



Media Release
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ABBOTT GOVERNMENT SILENCES DEAF VOICE

Tony Abbott shocked the nation on Monday when he announced his new cabinet; eliminating key ministerial portfolios, including Disability, Women, and Mental Health. Deaf Australia has condemned the move, saying it will take Australia backwards.

“With this decision, Tony has already broken his promise made in his victory speech, saying there would be “no surprises, no excuses’,” said Deaf Australia Acting President Todd Wright today. “He has shown his true colours by further marginalising one of the most vulnerable minority groups in Australian society.”

“Cutting the Disability Ministry and Parliamentary Secretary for Disability role proves Abbott is out of touch with Australian people and wants to make sure we have no way to communicate our needs to the government,” said Mr Wright, “It is easy to ignore the needs of vulnerable people when there is no-one responsible for ensuring their wellbeing.”

This is the latest in a series of anti-disability decisions Abbott hoped would go unnoticed. Deaf Australia has been told that the Coalition’s last-minute policy costings, released the day before the election, appear to show plans to pay for election promises by axing 50% of the Employment Assistance Fund (EAF); an already pitifully small fund that covers vital interpreting, captioning and notetaking services, and workplace modifications for Deaf people in employment.

The EAF is an essential tool used by potential Deaf employees to gain access to job interviews, to secure a job, and to develop a meaningful career, by removing barriers in the workplace.

“If the EAF is cut, many Deaf people will be at risk of losing their jobs, as their employers will not be able to afford to pay for interpreters and other requirements that they need,” explained Mr Wright, “Forcing Deaf people back onto the dole is irresponsible and old-fashioned and will cost the government much more in the long run.”

Many Deaf employees find the current EAF funding level inadequate for their career development needs, so any cuts will be a huge step backward.

“Abbott is washing his hands from disability issues by removing critical ministry and parliamentary secretary roles in his cabinet,” explained Mr Wright, “He is out of touch with what the disability sector needs and will drag down long-term productivity gains in the workforce contradicting key Liberal policy.”

Deaf Australia is calling for the Abbott government to immediately reinstate the Disability Ministry and to clarify their commitment to the Employment Assistance Fund.

Deaf Australia is the national peak organisation for Deaf people in Australia. It represents the views of deaf people who use Auslan and is a true consumer organisation as only deaf people have the right to vote on Deaf Australia business and to be elected to the Board. Deaf Australia’s vision is that deaf people are respected and fully included in the Australian community and the right to use Auslan is legally recognised.

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Media contact: Amber Venner

Phone: 0402 443 603

Email: amber@communicationrepublic.com.au