



Media Release

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AUSLAN INTERPRETERS A BUSHFIRE LIFESAVER

The current bushfire situation in NSW has brought the issue of public emergency communications into the spotlight over the last few days with Auslan interpreters only being brought in days after the fires started.

‘Deaf people need effective, real-time, access to emergency information,’ said Deaf Australia President Ann Darwin, ‘It is not good enough for services tasked with disseminating crucial warnings and information to simply provide captioning and hope this will cover everyone.’

‘English is a second language for most Deaf people and in a stressful emergency situation the likelihood of miscommunication is compounded,’ she said.

Dr Breda Carty, a Deaf Springwood local, explains about the particularly frightening experience of not having access to the same information as hearing people in her community, who are relying heavily on radio, phone and spoken communication with neighbors and emergency personnel.

‘It was a great relief when Rural Fire Service (RFS) press conferences finally provided Auslan interpreters yesterday (four days after the fires started),’ said Dr Carty, ‘and I feel much safer knowing I will be able to access these regular media updates.’

The NSW RFS has acknowledged this vital communication need by including Auslan interpreters in their regular televised media briefings about the bushfires in NSW.

‘This is a major emergency and it’s important that communities stay up to date with the fire situation any way they can,’ said Anthony Clark, NSW RFS Group Manager Corporate Communications, ‘We are using an Auslan interpreter to assist with the delivery of urgent information, to ensure as many people as possible can get access to timely information.’

With the bushfire season starting earlier and lasting longer each year, Deaf Australia is calling on all relevant government services to make sure interpreters are included for all televised emergency information and Auslan information is provided in online resources.

‘We need both captioning and Auslan interpreting,’ said Ms Darwin, ‘All state governments need to get ready now and make sure that lives are not lost as a result of poor communication.’

‘If emergency services are telling you to evacuate from your home, you need to know when to leave, where the safe passages are and where to go,’ she said, ‘When lives are at stake, the Government has a responsibility to make sure everyone is able to access emergency warnings and information in a format that is effective and easy to understand.’

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