

# **Appendix 4**

## **Accessible Beaches Overview 2017-18**

# Accessible Beaches Stage Three Update

Altona and Williamstown Beaches  
December 2017 to 1 April 2018



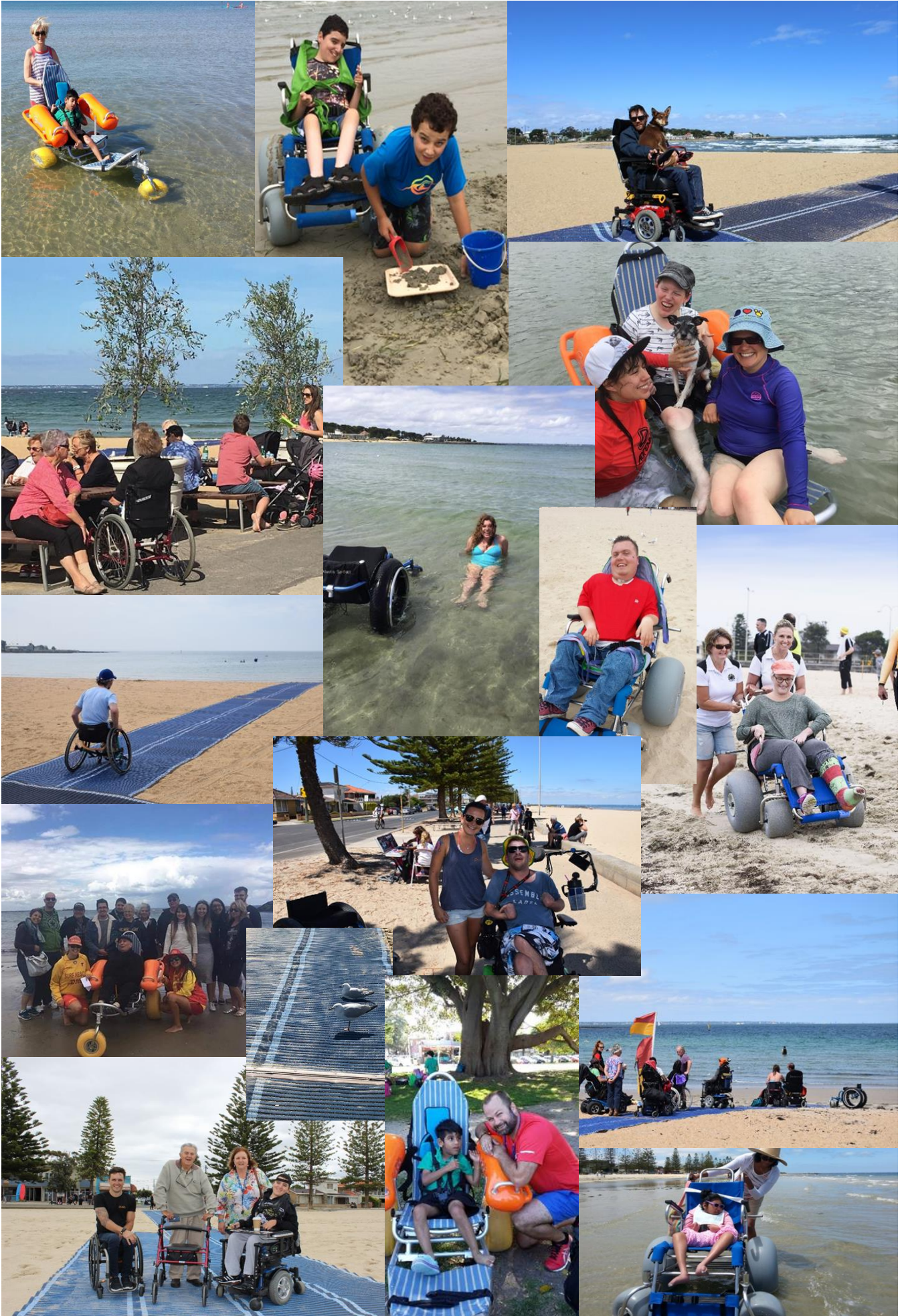
June 2018

### **Acknowledgements**

This paper was compiled by the Strategy and Advocacy Department. For further information contact the Hobsons Bay City Council on 9932 1000 [www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au](http://www.hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au)

Council acknowledges all language groups of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners of these municipal lands. We recognise the first people's relationship to this land and offer our respect to their elders past and present.

