



**Media Release
23 March 2010**

Auslan as an official language – YES, Deaf people want it!

Deaf Australia calls on Deafness Forum to withdraw its current discussion paper and questionnaire on whether Deaf people think Auslan (Australian Sign Language) should be recognised as an official language.

The answer to this question is already out there.

YES! Deaf people want official recognition for their language, Auslan.

Is Deafness Forum looking for a different answer with their questionnaire?

Although Auslan has been recognised in the Australian Language and Literacy Policy as a community language since 1991, this is only a policy and there is no law in Australia that gives Deaf people the right to use Auslan.

Deaf Australia has for many years had an Auslan policy that calls for greater recognition of Deaf people's right to use Auslan, and this policy has for years been on our website www.deafau.org.au/info/policies_auslan.php for anyone, including Deafness Forum, to refer to. The most recent version of this policy was adopted by our members at our Annual General Meeting on 3rd November 2006.

This policy calls for:

The Australian Government and state governments to abolish any remaining obstacles to the use of Auslan as the primary and everyday language of Deaf people, e.g., as a language of education

While it does not specifically call for Auslan as an "official language" it clearly calls for recognition of Deaf people's right to use Auslan.

Deaf Australia and its state branches have been saying for many years now that Auslan needs to become an official language or there needs to be a law that recognises Deaf people's right to use it. Deafness Forum should certainly be aware of Deaf Australia's policy on and statements about the right to use Auslan because Deafness Forum representatives have attended many of the forums where Deaf Australia has raised the issue.

Last week we were informed by a supporter that Deafness Forum has released a discussion paper and questionnaire asking Deaf people whether they think Auslan should be recognised as an official language.

Deafness Forum did not inform nor consult with Deaf Australia on the preparation of this discussion paper and questionnaire.

Deaf Australia believes that Deafness Forum's questionnaire is disrespectful to Deaf Australia, and to members of the Deaf community who have already expressed their position in relation to Auslan.

Deafness Forum is a collective of organisations (and some individuals) who have an interest in deafness but it does not have a majority of Deaf consumers and is not managed by Deaf consumers. It has a very small number of individual Deaf members, no Deaf-managed consumer organisation members, and the majority of its members do not use Auslan.

Deaf Australia therefore calls on Deafness Forum to withdraw their current discussion paper and questionnaire on the issue of Auslan as an official language, and either refer the issue to Deaf Australia as the only leading national peak body representing Deaf consumers who use Auslan, or refer to Deaf Australia's Auslan policy to answer their questions about the Deaf community's views on Auslan.

About Deaf Australia:

Deaf Australia is the only leading national peak body for deaf people managed for and by deaf people. We represent, promote and preserve the Australian Deaf community and its language and culture. We provide an advocacy and information service for and about deaf people. We work with the deaf community and stakeholders in the best interest of deaf people.

Deaf Australia (established in 1986) is the Australian national member of the World Federation of the Deaf, is a founding member of Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), and works cooperatively with many organisations to achieve a better quality of life for deaf people.

Deaf Australia is funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

Further information:

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