may have preconceived notions about their abilities.
 - (vii) **Fear of discrimination:** Some disabled individuals may worry about being treated differently or excluded from activities due to their disability.
 - (viii) **Negative perceptions:** Negative attitudes from others can create a barrier to participation. A recent study from Massey University found that ableist attitudes are a major barrier to young people participating in sports and recreation. Addressing these attitudes could significantly increase participation by removing these barriers.
19. Taieri Mouth poses notable accessibility challenges for individuals with disabilities, especially those who use wheelchairs, as there is limited access to the beaches and nearby coastal areas. Although the location is a favoured coastal spot, its current infrastructure limits equal opportunities for people with disabilities to engage in recreational activities, both passive and active.
20. Specific Barriers at Taieri Mouth include the following:
- (a) **Limited Beach Access:** The primary issue is the insufficient number of accessible entry points to the beach and other local blue spaces, such as the Taieri River, making it difficult for individuals with mobility challenges to fully enjoy these areas.
 - (b) **Lack of Adapted Facilities:**
There is a noticeable shortage of facilities that cater to people with disabilities, such as ramps, accessible restrooms, and other necessary amenities.

- (c) **No Accessible Accommodation:** The lack of specially designed accommodation for disabled individuals further limits their ability to enjoy extended stays or overnight visits in the area.
- (d) **Transportation Barriers:** The remote location of Taieri Mouth also presents challenges for those who depend on accessible transportation options to reach the area.

Barriers to accommodate people with disabilities near the coast

- 21. As mentioned above the closest wheelchair accessible accommodation is in Milton, however this facility does not allow for a carer/support person to have a separate bedroom.
- 22. There is limited accommodation with two separate bedrooms which have a wet area accessible shower and benches in the Otago area. Many only provide one bedroom that is not suitable if the disabled person has a support person/carers with them who is not their partner.
- 23. Currently if a disabled person comes from Central Otago for example with friends to visit and fish at the wharf they cannot stay at Taieri Mouth while their friends can. This means having to make alternative arrangements outside the village. Not very inclusive for them to socialise.
- 24. Inaccessible accommodation can:
 - (a) restrict disabled individuals' ability to participate in social events, gatherings, and community activities, leading to feelings of isolation and loneliness.
 - (b) can increase reliance on caregivers or family members for assistance with daily tasks and social outings, potentially impacting independence and autonomy.

- (c) Growing feelings of exclusion and marginalization:
 - (i) Being unable to access the same spaces and activities as their non-disabled peers can lead to feelings of exclusion, resentment, and a sense of being different or left out.
- (d) Impact on well-being:
 - (i) Social isolation is strongly linked to poorer mental and physical health, including increased rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions.
 - (ii) Research suggests that disabled individuals may experience poorer health outcomes, including greater vulnerability to secondary conditions and co-morbidities
 - (iii) Social isolation and lack of social support can negatively impact overall well-being and quality of life.

How this proposal will address need for places to stay and recreate in Otago

25. The Onumai proposal will:

- (a) benefit the disabled person by enabling them to undertake normal activities and procedures and partake in activities with their peers within the coastal environment.
- (b) Help people in Otago to access the coast for sport and recreation by:
 - (i) providing accessible facilities and access to water sports and passive recreation opportunities for disabled people and their family and friends.

- (ii) Upgrading access to the wharf and pontoon which enables disabled people to reach the Coast.

26. As mentioned above having accessible accommodation on site will mean that the disabled person is able to stay near the activity they and their family/friends are undertaking. The accommodation element, and the facilities that it provides will make a significant difference to the utility of the facilities for disabled people both on a 'day' basis and for overnight use. It will allow people the ability to easily toilet, have access to clean spaces to deal with unexpected issues with the likes of ostomy bags etc or simply rest on a bed if they need. For some people this will give them the confidence to try something new where previously the barriers have been too significant.
27. The facility will allow them to stay in the area, rather than having to leave (which can exacerbate feelings of isolation). I would anticipate this facility will see disabled people staying and having their friends join them by staying at other accommodation in Taieri Mouth because there are so few locations available by the coast where this is possible.
28. By being able to stay close to the activity the disabled person will have more energy and time to enjoy and participate fully in the activity.
29. Providing accessible accommodation and access to boats will ensure that:
 - (a) The annual fishing competitions that take place around the area are inclusive, supporting the achievement of Sport New Zealand's strategy and the New Zealand Disability Strategy.
 - (b) Enabling other community events that may wish to utilise the Wharf and Facility to be inclusive also.

30. Based on my knowledge and experience the establishment of a facility such as this will be a significant gain for the disabled community. With benefits that will extend beyond disabled people, to those that support them and the wider community.

Conclusion

31. The Onumai proposal presents an opportunity for individuals who are less able than me to safely engage in water activities and/or experience being over water with their families and friends.
32. By providing accessible accommodation over water, the Onumai proposal will allow disabled individuals to closely experience what it's like to sleep on a boat and fully access the coastal environment. For those who have slept on a boat, the sound of the waves can be incredibly soothing, helping the body relax and aiding sleep. Sleep can be challenging for some disabled individuals, and I can personally attest to how beneficial this experience can be. For many disabled people experiencing this is simply not possible currently and to that extent they are excluded from the coastal environment.
33. Currently, there is no facility in the South Island that I am aware of where a disabled person can sleep over water¹.
34. I believe providing these facilities does have a functional need. As the ability to sleep over water not currently available for disabled individuals who use wheelchairs within Otago, at least.
35. I view this proposal as an opportunity for Taieri Mouth to become a leader in providing accessible accommodation in the Otago coastal region, promoting inclusion in water activities. I would expect it to be a sought after facility within the disabled community.

¹ I am aware of some in the North Island including The Loft Overwater in the Bay of Islands, Trinity Wharf near Tauranga and the Hilton Auckland.

36. Furthermore, the approval of the Onumai proposal would demonstrate continued support for the disabled community in Otago, ensuring that people with disabilities have access to environments that can sometimes be limiting, or that they are effectively excluded from.
37. I will be reviewing drawings at the various stages of the approved build to ensure that the design not only meets the current Building Code but also incorporates Universal Design principles where possible.

Dated 26 August 2025

John Marrable