Council acknowledges the legal responsibility to comply with the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*. The *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* is designed to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens. The Charter gives legal protection to 20 fundamental human rights under four key values that include freedom, respect, equality and dignity.



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## Introduction

Hobsons Bay has over 20 kilometers of beaches and foreshore areas, which the community greatly value. People with a disability represent approximately 18.5 per cent (17,790 people) of the total Hobsons Bay population. People with a disability face physical and attitudinal barriers within the community, restricting their ability to conduct their lives in a spontaneous and unplanned manner as well as restricting integration into mainstream community activities.

Altona and Williamstown beaches are key destination points for many people who live, work, study and visit Hobsons Bay. Due to the changing natural environment and uneven soft surfaces, beaches can be extremely difficult for people with mobility needs to access and enjoy. However, if accessible, they can provide great opportunities for inclusion and recreational activities.

Council's Disability Access and Inclusion Strategy 2013-17 articulates that *"Council is working towards achieving a fully accessible and inclusive municipality where all residents, regardless of their ability can reach their full potential and lead fulfilling lives"*.

From December 2015 to March 2016 Hobsons Bay City Council, with support from local life saving clubs and traders, implemented its first accessible beaches project trial. This included an accessible beach wheelchair located at Altona Beach and beach matting located at Williamstown Beach. The findings from the trial indicated that these two pieces of accessible equipment provided support and opportunities for community members with a disability, as well as their families and friends, to explore, play, exercise, meet and connect.

Recommendations from the trial were reported to Council with the ultimate goal of working towards accessible beaches for all by 2020.

Council is now three years into the accessible beaches project. The progress of how Council is meeting the commitment to achieve accessible beaches for all by 2020 and next steps is outlined within this report.

## Altona Beach recommendation tracker – progress since 2015



**Recommendation 1:**  
explore the feasibility and funding available to provide a Changing Places toilet when upgrading the Weaver Reserve toilets in Altona

**COMPLETE**  
Weaver Reserve houses a fully accessible adult changing facility including a changing hoist

**Recommendation 2:**  
explore funding opportunities to provide beach matting to the hard sand at Altona Beach seven days a week and storage opportunities when matting is not in use

**COMPLETE**  
Matting has been made available seven days a week all year round

**Recommendation 3:**  
explore funding and storage space to provide a range of beach wheelchairs at Altona Beach over the next three years

**IN PROGRESS**  
3 of 4 chairs  
The beach has an adult Sandcruiser chair, a water entry MobiChair and a childrens chair. The next priority is to provide an independent beach wheelchair.

**Recommendation 4:**  
explore the possibility of hiring the beach wheelchair seven days a week by working with local traders and other stakeholders

**IN PROGRESS**  
On going conversations continue, seeking to address hire outside of life saving patrol times

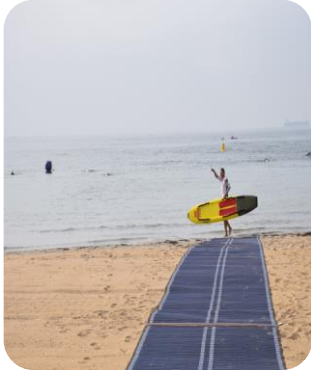
**Recommendation 5:**  
explore the feasibility of developing an online booking system to support the hiring of beach wheelchairs

**COMPLETE**  
Council launched a new booking system at the start of the 2017-18 summer season

**Recommendation 6:**  
review the access appraisal of Altona Beach and explore the opportunity to incorporate these works within future budgets for upgrades

**IN PROGRESS**  
Feedback and the original access appraisal to be collated prior to implementing works

## Williamstown Beach recommendation tracker – progress since 2015



Coming in 2018-2019

**Recommendation 1:**  
explore the opportunity to extend the availability of the matting to seven days a week at Williamstown Beach over summer

**COMPLETE**

Matting has been made available seven days a week all year round

**Recommendation 2:**  
explore the opportunity to provide and store a range of beach wheelchairs at Williamstown Beach for hire

**IN PROGRESS**

2 of 4 chairs  
The beach has an adult water entry MobiChair and a Sandpiper children's beach wheelchair. The next priority is to provide an adult Sandcruiser chair

**Recommendation 3:**  
explore the feasibility to provide a Changing Places toilet when upgrading the public toilets next to the life saving club

**NOT STARTED**

Upgrade yet to be scheduled

**Recommendation 4:**  
strengthen communication processes with community members regarding access to beach wheelchairs

**COMPLETE**

Council launched a new booking system at the start of the 2017-18 summer season along with regular social media updates

**Recommendation 5:**  
review the access appraisal of Williamstown Beach and explore the opportunity to incorporate these works within future budgets for upgrades

**IN PROGRESS**

Feedback and the original access appraisal to be collated prior to implementing works



## Stage Three - Summer 2017-18 Update

Over the 2017-18 summer Council has conducted its third successive year of the accessible beach program. Council provided free-to-hire beach wheelchairs available on weekends during life saving club patrol hours and beach matting seven days a week for 24 hours a day on Altona and Williamstown beaches.

