



Inclusive Tourism Strategy

2020 - 2025

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Indigenous statement

A Gumbaynggirr Dream. A place where there is genuine respect for the land and the original people of this country. A place where the ancestors way of holding country is recognised. A place where there is respect for custodial people who carry this tradition today and for Elders and the children of the future. A place where we all walk together, where we can all be here in harmony with the land and all life.

Vision

Our vision for the future must encompass all aspects of living and working in our shire, as well as ways in which we are connected where inclusiveness can flourish.

Definitions

Access means you can go where you want to in the community

Accessible facilities means places such as toilets are designed to meet the Australian Standard for disability access, mainly AS1428.

Designated Accessible Parking Bay (DAPB) means a parking bay that meets the current Australian Standard for disability access

Host community – the place where tourists are visiting

Inclusion means you feel part of the community and are treated with dignity and respect as a valued and equal member of society.

Inclusive tourism refers to tourism services and products where people of all abilities feel welcome and wanted as customers and guests. It assists people with a disability and groups with similar access needs, to better use tourism services.

Universal design – the design of places, products, information, communication and policy usable by the widest range of people in the widest range of situations without special or separate design, the design of everything with everyone in mind

Introduction

This Inclusive Tourism Strategy (the Strategy) is part of Bellingen Council's overall plan to develop the visitor economy. The strategy supports Council's commitment to an inclusive community. The purpose of this strategy is to make sure all our visitors feel welcome and enjoy their stay.

Bellingen Shire is a lifestyle region. Over thirteen thousand people live in Bellingen Shire (ABS 2015). Our residents come from different backgrounds and places. We have many cultural activities that support a strong community. The Shire has a beautiful natural environment with World Heritage National Parks, pristine aquatic environments and State forests. Over fifty seven percent of the Shire is made up of national parks and state forests.

More than 300,000 people come to the Shire each year to enjoy these attractions, catch up with family and friends, explore our unique retail offering, attend festival and events and soak up the Bellingen Shire unique culture.

This strategy aims to guide Council planning for inclusive tourism. An inclusive community benefits visitors and local residents alike.

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation says:

“Accessibility is a central element of any responsible and sustainable tourism policy. It is both a human rights imperative, and an exceptional business opportunity. It does not only benefit persons with disabilities or special needs; it benefits us all.” UNWTO (2013).

Access involves the design of buildings, outdoor places, information and service delivery so everyone can participate. This is also called universal design. Universal Design benefits everyone including people with a disability, older people, parents with young children and workers who deliver goods and services.

Background

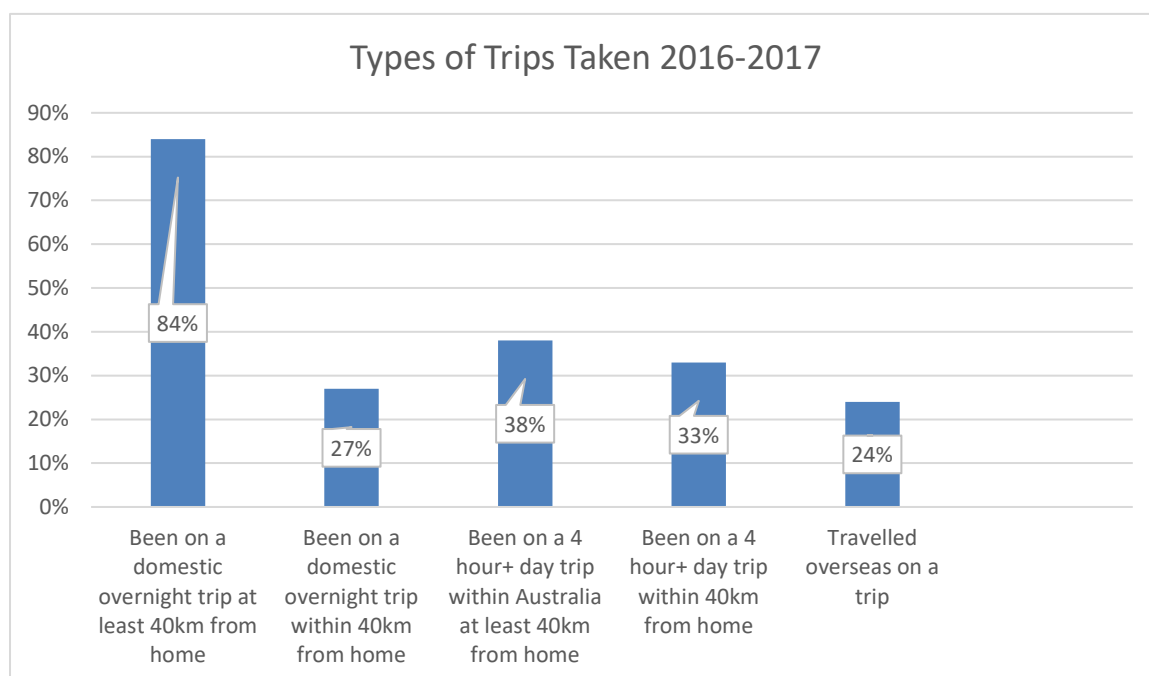
In 2007 the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation started working on ways to improve the experience of travellers with disabilities. The NSW government made inclusive tourism a priority in 2018 holding a Ministerial Forum. Bellingen Council's 2017-2021 Disability Inclusion Action Plan lists accessible tourism as an action. The Inclusive Tourism Strategy is a response to this action and sits within Council's Operation Plan.

The COVID19 pandemic has had a severe impact on the tourism industry. A temporary end to international tourism into and out of Australia means local tourism is expanding. Opportunities to travel within Australia must be open to everyone.

People with temporary or permanent disabilities or the challenges of ageing usually travel with at least one other person. They typically contribute over a quarter of the tourism receipts coming into a destination.

