



National Relay Service: The Deaf Perspective DISCUSSION PAPER

Purpose

This discussion paper 'National Relay Service: The Deaf Perspective' has been written with the intention of generating feedback from the Deaf community about the National Relay Service (NRS) today and their experiences when using the service (i.e. the new Internet relay and emergency services). The feedback will help us understand what the Deaf community think and say, so it can assist us when we speak to the Government and the industry about how Deaf people feel about the services provided by the NRS.

In Australia today, we have a new Government that is committed to making sure the whole country is connected to high speed Broadband. Coupled with this commitment are the recent rapid changes in technology where video communications are becoming cheaper and picture quality is sharper. In 2007, we prepared a position paper 'What is Deaf equivalent in Voice Telephony?' after gathering information from the Deaf community in August 2005. Video telephony was brought forward as the nearest equivalent to voice telephony and a recommendation was made that a video relay service be established. In our previous discussion papers, we have asked the Deaf community for their thoughts about various aspects of the NRS and similar questions have been asked again to ascertain if the Deaf community still feels the same today regarding the services currently provided by the NRS

This discussion paper also covers your experiences when using the 106 text emergency service. Feedback regarding your use of the 106 service will be used to assist us with preparation of material to be presented at the Emergency Services Forum which is to be held on Tuesday 29th April, 2008. At this forum, we intend to bring together government and industry representatives with Deaf consumers, to look at current emergency services access for the Deaf community. More information about the Emergency Services Forum will be available by the end of February.

For the first time, this discussion paper will have an online questionnaire for people to complete and we would like to recommend that you complete your response/s to this paper using this method. We will still supply a separate questionnaire for those who do not have access to the Internet. We encourage Deaf people to complete the questionnaire. Also, please pass the information and questionnaire on to your family members, friends and colleagues for their input. The cut off date for people to respond to this discussion paper & questionnaire is **5pm on Friday 18th April, 2008.**

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31 January 2008

Section 1: Your current experience of the NRS

This discussion paper is written on the assumption that you have already used the NRS and therefore, only very brief details of the actual NRS function or services provided will be outlined here. Detailed information about many different services provided by the NRS can be found on their website and if you have not visited it yet, please do so. The link to their website is: www.relayservice.com.au

Since the NRS was established, the only means for Deaf people to make calls using the NRS was to use a TTY. There are four call options when using the NRS;

- *Type and Read* – for people who want to type and read messages on screen, (mostly used by Deaf people)
- *Speak and Read* (Voice Carry Over or VCO) – for people who prefer to speak, but like to read the responses on the TTY screen
- *Type and Listen* (Hearing Carry Over or HCO)– for people who have difficulty speaking or communicating but can hear adequately
- *Speak and Listen* (Speech to Speech)– for people who sometimes have trouble with other people not understanding their speech over the phone

Some Deaf people have mentioned that they use either *Type and Read* or *Speak and Read* (VCO) facilities. In the questionnaire, we will be asking you to tell us which call option you use. We are particularly interested in finding out how much *Speak and Read* (VCO) is used in the Deaf community.

It was not until July 2007 that the Internet Relay feature was added as another option to using the NRS and therefore it is now possible for Deaf people to use computers using the NRS website, MSN, AOL or compatible mobile handsets to make calls though Internet Relay. As many Deaf people in Australia use MSN to chat with others, being able to make calls while using MSN is very handy. However, there are some limitations with Internet Relay - for example, you can phone anyone, but you cannot receive calls. More information about what you can and cannot do when using this service, can be found on the NRS website.

In 2006 when the NRS contract was up for tender, the NRS operations (relay service) and the NRS Information and Marketing service were made into separate contracts. The Federal government decided to award the NRS operations (relay service) to Australian Communication Exchange and the NRS Information and Marketing service to WestWood Spice and their partners, the Australian Federation of Deaf Societies (AFDS). All services operate under the banner of the *National Relay Service*.

This was the first time important parts of the NRS service was managed separately since 1995, as previously, all services were managed by one organisation (Australian Communication Exchange).

Deaf Australia is keen to know if you have noticed any change in relay service delivery and support, access to information and training and ability to make complaints.

Deaf Australia and DTAN are also keen to know more from the Deaf community as to whether you feel that the NRS is actually currently providing us with products and services that are in keeping with the advances in technology and in keeping with international

trends. For example: In our last discussion paper 'What is Deaf equivalent to Voice Telephony' we spoke about what was happening overseas especially in the United States, where they provide three different types of relay services: TTY Relay, Internet Relay and Video Relay. 85% of the responses to that discussion paper showed that the Deaf community in Australia felt that we were ready for Video Relay Service. The position paper is available on our website http://www.aad.org.au/info/paper_voctel.php

At the same time the Internet Relay service started (July 2007), "Call queuing" was introduced. In the past, during busy times, the NRS would give a 'busy' or 'engaged' signal. Now all calls are placed in a queue. The idea is for "Call queuing" to help manage the flow of calls and make life easier for NRS users.