Working towards the goal of two fully accessible beaches by 2020 Council is currently 43 per cent through the timeframe to complete recommendations by December 2020. In relation to actions, the project is 57 per cent complete with major progress made in the range of wheelchairs, all year round matting access and a key win with the installation of Weaver Reserve changing facility. This progress equates to five out of 11 actions complete, five in progress and one not started.

This season's program ran from 2 December 2017 to 1 April 2018, with support from Altona Life Saving Club, Williamstown Swimming and Life Saving Club, local traders and Council.



**Figure 1. Family outing to Williamstown Beach**

*"She had an amazing time! She actually smiled and could not stop talking about how much fun it was going to the beach, smelling some fresh air and seeing the grandkids have fun. She already is talking about going again with the whole family. Thank you so much for providing this service. It's actually life-changing and makes people very very very happy." Eman*

To understand if the 2017-18 season continues to be a success an evaluation was undertaken which looked at what worked, what didn't work, and what could be done differently in future.

Key elements explored:

- **reach** – capturing the number of users and user type
- **implementation processes** – location, hiring of the chair, maintenance and storage
- **partnership** – reflecting on the established relationships with the life saving club, traders and other stakeholders
- **quality of access** – has community access been improved and to what quality?

Feedback was sought during the summer. Each wheelchair user was contacted post-use to gain feedback regarding the above points. In addition the life saving clubs, Altona Village Traders Association, the Norfolk Café, the Kiosk D'Asporto and community were consulted. Social media provided another avenue for Council to monitor reach as well as feedback from the community.

### Beach Wheelchairs

Accessible beach wheelchairs are designed to allow access across soft sandy surfaces where conventional wheelchairs are unable to go. The previous year's program successfully tested the MobiChair beach wheelchairs (water chair) at both Altona and Williamstown beaches.

The trial evaluation recommended that an additional two chairs be purchased for the 2017-18 summer: independent chair, and a children's chair.

In working towards this, Council purchased a Sandpiper children's beach wheelchair (water chair specifically designed for children) to be housed at Williamstown Beach, adding to the MobiChair.

In addition, Community Bank and Altona Rotary Club donated a Sandpiper children's beach wheelchair to Altona Beach. This chair joined the existing adult Sandcruiser (adult chair) and MobiChair.

The goal of providing a range of beach wheelchair options for community members will be complete with the purchase of an independent beach wheelchair.

Since the project started the beach wheelchairs have been hired 92 times.

### Outcomes

The introduction of the new purpose designed children's beach wheelchair produced a multitude of positive outcomes and the ability for additional community members to access the water. These are further outlined below.

**Reach** - Over the course of the 17 week season Council's beach wheelchairs provided the opportunity for 36 community members and their families to access Hobsons Bay beaches.

Users came from across Victoria including Altona, Sunshine West, Keilor, Albert Park, Brunswick, Coburg and Dandenong. Of the 36 users, 15 per cent were children and the majority of hires came from Altona Beach.

Multiple service user groups utilised the beach wheelchairs including Yooralla, Mambourin, SCOPE and SPIRE (a spinal injury rehabilitation service). We also welcomed backed Mackellar Primary School, visiting Altona beach with over 700 students.

**Bookings** – This summer Council was successful in installing an online booking system to support the hiring of beach wheelchairs. The portal was purpose built as part of Council’s new meeting booking system Priava.

The system allows community members to independently make bookings and provides visibility on the availability of specific beach wheelchairs at both locations. Additionally efficiencies are gained as life saving clubs are also able to access the bookings prior to patrol on weekends, reducing double handling and ensuring the life savers are informed ahead of time.

Four community members made use of the booking system. While this is still a low number, all bookings were made successfully. The majority of the other bookings made came through phone calls to Council during the week. Online bookings should increase in the future with further promotion.

As the program grows and user base increases the online booking system will aid in managing the bookings and providing visibility to all stakeholders (Council, life saving club, and café where the chairs are housed). This will greatly improve the quality and timeliness of stakeholders knowing when chairs are booked, rather than having to rely on Council providing the most up to date information on a Friday afternoon which can change over the weekend.