There are approximately 4.2 million Australians with a disability, almost 20 per cent of the population. There are around 1 billion people with a disability worldwide or 15 per cent of the global population. In Australia (2018) the accessible tourism sector for overnight and/or day trip travel is estimated at 1.3 million individuals, or 7% of the total Australian adult population. Many people with a disability travel with others, especially when they need a carer. This means 14% of the Australian population (an estimated 3.4 million people) needs accessible tourism experiences and services.

Tourists with a disability spend (both overnight and day) around \$3.2 billion annually (of which \$2.7 billion is for overnight and \$546 million is day trips). Adding people travelling with a person with a disability means the true value of the sector could be as high as \$8.0 billion.



Tourism Research Australia, Accessible Tourism Report 2018

Policy and legislative background

Australia adopted the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act in 1992. This Federal Act of Parliament outlines protections for people under the definition of disability in the legislation. This legislation relies on the person who believes they have experienced discrimination because of their disability to make a claim to the Australian Human Rights Commission. The Act covers almost every aspect of life including access to buildings, outdoor spaces, goods and services.

In 2008 Australia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007). All our national, state and local responses to inclusion and support for people with disabilities stems from this convention.

In 2010 the Disability Access to Premises (Buildings) Standards was added to the 1992 legislation. This law requires all new buildings and renovations include elements for disability access (except private houses and units). There are also many guidelines for disability access in areas not covered by mandatory legislation, referred to as Universal Design.

In 2013 the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was adopted as Federal Legislation. This national approach to disability funding creates many new opportunities for people living with disabilities, their families and carers to lead independent lives. For this to be a reality the communities in which people live and visit must be accessible and inclusive.

The NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014 responded to the NDIS giving local Councils responsibility for improving access and inclusion through Disability Inclusion Action Plans.

The impact of the NDIS on tourism and independent travel is evident in the research and destinations adopting an inclusive tourism strategy will, be able to capitalise on this significant boost to tourism numbers.

What is Inclusive Tourism

Inclusive tourism has a broad meaning ensuring every visitor has a safe and enjoyable travel experience on an equal basis with others regardless of appearance or circumstances. Many visitors who have invisible disabilities, such as dementia, are often overlooked in inclusive planning.

In this Inclusive Tourism Strategy, we concentrate on the experience of people with disability, the challenges of ageing and the people they travel with. Making the tourism experience inclusive for this group means the whole community, locals and visitors, benefit.

Inclusive tourism refers to tourism services and products where people of all abilities feel welcome and wanted as customers and guests. It assists people with a disability and groups with similar access needs, to better use tourism services.

A destination wanting to deliver excellence in customer service must understand the needs of their customers. Customer service staff and business operators need the knowledge and understanding of people with disabilities, older people and families travelling with young children. This allows them to provide the appropriate level of service. Service with humanity.

Inclusive tourism enables people:

...to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments. (UNWTO 2013)

As a result, people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else for a fulfilling and productive life. They can live what the rest of the community thinks of as an ordinary life. Barriers are removed so people can get on with living (*The Shut Out Report*, 2009).

Other people face challenges participating in the community. Older people and families with young children have similar access needs. Removing barriers faced by people with disabilities will have a flow-on effect for older people and young families.

A Universal Design Approach

This strategy follows a Universal Design approach.

Universal Design means the design of everything with everyone in mind. This includes the design of places and spaces, products, communication, information and policies. It means people with a disability can participate in the community on an equal basis with others and can travel with their families and friends.

Universal Design was developed as a way of thinking about “design for all” without the need for separate or special features.

For tourism providers this includes:

Information – tourism literature and promotional material produced in different formats with accurate information on accessible accommodation and other facilities

Contact information – different methods for different communication needs with timely responses to access enquiries.

Reservation systems – designed to be accessible and user friendly and provide accurate accessible transport information.

Destination – Facilities designed for access and inclusion, trained and knowledgeable customer service, ability to respond to access requests and issues including list of local services for a range of potential needs.

Feedback and complaints – systems available in different formats.

For the host community key things include:

Places – buildings, public toilets, streetscapes, parks and other outdoor places designed for access and maintained for health and safety.

Information – about services and locations easy to find and available in different formats. Good wayfinding including signage designed for access.

Communication – people providing services are able to meet the needs of diverse customers. This includes food services and other retail relevant for tourists.

Policies – private businesses and public organisations have consistent methods in place to ensure access and inclusion are ongoing.

Benefits for the Local Economy

...accessibility is not a “favour” to visitors but rather a game-changer for businesses, helping them to combat the effects of COVID-19 (UNWTO 2020 p3)

When a community is accessible and inclusive more people enjoy the opportunity to travel and the tourism industry gets more visitors, longer seasons and new incomes. Society as a whole benefits from new job opportunities, more tax revenue and an accessible environment for local communities and visitors.

Bellingen Shire Council’s Community Vision Statement 2027 aims for an inclusive community where people feel connected to each other. It aims to make its public places safe and accessible to all. This includes accessible transport.

The Community Vision Statement 2027 aims for a balanced, sustainable tourism industry. We want our regional tourism locations and our tourism providers to strive for sustainable operations. The inclusive tourism market is integral to long term sustainability.

Tourism is an integral part of the Bellingen Shire’s economy. Inclusive Tourism represents potentially a large and rapidly growing segment of the market. The Shire recognises the importance and benefits of building the region as an accessible and inclusive destination.

In the planning process, tourism has an integral relationship to the host destination. The improvements for tourists have similar benefits for local residents. Any tourism policy or planning framework must include the values of the host community.

Bellingen Shire Council has a strong focus on tourism management as opposed to tourism marketing. It aims to manage tourism in line with community ideals which includes: protecting sense of place, protecting the natural environment and attracting visitors with similar values.

