

Beach and Foreshore Access Strategy 2019 - 2028



Photo: North Beach

Introduction

Wollongong’s coastline stretches from Stanwell Park Beach in the north to Windang Beach in the south. It includes 17 beaches patrolled by Council’s professional lifeguards and Surf Life Saving NSW volunteers. Our City’s beaches and foreshores are a key part of our identity. They are highly valued by both locals and visitors and

provide an ideal setting for many recreational and lifestyle activities. In Council’s 2017 Community Survey, the residents identified patrolled beaches as an area where Council ‘performed extremely well’. It’s only fitting we continue to invest in improving ease of access to beaches for everyone, including people with a disability.

Did you know?

- 1 in 5 people in Australia have some form of disability.
- 35.9% of Australia’s 8.9 million households include a person with a disability.
- 4.4% of people with a disability in Australia use a wheelchair.
- 1 in 6 Australians are affected by hearing loss. There are approximately 30,000 Deaf Auslan users with total hearing loss.
- Vision Australia estimates there are currently 357,000 people in Australia who are blind or have low vision.

Source: Australian Network on Disability <https://www.and.org.au/pages/disability-statistics.html>. Viewed 6.8.2018



20% of Australians have some type of disability or have some difficulty getting down to the water.



85% of Australians live within 50km of the coast.

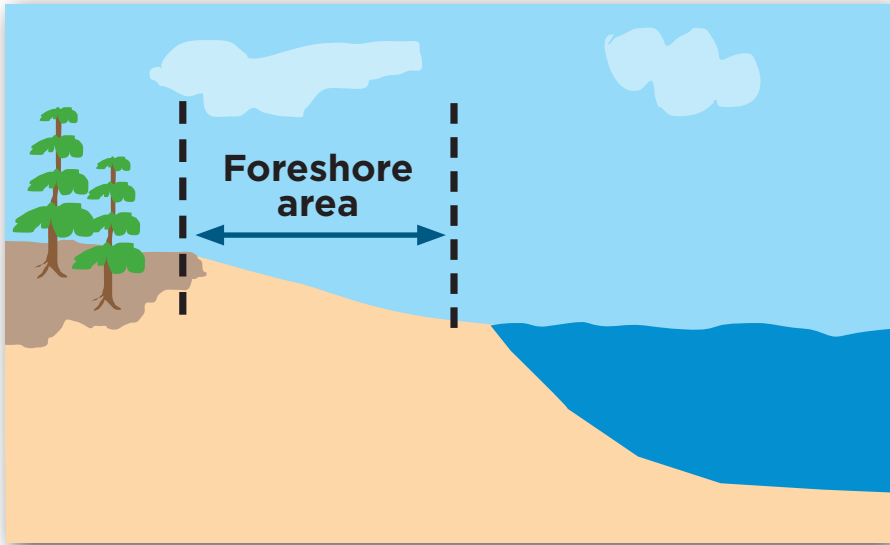
Australia State of the Environment 2016 Report: <https://soe.environment.gov.au/sites/g/files/net806/f/soe2016-coasts-launch-17feb.pdf?v=1488793015>

Definitions

- **Beach:**
An area covered with sand or small rocks that is next to an ocean or lake.



- **Foreshore:**
The part of a shore between the water and occupied or cultivated land.



- **Beach Access:**
A continuous, unobstructed path that crosses the surface of the beach that allows pedestrians to participate in beach related activities.





Photo courtesy of Shane Hryhorec - Push Mobility



Wollongong 2022 Community Goal:
"We are a healthy
community in a
liveable city"

Why do we need a strategy?

In 2016, in response to the introduction of the NSW Disability Inclusion Act, Council developed a Disability Inclusion Action Plan. A consistent message from the community consultation was that people with a disability wanted improved and easier access to Council's recreational services and facilities.

Our City's foreshore areas cater for a range of entertainment, sport and recreational activities. They provide pedestrian and shared paths, playgrounds, picnic areas, toilets and showers and other supporting

infrastructure. Our foreshores host many events including surf lifesaving and surfing events, Australia Day and New Year's Eve celebrations.

