



Disability Action Plan

2023-2025



Waterways For All



Alternative Format

Copies of this document are available on the Waterways Ireland website and in paper format. Documentation will be made available on request in formats such as Easy Read, Braille, audio formats, large print or minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language.

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Foreword from the Chief Executive

Waterways For All - The Waterways Ireland Disability Action Plan 2023-2025 is a statement of our commitment to fulfilling the statutory obligations in compliance with Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006) in Northern Ireland and the Disability Act 2005 in Ireland.

The successful implementation of this Plan will enhance the services, facilities and waterways we manage so they can be enjoyed by all in our communities with a particular focus on people with disabilities. As an employer we continually examine how we can do more to attract people with disabilities to consider Waterways Ireland as an employer of choice.

The Plan provides a strategic framework to address the attitudinal and environmental barriers to the full and effective participation of people with disabilities in public life. Ensuring participation by all will be at the heart of policy and decision-making within our organisation. Positive action measures will be mainstreamed and prioritised across all of our work programmes.



JOHN MC DONAGH
Chief Executive Officer

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995), as amended by Article 5 of the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, Waterways Ireland is required, when carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life

1.2 Under Section 49B of the DDA 1995, Waterways Ireland is also required to submit to the Equality Commission a Disability Action Plan showing how it proposes to fulfill these duties in relation to its functions.

1.3 As a North-South Body, it is also intended that delivery of the measures in this Action Plan will address our statutory obligations under the Disability Act 2005 in Ireland.

1.4 Note on terminology

In this Action Plan, the terms “persons with disabilities” and “disabled people” are used interchangeably. The term ‘disabled people’ is recognised by many within the disability rights movement to align with the social and human rights model of disability, as it is considered to acknowledge the fact that people with an impairment are disabled by barriers in the environment and society. However, we also recognise that others prefer the term “persons with disabilities” because of the inherent understanding in the term that they are first and foremost human beings entitled to human rights. This reflects the language used in the UNCRPD. Finally, we recognise that some people do not identify as being disabled.

2.0 Purpose of the Disability Action Plan

2.1 Waterways Ireland is committed to the fulfillment of its disability duties in relation to its business functions, and in making these duties central to our aim of creating the right conditions to support inclusion, equality of opportunity and increasing public participation and appreciation of the waterways’ environment.

This Plan outlines the positive action measures Waterways Ireland will deliver during 2023-2025. It builds upon the achievements of previous Action Plans, whilst also identifying new opportunities to make disability issues an integral part of Waterways Ireland's work programmes.

3.0 About Waterways Ireland

- 3.1 Waterways Ireland is one of six North-South Implementation Bodies, established under the British-Irish Agreement Act of 1999.

We are the cross-border navigational authority responsible for the management, maintenance, development, and restoration of almost 1,100 km of inland navigational waterways and over 600 km of Greenways and Blueways, principally for recreational purposes, comprising:

- Lower Bann Navigation
- Erne System
- Shannon-Erne Waterway
- Shannon Navigation
- Royal Canal
- Grand Canal
- Barrow Navigation
- Ulster Canal

In July 2007, it was agreed by the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) to include responsibility for the reconstruction of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Clones, and following restoration, its management, maintenance, and development, principally for recreational purposes to Waterways Ireland's remit.

Our Headquarters are in Enniskillen Co Fermanagh, with regional offices in Dublin, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co Leitrim, and Scarriff, Co Clare.

At an operational level, Waterways Ireland is responsible for a vast range of infrastructure assets including navigation channels, embankments, towpaths, adjoining lands, harbours, jetties, fishing stands, bridges, culverts, aqueducts, overflows, locks, sluices and lock houses along with buildings and archives.

Waterways Ireland's work programmes are critical to providing a safe and high-quality recreational environment for customers, whilst preserving the industrial and environmental heritage of the waterways for future generations.

Our Mission is to be the custodian of the inland navigations and collaborate to reimagine, maintain, develop, and promote them to sustain communities, environment, and heritage.

Our mission statement is: "Creating inspirational inland navigations and waterways experiences through conservation and sustainable development for the benefit of all."