Council aims to apply a strong influence around professional development to enable industry operators to continually improve customer service, product quality and value for money. In 2018 Council ran a series of workshops throughout the Shire to educate and inform business about the opportunities the Inclusive Tourism market presents.

About the Inclusive Tourism Strategy

This Strategy looks at the whole of Bellingen Shire as a tourist destination. Inclusive Tourism Pty Ltd reviewed what works now and what needs to be improved. We looked at the barriers that prevent inclusion. Our assessment looked at some specific locations popular with locals and tourists to see what needs to change to make them more inclusive.

Bellingen Shire has achieved a lot already to improve access and inclusion. There is always more to do to make the community a fully inclusive place to live and to visit. Council's budget is limited so it needs to make decisions about what to do first that will make the most difference. The recommendations at the end of this Strategy provide guidance about priorities. Council has direct control over some things but not others. The whole community needs to work together to create inclusive spaces and places so that everyone can enjoy this very special part of the world.

As noted above, from infancy to old age people can have a wide range of physical and psychological challenges that may be permanent or temporary or age related. This creates challenges for an inclusive tourism approach. Universal Design recommends creating places and spaces accessible to the widest possible human experience, but this may not be possible in all circumstances. However, visitors need a range of services, facilities and attractions to make their stay worthwhile and enjoyable.

Regardless of starting point or priority there are some essential elements that support inclusion. These are accessible amenities, parking, adequate pathways between and to facilities and destinations, places to eat and shop, places to stay and transport. It is not possible to pick and choose between these elements. They are all necessary for marketing a location as accessible and inclusive. This must be linked with accurate and easily available information on accessible facilities, places and spaces including private and public spheres.

How the strategy was developed

To make this strategy we talked with people in the community. Staff from different parts of Council were involved. We also looked at research, relevant literature, policies and legislation.

Consultation

Conversations were had in person and by telephone with a wide range of people from Bellingen Shire. Some respondents used the online survey. People from all age groups and many different backgrounds got involved. They included business owners, people with disability, older people, disability and aged care support workers, parents with young children, people with family members who are older and frail or with dementia and disabilities. Some people were interested in the impact of

tourism on the region. Others wanted to build or improve accessible tourist accommodation.

People were asked about the places they like to go in Bellingen Shire and where they take their visitors, which places have good access and where improvements are needed. We also asked them about access and inclusion in the rest of Bellingen especially the villages and shopping areas.

Results of the Consultation

Community members were generally supportive of inclusive tourism and of improving access and inclusion for locals. There are concerns about the impact of expanding tourism on village life and affordable housing.

General Access Barriers

Participants said these things need improving:

- Footpath maintenance
- Gaps in footpath continuity
- Steep gutters and inadequate curb ramps
- Parking unaligned with easy access to footpaths
- Not enough parking spaces, especially Designated Accessible Parking Bays
- Not enough toilets in general, and accessible facilities in particular. Need for better cleaning regime.
- Need more seating in the shade in some locations
- Shops and other venues without level or ramped entry
- Need for better signage throughout the Region
- Need better places for distribution and other sources for information about events, activities and locations
- Staff and business owners need training to provide more inclusive service

Many of these access issues were identified in the current Bellingen Shire Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) 2017-2021. The community consultation for this Inclusive Tourism Strategy will assist in the development of the next DIAP.

Outdoor Locations

We asked people about seven popular outdoor locations. We asked people to rate the popularity of these locations. The results in order of importance are Urunga Boardwalk, Dangar Falls, Hungry Head Beach, Urunga Wetlands, Lido Pool, Mylestom Salt Water Pool and North Beach Urunga.

Participants suggested other locations they felt should be considered for accessible tourism. These included Atherton Drive Urunga, Bellingen Market and Jarrett Park, Rainforest Centre Dorrigo National Park and selected walking trails.

Participants also identified the range of beautiful drives throughout Bellingen Shire, particularly on the plateau as desirable tourist experiences.

These locations vary in their level of accessibility. Upgrades for better access is required in all locations. Some locations need more work than others.

Community concerns – Balance between village life and tourism

Villages seen as “desirable places to live want to avoid changing the nature of the towns, the heart of the place, preserving the experience of living there”. (Participant comments)

Community members expressed concern:

- that village life and local culture could be swamped through expanding tourism facilities with more marketing for inclusive and accessible attractions
- housing and rental prices would continue to be unaffordable for locals and this will worsen through expanding tourist accommodation and Airbnb.
- too much hard surfacing to improve accessibility is contrary to environmental preservation, looking for alternative surface treatments
- that tourism has already affected parts of Bellingen Shire with locals avoiding some locations due to overcrowding and lack of parking – the feeling of being excluded from your own community

These concerns are not exclusive to the Bellingen Shire. A housing crisis is occurring along much of the NSW coast as people seek to capitalise on tourism opportunities. Sustainable and inclusive communities need to meet and address the needs of all residents and workers. It is important for an inclusive tourism strategy to respond to community concerns by careful assessment of direction and priorities. The tourism industry is an important employer providing casual and lower paid jobs. These employees need to live locally to work. Inclusive tourism also provides employment opportunities for people with disability as venues are accessible and attitudes are informed and supportive.

Literature Review and Background Research

There is a large and growing body of literature on accessible travel and tourism. This is generated by research on health and wellbeing as well as economics. The rights of people with disabilities to lives of equality and dignity along with the rest of humanity also plays a key part.

A list of key research documents is included in the reference section attached to this strategy.

The Way Forward

The following section of this strategy provides Council with options for a way forward to improve access for inclusive tourism in Bellingen Shire. These options respond to the community consultation. Consideration was also given to the recommendations from the World Tourism Organisation and the requirements of Commonwealth and State legislation. This strategy also sits closely with Bellingen Shire Disability Inclusion Action Plans.

