

MEDIA RELEASE

31 MAY 2018

LAST CALL – SUSPEND THE TENDER OF THE NATIONAL RELAY SERVICE

Deaf Australia calls on the Government to suspend the tender process for the delivery of the National Relay System citing inadequate consultation with user groups. Today is a final day for Request for Tender (RFT) for the delivery of the National Relay Service commencing in January 2019.

The Federal Government has submitted that the National Relay Service is merely a 'safety-net' for its users who have access to "new and emerging mainstream technologies". A submission which contradicts the NRS consumers' view that National Relay Service is an ESSENTIAL service – as such, all services must be 24/7, including the Video Relay Service. Instead, the government wants deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing and people with speech impairment to use the National Relay Service as an ALTERNATIVE to unproven and untested 'mainstream technology'.

'Communication is an essential right for everyone; yet it seems that Government believes that deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing and people with speech impairment do not need to have the same rights as everyone else' – said Mr. Kyle Miers, Chief Executive of Deaf Australia. 'Deaf people who use sign language need the equivalency of full access to communication using the Video Relay Service which currently operates on limited hours. The present tender offers no assurances whatsoever that this will be the case.'

At the recent Senate Estimate, the Department of Communication advised Senator Steele-John that a change of regulation to use 'mainstream communication' will be expected to be introduced in end of June to mid-July 2018.

'During the one and only consultation, the Department advised that the mainstream communication will have no bearing on the National Relay Service, yet it plays a significant part in the provisioning of the National Relay Service', said Mr. Miers. 'To have this tender close BEFORE the approval of the regulation is like 'putting the cart before the horse' and leaves no choice for Parliamentarians but to approve it.'

'12,000 signatures collected on a petition on Change.org clearly shows that the Government and the Department of Communications has failed to listen, consult and accommodate our needs' said Mr. Miers.

Deaf Australia and NRS users are very concerned that the Government and the Department of Communication are risking lives with no assurance of equivalency of full access and the use of unproven and untested mainstream communication as preferred methods.

For these reasons, Deaf Australia calls on the Government and the Department to suspend the tender process until the Government and the Department properly consult with NRS users and peak organisations to create an NRS Service level obligations that satisfies everyone.

- End

Media Contact:

Kyle Miers, Chief Executive
0458 256 796 (text only) – info(at)deafaustalia.org.au

About Deaf Australia:

Deaf Australia is for all deaf, hard of hearing and non-deaf people and organisations (not-for-profit, for profit or government) that use and/or accept and respect Auslan (Australian Sign Language).

Deaf Australia is the deaf-led peak organisation representing deaf people in Australia. We promote the advancement of human rights and equality for deaf people by collaborating with our members and stakeholders in implementing the United Nations Conventions and the National Disability Strategy.

Web: deafaustalia.org.au
Facebook: DeafAustraliaInc
Twitter: @deafaustalia