

From: [NSW Government](#)
To: [Flood Inquiry](#)
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Submission details

I am making this submission as Other

Submission type I am submitting on behalf of my organisation

Organisation making the submission (if applicable) ASLIA Australian Sign Language Interpreter Association

Your position in the organisation (if applicable) National Chair

Consent to make submission public I give my consent for this submission to be made public

Share your experience or tell your story

Terms of Reference (optional)

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#)

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- [Flood Inquiry - ASLIA NSWACT.docx](#)
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Flood Enquiry Submission 2022

Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association NSW/ACT

Introduction

Thank you to the NSW Government for giving us a platform to explain our current situation regarding the 2022 floods in New South Wales.

The Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association, or ASLIA, is a nationally run, not-for-profit, professional body which was established to lead, promote, and advocate for Auslan (Australian Sign Language) interpreters across Australia. Each state has their own committee. This submission was made by ASLIA NSW/ACT.

We are making this submission on behalf of Auslan interpreters to support the introduction of an all of government requirement to commit to using Digital Communication Technology that fully complies with recognised accessibility standards including Auslan interpretation and support the creation and implementation of a specific accessibility information policy that requires Auslan interpreters to be booked for all emergency government announcements. This includes all levels of government and emergency services.

The role of Auslan interpreters is to accurately translate between English and Auslan. It entails expressing the meaning of what is being said, while encompassing the linguistic and cultural differences between the languages. Deaf people are naturally visually receptive, so having information given to them in a language form that they understand is vital.

Auslan interpreters have been noticeably present during government announcements since the 2019-2020 fires, and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, but rural areas still do not have enough Auslan presence for their emergency announcements. The current floods have brought to light how important having access to these announcements are to rural Deaf Communities. This submission will outline what the current state of Auslan access looks like, why it is important to have Auslan access, and how we can improve and solve the issue of Auslan access during emergencies.

Glossary of Terms

Auslan – Auslan is the majority language used by the Deaf Community. Auslan is a visual form of communication and is therefore, the natural language for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people. The name Auslan is an amalgamation of Australian Sign Language. It is its own language is vastly different from English as it has its own grammar and vocabulary.

Deaf Community – The capital letters used in Deaf Community represent Auslan using Deaf people. It is used to establish the cultural and linguistic differences between the sign language using community, and those who do not use sign language (either they have been brought up

communicating using the 'oral method', lip reading and speaking, or they have become gradually deaf later in life). This submission relates to the Auslan using Deaf Community.

1.1 Causes and Contributing Factors

Currently there is no established policy that ensures government and emergency announcements need to be Auslan Interpreted. Broadcasters only include interpreters when practical so there is considerable flexibility and difference in provision. This is a concern, especially during emergencies as Local Government Areas (LGAs), local SES and state SES rarely have their announcements Auslan interpreted.

As a result of this, rural Deaf Communities are receiving delayed and/or anecdotal information which is not government endorsed, and is at risk of being outdated and incorrect. It is a known fact that important announcements and information is being lost altogether, due to the lack of Auslan interpreted content, leaving many of the Deaf Community in a dangerous and vulnerable position.

Without Auslan interpreters present at all emergency briefings, the Deaf Community receives their information through either family members who may not be Auslan fluent, local interpreters who are contacting their Deaf friends and clients, or through captioning. Captioning, although an important access requirement is not always understood by the Deaf Community as English is often their second language and is not fully understood, or the captioning has errors. For example, during evacuation warnings during the 2019/2020 NSW fires, Kempsey was captioned as Campsie.