Option 1 – The Day Trip

A focus on the day trip provides significant benefits for both locals and visitors. This option responds to concerns from local residents and current social trends about the impact of tourism on affordable housing. People on day trips have a positive impact on the local economy. They need food and are likely to purchase other items in specialty shops, galleries etc and attend events such as markets and festivals.

The day trip, not requiring accommodation includes:

- locals enjoying their own region
- family and friends visiting locals
- tourists on day trips from adjoining larger centres to the north and south
- people travelling between the tablelands and the coast or along the coast

Inclusive tourism for the day trip has several key components. Council has a large sphere of interest in improving access for inclusion in this context. The business sector also plays an important role in the experience of day visitors.

Council responsibilities include:

Provision of Information

Access and inclusion detail on all Council's information platforms including website, call centre, visitor information centres, notice boards and newsletters. This should include:

- general information about the Region, attractions, events, destinations and towns (such as mobility maps)
- a good wayfinding strategy

Infrastructure

- adequate and well placed Designated Accessible Parking Bays (that meet current design standards)
- adequate toilet facilities that include both accessible and ambulatory toilet cubicles designed to meet current standards
- correct curb ramps aligned with parking, footpaths and crossing points
- good, well maintained footpath system without gaps and trip hazards to all facilities, this includes street scapes in town centres
- parks and gardens designed for access and inclusion
- accessible aquatic destinations for swimming, fishing, viewing
- picnic sites with accessible outdoor furniture

The importance of providing appropriately designed accessible toilet facilities in all town centres and at major destination locations cannot be understated. These facilities along with connecting pathways with parking bays, shopping precincts and major outdoor attractions are essential elements for the day trip.

For private businesses such as cafes, restaurants, hotels, retail outlets and supermarkets responsibilities include:

- level barrier free entry to premises (the same main entry as all customers)
- internal arrangements that allow room for people to maneuver with mobility aids, or vision impairment and to reach goods for sale
- payment systems accessible to a range of people with different needs and abilities
- staff knowledge on how to communicate and provide information in a range of formats and to make people feel welcome and valued regardless of their circumstances
- for food providers the provision of accessible toilet facilities is strongly recommended

Inclusive day trips can bring substantial economic benefit to small regional towns where people are visiting with the intention of eating out, buying local produce and products and attending local events. For this to be the priority Council would need to work in collaboration with the business community to make sure visitors have a range of choices to make their visits worthwhile.

Action Priorities for the Day Trip

Places and Spaces

The following access elements were identified in the community consultation in need of improvement. Current guidelines for access support these actions.

General Access Issues

Connecting Pathways

Community consultation identified many issues with the condition, maintenance and connections of footpaths in all the villages in Bellingen Shire.

Action: Undertake a professional audit of footpaths for Urunga, Bellingen and Dorrigo. This provides Council with a logical rationale for gradual upgrade of connecting pathways in the main towns using established criteria to prioritise works.

Action: Include progressive implementation of findings in annual works plan.

Parking

Community consultation identified congestion in Bellingen and difficulty finding parking spaces as an increasing problem for locals and visitors.

Action: Audit parking provision in Bellingen including number and location of DAPBs, alignment with curb ramps to connecting paths of travel.

Action: Implement findings.

Curb Ramps

Alignment of curb ramps with parking and steepness of gutters was identified as a major problem for people using mobility aids, older passengers and drivers moving from parked cars to footpaths. This is a particular issue in Urunga.

Action: Audit curb ramps and gutters in Urunga include alignment with Designated Accessible Parking Bays.

Action: Implement upgrades.

Toilets

Accessible toilet facilities are essential for Bellingen Shire to develop as an accessible and inclusive tourist destination. The community consultation identified many issues with availability and standard of facilities. While a recent investigation reported that Bellingen Shire had an excess of public toilets per population, this does not mean there are adequate accessible toilet facilities in the right locations.

Action: Undertake an access audit of accessible public toilet facilities in Dorrigo, Bellingen, Urunga and Mylestom and key identified public tourist destinations.

Action: Consider adopting a toilet policy where all new and renovated public toilet cubicles are of universal design (unisex and accessible) as a standard installation.

Action: Implement a better cleaning regime.

Option 2 – Overnight and longer stays

All the elements and actions in the Day Trip option apply for the inclusive tourism experience of visitors on overnight and longer stays.

Marketing Bellingen Shire inclusive tourism for people staying overnight or for longer visits requires work on developing accessible tourism accommodation.

There are limited options for accessible tourist accommodation in Bellingen Shire. There is interest from some tourist operators and locals in developing accessible accommodation.

Actions for overnight and longer stays

Audit of all tourist accommodation in Bellingen Shire. Document all accessible accommodation options.

Provide information on accessible tourist accommodation and inclusive tourism to all accommodation providers.

Offer information sessions/workshops on inclusive tourism to tourism accommodation providers.

Destination Locations

There are key destinations in Bellingen Shire that attract visitors on day trips and are also popular with locals. These locations need various levels of upgrade to reduce access barriers and to improve inclusion for all. The priority ratings below take into consideration community feedback as well as site popularity, existing access features and potential for further development as accessible locations. The priority ratings also consider the range of experiences and facilities on offer to cater for visitors with different access needs.

Urunga Boardwalk – High Priority

The Boardwalk provides an excellent opportunity for people with limited mobility to view the coastal waters and ocean at Urunga. It is also a beautiful sensory experience for people with vision impairment and other sensory and neurological disabilities. It is the most popular attraction on the coast. The boardwalk suffers from over popularity especially in peak holiday seasons when locals avoid using it for this reason.

The design of the boardwalk presents some major issues for access under the current guidelines. The width of the boardwalk is inadequate to cope with the level of use especially for passing foot traffic and people using mobility aids. The current

passing bays are spaced too far apart. The installation of kick plates along both sides are essential to prevent wheel slippage and provide safer navigation for people with vision impairment.