**Maintenance** – The chairs continue to prove to be strong, durable and fit for purpose. Altona’s MobiChair was the only beach wheelchair that required any significant maintenance. On notification Push Mobility (the distributor) were able to fix the problem quickly, providing and installing a replacement spare part to the arm of a float.

Williamstown’s MobiChair has some noticeable sun damage to its floats. It has been noted that the chairs are currently being stored outside. A request for the life saving club to install a storage shed which the chairs can also utilise has been explored and approved for next season.

Push Mobility have committed to offering on going regular service maintenance at a cost yet to be determined. This will be further investigated leading into next summer.

**Partnerships** – There continues to be strong active support from both the Altona Life Saving Club and the Williamstown Swimming and Life Saving Club, with both clubs continuing to take a positive proactive approach, championing the project to the local community. The end result, supported with effective communication, meant that if challenges arose they were managed smoothly.

The Altona Village Traders Association continue to be a strong advocate of beach access, providing support, candid feedback as required and adding value to the overall project.

Ground has been lost with the Norfolk Café at Altona Beach. The business changed hands between last summer and the new owners were not in a position to be able to play a significant supportive role in promoting beach access. On reflection the change underlines the positive contribution a local business can make. The local business community will be a focus at both beaches next season.

**Quality of access** – The beach wheelchairs continue to provide great access to both beaches, empowering 36 users, their families, friends and carers to enjoy the beach environment last summer.

The chairs continue to deliver “first time” experiences, with some users having never accessed the sand or water before. Another consistent theme is the chairs’ capacity to allow families to experience the beach and water together, rather than having to wait at the footpath.

The introduction of the children’s Sandpiper provided a dignified opportunity for children with a disability to access the beach in a purpose built chair verses being in an oversized adult chair. This was a significant milestone in the project through giving users a range of choices in how they wish to access the beach and or water.

The project is only one step away from completing its goal of providing users a range of wheelchairs. The final piece of the puzzle is to provide a beach wheelchair for independent users, allowing for “off mat” access to the sand and water’s edge.

**Transferring** – Over the last two years consistent feedback highlighted the significance of providing a changing facility with hoist to support people to be able to transfer into the beach wheelchairs. The installation of the 24 hour fully accessible adult changing facility at the Weaver Reserve toilets, adjacent to Altona Beach, is a game changer.

Beach goers with higher support needs can now access Altona Beach by making use of a hoist, adult change table, accessible shower and toilet. The facility is locked off by an MLAK key protecting the resources from vandalism and ensuring that those that need can access the facilities anytime they need too. In the short space of two years Altona Beach is arguably the most accessible beach in Australia.



**Figure 2. Double thumbs up from Adam, Altona Beach**

## Beach Matting

Following consistent clear feedback beach matting was provided 24 hours per day, seven days a week at both Williamstown and Altona beaches. Beach matting is used by the whole community and whilst certainly supporting community members with a disability it also supports prams, walking and mobility aids to pass over the soft sand to the hard sand at the water's edge.

The matting has now provided over 540 days of continuous beach access. Hobsons Bay City Council is the first council in Australia to provide beach matting all year round.

The 'blue matting' was used every single day. Over the last three years the matting has entrenched itself as a familiar and natural sight at the beach. Whilst primarily being used for access it is also a race track, a cricket pitch, a place to brush the sand off feet, a spot for mothers group catch ups, a place to park and feel the sea breeze on your face, to dip your toes in the water or the means for an independent wheelchair user to propel themselves down to the water's edge.

Providing matting all year round has conclusively improved beach access for the whole community.

## Outcomes

The introduction of beach matting at Altona and Williamstown beaches all year round has produced positive outcomes on a daily basis. A simple, smart, cost effective universal solution to the access that also transforms community attitudes towards disability. These are further outlined below.

**Reach** - The beach matting has provided access opportunities for the whole community including independent wheelchair users, electric wheelchair users, people that use mobility aids, frames and sticks, pushers, prams, bikes, and scooters. The matting has been used by young people, older people, families and friends.

The beach matting provides people with a disability the opportunity to be spontaneous and actively participate in the community at any time that suits them. Altona and Williamstown beaches are now an accessible destination of choice for disability and aged service providers.

**Independent and electric wheelchair users** – By providing 24/7 beach matting access at both beaches, the number of wheelchair users has visibly increased. The matting provides spontaneous opportunity to access the beach with minimum effort, maximising positive outcomes.

