



**Media Release
For immediate release**

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Deaf people demand apology from Telstra Businesswoman of the Year.

Deaf Australia and the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) have called for a public apology from Telstra Queensland Businesswoman of the Year, Ms Dimity Dornan, for her comments about deafness in her award acceptance speech on Tuesday, as published in the Sydney Morning Herald and other media.

Ms Dornan, a speech therapist, who founded the Hear and Say Centre in Brisbane, is quoted as saying, "Deafness is at the same stage as polio ... it is a scourge in our world". Her clinics discourage the use of sign language, the official language of deaf people in Australia, and she is well known for her inflammatory remarks about deafness.

WFD President, Sydneysider Colin Allen and Deaf Australia President Ann Darwin call on Ms Dornan to publicly apologise to the 70 million deaf people she has insulted world wide.

"Ms Dornan's words make a mockery of real deaf people's lives and their experiences. Her claim to represent all deaf people, particularly children who are deaf, is simply false and misleading," said Ms Darwin. "She does not speak for us."

"It is unthinkable that this type of comment would be made publicly," said Mr Allen, "Particularly as we begin to celebrate the Deaf community, its language and culture with National Week of Deaf People beginning tomorrow."

Karen Lloyd AM, Executive Officer of Deaf Australia, the national peak body representing Deaf people's interests in Australia, said: "We are deeply offended at Ms Dornan's comments. She clearly does not understand Deaf people and culture at all.

"We invite Ms Dornan to attend our National Week of Deaf People events next week to learn more about the reality of the Deaf community and the normal, full and meaningful lives they lead."

Deaf Australia has contacted Ms Dornan directly and invited her to meet with them to discuss the issues and build a better relationship between organisations that are doing their best to improve services for deaf people.

The WFD and Deaf Australia have held discussions with Australia's Disability Discrimination Commissioner Mr Graeme Innes AM, who said: "The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognises the importance of sign language, the deaf community and culture, and protects the rights of all deaf people to use sign language and have their cultural identity respected."

Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Kevin Cocks AM, said he affirmed Commissioner Innes' comments and added "Due respect should be paid to people who are deaf and their families whose pathways diverge from the vision of Ms Dornan".

Ms Dornan's comments are in direct contravention of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in particular Article 24.3B, which outlines the right for deaf people to use sign language and value their linguistic identity.

WFD and Deaf Australia respect parents' choices but their position is firmly that deaf children have the right to use sign language as well as English and to have their deaf identity actively accepted and respected.

"Parents should not have to choose between either speech or sign language," said Ms Lloyd, "They should have access to both speech and sign language for their child and be supported to make the best possible choices for their child's needs."

This issue has sparked a frenzy of social media discussion and debate, including a facebook page set up called "Stop Deaf Cultural Genocide", which now has 640 followers.

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