This Strategy will help Council meet its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA). Under this Act, we are a 'service provider' and must consider the needs of people with a disability when developing and delivering services and facilities including our beach and foreshore areas.



Photo: Austinmer Beach promenade



Photo: Thirroul Beach

The purpose of this strategy

This Strategy will provide a more planned and considered approach in the way Council can practically support people with a range of disabilities to access our beaches and foreshores. Improved access for people with a disability also means improved access for everyone including parents with prams and people with limited mobility.

This Strategy aligns with Council’s objective to increase the health and wellbeing of our community (Wollongong 2028 Community Objective 5.1). The Strategy will guide Council in making improvements to the accessibility of beaches and foreshores and assist in allocating resources fairly across Council’s three planning districts; Planning District 1 (North), Planning District 2 (Central), Planning District 3 (South).



Photo: Port Kembla Beach

The challenges

It’s a challenge to create and sustain accessible beaches. The dynamic and harsh environment, including changing tidal conditions, movement of sand, steep sand dunes and soft, unstable sand all make it difficult to maintain infrastructure and provide consistent access to the beach. Also, many of our existing facilities were built to the regulations of the day and don’t comply with many of today’s accessibility standards.

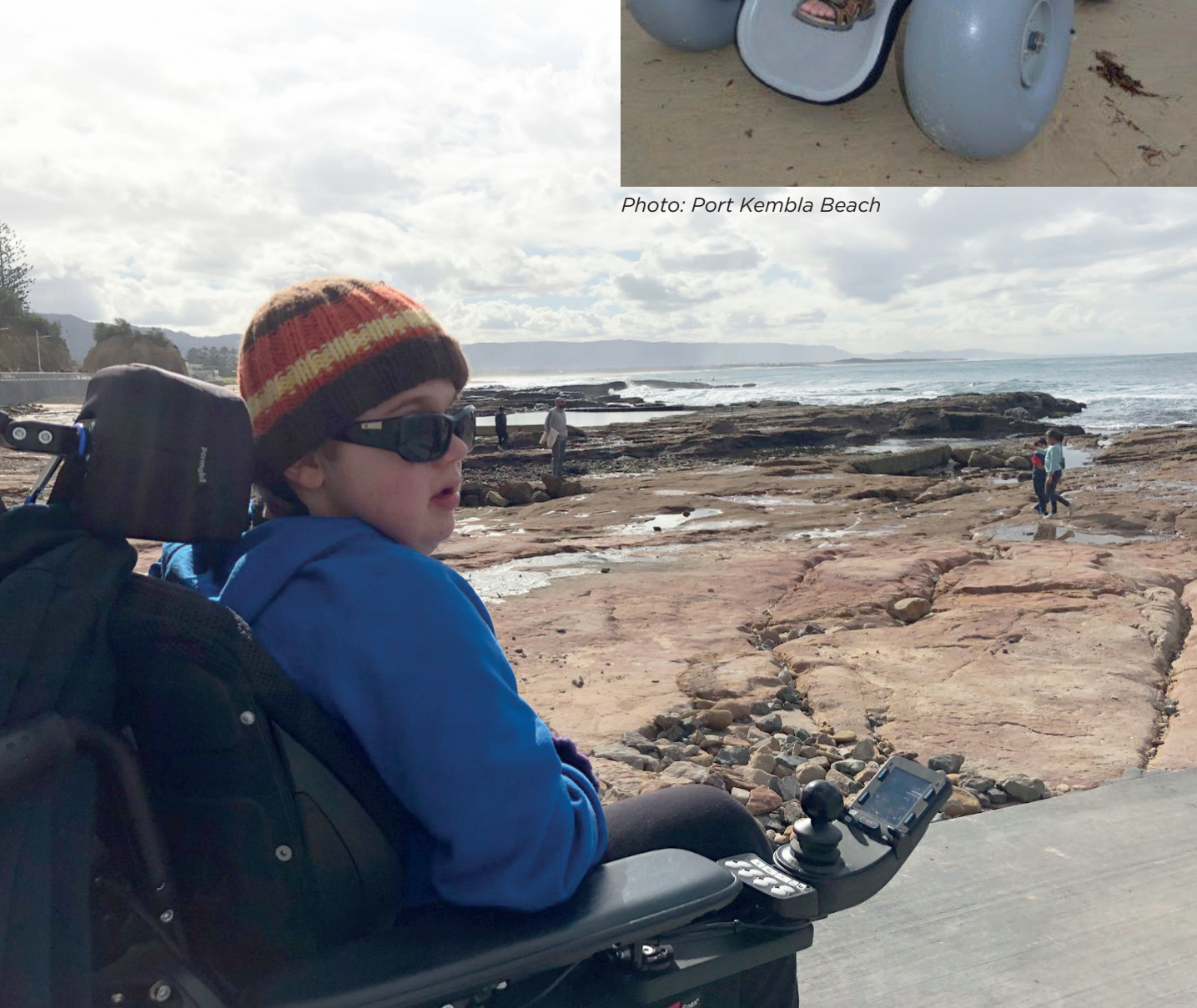


Photo: Blue Mile Tramway



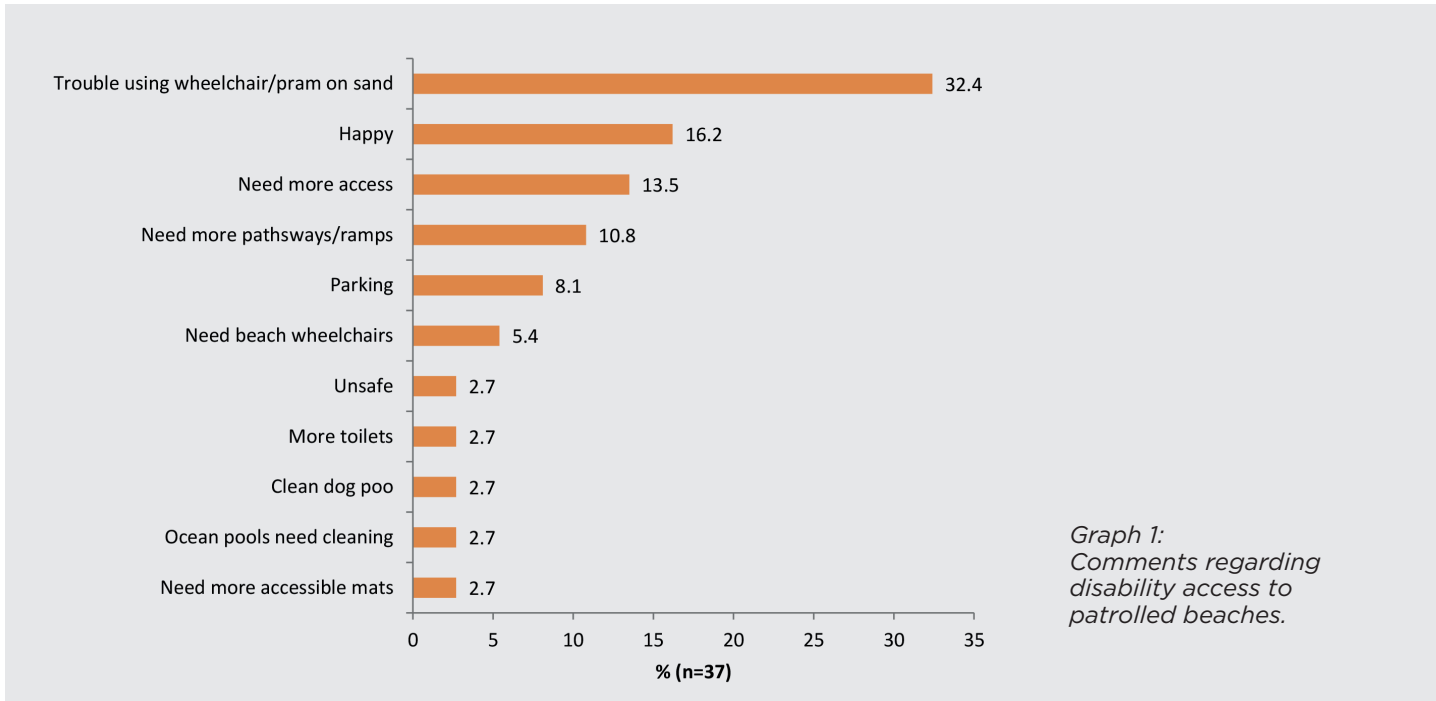
Photo: Port Kembla Beach

What did we do?

- We:
- looked at what other councils were doing to improve access to their beaches.
 - looked at what products are available to support access to beaches.
 - reviewed Council's Disability Access and Inclusion Plan Survey 2015 to see what the community told us.
 - engaged with South Coast Disabled Surfers Association and Surf Life Saving Illawarra to discuss beach accessibility.
 - held a discussion with clients of Spinal Cord Injuries Australia and the local MS Society support co-ordinator about beach accessibility.
 - held discussions with members of our deaf and blind community on how beaches can be made more accessible.
 - provided the parents and carers of students at Para Meadows School with a Beach Access Questionnaire.
 - provided Council's staff with the results from the consultations and a presentation from a beach access expert with lived experience.
 - ran a staff workshop to identify the beaches in our City which posed the least and greatest challenge to improving accessibility.
 - made minor amendments to the strategy based on the feedback from the exhibition of the Draft Strategy.



Photo: DIAP report back and community consultation.