4.0 Implementation of the Plan

- 4.1 Waterways Ireland is committed to the effective implementation of this Action Plan throughout the organisation.
- 4.2 The Action Plan will be monitored on a bi-annual basis by the Senior Management Team who will review progress in implementing previously agreed actions together with consideration of any new developments in the intervening period. Where appropriate, the Action Plan will be revised to reflect any new developments, consultations, the outcome of any new Equality Impact Assessments or any additional information not previously available.
- 4.3 Responsibility for the delivery of this Disability Action Plan lies with the Chief Executive and Senior Management Team. Day to day responsibility lies with the Corporate Services Section who will be responsible for the implementation of administrative arrangements to ensure that Waterways Ireland complies with its disability duties when carrying out its functions.
- 4.4 Necessary resources, in terms of people, time and budget, will be allocated in order to effectively implement this Plan and also deliver associated objectives and targets relating to disability duties in our corporate and business plans. Waterways Ireland is committed to ensuring that this Plan is communicated to all staff and will provide the necessary training and guidance on disability duties on the implementation of this plan.
- 4.5 Waterways Ireland will also ensure appropriate internal arrangements are in place to monitor and report on compliance with the disability duties, and implementation of this Action Plan. A three-year review of the Plan will be carried out in consultation with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

5.0 Annual Report

- 5.1 Waterways Ireland confirms its commitment to submitting an annual report to the Equality Commission based on the implementation of this Plan. A copy of the annual report will be made available on our website and can be provided in alternative formats on request.
- 5.2 Details of progress on meeting objectives in relation to our public sector disability duties will also be included in Waterways Ireland's Annual Report.

6.0 Effective Engagement

- 6.1 We are committed to engaging effectively with people who have disabilities and their representative groups on the development, implementation and review of this plan.

7.0 Consultation

- 7.1 Waterways Ireland is committed to carrying out meaningful consultation in the development of its disability duties. Consultation is integral to the effective development, implementation, monitoring and review of the Plan. It is intended that this reflective and forward looking engagement of consultees will ensure that the actions Waterways Ireland put in place bring about sustainable change for people with disabilities.
- 7.2 The involvement of consultees is designed to assist Waterways Ireland by:
- Identifying barriers faced by people with disabilities in participating in public life in general and specifically any barriers they have encountered when dealing with us.
 - Identifying circumstances in the past in which we have not promoted positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and by identifying future opportunities to promote such attitudes.
 - Setting priorities and identifying solutions to take remedial action; and
 - Monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of measures taken.
- 7.3 Consultation on the Disability Action Plan run from 18 October 2022 to 10 January 2023 and consisted of:
- Requests for responses to stakeholders and target groups on the draft Plan.
 - Online consultation with placement of the draft 2023-2025 Disability Action Plan on Waterways Ireland's website with social media advertising.
 - Face to face meetings with advisory groups and use of other methodologies identified as best practice; and
 - Removal of barriers to participation by offering to make consultation documents available in alternative formats
- 7.4 Consultation responses were accepted in a variety of formats including:
- Consultation response questionnaire
 - By e-mail to informationrequest@waterwaysireland.org
 - By requesting a one-to-one meeting; and
 - Any other method which could be reasonably accommodated.
- 7.5 On completion of the consultation process, Waterways Ireland reviewed the feedback received and has updated the Disability Action Plan as necessary. All consultees received a copy of our response to the consultation comments received.

8.0 Public Life Positions over which Waterways Ireland has Responsibility

8.1 Waterways Ireland does not have direct control over public life positions; however, we will continue to clearly communicate our commitment to encouraging the participation of people with disabilities in public life through recruitment.

8.2 Opportunities are also provided for involvement of our staff in policy and decision-making groups through the following channels;

- Waterways Ireland Equality and Diversity Working Group
- Joint Industrial Relations Forum
- Trade Union National Negotiating Committees
- Health & Safety both regional and organisation wide representation

9.0 Previous Measures

9.1 The following measures are indicative of the many positive actions we have taken in delivering previous Disability Action Plans, with a number of these actions established as part of our continuing commitment to promoting good equality practices.