Dangar Falls – High Priority

Dangar Falls was identified as a very popular destination. It is widely known inside and outside Bellingen Shire. The viewing platform has been upgraded as an accessible feature. The picnic area could be upgraded for better access to make longer stays possible. This would include connecting pathways between car park, look out and picnic furniture. The children's playground could be upgraded to meet current guidelines for access.

Lido Saltwater Pool – Medium Priority

This destination has a good mix of accessible infrastructure close to parking and accessible toilets. It could be improved as an inclusive destination with access to swimming via fixed ramp with railings into the water. This enables access for frail people with limited mobility and for aquatic wheelchairs.

Urunga Wetlands – Medium Priority

This location was identified as a good design for people with dementia and other cognitive issues. Improvements would include designated parking and more seating with shade in appropriate places near and along the walk.

Hungry Head Beach – High Priority

Identified as a popular destination this beautiful ocean beach has limited access features. The lookout has the potential as an accessible viewing location requiring some outdoor seating and picnic furniture with shade. Access to beach from the headland is via steps. This site has been affected by severe beach erosion making access to the water difficult for all. Any remediation works being considered should employ universal design principals with a view to providing easy beach access via removable matting. The area is also lacking accessible amenities and designated accessible parking in both the upper and lower car parks.

Mylestom Saltwater Pool – Low Priority

This destination has a lovely picnic area with accessible parking and undercover seating area. It provides good views of the water. It would be very difficult to provide mobility access to pool due to steep terrain from the picnic area down to the water. It is understood there is funding available to develop a new amenities block. Any new public toilets should adhere to the principals of universal design, be unisex and accessible. The construction of accessible facilities to this area will provide a recreation space suitable for extended day visits. The children's playground could be upgraded to meet current guidelines for access.

North Beach Mylestom – Low Priority

This destination needs a range of accessible features including toilets, beach shower, pathways and designated parking designed for access to be considered or marketed as an inclusive location. There is public vehicular access to the beach. This can provide people with mobility issues the opportunity to have better access to the ocean.

Additional Locations

The following destinations were identified as possible locations for access upgrades.

Urunga

Atherton Drive: This area was suggested for the views of the river. A flat area with the potential for installing viewing, seating and picnic furniture at intervals along the drive. Parking, surface treatments and pathways need to be considered.

Connect cycle/pathway from Atherton Drive to Hungry Head. The development of the current pathway to make all connections as a longer outdoor experience for all abilities. There was a Masterplan developed for this area in 2018. It is recommended the Masterplan be revisited to ensure all amenities included for development are accessible and inclusive.

Bellingen

Lavender Bridge and Park: Suggested additional pathway connections on both sides of the bridge and improving path across the bridge. Accessible toilets in the park as access to existing toilet via steep pathway.

Bellingen Market: suggested working with market organisers to improve access to market, would involve parking provision and temporary accessible matting through market for access.

Dorrigo

Rainforest Centre Dorrigo National Park and select walking trails improve selection of accessible tracks and access at centre. It is understood NPWS is planning to upgrade this site. It is recommended that all changes adhere to Universal Design principals and inclusive tourism strategies should be adopted to ensure an accessible and inclusive development.

Scenic Drives

There are a range of beautiful drives throughout Bellingen Shire, particularly on the plateau as desirable tourist experiences. Griffiths Lookout at Dorrigo offers access to great views whilst remaining in the car. This may be an opportunity for a tour company to add wheelchair accessible vehicle to fleet for tourists with access needs.

Action: Undertake access audits of the above additional locations.

Information and Communication

Collaboration and Partnerships

There are important reasons for Council to develop strong partnerships and collaborative relationships with the business sector across Bellingen Shire. The business sector has a major role and contribution in making Bellingen Shire an inclusive tourist destination.

Action: Undertake information and education with local businesses on the benefits of inclusive tourism.

Action: Collaborate with local businesses to improve access and inclusion. Food outlets, retail and specialty shops and events are a priority for visitors. Focus should be to improve access to premises, internal layouts and customer information such as menu design, ordering and payment options.

Action: Consider developing an incentive scheme for shops and cafes to improve access such as barrier free entry to premises.

Action: Collaborate with ilovebelloshire and other independent information platforms to update information to include access features on all destinations, attractions and events listed for Bellingen Shire.

Marketing

A key part of developing an accessible shire must be around the promotion of the accessible offer. Tourists looking for accessible and inclusive destinations and experiences require information giving them confidence that their journey will be successful, safe and enjoyable. Marketing must include easy to find, accurate information about the location, event or experience.

Accessible Tourism Marketing Key Points

- Don't assume all disabilities are the same.
- Make it easy to find information about accessibility and ensure the information is accurate and up to date.
- Make the information available in multiple formats, PDF documents may not be accessible for everyone, so provide Word and HTML options.
- Ensure the information provided is detailed and access specific.
- Include images of the accessible facilities.
- Include images of people with a disabilities and older people in marketing material.
- Incorporate access information into standard Visitor Information collateral

Effective marketing via a range of different channels is crucial in a world where there is so much online traffic. Consultation participants said they research where they are going to go online prior to visiting. To ensure Bellingen Shire is promoted effectively:

- Tag key words in all social media posts. Tags such as [accessibletourism](#), [disabilitytravel](#), [wheelchairaccess](#) etc will ensure you are reaching people with access requirements.
- Include images of people with a variety of disabilities into your online promotions.
- Reach out to disability forums, peak bodies, specialist travel agents and NDIS coordinators.
- Reach out to accessible travel bloggers such as [havewheelchairwilltravel.net](#)

Action: Develop a marketing strategy for inclusive tourism in Bellingen Shire.