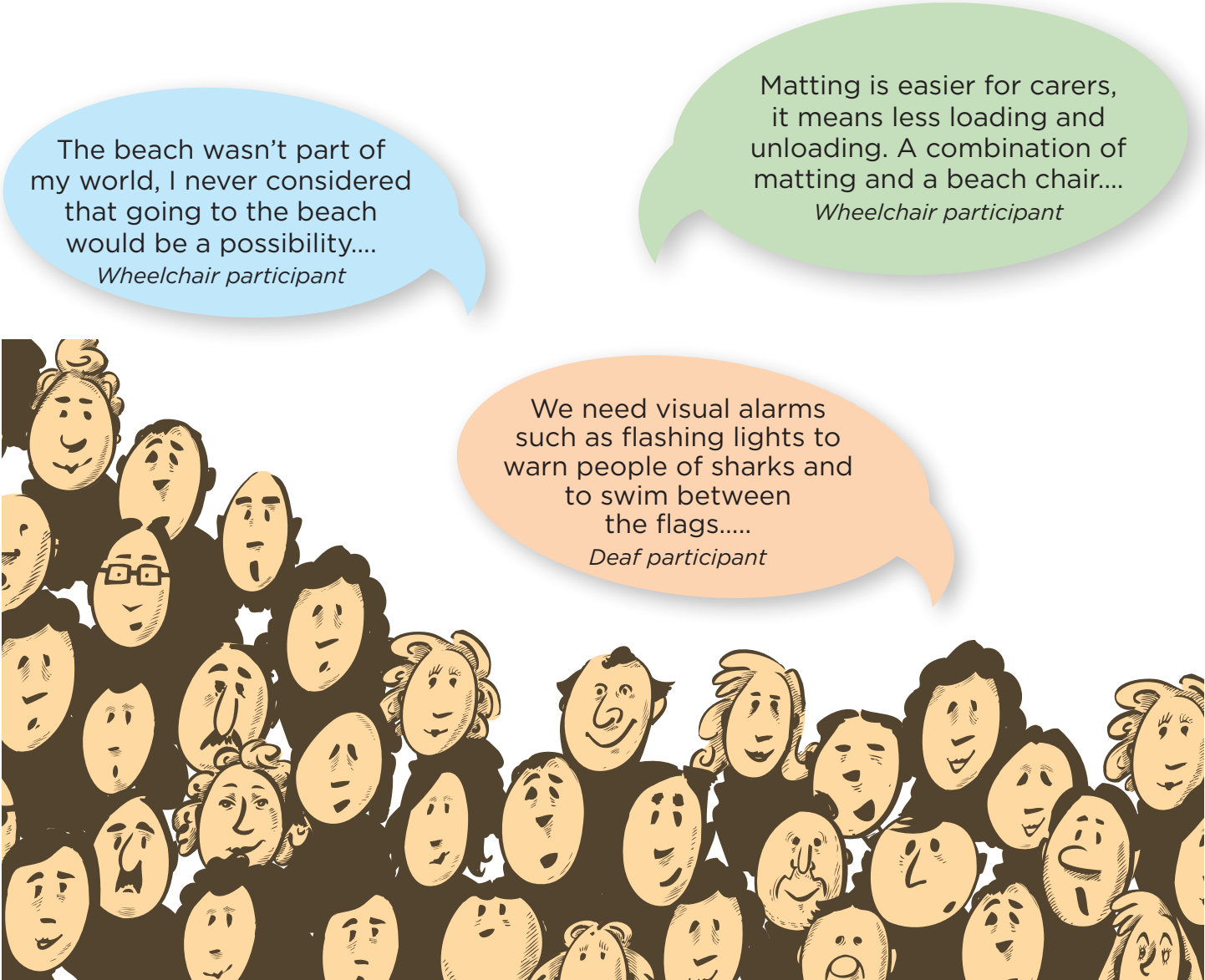


Graph 1: Comments regarding disability access to patrolled beaches.

What did the community tell us?

People with a disability want:

- to be on the beach with their family and friends
- relevant information about beaches eg what is available, how to book a chair, how accessible are the facilities, what else is nearby
- beach matting so they spontaneously visit the beach and simple processes for booking beach wheelchairs
- more accessible parking bays that are safe and closer to beach
- level continuous pathways connecting car park to the beach and to facilities
- accessible toilets, showers and change rooms
- assistance for carers in transferring a person to and from a chair and safe storage for their own wheelchairs
- visual alarms (flashing lights) to warn people that are deaf of any dangers
- to be able to access BBQs, picnic shelters, cafés
- shade and access to drinking water
- to be able to view the beach from parking bays
- to be able to turn up spontaneously like everybody else and access the beach
