

The Recreational Needs of Disabled People

In recent years, efforts have been made to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against unfairly. Although there is a national increase in recreational activity, opportunity to participate may not be available to all. The purpose of this R&D Project was to provide advice to the Environment Agency which would enable it to determine how its Recreation Function can effectively discharge its statutory duties to disabled people.

The main objectives of the study were to:

- to review published material on water-related recreation and people with disabilities
- to carry out a consultation exercise with key organisations to collect further knowledge and expertise to augment upon the literature review
- to assess the policy and management issues facing the Agency with respect to its statutory duty to meet the needs of disabled people
- to make recommendations for Agency action based on the information collected and issues raised during the study.

The method of research followed a series of stages. First a literature review was carried out using libraries, the Internet, and organisational contacts. This was followed by a consultation exercise where 40 structured interviews were held with representatives of water sports clubs, national governing bodies, water recreation management agencies, disability organisations and social services establishments. This provided further information on the demands for water recreation. Discussion with Agency staff was used to inform the assessment of Agency policy in relation to disabled people.

The study found that the literature provided little useful quantitative data. The Environment Agency would not be able to impact upon many of the factors influencing participation and would be restricted in how it could influence demand. The consultation exercise found that the existence of insufficient opportunities for disabled people to participate in water recreation led to a view that they participated less than the population as a whole. It is likely that more disabled people would participate if opportunity were improved. A range of recommendations was put forward for ways that the Agency modify its policy and procedures in order to take fuller account of the needs of disabled people in the course of its work. While some of these can be acted upon by the Recreation Function directly, many will require change or action by other Functions.

The Technical Report is intended as a source of information and advice on ways in which the Environment Agency should consider changing its working methods and procedures in order to ensure that the recreational needs of disabled people are provided for. If the recommendations

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within the report are to be acted upon there will be implications for staff in a wide range of Agency functions. Therefore, while Environment Agency Recreation staff will find the report of most immediate interest other staff should also use it. External interested parties may also find it of use.

The output from project W3-010 is

R&D Technical Report W204 – Providing Recreation for Disabled People – Management Issues for the Agency

Internal status: Released to Regions
External status: Released to Public Domain

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Copies of the documents are available internally from the Regional Information Centres and externally from the Environment Agency R&D Dissemination Centre c/o WRc (Tel: 01793 865000, Fax: 01793 514562).

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