

Unconfirmed Minutes



Unconfirmed Minutes of the Equal Access Advisory Committee Meeting held Wednesday 27 August 2025

Venue:

In-person: South Sea Islander Room, Tweed Heads Administration Office
Online: MS Teams meeting

Time:

1.08pm

Present:

Committee members: Stephanie Boldeman (online), Gillian Cooper, Julie Lowe, Pat Miller (Chair), Judi Sandercock, Melissa Simcoe (Deputy Chair), Councillor Meredith Dennis.
Tweed Shire Council staff: Naomi Searle, Lisa Francisco, Giselle Benitez Hetherington (Secretariat) Grace Anderson (Minute Secretary).

Apologies:

Karen Gibson, Colin Usher, Tracey Boniface, Laura Baruch (Coordinator – Volunteer Program), Councillor Kimberly Hone, Vicky Harrison (Senior Practitioner-Community Care), Shannon Carruth (Manager, Inclusive and Creative Communities).

Absent:

Gary Shallala-Hudson, Kyle Sculley.

Guests:

Aimee Austin (Manager–People & Culture), Joanne Watters (Coordinator, Community Care), Melissa Lindeberg (Community Development Officer Social Planning) (Tweed Shire Council).

Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country

The Committee reviewed the meeting agenda items, confirming discussion of new updates at items OAT 2 Review of Action Register and OAT 3 Closing remarks.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting:

Moved: Melissa Simcoe

Seconded: Meredith Dennis

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Equal Access Advisory Committee held on Tuesday 13 May 2025 be accepted as a true and accurate record of the proceedings of that meeting.

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General Business:

GB 1. Strategic Workshop: Focus Area 3 – Access to meaningful employment

Giselle outlined outcomes from the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) community consultation, priorities and adopted actions. Members were encouraged to reflect on the plan ahead of the November meeting and consider how they can contribute to keeping the focus on community priorities.

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Aimee Austin provided an update on the status of actions, the People and Culture program, the development of a new Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Management Plan, and new workforce census.

Discussion:

Members discussed Council's inclusive employment strategies, including integrating disability inclusion into staff training, reviewing recruitment practices to reduce barriers, prioritising essential skills over unnecessary requirements, and challenges in tracking progress with data - particularly where perceived stigma may deter staff from disclosing a disability.

Member suggestions included workplace adjustments as an index for measuring inclusion, use of job simulations in recruitment, and more inclusive language in job advertisements.

Members supported the rollout of the Sunflower Hidden Disabilities campaign to build understanding and inclusive culture, and raised points on flexible working arrangements, data privacy, and the need for staff education.

Members were invited to, and expressed interest, in reviewing the draft workforce census and providing comment.

Actions:

1. *Staff to investigate inclusive recruitment language (e.g. "people of all or diverse abilities", "encourage people with lived experience of disability").*
2. *Staff to explore recruitment adjustment techniques, such as job samples and simulations.*
3. *Staff to review the committee application process to reduce repetitive questions.*
4. *Staff to share the draft workforce census for Committee feedback with members, ahead of the November 2025 meeting.*
5. *Staff to circulate the draft Equal Employment Opportunities Management Plan with members once reviewed by Executive Leadership Team for feedback at a future meeting.*

GB 2. NDIS Audit – Consultation on new guidelines

Jo Watters provided an overview of the draft internal guidelines developed following a recent NDIS audit and sought Committee feedback on proposed Terms of Reference (TOR) for a new NDIS Working Group. Members were invited to consider the accessibility, clarity, and relevance of the TOR, and to express interest in joining the Working Group through an upcoming Expression of Interest (EOI) process.

Discussion:

Members emphasised the importance of including individuals with lived experience of the NDIS in the Working Group and supported an EOI process open to the broader community. Feedback on the TOR should be finalised by October 2025, with EOIs to be distributed in early 2026. One member declared a conflict of interest and confirmed they would not apply.

Actions:

1. *Council to resend the Terms of Reference and provide the supporting documents to clarify the scope of work to the Committee.*

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2. *Committee members to provide feedback on the draft Terms of Reference by end of October 2025.*
3. *Committee to nominate an EAAC representative for the NDIS Working Group at the November 2025 meeting.*

GB 3. General Updates

GB 3.1. Remaking the DIAP – Priorities and Consultation Plan

Giselle outlined the proposed review and remaking of the Tweed Access and Inclusion Plan 2023-2026 (Council's Disability Inclusion Action Plan - DIAP), including priority actions such as surveys with action owners, the Committee, and the community. Members were invited to provide suggestions on how the process could be streamlined and made more impactful. They were encouraged to reflect on the current plan ahead of the survey to be distributed in September, noting that a draft plan is anticipated to be presented at the November 2025 meeting, subject to timing.