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[Whittlesea Accessible Tourism Strategy](#)

<https://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au/media/1707/tourism-strategy-accessible.pdf>

The Shut Out Report, 2009, Australian Government consultation for the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020

Appendix 1. Consultation Report

Participants

Thirty individuals were consulted for the Inclusive Tourism Strategy. The participants represented all age groups and many different backgrounds including business owners, disability and aged care support workers, parents with young children, people with frail and elderly family members, people with family members with dementia or disability. The participants included community members interested in the impact of tourism on the region, or with an interest in developing accessible tourist accommodation.

Methods

Three methods were used for the collection of data from the community. These were small group discussions, individual phone conversations and online survey.

Small group discussions.

A focus group discussion was held in each of the three villages, Urunga, Bellingen and Dorrigo. Community members from Mylestom joined the Urunga group. These village-based conversations aimed to capture localised issues as well as broader comments about inclusive tourism across the Shire. Each group was led through a series of questions. The questions related to the reasons for involvement in the focus group, experience of travel, attitudes and experiences about tourism and inclusive tourism in the region, issues relating to access and inclusion in Bellingen Shire. The discussions were two hours in duration.

Three meetings were held with specific stakeholders, one in Dorrigo with the Aboriginal Land Council and two in Bellingen with Council staff, and Councillors. These meetings were approximately 90 minutes duration. Similar issues were discussed relating to the Inclusive Tourism Strategy as well as matters relevant to the stakeholder groups.

Phone Conversations

Five phone consultations were conducted. Participants included support workers, family member of people with disabilities, person with disability. Consultations were between 45 minutes and 60 minutes duration. The same questions were covered as in the group discussions. Because these were individual conversations of some length a range of matters were discussed in depth capturing experiences and issues of importance for this project.

Online survey

The online survey followed similar question pathway to the above discussions. Similar themes and priorities emerged through the survey as in the group discussions. There were 8 responders.

Results

The following is a summary of the data collected from the community consultation.

Themes from the consultation

1. Impact of tourism on Bellingen Shire and residents

Villages seen as “desirable places to live want to avoid changing the nature of the towns, the heart of the place, preserving the experience of living there.”

Community members were generally supportive:

- of being inclusive and accessible
- of improving access and inclusion for locals

Community members expressed concern:

- that village life and local culture would be swamped through expanding tourism facilities and marketing inclusive and accessible attractions
- housing and rental prices would continue to be unaffordable for locals and this will worsen through expanding tourist accommodation and Air B&B
- too much hard surfacing to improve accessibility is contrary to environmental preservation
- that tourism has already affected some parts of Bellingen Shire with locals avoiding some locations due to overcrowding and lack of parking – the feeling of being excluded from your own community

2. The existing barriers to inclusion

Places and spaces

- Footpath maintenance
- Gaps in footpath continuity
- Steep gutters and inadequate kerb ramps
- Parking unaligned with easy access to footpath
- Inadequate parking spaces, especially DAPBs
- Lack of toilets in general and accessible facilities in particular
- Lack of seating in the shade in some locations
- Shops and other venues without level or ramped entry

Information and communication

- Inadequate signage
- Need better places for distribution and other sources for information
- Staff and business owners need training to provide more inclusive service approach

3. Feedback on Seven Designated Locations (identified for access auditing)

Seven locations were included for access audits. Focus group participants were asked to prioritise in order of importance for upgrade as inclusive locations. The list below is in order of priority as rated by the participants.

- Urunga Boardwalk

Boardwalk is good but much too narrow, suffers from over popularity in peak season, especially Christmas holiday period when locals don't use it because of the crowds – crowds mean difficult to pass safely as it is so narrow

Boardwalk needs upgrade to meet current access guidelines

- Dangar Falls

Viewing platform upgrade in process, picnic area needs upgrading to include connecting pathways picnic furniture designed for access, accessible toilet facilities, designated car parking

- Hungry Head Beach

Access to beach only via steps, lookout could be upgraded to provide accessible viewing and seating

- Urunga Wetlands

Needs designated parking and more seating in shade, identified as good site for people with dementia and other cognitive issues

- Lido Saltwater Pool

Good mix of accessible infrastructure, access to swimming via fixed ramp with railings into the water for aquatic wheelchairs and frail mobility could improve access

- Mylestom Saltwater Pool

Very difficult to provide mobility access to pool due to steep terrain and presence of large trees, some good picnic facilities, toilet needs upgrading to meet current standards, children's playground not accessible

- North Beach Mylestom

Needs a range of accessible features including toilets, beach shower, pathways and designated parking designed for access

Other locations identified as possible sites for access upgrades by participants

Atherton Drive Urunga

Bellingen Market

Lavender Bridge and park, Bellingen

Rainforest Centre Dorrigo National Park and select walking trails

Many participants identified the range of beautiful drives throughout Bellingen Shire, particularly on the plateau as desirable tourist experiences. Many said they took their own visitors, family and friends on these drives.

