



*Making an inclusive Australia for deaf people*

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Standing Committee on Industry, Innovation, Science and Resources  
Parliament House  
PO Box 6021  
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: [iisr.reps@aph.gov.au](mailto:iisr.reps@aph.gov.au)

### **Inquiry into the social issues relating to land-based driverless vehicles in Australia**

This submission is made in response to a call for submissions by the Standing Committee on Industry, Innovation, Science and Resources as part of the committee's inquiry into the social issues relating to land-based driverless vehicles in Australia.

The Commonwealth Government's National Disability Strategy (2010-2020) has established a range of strategies to remove barriers experienced by deaf and hard of hearing people and to promote inclusion and it is in our view that this strategy has not been effectively implemented and monitored across range of issues.

Deaf Australia urges and would appreciate the committee's review of the National Disability Strategy and to incorporate this strategy as part of the inquiry.

Deaf people are often the most misunderstood, the most alienated and marginalised of disability groups and often have various influencers that determine the lives of many deaf and hard of hearing people, often without direct involvement or input from the deaf community.

Like all people, deaf and hard of hearing people need to access information – in a way they can effectively and efficiently acquire and impart information. This concept, which to us seems very simple, seems to be very difficult for non-deaf people to comprehend as non-deaf people rely on communication through sounds.

Deaf people, in general, are better drivers than non-deaf people as deaf people's peripheral vision awareness is far superior and they are able to respond quickly to situations<sup>1</sup>.

Yet, many new developments on vehicles (both commercial and private) have consistently relied on sounds and/ or audible alerts which prevents deaf people taking advantage of a range of features available to non-deaf people. This can lead to preventing them from potential in obtaining meaningful employment.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Sheffield, '[Deaf adults see better than hearing people new study finds](#)', 11 November 2010.

We believe this lack of universal design where sounds are not accompanied by visual systems has intentionally or unintentionally caused various barriers where products, services, environments are not accessible for deaf and hard of hearing people who require specialised modifications. This further marginalises deaf and hard of hearing people.

It is important to note that the road / traffic system is more accessible for deaf people than any other public and government services. Members of the public even communicate with each other through visual means such as dipping the lights to warn drivers of police presence (although it is illegal practice), or to allow trucks to safely pull in front of you when passed. This non-verbal communication is commonly shared and understood for all road users.

Commercial drivers have strict assessment to fitness guidelines that require deaf person to wear a hearing aid when driving commercial trucks. There is no evidence, whatsoever, that wearing hearing aids will improve road safety.

Some of the newer trucks (heavy haulage) and newer vehicles are fitted with technologies where sounds are accompanied with visual systems and warns the drivers of potential dangers, such technologies are not incorporated into the fitness guidelines.

For this reason, Deaf Australia has collaborated with the National Transport Commission in reviewing the guidelines, making it easier for deaf people to obtain commercial drivers' licenses and utilise advancing technologies in communicating with drivers (applicable for any driver) to ensure safety of the roads.

The Assessing Fitness to Drive<sup>2</sup> has been amended and took effect on 1 October 2016.

Deaf Australia specifically refers to Article 9 (Accessibility) of The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (The Convention) which states that state parties shall take appropriate measures to:

- (f) Promote other appropriate forms of assistance and support to persons with disability to ensure their access to information;
- (g) Promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communication technologies and system, including the internet; and
- (h) Promote the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communication technologies and systems at an early stage, so that these technologies and systems become accessible at minimum cost.

Access to information has become Deaf Australia's mandate and is supported by our constituents. Accessible communication through effective use of technologies is a human right and must be supported in ways that will not diminish the capacity for deaf people to participate in an inclusive society.

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<sup>2</sup> National Transport Commission and Ausroads, '[Assessing Fitness to Drive](#)', 2016 (accessed 28 November 2016).

The National Disability Strategy (2010-2020)<sup>3</sup> highlights the commitment of all governments (state/territory and Commonwealth) to cover six policy areas:

1. Inclusive and accessible community;
2. Rights protection, justice and legislation;
3. Economic security;
4. Personal and community support;
5. Learning and skills; and
6. Health and wellbeing.

Deaf Australia believes the first policy (Inclusive and accessible community) is the underpinning policy that this committee must take into consideration when making policy and/ or legislation to ensure universal design principles (1.7 of the National Disability Strategy).

## Recommendations

### **That the Commonwealth Government:**

1. Requires all audible systems to be accompanied with distinguishable visual systems as a universal design (applicable to all vehicles); and/ or
2. In addition to universal design it would be appropriate to determine positioning of these visual alerts in the driver's console to appropriately communicate with the drivers.

Deaf Australia believes these recommendations are not limited to land-based driverless vehicles, but for all vehicles, both private and commercial. To this effect, Deaf Australia recommends that:

3. The Commonwealth and state/ territory governments through Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to amend relevant legislation to incorporate recommendations 1 and 2.

Regards



Kyle Miers  
Chief Executive

15 February 2017

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<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth Government, '[National Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#)', February 2011 (accessed 3 January 2017).

## ABOUT DEAF AUSTRALIA AND OUR CONSTITUENCY

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 ensuring that the United Nations Conventions and the National Disability Strategy are implemented.

Deaf Australia is focusing on deaf and hard of hearing people who are born or became deaf in childhood. This represents between 13,500 – 18,000 deaf Australians who use Auslan (Australian Sign Language) across all age groups.

However, in 2006, *'Listen Hear! The Economic Impact and Cost of Hearing Loss'* reported that 1 in 6 Australians have some degree of hearing loss and that will increase to 1 in 4 by 2050<sup>4</sup> due to ageing population.

Deaf Australia does not represent the views of parents of deaf people, medical professionals or service providers as they are not the core focus of our constituents. Although the intention of these groups may be well meaning, Deaf Australia believes that the focus on deaf and hard of hearing people is lacking.

Web: [deafaustalia.org.au](http://deafaustalia.org.au)  
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<sup>4</sup> Access Economics, ['Listen Hear! The Economic Impact and Cost of Hearing Loss in Australia'](#), February 2006.