

BROADCASTING AUSTRALIAN DISASTERS FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING PEOPLE

Australians who are deaf and hard of hearing comprise one sixth of the population. Equal access to information, especially critical information during emergencies and disasters, benefits the whole community. For this reason, it is crucial that broadcasters ensure the needs of all Australians are met in the dissemination of emergency information through the use of Auslan interpreters.

Deaf Australia, Deafness Forum of Australia, Deafblind Australia, Deaf Sports Australia, Better Hearing Australia, The Deaf Society, AccessPlus WA, Deaf CanDo, Expression Australia and Deaf Services express sincere gratitude to Emergency Services agencies and personnel who are working hard to make the community safe during these unprecedented bushfires and current cyclone in Western Australia/Northern Territory.

Deaf and hard of hearing people who are affected by natural or other disasters or emergencies rely heavily on information provided through broadcasts, across all media channels but particularly television. Creating a level playing field to inform deaf and hard of hearing people benefits everyone because accessible information assists them to take action to protect themselves and potentially assist others. This is compromised when broadcasters do not include an appropriately certified sign language interpreter, visible on screen, throughout all live broadcasts.

Ensuring qualified Auslan/English interpreters are included in Emergency Services briefings and announcements is not only critical but becoming a community expectation for both hearing and deaf people. We strongly urge broadcasters to make every effort to ensure that interpreters are used and that they are clearly visible on screen, equally prominent to the speaker and unimpeded by graphics on the screen.

We acknowledge that captions are available during all broadcasts, however live captioning is often prone to errors due to the speed of the speech and use of complex place names and technical terms. In addition, not every television has captions available, particularly when deaf and hard of hearing people are away from their home. For many deaf people, English is their second language and Auslan (Australian Sign Language) their first. Captions do not necessarily mean that information is fully accessible in these circumstances, which makes it harder to stay informed.

Deaf Australia has previously worked with Free TV who provides policy and support for Channel 7, 9 and 10 to update its Advisory Notes ¹ and ² to ensure that interpreter is included in the screenshot.

'We are sure that every Australian will agree that everyone should access information during the emergency disasters at all times', said Mr Kyle Miers, Chief Executive of Deaf Australia. 'Access to information and to make informed knowledge and decisions are fundamental rights for everyone, including deaf and hard of hearing people'.

It is crucial that Broadcasters take seriously their obligation to ensure disaster information is accessible for everyone, including deaf and hard of hearing people.

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¹ FreeTv, 'Emergency Information Broadcast' updated 12 June 2018 (<https://www.freetv.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/FINAL-Amended-Advisory-Note-Emergency-Information-12-June.pdf>).

² FreeTv, 'Portrayal of People with Disabilities' updated 12 June 2018 (<https://www.freetv.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/FINAL-Amended-Advisory-Note-Portrayal-of-people-with-disabilities-12-June.pdf>).

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About Deaf Australia:

Deaf Australia is for all deaf, hard of hearing and non-deaf people and organisations (not-for-profit, for profit or government) that use and/or accept and respect Auslan (Australian Sign Language).

Deaf Australia is the deaf-led peak organisation representing deaf people in Australia. We promote the advancement of human rights and equality for deaf people by collaborating with our members and stakeholders in implementing the United Nations Conventions and the National Disability Strategy.

Deaf Australia is a national representative member to the World Federation of the Deaf (www.wfdeaf.org).

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