**Minimal sand movement** – Altona and Williamstown beaches continue to provide a stable sand environment for the matting. Matting at both beaches have endured high tides, king tides, weather events, and seasonal weather without any damage. Council has a high confidence level in the mats ability to handle all beach conditions.

**Maintenance** – Council officers have managed the maintenance of the matting with regular inspections. To date there has been minimal need to intercede aside from intermittent sand removal and repining. In fact officers were only required to remove the matting once (from Altona beach) to accommodate a life saving club state competition. Since the trial in 2015-16 this maintenance has now become part of beach maintenance with minimal cost and resources.

**Matting wear and tear** – Matting at Altona beach was completely replaced this season by the distributor at no cost to Council due to a manufacture fault with the edging. The new matting, with a new edging treatment is holding up well.

The matting at Williamstown Beach is in its third year. It is currently in good condition with some minor fraying. Keeping the matting in situ has reduced the overall wear and tear of the mats and pins. It is recommended to review the Williamstown matting at the end of the 2018 winter season and consider if any major maintenance is required.



**Figure 3. Sam and friends, Altona Beach**

*"The new change room is AWESOME!!!!!! Everything is just perfect!!!!!! I'm going to move sometime, but I can still come to Altona beach because of the change room. I can't tell you how good that feels." Sam*

## Brodie's Beach

Brodie is a local resident who absolutely loves Altona beach. In November 2015 his mum Deanne was considering having to stay away from the beach because the access was getting too hard. But that changed for the better in December 2015. Below is Brodie's story cataloguing beach access. As shown in the pictures, through the implementation and diversity of beach access equipment Brodie's experiences, and that of his family, has greatly improved.



### November 2015

Last time they took the wheelchair to the beach. Brodie was getting too heavy to manually transfer



### December 2015

Brodie and Kye, two happy kids and one happy Mum – with Adult Sandcruiser



### December 2016

Matting and MobiChair a winning combination...bringing the whole family together and having access into the water



### December 2017

Brodie in a chair that fits – the child's Sandpiper

**Figure 4. Brodie testing out chairs and matting**

*"Brodie just likes to sit in the water and dip the toes in. We have fun. He is just so happy. He will try and scoot away from us because he just doesn't want to leave. He just loves it so much. They've now got changing room facilities and they are amazing too with the hoist and the shower"* **Deanne, Brodie's Mum**

## The Tide is Changing



**Figure 5. Contact point word cloud, Williamstown Beach**

In December 2015 Council implemented its first ever Accessible Beaches Trial, with an accessible beach wheelchair located at Altona Beach, and beach matting located at Williamstown Beach.

At the time there was not a single accessible beach program in Port Phillip Bay and minimal across Australia. Three years later and Hobsons Bay City Council is recognised as an expert, leading the way in beach accessibility and creating positive change across Australia.

So much so, that this summer there were eight bayside beaches that provided matting for beach access: Williamstown, Altona, Mount Martha, Mordialloc, Mentone, Brighton, St Kilda and Port Melbourne. There are now also projects in Geelong, Torquay and soon in Mildura, with many more nationwide.

The availability of beach matting at Altona and Williamstown 365 days a year is a national first.

