

DEMOCRATS MEDIA

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SENATOR NATASHA STOTT DESPOJA
SENATOR FOR SOUTH AUSTRALIA

DEMOCRATS CALL FOR INQUIRY INTO HEARING IMPAIRMENT

To mark Hearing Awareness Week 2007 (August 19-25), the Australian Democrats have called for an inquiry into issues affecting the nearly 4 million deaf and hearing impaired in Australia.

Democrats' Senator for South Australia Natasha Stott Despoja, a long term advocate for improved captioning, said Australia lags about five years behind the United States, United Kingdom and other comparable countries when it comes to captioning for the deaf and hearing impaired.

"Hearing impairment and deafness can lead to isolation in the family and community, in the workplace and institutions such as hospitals and aged care homes. Currently, it also means reduced access to free to air TV as well as films in cinemas," Senator Stott Despoja said.

"The deaf and hearing impaired should not be discriminated against in this way - we need 100% captioning.

"We also need captioning and Auslan interpreters for our Parliaments, which should lead the way in providing equal access for deaf and hearing impaired Australians."

Last week, Senator Stott Despoja lodged a motion in the Senate acknowledging Hearing Awareness Week and calling on the Government to implement 100% captioning of programming of free to air TV by 2010; provide access to captioned movies in cinemas (currently only 10 cinemas screen captioned movies); and remove the exemption from the captioning requirements for digital multi-channels. The motion is due to be voted on September 10.

In September, Senator Stott Despoja will move to establish a Senate inquiry into issues affecting the deaf and hearing impaired, including an investigation of current levels of captioning in Australia; a comparison with captioning levels overseas; and an investigation of appropriate technology and its costs.

"Overseas experience shows that the lives of deaf and hearing impaired people can be vastly improved through access to technology. We have the technology - it's time to make it happen. I urge concerned members of the public to lobby their local MPs to support my motion and move for a Senate inquiry," Senator Stott Despoja said.

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