Consultation Notes – raw data

The following notes are from the focus groups discussions and phone consultations. They are organised under general headings and grouped by topic. This information may assist in the development of the next Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

General Access Issues, not location specific

Places and Spaces

Concerns about the need for hard pathways sacrificing more organic surfacing – losing the feel of the place as natural environment. We live in a “hard landscape” want more of an “organic experience”

Need to include sensory garden

Need accessible playgrounds and more variety in play equipment

Need change in private business to make buildings accessible

Car parks and lack of accommodation for different vehicles

Quiet places (need for)

Deep gutters

Vegetation (overgrown)

Wetlands and bush walks are popular but nothing accessible

Steps, footpaths, wheelchairs, signage, ramps, handrails,

Specific to Toilets:

Not enough public toilets in general, have to detour

Toilets often locked

Not all the accessible toilets are MLAK

Need better online info for locations and hours

Council website not up to date

Hungry Head surf club toilets need better lighting

Just want clean toilets with room for pram to fit

Finding clean toilets is difficult

Not COVID clean, not all have soap- Where are the ones with soap or hand sanitiser

Opening times – where are accessible, family friendly toilets

Information and Communication

Staff training, how to provide service, open minded, not placing limits based on assumptions about what the person is capable of – they decide

Change service such as menus in large print

How do we cater for people with mental disabilities (who are tourists and visitors)

Perception that building for access adds more cost

Dementia – design for dementia friendly environment and service, communication and training

Not everyone has online access, need alternative sources and education

Safety, communication, Braille, audio information, non-judgmental attitudes

Specific to Council Role and Services:

Need more sources and platforms for information sharing

Create website not well known or publicised. Create website is not user friendly

Community noticeboards not well used or maintained/updated

Need better feedback mechanisms for community after input into consultations

Produces many strategies and plans but don't see any tangible results

Council needs to follow up on previous plans (perception that lots of consultation and previous plans don't end up with anything happening)

Large print versions of report (and other Council documents)

Access and Inclusion in Specific Locations

Urunga and Mylestom

Places and Spaces

Urunga is seen as the poor cousin (the slops) of Bellingen with people settling here because Bellingen is unaffordable

Urunga and Mylestom seen as desirable places to live want to avoid changing the nature of the towns, the heart of the place, preserving the experience of living there

Pathways and Parking:

Access issues include footpath maintenance, high gutters and inadequate kerb ramps in relation to Urunga

People falling in Bonville Street – 12 times in 30 years

Town not designed for access – need to drive from one location to the next – not connected by accessible pathways. Have to drive to a bike path. There are no bike racks at all in the town

Want paths along Giinagay Way to connect

Previous plans to have paths along the river to link everything – haven't happened

Complete walking path all the way around from Atherton Drive to the Board Walk and Hungry Head

Want more footpath and bike path connections in Urunga – Bellingen Keys to the Wetlands, and no footpaths throughout the Bellingen Keys development, very difficult for older people and pwd to walk safely, need footpath connections to town centre

Urunga town has very steep gutters and no consistency from car park to kerb ramps and access to the footpaths

Steep gutters in Urunga for people with difficulty walking there is risk of falls and difficult getting into and out of cars due to the steep gutters, affordable housing is a big problem and Airbnb has made this worse, rentals were tight even before COVID

More designated parking spaces in relevant areas

More accessible parking, Urunga is difficult, Bellingen challenging – people go to Coffs for easier access (for shopping)

Need reassess Designated Accessible Parking In Urunga, some spaces not meeting Australian Standards (too small) and there are not enough with current spaces always filled.

Mylestom – new path is good but the pool and surrounds are a bit tired looking

Toilets:

Mylestom toilets in desperate need of upgrade

Need accessible toilet on Atherton Drive

Outdoor Activities:

Accessible boat ramp at Urunga – linked to sailing club

Atherton Drive – stressed by all that this should be included for development as inclusive tourism destination

Atherton Drive would be good to develop as tourism site, need to fix road and footpaths to be improved and seating with shade to view the river

Atherton Drive to sit, fish and enjoy view of the river, not as busy as the Lido, better for kids

Boardwalk is good but much too narrow, suffers from over popularity in holidays, especially Christmas holiday period when locals don't use it because of the crowds – crowds mean difficult to pass safely as it is so narrow

Many people use the Urunga boardwalk including older people with wheelie walkers, manual wheelchairs and NDIS clients and motorised scooters

Hungry Head – needs shade over seating, toilets are terrible – too dark with no lighting at all and no access, need maintenance or replacing

Hungry Head beach lookout could be developed – steep steps down to the beach, toilets not accessible, could make access to the beach just north of the surf club

Wetlands really good for elderly, especially with early dementia, has good parking and a good path that is non slip and wide enough for passing and is very popular but nowhere to sit in the shade and the walks are also hot with no shade, needs more picnic furniture and shade and more places to sit in the shade. The path needs to be better maintained as ferns over grow and caused hazard and slip hazard

Lido pool is really good – used by NDIS carers with good picnic shaded areas

Want walkway and wheelchair access and aquatic wheelchair all the way to the beach and into the water, this is possible at the Urunga Lido with a possible fixed ramp with railings

Urunga Lido good for elderly, feel safe to swim

Go for a drive, Mylestom North Bank of the river, places to stop and view including going up the mountain – wanted elevated platforms for walking and getting people off the road – better stopping places and viewing. More rubbish bins

People travelling and living out of vans including homeless people need access to hot showers

Bellingen 2/2/21 and 17/2/21

Places and Spaces

Pathways and Parking:

The Bellingen street scape is not good for access, the main road is difficult to cross, incline to information such as the map is too steep, barriers exist when going from road via kerb ramps to walkway

The tessellated paving on the footpaths through Bellingen are slippery

There are inclines in path near Black Bear and Swiss Patisserie

Lavenders Bridge needs to be more accessible and safe for pedestrians

Bello all about wheelchairs

Bellingen needs park and ride due to volume of visitors and people in town overwhelming, too busy, traffic issues and parking

Not enough pedestrian crossings in Bellingen

Designated Accessible Parking Bays in Bellingen need a rethink particularly the one in front of the CWA and in front of the HUB, either not meeting current Australian Standard or blocked by other cars

No designated parking at the Bello market which is very popular

Volume of people impacts the CBD for mobility and for people with vision impairment it is very confusing

Footpaths in the main street was an RMS project with external designer – *tessellated tiling may be issue for people with vision impairment, dementia and possible trip hazard as the gaps between the tiles are wider than recommended in the guidelines* but there have been no recorded problems or complaints except a few to the visitor centre that they are slippery when wet

