

## 7.2 Access to the Coast

**The coast has cultural, historical and spiritual significance to the people of KZN, thus it is important that access to the coast be maintained. However, access to the coast was restricted for many in the past (Section 7.1), making it imperative that free access be maintained in the future. In addition, coastal access provides opportunities for recreation, education and overall improvement of both mental and physical health.<sup>1</sup>**

Coastal access is now defined in the *ICM Act* as “land adjacent to coastal public property specifically designated for enabling public access to that coastal public property”. This includes associated facilities such as parking areas, public toilets, boardwalks and formal boat launch sites. Historically, the public has gained access to the coast through street ends, parks and public piers. However, increasing urban development along the coast has restricted free, easy access to the coast and the benefits it provides.

### Current coastal access

It is estimated that, on average, the province has six access points per one kilometre of coastline, with density increasing from north to south. Local municipalities south of the Thukela River have significantly higher number of access routes than those located north of the Thukela. The vast majority of access routes are informal pedestrian pathways covered by grass or sand, with only a small number of hard-surfaced, formal routes capable of providing vehicle access to the beach.

For many years, the use of off-road vehicles such as 4x4s and quad bikes in the South African coastal zone was subject to little or no regulation. While this ensured access to the coast for some users, it resulted in damage to coastal ecosystems.<sup>2</sup> As a result, *The control of vehicles in the coastal zone of South Africa Regulations (No. 1399 of 2001)* was enacted in January 2002 as part of the *National Environmental Management Act*. These regulations prohibit members of the public from

Durban’s beachfront promenade facilitates better coastal access.



Photo: Bronwyn Goble

driving motorised vehicles within the coastal zone. Drivers may be exempt from this rule only for health and safety emergencies, and to assist persons with disabilities. Permits may be issued to allow vehicle access to the coast for purposes such as scientific research, tourism and commercial fishing activities. Exceptions to the rule include designated mining areas, proclaimed harbour areas, and official boat launch sites, where towing vehicles may have limited access to the beach to launch boats.

### Boat launch sites

Prior to the 2nd World War, most boating activity along the KZN coast took place from protected harbours such as The Bay of Natal. However, with the development of the trailerable “ski-boat” in the late 1940s, boat fishing along the KZN coast became more accessible to the public as boats could be towed onto the beach and launched through the surf. Although the vessels used were designed to be launched through the surf, safety was a major concern and protected bays and river mouths were often used as preferred launch sites. Ultimately this led to the identification and subsequent management of small vessel launch sites along the KZN coast, primarily based on safety and logistical considerations.<sup>3</sup>

With the banning of vehicles in the coastal zone, launching of ski-boats from designated beach launch sites was also placed under stricter control, with the obligatory licensing of these launch sites. The new regulations placed greater emphasis on the environment, a task delegated to the Provincial Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs in 2003. This presented an opportunity for the Province’s coastal zone managers to obtain useful information on the usage patterns of launch sites and to further the ecological understanding of the use of offshore marine resources. Through extensive stakeholder participation, this licensing initiative introduced a mandatory launch and catch register system, known as the Boat Launch Site Monitoring System (BLSMS), developed for each successfully licensed small craft launch site in 2004. This generates comprehensive launch site statistics and information about associated activities.

This innovative system is the first attempt at a province-wide monitoring initiative for launch sites in South Africa and is an example of unique, mutually beneficial co-operation between

different stakeholders towards the common goal of improved management.

There are currently 30 licensed beach launch sites in KZN and all participate in the BLSMS. In addition, a further nine boat launch sites within Durban and Richards Bay harbours also voluntarily participate in the BLSMS, thus providing comprehensive coverage of small vessel launching activities in the Province. In 2010, a total of 54 110 individual launches were recorded, consisting of ski-boats (63%), inflatable vessels (27%) and jet-skis (9%).

**While boat access to the coast is effectively managed in KZN, there is still a need to ensure pedestrian access and associated facilities for beach goers. The ICM Act requires municipalities adjacent to the coast to designate strips of coastal access land for public use. They are also responsible for enforcing the rights of the public, preventing any environmental impacts, and providing other related infrastructure as required (e.g. signage, parking areas, restrooms, etc.).**

**However it is difficult to provide these facilities, given that some sections of coast are significantly developed, restricting coastal access. There are also increasing climate change and environmental concerns (Sections 9.4 and 9.5) that should be taken into account in planning for future coastal access and associated infrastructure. ■**



Launch of a recreational vessel.

Photo: Stuart Laing