- training/education for lifeguards in disability awareness





Map: Council planning districts and patrolled beaches.

What do we know about our beaches?

From the information obtained from our research, site audits and feedback from key stakeholders, Council has provided an accessibility rating on our beaches, refer to Table 1 below:

	Adequate, safe accessible parking	Accessible foreshore footpath & connectivity	Accessible toilets	Showers	Accessible BBQs, picnic shelters	Access to cafés nearby	Shade available with view of beach
Stanwell Park	**	*	**	nf	*	nf	*
Coalcliff	*	*	nf	nf	nf	nf	*
Scarborough	*	*	nf	nf	nf	nf	*
Coledale	*	*	cp	*	*	nf	***
Austinmer	**	***	cp	cp	*	***	***
Thirroul	**	***	**	**	**	***	*
Sandon Point	**	*	nf	nf	nf	nf	**
Bulli	**	**	*	*	cp	***	**
Woonona	**	*	*	nf	*	**	*
Bellambi	**	*	cp	nf	nf	**	*
Corrimal	**	*	nf	*	**	***	*
Towradgi	**	*	nf	nf	**	cp	**
Fairy Meadow	**	*	nf	nf	**	nf	*
North Wollongong	**	***	***	***	***	***	***
Wollongong City	**	***	***	**	*	***	*
Port Kembla	**	**	**	**	*	***	*
Windang	*	*	nf	nf	*	nf	*

