



Scan for
NZSL name



Visual description: A purple Whaikaha logo with a QR scan for the NZSL name.

Briefing

Date:	18 February 2025
For:	Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Disability Issues
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Security level:	In confidence

NZSL Strategy: Revised Cabinet paper and strategy for Ministerial consultation

Purpose

Following your confirmation at the Officials meeting on 17 February, attached are documents for Ministerial consultation, which will need to commence by Tuesday, 25 February at the latest:

- the draft New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Strategy
- the draft Cabinet paper, seeking approval for the NZSL Board to consult on the draft strategy.

Executive summary

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is an official language of New Zealand.

The NZSL Board (the Board) has developed a refreshed NZSL Strategy and would like to release the final strategy during the International Week of Deaf People in September 2025. s9(2)(f)(iv)

The Board would also like to conduct a public consultation process first on the draft NZSL Strategy, with that consultation currently scheduled for 22 April (at the latest) to 2 June 2025.

To keep the timeline for the NZSL Strategy refresh on track, Ministerial consultation would need to be completed by **10 March 2025**. This means that it would need to begin by **25 February**.

The attached draft Cabinet paper and NZSL Strategy have been updated to reflect agency consultation. Most agencies were supportive of the draft strategy, with most comments relatively minor or related to how information was presented and suggesting changes to better ensure that Deaf voices and identities were visible in the strategy.

Some agencies commented on the impact of the NZSL Strategy on agency baselines. There were also comments related to prioritisation of actions, particularly given the needs of the Deaf community, and the size of the NZSL workforce.

Our view is that agencies already have legislative obligations under the NZSL Act to provide information and services in NZSL. We also consider that part of developing the action plans will involve prioritising and sequencing actions, based on the needs of the Deaf community, and the size of the NZSL workforce. The scaling of initiatives over the strategy would also reduce the fiscal impact on agencies.

Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

1. **Note** that updated versions of the draft NZSL Strategy and Cabinet paper are attached for Ministerial consultation
2. **Note** that Ministerial consultation needs to occur between 25 February and 10 March 2025 to ensure the timeframe stays on track s9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
3. **Note** that updated versions of the NZSL Strategy and covering Cabinet paper will be provided to you on Monday, 17 March, seeking your approval to lodge on 20 March for Cabinet SOU Committee on Wednesday, 26 March

Noted

Noted

Noted

4. **Note** that we are planning to launch the consultation process on 22 April, and will work with your office to prepare a press release

Noted



Hon Louise Upston

Minister for Disability Issues

Date 20250224



Sheryl Pinckney

Group Manager, Partnerships and Stewardship

Date 18 February 2025

Actions for private secretaries:

NZSL Strategy: Revised Cabinet paper and strategy for Ministerial consultation

Background

- 1 The New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006 (the NZSL Act) declared New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) to be an official language of New Zealand.
- 2 However, the Deaf community still struggles to be able to access and use NZSL in everyday interactions. These challenges impact on the ability of Deaf children, young people, and adults to fully participate in society.
- 3 The longstanding nature of these issues indicate that something different is needed if the situation for Deaf people is going to change.
- 4 The NZSL Board (the Board) has developed a refreshed NZSL Strategy, aimed at addressing these issues. s9(2)(f)(iv) [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- 5 The Board would like to undertake six-week consultation process on the draft strategy. This consultation is currently proposed for 22 April to 2 June.

We have incorporated agency feedback into the attached documents

- 6 The attached documents for Ministerial consultation reflect changes from agency feedback.
- 7 Feedback reflected a wide variety of issues, including:
 - *adding information to ensure that Deaf voices and the breadth of Deaf identities were visible in the strategy*, for instance, by reflecting the range of Deaf identifies more inclusively; adding material relating to linguistic minorities and human rights, and clarifying that strategy is about enabling (not just supporting) Deaf people.
 - *the need for enforcement mechanisms*. A short new section on 'reporting on progress' has been added to the strategy to reflect reporting proposals, however, we recognise that the Board has no powers of enforcement. We have strengthened material in the Cabinet paper relating to government agencies being required to include material in their annual reports.
 - *workforce issues*. There was concern that the small NZSL and Deaf workforce may end up overwhelmed, or that resource could be removed from first language users (ie Deaf children accessing NZSL) to second language learners (ie public servants seeking to learn basic NZSL). We have

added some material into both the strategy and Cabinet paper to reflect the need to sequence and scale activity to prevent this from happening.

- *the Alternative Formats service.* There were comments specifically about the Alternative Formats service, and its capacity to respond to any increase in demand as a result of the new Strategy. Given this, we have added material into the Cabinet paper to note that work is underway aimed at strengthening the Alternative Formats service and making it more responsive to the needs of government agencies.

8 Some agencies expressed concern about the prioritisation of actions between (and within) revitalisation and integration. There was also mixed support for the public service priority area, with some agencies wanting it strengthened to require more official information in NZSL or to include additional Crown agencies. Other agencies were, however, concerned about the resource and fiscal implications of this action area, in particular the development of agency NZSL capability plans and requiring agencies to report as part of their annual reports.

9 We consider that:

- there are already obligations on some government agencies (mostly Departments) *under* the New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006, but agencies are not doing enough to meet these obligations. We have added material into the strategy and Cabinet paper to reflect these existing obligations.
- most of the concerns about prioritisation of actions, and impact on agencies / agency baselines can be addressed during action planning, which will also involve other agencies. We have added content into the documents to reflect these points.

10 Developing the action plans that sit underneath the NZSL Strategy will enable actions to be prioritised so the needs of the Deaf community can be met, whilst also recognising the size of the NZSL workforce. At the same time, sequencing and scaling of actions will also reduce the impact on agency baselines, while still ensuring progress is made on delivering actions, many of which are long-term and likely to continue beyond the life of the strategy.

11 There were also some comments on the relationship between the New Zealand Disability Strategy and the NZSL strategy, and whether reporting could be linked. We consider reporting should be kept separate to reflect the importance of NZSL as an official language.

Timeframes and Next steps

12 Ministerial consultation should commence by 25 February and be completed by 10 March 2025.

13 The following table provides the ambitious timeframe for the strategy.

Key action or event	Possible timeframe
Cabinet paper one: Approval to consult	
Ministerial consultation (two weeks)	25 February – 10 March
Cabinet paper and draft Strategy provided for approval to lodge	Monday 17 March
Cabinet paper and draft Strategy lodged	Thursday 20 March
Cabinet Social Outcomes (SOU) Committee considers draft strategy / approval to consult	Wednesday, 26 March
Public Consultation process	
Public and stakeholder consultation (approximately 6 weeks)	22 April – 2 June
Analysis of submissions and updating strategy	3 June – 17 June
Board meeting – approval updated strategy	Week 23 June

s9(2)(f)(iv)

- 14 We will provide you with an updated Cabinet paper and strategy on Monday, 17 March seeking approval to lodge the documents for consideration at Cabinet SOU Committee on 26 March. We will also provide you with talking points to support you at Cabinet SOU Committee.
- 15 We will also work with your office on communications, including a press release (and / or video) relating to the public consultation on the strategy.
- 16 Any delays in the process from here on in will impact on the timing of the release of the final NZSL Strategy s9(2)(f)(iv)

End

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Appendices

- Draft NZSL Strategy: *New Zealand Sign Language – every day, everywhere* [attached as separate document]
- Draft Cabinet paper: *Public consultation – Draft New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Strategy* [attached as separate document]