

8 December, 2021

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The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change
Level 16, 8 Nicholson Street,
East Melbourne, VIC 3002

By email: lily.dambrosio@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Minister,

Re: Failure of DEWP to Maintain Disabled Beach Access Ramp at Centre Road, Seaspray

I write on behalf of my son-in-law who is now wheelchair bound as a result of a motor vehicle accident in 2020.

My son-in-law has been a regular beach goer to Seaspray and a regular user of the Centre Road access crossing for over 20 years.

The Centre Road beach access crossing has provided disabled access for almost 15 years and has been extensively used by both able bodied and disabled beach visitors throughout those years.

Centre Road is an important beach access point for the Seaspray community. This was recognised by the Department when it approved and funded the building of a disabled ramp.

The Centre Road beach access point supports the second highest volume of beach users in Seaspray. The disabled ramp receives almost as much use as the steps. It is favoured by the elderly, families with pushers and young children and persons with health conditions affecting mobility. It is essential for wheelchair bound persons.

The disabled access ramp was built because community members raised concerns with the Department that steps built to protect the dunes represented an impediment to persons from the groups noted above gaining access to the beach.

The Department agreed to construction of the disabled ramp and funded its construction. Some funding assistance was also provided by Sale Rotary.

The ramp has provided great benefit to the community, but it has been impacted over the past few years by sand build up on sections of the ramps.

As you will recognise coastal environments are subject to constant change and sand dunes in particular shift and change over time. Built infrastructure needs regular monitoring. It cannot just be left with no maintenance.

The Department has failed to adequately maintain the infrastructure it built. It has failed to provide sufficient resources to ensure the infrastructure is kept in good working order. No effort has been made by the Department to clear on a regular basis the sand build-up on the ramps.

Regular minor clearing would have addressed the problem. Taking no action over 15 years has led to the problem becoming such that the disabled ramp has been damaged and is now closed.

A major rain event in November, 2021 caused the weight of accumulated sand to greatly increase, such that fasteners holding the decking in place could not carry this weight. The ramp deck collapsed under the load of the wet sand.

A modest \$2000 to \$3000 spend per year on maintaining the disability ramp would have avoided this outcome. The ramp would still be operational. Now, it estimated the cost of repair to be in the order of \$15,000 to \$20,000.

Whilst this is a large sum the need for such expenditure has only arisen because of past failure to properly maintain this public infrastructure.

It is important to the community that the Centre Road disabled access ramp is repaired and maintained such it can continue to provide valuable beach experiences for the Seaspray and wider Gippsland disabled community.

In closing I note it has been asserted that alternate disabled access exists about 1.5kms away at Seaspray.

This denies the relevance and need of properly maintaining infrastructure the Department recognised some 15 years ago as meeting an important community requirement in Seaspray. It flies in the face of the case evidenced at that time for proper beach access to be provided at Centre Road.

The Centre Road disabled access ramp and beach viewing platform enabled valuable beach experiences for many people who could not use the steps. This access can be continued if the Department maintains the assets it previously built at Seaspray in a similar manner to community assets it is responsible for across Victoria.

I would appreciate your intervention in ensuring the Centre Road disabled access ramp at Centre Road, Seaspray can be repaired and properly maintained into the future.

Your sincerely,

Margaret Dynon