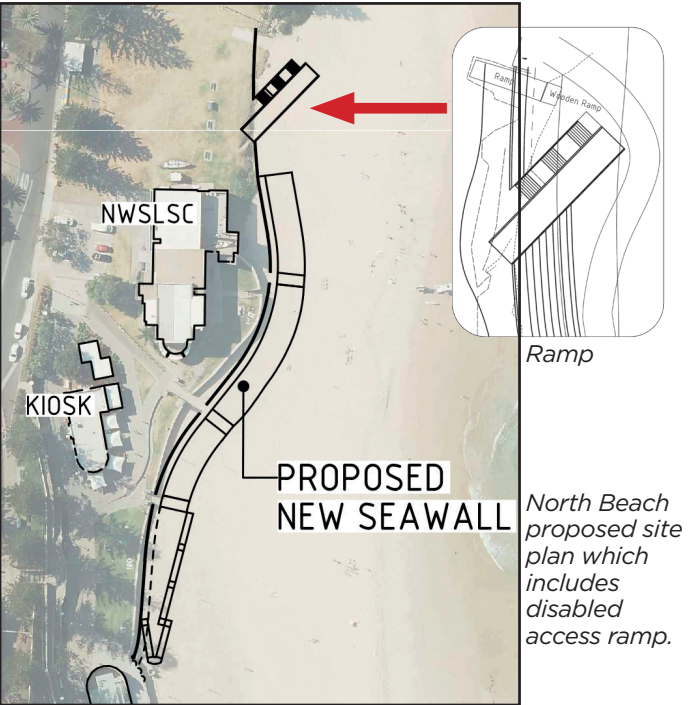
Table 1: Patrolled beach precincts rated against accessibility features. May 2019.

Key:	*	Poor	nf	No facility
	**	Satisfactory	cp	Currently planned
	***	Good		

What will we do with the information?

We’ve identified four beaches as priorities for access improvements: Austinmer, Thirroul, North Wollongong and Port Kembla. See Map 1. These beaches are spread across Council’s three planning areas, are very popular with residents and visitors, and can safely accommodate a beach wheelchair and matting. These four beaches also offer good foreshore connectivity.

While these beaches have been identified as focus areas for access improvements other actions will be considered for all our beaches.



What we will do?

Improve safe and accessible beach and foreshore access.

We will:

- ensure disability access is part of the assessment criteria for capital works projects.
- develop a priority list of capital works with cost estimates to improve beach access in each planning district.
- develop concept designs for Austinmer, Thirroul, North Wollongong and Port Kembla Beach that consider accessible parking, amenities, ramps, connectivity and shade.
- improve accessibility at foreshore bus stops.
- develop a program of footpath upgrades that connect public transport drop off points to beach.
- undertake ‘quick links’ audit to identify small projects that create connectivity links.
- implement the priorities of Council’s Public Toilet Strategy including installing lift and change tables at Austinmer, Thirroul and Port Kembla beaches.
- audit foreshore parking with the aim to increase accessible parking and parking bays with views to the beach/water.
- undertake a shade, seating and shelter audit of patrolled beaches.
- ensure door widths on accessible amenities accommodate a beach wheelchair.
- explore external funding opportunities to improve access.
- ensure accessibility is considered at all patrolled beaches as funding opportunities arise.

Provide relevant and current access information about our beaches and foreshores.

We will:

- develop a promotion plan to promote the beach wheelchairs and matting.
- develop a webpage that promotes the access features of foreshores and beaches.
- review the current beach wheelchair usage guidelines and booking process including investigating storage options for wheelchairs.
- investigate an online booking system for the hiring of the chairs.
- install wayfinding signage that includes accessible amenities and parking information.
- investigate new technologies that support the deaf and blind community in accessing foreshores and beaches.

Work with partners in improving beach access.

We will:

- explore opportunities for collaboration with surf clubs to improve access including beach matting.
- provide disability awareness training for surf clubs and Council’s lifeguards.
- explore opportunities to collaborate with organisations to provide programs at beaches.
- engage people with disability when developing foreshore plans.
- trial a ‘come & try’ beach matting and wheelchair program in the three planning areas.
- provide a range of beach wheelchairs, matting and appropriate storage.



We'd like to thank everyone who has provided
input to help us improve the accessibility of
Wollongong's foreshore and beaches.