Discussion:

Members supported a streamlined process, noting:

- many current actions are ongoing or in progress and may be carried over into the new plan; and
- the new DIAP will rely on the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data, as the next Census will be held in 2026 with data expected in 2027.

Members also suggested simplifying the actions in the new plan, better referencing the *NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014*, and ensuring the DIAP is responsive to the lived experience of people with disability in the community.

Actions:

1. *Committee members to reflect on the current plan ahead of the September survey and prepare feedback for discussion at the November 2025 meeting.*
2. *Committee members to provide feedback on how the DIAP could better reflect the lived experiences of people with disability in the community.*
3. *Committee members to provide input on opportunities to simplify and streamline the DIAP.*
4. *Staff to present a draft plan at the November 2025 meeting, if available.*

GB 3.2. Draft Policy on Assistance Animals in Council Places – Exhibition Update

Giselle and Melissa presented early insights of the public exhibition held from 13 June to 15 August 2025, which included three community sessions (one online) and collected feedback via phone, surveys and form submissions. Members were invited to note findings, seek clarification, and provide feedback on the next steps for finalisation and rollout.

Discussion:

Members acknowledged the exhibition process and policy content, commending the alternate information formats, particularly the explainer video.

Members discussed proposed evidence requirements for assistance animals and suggested exploring a microchip marker to streamline validation, particularly for Tweed residents.

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Members noted challenges in policy enforcement and the potential impact of ongoing Australian and NSW legislative reforms, including the *Disability Discrimination Act* and *Companion Animals Act*, underway.

Council staff acknowledged community feedback on interstate practices recognising species other than dogs and committed to investigating relevant standards and protocols.

Actions:

1. *Staff to monitor and provide updates on relevant legislative reforms (Disability Discrimination Act, Companion Animals Act).*
2. *Staff to investigate standards and protocols for recognition of assistance animals other than dogs, including interstate practices.*
3. *Staff to consider feasibility of microchip markers or other methods to streamline evidence validation for assistance animals.*

GB 3.3. Northern Rivers Rail Trail (NRRT) update

Giselle gave an overview of the written update from the NRRT team on recent accessibility improvements at the Murwillumbah Railway Station, including upgrades to the public toilet and southern entry, pedestrian access, car parking, and seating. Works are expected to be completed by mid-September 2025, with an upcoming morning tea/media launch event scheduled for early October (dates to be advised by staff), noting that the EAAC statement of endorsement will be used. Members were invited to note the update and provide feedback or seek clarification.

Discussion:

Members acknowledged recent improvements and provided feedback on both physical and digital accessibility of the NRRT, in line with open Action 1 of the Action Register.

Members identified ongoing accessibility considerations for users with lived experience, including unsealed/sealed sections, accessible parking and toilets, terrain inclines affecting powerchair battery life, lack of charging stations, limited internet/telephone access, bike hire/repair operating hours, and temporary barriers during construction or upgrades.

Recommended improvements included:

- Clear communications acknowledging existing barriers, correcting website messaging that suggests all trail sections are fully accessible.
- Simpler website navigation, including high contrast and large font options, a dedicated access and inclusion page easily found from the home page, simplified layout, language, and imagery (e.g. removing slideshows), and inclusion of explainer video content.
- Clearer signposting of access facilities, features and barriers at physical locations along the NRRT, including audio and visual content.
- Installation of charging stations and provision of wheelchair-accessible shuttle services.

Members, Gillian Cooper and Pat Miller, nominated to work with Council and NRRT staff on detailed feedback regarding physical and digital accessibility.

Actions:

1. *Staff to confirm completion dates and opening details for the Murwillumbah Railway Station upgrades with the Committee.*

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2. *Committee members to notify the Secretariat of their interest in meeting with NRRT staff on recommended improvements.*
3. *Secretariat to arrange a meeting with NRRT staff and nominated Committee members.*

Stephanie Boldeman left meeting at 3:45pm due to technical issues.

OAT 1 – Member issues

OAT 1.1 Accessible Parking map

Melissa Simcoe spoke to a request raised on an online community forum regarding mapping or information on the location of accessible parking bays in the Tweed. Members and staff were invited to consider how existing resources could be enhanced to better support access across the Tweed Shire.

Discussion:

Staff outlined the relevance of current DIAP action 2.12:

- *“Develop and publish an access map and information on Council’s website and made available at Visitor Information Centres”,*

noting it is contingent on completion of Action 2.8:

- *“Create and pilot an asset auditing and improvement program to identify, build and promote access improvements at well-serviced locations for people with disabilities, making sure all improvements work together for a barrier-free experience.”*

Members suggested following best practice examples such as the *National Public Toilet Map* (toiletmap.gov.au) and noted that accessibility information would be limited to Council-owned and managed properties.