Section 2: 106 text emergency service

As mentioned earlier, we are hosting an Emergency Services Forum in April, 2008 with government and industry representatives and with Deaf consumers present to look at the issues that the Deaf community face when emergency services are required; especially when we hear more and more Deaf people are not using TTYs anymore.

Currently, the only means for Deaf people to access emergency services today in Australia is to use a TTY and calling through the 106 text emergency service. Direct access to the priority 106 text emergency service is not possible through the Internet Relay and therefore, many Deaf people are still unable to connect to emergency services with priority if they only have a mobile handset. The NRS website states that you can request 000 via an internet relay call, but unlike a call to 106, your call cannot be identified as an emergency call and can't be given any queue priority until you have been connected to a relay officer.

At several community consultations we have organised and facilitated in Australia over the years, Deaf people have expressed concern about the lack of access to emergency services especially when out of their home or away from their TTYs. This was also discussed on the Deaf Australia website discussion forum (<http://www.aad.org.au/forum/index.php>). This matter is especially important as most Deaf people have a mobile phone but cannot access emergency services.

In the questionnaire, we will be asking you questions about whether you have used the 106 text emergency service and for you to tell us about your personal experiences of being in emergency situations where you were unable to obtain assistance or make direct contact with emergency services. Also, it would be good for you to share with us your thoughts about what other options we should be lobbying for to obtain improved access for Deaf people to emergency services in the future.

Section 3: Other Information

We are interested in knowing more about whether Deaf people in Australia are using video communications technology, and whether you have travelled overseas and had the opportunity to use video relay services in other countries (e.g.. in the USA).

Video communications

There are a few different ways that Deaf people are able to communicate with each other using today's technology. The most common way to do this is to use chat software installed on a computer (i.e. MSN, Skype, Camfrog or ooVoo) and a webcam. Some software applications even allow up to 6 people to chat in the same conversation.

Some Deaf people in Australia have even purchased a D-Link broadband videophone that is connected to broadband at home, using their TV to make calls to other Deaf friends who use the same equipment, especially those who have family or friends in the United States.

While the above technology is really useful for people who are able to use them, the only barrier is that both people who wish to chat via video need to have the same equipment and/or software on both ends. For example, a Deaf person who uses webcam and MSN cannot talk to their Deaf friends who are either using videophones or different chat software e.g. Skype.

With Broadband services in Australia growing rapidly, we are seeing more businesses taking up the use of videophones, especially those in the health sector; education (rural and remote) and even some interpreting agencies now provide video remote interpreting services. Technology is also making fast progress and with this, picture quality will dramatically improve.

We would like to know whether you actually use video chat or videophones at home and responses to this discussion paper will hopefully show us a snapshot of what is used currently.

Overseas Relay Services

Several Deaf people have travelled overseas and seen many different Deaf communities from all over the world, as well as how they live and communicate. This includes seeing different types of relay services and how they are used – we know that some who have been to the United States have actually used a few different state based video relay services with different equipment used for each service.

We have also been told that some Deaf people in Australia who have D-Link Broadband Videophone installed in their home and are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) are sometimes able to connect to an American Video Relay Service to make calls.

Most of the comments that are made about the relay services available overseas are that the video relay service is the most efficient way to communicate with your hearing peers and that time spent making calls was much quicker. Any information about your *personal* experience of using any relay services when travelling overseas will be valuable for us.

If you are aware of any other types of relay services that are available overseas but not used in Australia, the additional space at the end of the questionnaire is provided for you to fill out your comments, along with thoughts about what you would like to see happen to the NRS in Australia and add anything else you think we might be interested in.

Comments and feedback

Deaf Australia Inc looks forward to your comments on this paper. As you can see it addresses many issues. We may have missed some, so please tell us your ideas, concerns and thoughts.

If you wish to provide feedback, please do either one of the following;

1. Online

Fill out the questionnaire form on the Internet by clicking the following link

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=hP9jXzJ7JNfBeyK0Q8ixJQ_3d_3d

2. Fax

Fill out the attached questionnaire form and fax to:

Andrew Wiltshire
Community Liaison and Projects Officer
Fax: 02 9871 8218

3. Post

Fill out the attached questionnaire form and post to (FREE POSTAGE):

Andrew Wiltshire
Community Liaison and Projects Officer
Deaf Australia Inc. (formerly AAD)
Reply Paid 1083
STAFFORD
QLD 4053

The deadline for feedback is 5pm Friday 18th April 2008.

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