Some complaints about the pedestrian crossings having too much distraction and visibility issues with the trees and the protruding low wall barriers

CBD has become very busy since COVID making it difficult to navigate for mobility, some footpaths need upgrades and not all buildings have level entry

Too many shops have steps

Need a tourism journey for Bellingen including Lavender Bridge and park, need more furniture and accessible toilets

Toilets:

Main Bellingen accessible toilet has poor lighting with skylights getting blocked by fallen leaves, it is not cleaned enough or maintained when things go wrong such as full flush

The new toilets in Church Street have a lack of parking and people park over the access path

Toilet outside Council with MLAK is hard to get into and bushes block entry, not maintained enough

Inadequate toilets in Bellingen, aged infrastructure and need replacing

Cars block access to toilet especially on public holidays

The path in front of the public toilets near the courthouse is very dangerous with lumps and bumps

Lots of problems with cars backing into spaces at toilets near courthouse with towbars protruding onto footpath

Activities:

Community markets should be included (as inclusive tourism focus)

Not many airconditioned food outlets in Bellingen

Rarely go to Bellingen or take parents as it is too crowded but took elderly mum to Butter Factory and was surprised by the number of trip hazards and steps into specialty shops, and difficult to navigate

Want pool (Bellingen) to be open all year round especially for hydrotherapy

Need Bellingen pool open all year

There is no caravan park in Bellingen

For social activity shops, cafes and markets not accessible

Markets need to be a priority for tourist attractions that are accessible in Bellingen town, pedestrian access is very poor to and through the markets and parking is inadequate with no designated accessible parking even for temporary use

Bellingen Youth Hub does not have good access with people using mobility aids having to go in a different entry door with people having to request access

All Markets are popular including Bellingen, Lido, Glenifer but have limited access for parking and pedestrians with access needs

Skywalk access path picnic area has an accessible path (bitumen)

Could develop local lookouts in Bellingen such as Hospital Hill and The Point

Need to have better access for events such as Bellingen Show and into Memorial Hall for theatre and films

Bellingen Visitor Centre enquiries:

Not many enquiries if ever related to access

One recent from B&B owner who had a guest in a wheelchair

Most from older people who can't walk far – what can we see without walking too far is the most common

Need to promote attractions and add access information

Ability Links blue sticker project trialled but not very successful

I Love Bello Shire online platform could be providers of access info

Need pathway journeys developed and wayfinding to include such attractions as the Butter Factory

Dorrigo

Participants from Dorrigo want to stress that Dorrigo is in the centre of a two hour radius of world heritage national park and 5 different rainforest ecosystems and this should be stressed and promoted for all tourism

Places and Spaces

Locations popular with visitors and locals:

Dangar Falls, Griffith Lookout

Rainforest Centre

National Park – Wong Walk, Glade Picnic Area, Donaldson Lookout

Platypus Flat, Moon Park Forest Drive daytrip

Promised Land

Norman Jolly Reserve

Griffiths Lookout

Old Coast Road to Paddys Plain

Darkwood valley to get away from people

Coast road Coop Drive

Walk along the river at Dorrigo – footpath

Walking track to Dangar Falls (along the top to the top pool)

Waterfall Way as a tourist drive – top five motorcycle rides in Australia

Dome waterfall/ deer park creek waterfalls

Drive loop Promised Land and Never Never

Swimming at Dangar Falls, Never Never

Rainforest Centre

Dorrigo Visitor Centre Enquiries:

Visitor Centre has 15-16K enquiries per year with 55% wanting to know about options for drive to waterfall and National Park

Most common request is for places to view and visit where there is minimal walking required

Considerations for Inclusive Tourism Planning

What people prioritise when planning their holiday:

Research online, book accomm, flights and dates can be based around an event, research attractions, proximity of accommodation and transport

Travelling with an older person, called airport re wheelchair access, exposed to elements, toilet access an issue. Toilets and their cleaning, distance between towns and what's available, signage, particularly for someone with dementia

Toilets and their location

Nature walks, terrain, hire of mobility aids and segues

Accommodation design such as having shower over the spa bath is an issue for mobility

Signage and walks showing distances

Adventure following family history trail, take own food but spend money in town

Variety of tracks, some shorter and include signs with distances

Signs for access

Look for comfort

Oversea travel and medications

Visitor centre needs better information and to make building accessible

Look at access prior to booking from website or phone

Wouldn't return if access not available

Location important

Look for places to suit prams, night security, well lit, family friendly with access to parks and playgrounds and a variety of walking paths

Research easy access accommodation online

Older partner with mobility issues, research terrain and accommodation with no or minimal steps, look at terrain online but doesn't pre-book in case they don't get there

Day trips important and return to places they know work, avoid Coffs because of the traffic

Nambucca Heads has good accessibility

Look for toilets with preference for an accessible toilet for room to maneuver even though they don't need it

Regardless of research on what is an accessible toilet, often they are not

Inclusion for travellers with mental health and cognitive challenges:

Need lots of reassurance and clarity about where they are going, how to book in and other information to make them feel safe and assist in aspects of holiday

Feelings of safety and security are important and clear information to make all processes easy and supported

Information beforehand so know what to expect

Information about services and support available if needed

Need understanding and respectful service delivery

Tourism services need training so they understand how to support the visit and experience of people with cognitive and mental health challenges

Experiences can be designed for people with cognitive and mental health challenges such as nature based, immersion in nature

Community Concerns about promoting tourism in Bellingen Shire

Affordable housing is a major concern

Services say staff retention is a big problem and affordable housing affects this

Also clients of disability and ageing services struggle with affordable housing

Caravan parks are full

Airbnb taking over longer term rentals was a problem even before COVID makes housing a big problem

Parking availability for locals as places get busier

Traffic congestion because of increased visitors impacts locals going about their business