- All capital and maintenance projects are designed in accordance with best practice.
- Events on and along our waterways are encouraged and facilitated to widen the appeal of the waterways for everyone, including people with disabilities. We collaborate and support a number of governing bodies to deliver recreation programmes to ensure they are accessible for people with disabilities.
- We support and encourage access for all events and programmes on and along our waterways. These are supported and promoted as part of our ongoing promotional reach.
- All job vacancies recruited externally are posted on the website and social media channels, opening career opportunities to a much wider audience and promoting equality of opportunity. It is Waterways Ireland's policy to provide employment equality to all existing and potential employees, irrespective of disability.
- All selection processes address the special needs of applicants on an individual basis.
- Employees, who have requested assistance to carry out their duties, have been provided with additional support, additionally, we invite employees to notify us if they wish to have a personal evacuation plan developed to accommodate their needs, in the event of an evacuation from our office buildings.
- Where public meetings are planned, consideration is given to ensuring that the venue and required services are accessible to all attendees

9.2 Whilst we are cognisant of the impact of Covid-19 restrictions on delivery of some elements of our previous Equality and Disability Action Plans, priority focused on the mental health and wellbeing of our staff, with employees completing online courses on:

- Managing Stress in the Workplace;
- Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace;
- Protecting Yourself when Home Working; and
- Diversity and Inclusion.

Section 10 of this Plan details the action measures and associated performance indicators and outputs Waterways Ireland commits to delivering between 2023-2025.

10. Action Measures

Under Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995) (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006), Waterways Ireland is required when carrying out its functions to have due regard to:

- Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- Encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

Promote positive attitudes towards disabled people

Staff Training and Awareness

	Action Measure	Performance Indicator	Impact / Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
1.	<p>Provide disability equality legislation training which will include information on employers and employees duties under the DDA and the WI equal opportunities policies and procedures.</p> <p>Deliver disability awareness and etiquette training to all staff to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting positive attitudes towards disabled people. • Developing understanding of the barriers faced by disabled people, including attitudinal and environmental factors. 	<p>Number of staff that have received disability equality training.</p> <p>100% of Operational staff 2023 and annual thereafter</p> <p>100% of PTA complete e-learning module (annual)</p> <p>100% of all new staff at induction</p> <p>Reduction in levels of reported bullying, harassment, discrimination and victimisation.</p>	<p>Keeps staff informed on disability issues and influences them to affect positive change opportunities.</p> <p>Staff have the training they need to identify what support they can offer customers/users with different needs and be aware of the support available to facilitate their interaction with users.</p> <p>Increased awareness of Waterways Ireland's shared disability obligations and provide staff with a</p>	<p>Q1 2023 (Ops)</p> <p>Q1 2023 (PTA)</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Corporate Services</p> <p>Human Resources</p>

	Action Measure	Performance Indicator	Impact / Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An understanding of the social model of disability. • Information on the use of appropriate language and etiquette. • Challenging stereotypes/ misconceptions about disabled people. 		<p>confidential opportunity to advise if they have any related requirements.</p> <p>Disabled employees requiring reasonable adjustments receive timely support and provide positive feedback about their experience</p>		
2.	<p>Provide enhanced training to key staff members to ensure integration of disability, equality and inclusion into leadership management and other key roles within the organisation.</p> <p>To include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Management & Extended Leadership Teams • Corporate Services Equality staff • Front facing Reception and Operational staff 	3 training interventions provided to key staff groups per annum.	Improves staff knowledge of disability issues and provides them with an up-to-date understanding of legislation and potential access opportunities.	2023 2024 2025	<p>Equality Unit, Corporate Services</p> <p>Human Resources</p>
3.	Encourage participation of disabled employees in training and development programmes.	5% increase in participation of disabled staff in training and development programmes.	Increased opportunities for staff with disabilities.	Annual	HR

	Action Measure	Performance Indicator	Impact / Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
	Outreach to disabled employees re development of training programmes.		Effective succession planning for future workforce needs.	Q3 2024	
4.	Integrate and deliver disability equality into recruitment training to ensure that where reasonable; applications in alternative formats are accepted, reasonable adjustments proactively offered and made.	All HR recruitment and selection panel members – targeted disability training Other potential panel members (Years 2 & 3) Number of requests for alternative formats, reasonable adjustments.	Staff have the training they need to identify what support they can offer job applicants with different needs.	Q3 2023 Q4 2025 Annual	Human Resources