The Committee supported exploring the integration of local data with broader platforms to improve visibility of accessible assets.

Moved Melissa Simcoe

Seconded Gillian Cooper

RECOMMENDATION that the Equal Access Advisory Committee supports, in principle, prioritising designated accessible parking bay data for the delivery of Action 2.12 of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP).

Unanimous

OAT 1.2 Tweed Disability Network meeting

Deputy Mayor, Councillor Dennis enquired about the Tweed Disability Network (TDN), including their meeting timeframes and membership eligibility. Giselle discussed the TDN as a quarterly meeting forum which is open to all community members across the Tweed Shire, including individuals, carers, and organisations, with lived, caring or professional experience. The TDN currently has approximately 170 members. The next meeting date is to be confirmed prior to November 2025. Sign-up is available via Council’s People with Disability webpage.

Action:

1. *Council staff to include all Committee members on the TDN mailing list.*

OAT 2 – Review of Action Register

Giselle led a review of the document *Equal Access Advisory Committee Action Register*. Members noted updates and provided feedback on current open items:

- Action 6.1: Pending completion of a bulk review as per existing terms, a staged process for review of priority policies over the term of Council will be developed.
- Action 7: Members agreed to close this item following adoption of the Depot Road Sports Precinct Master Plan by Council at the August meeting.
- Action 8: Melissa Simcoe provided details of the program for the upcoming *Success in Tweed* Business Forum in October, with the date to be confirmed based on venue availability. The forum will include a business-focused presentation featuring local representatives and guest presenters from JobAccess, Inclusive Employment Australia and Disability Employment Service providers.

Actions:

1. *Staff to progress developing the draft Policy checklist with nominated Committee members, under Action 6.*
2. *Close Action 7.*
3. *Staff and Committee members to finalise planning details for the ‘Success in Tweed Business Forum’ under Action 8, including confirmation of date and program content.*
4. *Secretariat to follow up with staff on outstanding open actions.*

OAT 3 – Closing remarks and questions

OAT 3.1 Northern Rivers DAP Community Reference Group (NSW Reconstruction Authority)

Giselle informed the Committee of the NSW Reconstruction Authority’s call for Expressions of Interest (EOI) to join the Northern Rivers Disaster Adaptation Plan (DAP) Community Reference Group. EOIs are due by Friday 19 September 2025. Members were also advised of a related community consultation survey and invited to consider participation.

Discussion:

Members discussed the opportunity and acknowledged the importance of contributing lived experience to the development of the Disaster Adaptation Plan.

Action:

1. *Secretariat to share information on the Northern Rivers DAP Community Reference Group and EOI process with Committee members.*

OAT 3.2 Upcoming workshop event on Disability Inclusive Emergency Management (DIEM) Project hosted by NEMA, NSW Reconstruction Authority and University of Sydney Centre

Giselle informed the Committee of an upcoming workshop hosted by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), the NSW Reconstruction Authority (NSWRA), and the University of Sydney’s Centre for Disability Research and Policy. The workshop aims to focus on disability-inclusive emergency management and is tentatively scheduled for mid-November 2025.

Participant invitations are being discussed with event hosts, and staff will advocate for Committee members’ involvement and an open Expressions of Interest (EOI) process.

Action:

1. Secretariat to share DIEM workshop details with Committee members, when available.

OAT 3.3 Correspondence from Association of Concerned Citizens of Bogangar, Cabarita Beach and Tweed Shire

Giselle shared that correspondence was received from the 'Association of Concerned Citizens of Bogangar, Cabarita Beach, and Tweed Shire' regarding an alternate proposal to Norries Headland Masterplan. The correspondence raised concerns about the retention of car parking at the northern section of the site. In November 2024, Council resolved that the project team review the Association's assessments, explore alternative options, assess feasibility, and report back by the end of the year. The project lead intends to table this matter at the next Committee meeting, subject to completion of the assessments, with all relevant documentation, including correspondence, provided for Committee consideration.

Action:

1. Secretariat to share relevant documents with the Committee, when the project lead is ready to consult.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Equal Access Advisory Committee will be held Tuesday 11 November 2025.

This meeting closed at 4:09pm

EXECUTIVE LEADSHIPS TEAM'S COMMENTS:**OAT 1.1 Accessible Parking Map**

That the Equal Access Advisory Committee supports, in principle, prioritising designated accessible parking bay data for the delivery of Action 2.12 of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP).

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS:**OAT 1.1 Accessible Parking Map**

That the Equal Access Advisory Committee supports, in principle, prioritising designated accessible parking bay data for the delivery of Action 2.12 of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP).