

Recycling pays off for coastal council

New accessway to Otaki Beach.

When Kapiti Coast District Council's leisure and open space team wanted to upgrade pedestrian access to Otaki Beach, they turned to Metal Art for the solution.

There was little metal involved however – the Lower Hutt company is New Zealand distributor of Replas recycled plastic products and its Enduroplank decking answered the council's question of how best to contend with the harsh marine environment on the often wild west coast

"We have been looking for some time at using recycled plastic products in our parks and elsewhere," says KCDC planner Stu Kilmister, "and the Otaki Beach project presented a suitable opportunity to trial the new material's benefits." KCDC has more than 40 kilometres of coastline and 85 official beach access-ways to manage, ranging from sand tracks, timber ramps and stairs to engineered concrete revetment protection structures. The existing timber beach access ramp by the Otaki Surf Lifesaving Club building had served its purpose well, but it was failing and becoming a safety hazard.

"We could have simply replaced like with like," says Mr Kilmister, but it is a very hard site for treated timber and we were aware that Metal Art provided another option. The sustainability message sent by using recycled products also sits well with council's overall policy objectives."

Replas products are manufactured from 100 per cent post-consumer and commercial plastic diverted from landfills in Australia and New Zealand and represents a real benefit of recycling, an aspect of waste minimisation that the public often questions.

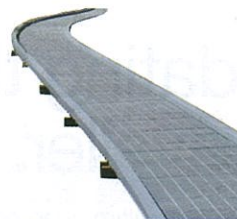
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The original access down to the beach alongside the new Enduroplank pathway.

"We are really pleased to see New Zealand councils start to pick up the idea of using recycled plastic where they can," says Carl Longstaff, Metal Art's managing director. "After all, councils promote recycling and make a big public investment in managing it." Replas turns waste material into something functional and long-lasting, extending the use of a finite resource by decades; and when its day is eventually done, it can be recycled again. For KCDC, however it was more than just a matter of being seen to be green.

"Any new material or process must prove its economic benefit. On the face of it there is a price premium with using Enduroplank as a substitute for traditional materials." The project brief included fixing the structure below typical beach levels at the seaward end, to counter erosion caused by the shifting sands.

"The beach will often drop by up to a metre over a six month period, so we could see the long term benefit of using a durable plastic material," says Mr Kilmister. The council will watch the

performance of the product for two years and will look for other opportunities to use the product. Otaki Beach users can now access their coastal playground by way of a slip-resistant walkway that will not splinter, rot or crack. They can expect it to stand up to the marine conditions for years to come while still continuing to look good.

The extra good news is that the equivalent of 30,000 two-litre milk bottles went into creating the new asset, a tangible benefit of keeping that plastic out of a landfill.

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