Communications

	Action Measure	Performance Indicator	Impact / Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
5.	Run internal communication campaigns to build inclusion, raise awareness of our challenges, and celebrate the diversity of our workforce.	2 campaigns per annum, in collaboration with the Waterways Ireland Working Well Group.	Increased staff knowledge and awareness of specific disability issues and their shared obligations to implement the disability agenda.	Annual	Equality Unit Marketing & Communications
6.	Use positive imagery and content to promote the accessibility of the waterway environment for people with disabilities.	Positive content in corporate publications, on social media and on our website.	Encourages people with disabilities to experience the waterways. Such imagery and content removes pre-conceived perceptions of the	Ongoing	Equality Unit Marketing & Communications

	Action Measure	Performance Indicator	Impact / Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
		2 collaborations per annum to create and capture positive imagery / content	capabilities of people with disabilities.		
7.	<p>Continue to create opportunities for the organisation to listen to staff and understand the personal impact of inequalities on disabled persons and to reduce barriers.</p> <p>Explore options to expand opportunities to make the waterways accessible through the use of the WI StreetView Google Maps Tracker initiative, podcasts, video, articles, etc.</p> <p>Increase awareness for these channels and promote the accessibility to a broader audience.</p>	1 promotional content (such as podcast, video, article) created per annum	Increased awareness of Waterways Ireland's disability obligations and provide staff with a confidential opportunity to advise if they have any related requirements.	Q3 2023 2024 2025	<p>Corporate Services</p> <p>Marketing & Communications</p>
8.	<p>Review our user communications to make sure they are clear and easy to understand, meet the needs of all users, and are available in other languages and alternative formats.</p>	<p>Number of requests for information in alternative format.</p> <p>Number of complaints about our information or service delivery.</p>	<p>Accessibility of Information and Services for staff and visitors to our facilities and waterways who experience information barriers.</p> <p>Creation of accessible communications, where</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	Corporate Services

	Action Measure	Performance Indicator	Impact / Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
	<p>Review and evaluate current communication channels available for disabled users and consider other potential channels to improve engagement.</p> <p>Continue to analyse equality related complaints to identify emerging trends which will allow for targeted intervention to improve the service and support we provide our disabled users.</p>	<p>Waterways Ireland website (under development) will be fully compliant with current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.</p> <p>2 promotional content (such as video, podcast, or articles) which include an alternative format of communication to raise awareness of the accessibility of Waterways Ireland facilities</p> <p>2 training content pieces which include an alternative form of communication.</p>	<p>applicable – written, spoken, digital and signed.</p>	<p>Mar 2024</p> <p>June 2024 June 2025</p> <p>June 2025</p>	<p>Marketing & Communications</p> <p>Marketing & Communications/ Corporate Services / HR</p>

Encourage participation by disabled people in public life

	Action Measure	Performance Indicator	Impact / Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
9.	<p>Address identified gaps in equality data to ensure that data is sufficient to allow meaningful equality analysis.</p> <p>Audit the level of public participation by disabled people.</p> <p>Identify any existing barriers to participation of disabled people.</p>	<p>Accurate and up to date reflection of the equality groups within our workforce to inform statutory reporting, and to guide policy making.</p>	<p>Informed feedback which will help WI identify barriers to equality of opportunity for disabled people.</p>	<p>Dec 2024</p>	<p>Corporate Services</p>
10.	<p>Affirmative action measures to attract more applications from people with disabilities for vacancies across all areas of our organisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use welcoming statement in recruitment exercise to encourage applications. • Engage with disability organisations and asking them to promote recruitment exercises. • Provide placement, work experience or job shadowing opportunities. 	<p>Increase of 3% per annum in applications received.</p> <p>1 work placement, work experience, work shadowing opportunity per annum.</p> <p>Host 1 capacity building workshop per annum.</p>	<p>Disabled people acquire skills and experience that will equip them to apply for public life positions.</p> <p>Workforce diversity data shows increased representation of disabled people.</p> <p>Compliance with Government targets for employment of persons with disabilities.</p>	<p>Annual</p> <p>Dec 2023 Dec 2024 Dec 2025</p> <p>Q4 2023 Q4 2024 Q4 2025</p>	<p>Human Resources</p>

