

Media release

For immediate release Friday 14th January 2010

Media release in Auslan available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BF6IRFyXxUs>

Australia's Deaf community congratulates and thanks the Queensland Government and the ACMA for Auslan-interpreted flood updates

Deaf Australia, the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) and the Australian Federation of Deaf Societies (AFDS) today congratulated the outstanding efforts of the Queensland Government in ensuring there was an Auslan (Australian Sign Language) interpreter standing alongside Queensland Premier Anna Bligh during press conferences concerning the devastating floods that inundated the state this week.

The consumer advocacy and service organisations say the press conferences conveyed vital emergency information to Australia's 15,000-strong Deaf community and showcased Australia's commitment to world's best practice via news bulletins broadcast internationally.

The groups praised the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) for quickly producing a video in Auslan notifying the Deaf community that the National Relay Service (NRS) – an essential national phone service for the Deaf community – was out of action due to floodwaters affecting their headquarters in Brisbane.

“ACCAN congratulates the swift action taken by the Queensland Government, the ACMA and the Australian Federation of Deaf Societies to ensure Deaf Australians were able to keep abreast of this vital community information,” said ACCAN Disability Policy Adviser Danielle Fried.

“We'd like to see emergency information and other matters of national importance interpreted into Auslan so that Australian society becomes more inclusive of members of its Deaf community.”

Deaf Australia's Executive Officer Karen Lloyd said “The closure of the NRS at the height of the crisis was of serious concern to us, and affected the Deaf community nationally, so the swift actions by the Queensland Government and ACMA in making information available in Auslan helped alleviate the problem of access to information in the crisis.”

AFDS President Mac Adam said, “AFDS is extremely pleased to see important information about the Queensland flood disaster available in Auslan. This is a step in the right direction in observing Article 21 of the recently ratified UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – provision of public information in accessible formats for Deaf people.”

The groups say they were disappointed Channel Nine and Channel Seven networks initially chose to crop the Auslan interpreters out of their live coverage, although this was rectified after Deaf Australia contacted FreeTV and viewers complained.

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ACCAN (Australian Communications Consumer Action Network) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation. Our goal is available, accessible and affordable communications that enhance the lives of consumers. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Australian government.