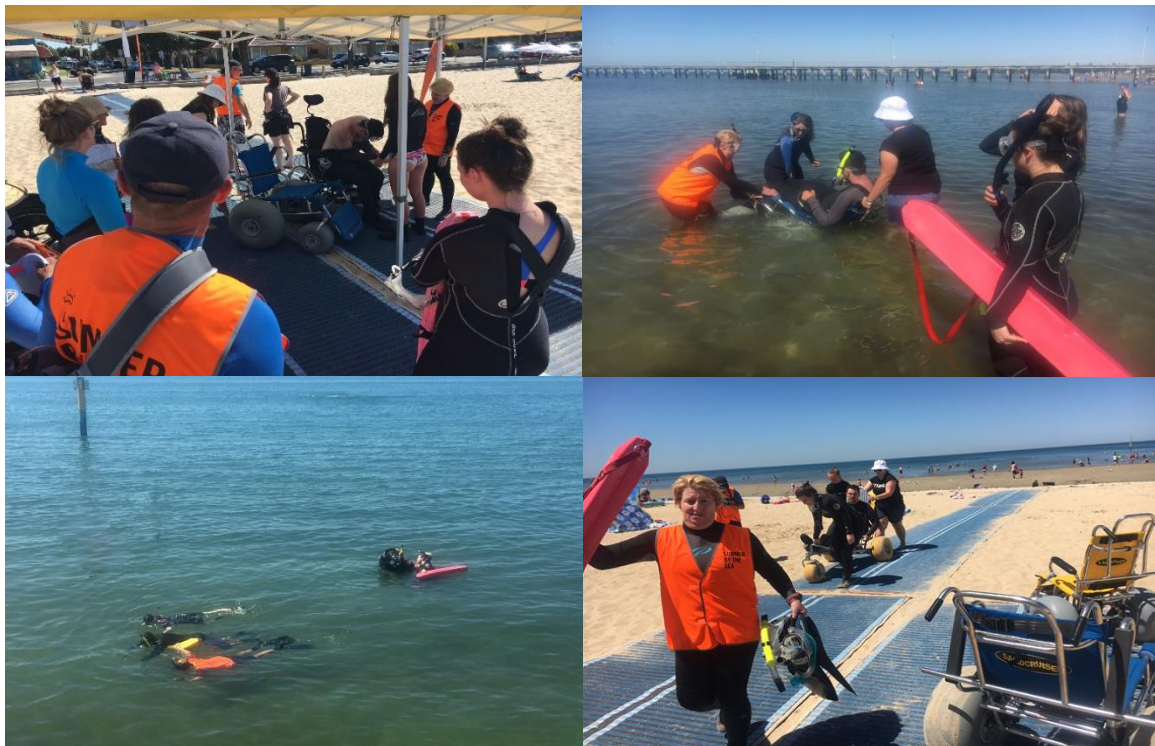
These fantastic results have only been made possible through a collaborative inter-council approach, sharing ideas, resources and jointly overcoming challenges as they arise. It is through these partnerships and this approach that we will see accessible beaches Australia wide. Council has provided support and advice far and wide including Hobart City Council, Gold Coast City Council, Shire of Augusta Margaret River, and Auckland City Council – putting Hobsons Bay on the map.

Council has also recently been invited to present on the accessible beaches project at the Australian Universal Design Conference in Brisbane in September 2018.

Beach access advocacy is now well and truly on its way to kick starting beach access for all.



## Disabled Divers Association – Snorkeling at Altona Pier



**Figure 6. Accessible Snorkeling, Altona Beach**

The accessible beaches project has also enabled other accessible projects to take place. The Summer by the Sea program is a Victorian Government initiative aiming to educate the community on Victoria’s precious coastal and marine environments, including its wide variety of species and habitats. This year Council ran thirteen activities including delivering a unique snorkelling experience for people with a disability at Altona Beach on 18 January 2017.

The accessible snorkelling project was led by Disabled Divers Association (DDA) with the support of Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Altona Life Saving Club, and volunteers. Disabled Divers Association are dedicated to encouraging and supporting people with a disability to access the sea and experience a day at the beach in a new light. Five participants had the opportunity to snorkel to the end of Altona Pier and back. For some this was the first time they had been in the water for fifteen years.

Altona was chosen due to Council’s accessible beach infrastructure. The provision of matting, wheelchairs and an accessible changing facility enabled the group to access the water and stay at the beach for a significant length of time, rather than having to leave to access accessible facilities. Council received great feedback in relation to the project and we look forward to hosting additional groups in the future.

At the start of the accessible beaches trail the idea of being able to provide the platform to support accessible snorkelling would have been inconceivable. This season has shown that it can be achieved if we continue to push the boundaries in relation to access.

## Looking forward to summer 2018-19

Council has completed its third summer of its journey to make Altona and Williamstown beaches fully accessible by 2020. Over the last three years Council has led the way in driving beach accessibility statewide and continues to be the catalyst for changes on a national level.

Through collaboration the beach access movement across Australia has gained great momentum and seen some fantastic wins.

### 2018-19 Actions

With the 2018-19 summer quickly approaching, Council will continue to lead from the front breaking down barriers to beach access. Below is an overview of next steps.

#### Accessible Beach Trial recommendations to be implemented in 2018-19

- 1) introduce an independent beach wheelchair
- 2) continue to investigate the potential to provide beach wheelchair hire seven days a week
- 3) review accessible parking availability and locations at Altona and Williamstown beaches
- 4) continue to investigate opportunities for an accessible change facility, including a hoist, for Williamstown Beach

#### NEW recommendations for 2018-2019 summer season

- 1) execute a targeted marketing plan promoting Altona and Williamstown beaches as accessible destinations
- 2) explore the opportunity to strengthen local links with traders

