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# **Final proposals to amend the New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006**

**Office of the Minister for Disability  
Issues**

**Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee**

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# **Final proposals to amend the New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006**

**Office of the Minister for Disability Issues**

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This is a summary of a Cabinet paper from the Minister for Disability Issues that seeks Cabinet agreement to amend the New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006 (the NZSL Act). You can see the full Cabinet Paper and other alternate formats at <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/information-releases/cabinet-papers/index.html>

## **Summary**

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) was recognised as an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand when the NZSL Act was passed in 2006. NZSL is important for Deaf people to learn, communicate and participate in our society. Research shows that access to NZSL can lead to positive outcomes for the Deaf community.

In 2019, the Minister for Disability Issues requested the NZSL Board provide her with advice on how the NZSL Act could be changed to better align with the NZSL Strategy. The review focused on options to:

- strengthen the role of public leadership by the Deaf community;
- create a mechanism to monitor how the NZSL Act is implemented with a focus on government agencies' actions
- and better reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi.

Officials worked in partnership with the NZSL Board on developing suggested changes within the above scope of the review.

Consultation on changes to the NZSL Act began on 9 September 2022 and ended on 11 November 2022. During consultation, people expressed support for:

- strengthening strategic leadership by Deaf people on matters relating to NZSL
- recognising Turi Māori identity and leadership by embedding Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi
- monitoring government agencies' actions to support the purpose of the NZSL Act.

There were no expressions of support for the status quo—that is, not amending the NZSL Act.

There were many issues raised during consultation that were outside the scope of the review. A summary of the key themes from the consultation will be available on the Office for Disability Issues' website: [NZSL Act Consultation 2022—Office for Disability Issues \(odi.govt.nz\)](https://www.od.govt.nz/nzsl-act-consultation-2022)

While the changes below take steps to recognise Deaf people's leadership, they do not address all the concerns and issues raised during consultation, particularly in relation to accessibility. Alongside our wider efforts in the disability portfolio, I expect the NZSL Board to work with the proposed Accessibility Committee on identifying, removing, and preventing barriers for the Deaf community.

## **Recommendations**

The Minister for Disability Issues asked for Cabinet to agree to amend the NZSL Act. Cabinet agreed to amend the NZSL Act so that:

- the NZSL Board becomes a statutory Ministerial advisory group. This would mean that the purpose and the role of the NZSL Board is set out legislation and they have additional functional functions and powers. These can include:
  - Providing strategic leadership; and
  - Gathering information from government agencies
- Turi Māori identity and leadership is recognised as part of including Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi its purpose reflects:
  - the creation of the NZSL statutory Ministerial advisory group; and
  - the language learning priority of acquisition
- there will be a review of the NZSL Act five years after it is changed

- more agencies will be guided by the principles of the Act to better support the Deaf community.

**End of Final proposals to amend the NZ Sign Language Act 2006**