	Action Measure	Performance Indicator	Impact / Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support capacity building measures in the voluntary/community sector, for example giving support to disability groups or others in relation to the provision of training for disabled people in, for example, interviewing or other relevant skills. Consider the implementation of a guaranteed interview scheme and shortlist disabled people who meet the minimum criteria for the position. 				
11.	Collate information about applicants for jobs and our staff to enable us to take appropriate action and make improvements with attracting, recruiting, retaining and progressing people with disabilities	3% of workforce having a disability 4.5% of workforce having a disability 6% of workforce having a disability	Progression and retention of staff with disabilities within the organisation Workforce diversity data shows increased representation of disabled people.	Dec 2023 Dec 2024 Dec 2025 Ongoing	Human Resources

	Action Measure	Performance Indicator	Impact / Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
12.	Liaise with local disability groups or representative bodies to ascertain the most effective way of raising awareness and getting input from their disabled members on communication, participation and engagement with Waterways Ireland.	1 service user consultative forum representative of equality groups established – proactive participation by people with disabilities.	Increased methods of raising awareness and engagement amongst disabled people and explore new initiatives to increase participation and engagement. Improved opportunities for disabled people to engage with and influence policy makers.	Sept 2025	Corporate Services
13.	Encourage the participation of disabled users by involving service users and external stakeholders where possible to work collaboratively, share information and build supportive, trusting and professional relationships. Ensure provision made for access for participants with a disability is managed and supported in all Waterways Ireland work with third parties to increase use of the inland waterways for recreational activity.	Support 2 events per annum targeting people with disabilities.	People with disabilities are encouraged to visit and enjoy our waterways and take part in a water sport. Increase the participation of people with disabilities in waterway activities, and in doing so, build their confidence, skills enhance their social well, and positively change their lives Increase in number of applications to Waterways Ireland seeking approval for events targeting people with disabilities.	2023-2025	Corporate Services / Operations / Marketing & Communications

	Action Measure	Performance Indicator	Impact / Outcome	Timescale	Responsibility
14.	<p>Consider the needs of disabled people across all our services.</p> <p>Ensure the principles of Access for All and Universal Design are central in the design, upgrade and development of facilities on and along our waterways to ensure these are accessible and usable for everyone.</p> <p>Internal and External communications/information material will, where possible and appropriate use positive imagery and content to promote the accessibility of the waterway environment for people with disabilities.</p> <p>Online and digital information is accessible to everyone by maintaining WI managed social media and websites to a high standard.</p>	<p>Number of complaints of equality/disability nature reported on Complaints Register.</p> <p>5 accessibility audits completed by end of Action Plan</p> <p>Increased provision of disabled facilities at 2 locations per annum</p> <p>Waterways Ireland website (under development) will be fully compliant with current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.</p>	<p>Removal of any structural barriers which limit physical access.</p> <p>Facilities on and along our waterways are designed and built, where applicable to the highest standards of accessibility for all to use and enjoy.</p> <p>Access for All to our services and facilities.</p> <p>Promotion of positive attitudes towards disabled people.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Dec 2025</p> <p>Annual</p> <p>Dec 2023</p>	<p>Operations / Technical Services</p> <p>Operations</p> <p>Marketing & Communications / IT</p>

11.0 Publication of the Plan

11.1 this Disability Action Plan is available at :

www.waterwaysireland.org

Waterways Ireland will, through its ongoing work with people with disabilities, seek out further opportunities to communicate the Plan and develop collaborative disability programmes. Additionally, the Plan will be highlighted through advertisements, mail shots and meetings directly with disability organizations and representative groups, where requested. A copy of the Plan will also be made available to all employees.

11.2 The Plan will be made available in alternative formats on request. It may also be provided in other minority languages, subject to demand.

For further information on the content of this Plan or to discuss your specific format / translation requirements, please contact:

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