During the 2022 Norther Rivers floods, local interpreters and Deaf Community members had to reach out to local councils and SES and other flood relief organisations asking them to use Auslan interpreters for their announcements and their online content and information. These requests led to a scrambling to get interpreted information out to the Community. Local interpreters and Deaf community members were having to creating communication networks between emergency services, local government, interpreter booking agencies and individual interpreters, whilst themselves dealing with the natural disaster. By the time these communication channels were established, most of the power and telecommunication channels were not working across the region, leaving vital communications unsent. The Auslan interpretation clips that did get sent through were often uploaded hours after the original post, and in most cases, after the warning events had already occurred. The lack of policy and systems ensuring coordinated multi agency Auslan interpreted communication led to community members putting themselves at physical risk attending residences to provide updates of emergency and evacuation warnings and others unable to fulfil other community/family/personal needs as they were having to create local solutions to government gaps.

This also led to local Deaf community members and interpreters deciding which of the media announcements to prioritise for interpretation. It is beyond the scope of professional practice for individual interpreters be in the position where they need to prioritise which government SES emergency announcements to interpret.

Having policy to have interpreters during briefings and announcements would help solve a lot of the problems outlined.

1.2 Preparation and Planning

ASLIA would like to work alongside national, state, and local councils, and emergency services, along with Deaf organisations and interpreter booking agencies, to establish a policy ensuring that all announcements are made with Auslan interpreting embedded in them. Interpreting can be done live, for live briefings, or can be filmed and attached to online resources. We have seen a positive response from the Deaf Community when online recourses have either an Auslan friendly version, or a picture-in-picture Interpreter. It is also vital that interpreters are clearly visible at all times.

Working alongside ASLIA and Auslan interpreting booking agents is a great tool for releasing this information throughout the Deaf Community in disaster affected areas and non-affected areas. It also builds confidence and trust between the government and the Deaf Community.

Working together is also a great opportunity for both parties to learn and grow from the experience and knowledge of our respective fields of expertise.

Northern Rivers Interpreters During the 2022 Floods

Key points and learnings

Issues faced by Deaf community in floods

There was no standard place to get real time interpreted information. Emergency announcements were being shared on individual's social media pages, with people having to tag in Deaf community members so they could access the video. Not having access to the emergency announcements in real time left the some Deaf community in a disadvantage resulting in delays in preparedness to leave and lack of knowledge on the evacuation centre locations.

Issues faced by interpreters.

When filming Auslan interpretations, there was no secure or standardised platform to send the videos to. There is no single point of distribution point for Auslan interpreted clips, creating an adhoc accessibility of the videos uploaded to social media posts. Using local interpreters meant they were interpreting while dealing with the natural disaster themselves and lost the ability to post interpretations when the electricity was lost. Interpreters should not have to make decisions around what information gets interpreted.

Issues on LGA and SES social media sites meant long delays before Auslan interpretations where uploaded, often to late. Credit of the media representative for LLC, they worked hard, cooperated and understood the importance, but without a media policy or procedure, they were not trained in providing equal access for the Deaf Community.

Interpreters being present for all announcement and warnings ensures that you have the whole of the Australian public following the instructions of Government and the SES. Policy and procedures need to be in place, so everyone has equal access.

ASLIA calls for

- The creation of a rigorous accessibility policy that outline when and how Auslan interpreters and/or interpretation should be used, before during and after an emergency or crisis.
- Implementation of the above this policy through partnership with booking agencies to supply Auslan/English interpreters for all public emergency communication in a timely manner including television press release, social media posts and emergency text messaging
- In preparing and responding to upcoming emergencies, emergency centres as part of their response process, contact and include interpreters in their communications.
- Auslan interpreted information and communications to continue into the recovery phase in an emergency event.

Please find below examples of countries that have successful Sign Language inclusive public communication policies from the Scottish Government.

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2017/10/british-sign-language-bsl-national-plan-2017-2023/documents/00526382-pdf/00526382-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00526382.pdf>

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/british-sign-language-bsl-national-plan-2017-2023/>

ASLIA thanks the NSW Government for all their hard work in making sure that many of their briefings and announcements have Auslan Interpreters and we are looking forward to working together to creating a policy and procedure that ensures Auslan is present for all emergencies.

ASLIA NSW/ACT is one of many stake holders who can work together to ensure a policy is put in place