REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS BEFORE

PROCEDURE COMMITTEE

AUSLAN INTERPRETATION FOR BROADCASTING

CORRECTED

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, on Friday 14 October 2022

The Committee met at 9:30

PRESENT

The President, the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox (Chair)

Ms Abigail Boyd
The Hon. Mark Buttigieg
The Hon. Wes Fang

* Please note:
[inaudible] is used when audio words cannot be deciphered.
[audio malfunction] is used when words are lost due to a technical malfunction.
[disorder] is used when members or witnesses speak over one another.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the Procedure Committee inquiry into the use of Auslan interpretation for the broadcasting of Legislative Council proceedings. This is a groundbreaking hearing. The members of the Procedure Committee here today are a subcommittee of the Procedure Committee appointed for this hearing. We are excited to meet you today and, indeed, to try out Auslan and consider how to integrate it into the work of the Legislative Council. Thank you for being here with us. Hopefully today's groundbreaking Committee hearing is a sign of things to come in many ways. But we will not prejudge or pre-empt any of those matters. We are here to listen to you today and to understand how we might proceed down this pathway.

The inquiry will examine the merits of varying the standing orders to introduce live Auslan interpretation of the broadcast of all or part of the Legislative Council proceedings and to consider whether there are other ways the Legislative Council can take action to ensure that it is acting in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was signed by Australia in 2007.

I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we are meeting today. I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of New South Wales. I also acknowledge and pay my respects to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today in person or online. Today we will be hearing from a number of stakeholders, including members of the Deaf community, deaf peak body groups and academics, as well as representatives from other parliamentary jurisdictions. While we may have many witnesses with us in person, some will be appearing by videoconference today. I thank everybody for making the time to give evidence to this important inquiry.

Before we commence, I make some brief comments about the procedures for today's hearing. The Committee secretariat has arranged for Auslan interpreters to be available throughout the hearing to ensure full and active participation of all witnesses and Committee members. I note that a number of witnesses will also be appearing with their own interpreter. Today's hearing is being broadcast live via the Parliament's website. The broadcast will include Auslan interpretation. A transcript of today's hearing will be placed on the Committee's website when it becomes available.

In accordance with the broadcasting guidelines, media representatives are reminded that they must take responsibility for what they publish about the Committee's proceedings. While parliamentary privilege applies to witnesses giving evidence today, it does not apply to what witnesses say outside of their evidence at the hearing. Therefore, I urge witnesses to be careful about comments they may make to the media or to others after they complete their evidence. Committee hearings are not intended to provide a forum for people to make adverse reflections about others under the protection of parliamentary privilege. In that regard, it is important that witnesses focus on the issues raised by the inquiry terms of reference and avoid naming individuals unnecessarily.

All witnesses have a right to procedural fairness according to the procedural fairness resolution adopted by the House in 2018. If a witness is unable to answer a question today and wants more time to respond, they can take the question on notice. Written answers to questions taken on notice are to be provided within 21 days. If witnesses wish to hand up documents, they should do so through the Committee staff. I remind English-speaking Committee members, witnesses and Auslan-to-English interpreters to speak into the microphones. Given the reliance on interpreters for today's hearing, I also ask Committee members and English-speaking witnesses to ensure that due consideration is given to the time needed for the translators to perform their translating task.

Additionally, we have a number of witnesses appearing in person and via videoconference. It may be helpful to identify who questions are directed to and who is speaking. For those present in the room today who are hard of hearing, please note that the room is fitted with induction loops, compatible with hearing aid systems that have telecoil receivers. Finally, would everyone please turn off their mobile phones or turn them to silent for the duration of the hearing.

Ms KIRRI DANGERFIELD, Auslan interpreter, affirmed

Ms KATE HINTON, Auslan interpreter, sworn

Ms BETTINA GIRDLER, Auslan interpreter, affirmed

Dr JESSICA KIRKNESS, Private Citizen, affirmed and examined through interpreter

Ms LORRAINE MULLEY, Australian Deaf Elders Group, sworn and affirmed through interpreter

Ms DARLENE THORNTON, Private Citizen, sworn and examined through interpreter

The CHAIR: I welcome our interpreters Bettina Girdler, Kirri Dangerfield and Kate Hinton. I welcome the first panel of witnesses, Dr Jessica Kirkness, Lorraine Mulley and Darlene Thornton. It is great to see you here for this historic Committee hearing. I understand, Darlene, that you are Nathan's mum. Nathan is with us now on my right. That is very special. Thank you all for coming. Would anyone like to start by making a short statement? Please keep it short, as we have some questions for you as well.

JESSICA KIRKNESS: I'm happy to go first. I just wanted to say thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I think it's a really important and timely conversation to be having, especially after COVID, when we've had so much public interest and support for full access to Auslan in broadcasting on television and for safety information. I think this is a really natural and important continuation of that movement towards providing access for people—all people, but especially Deaf people, who are routinely excluded from a lot of political conversations. So thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Would anyone else like to make a short opening statement?

DARLENE THORNTON: Yes, please. I'm really grateful for this event today, especially given the recent history that we've had. New South Wales has not truly been accessible for people with disabilities. I think that this is a good opportunity to start making steps towards improvements in that space, particularly for our Deaf community, whose language prohibits them from equally being involved in the happenings and discussions of this Parliament. Having access to information is a basic human right. I think that this is a great acknowledgement of the importance of that in proceedings and acknowledge that Auslan interpreters being provided in these contexts allows that to happen.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Lorraine, is there anything you wish to say?

LORRAINE MULLEY: Yes. I'd like to say I too am very grateful to be invited here today. I think that it is important. I come as a representative of Deaf Seniors Group. This is a group that lobbies for equality for deaf people over 65 and recognition of our language, culture and diversity. There are many different languages and ways which people communicate. Access is derived from that language provision. It's a wide community. I think that it doesn't matter whether citizens are hearing or deaf. Their access to these things is paramount. I've brought this with me today, which is a document that recognises the background of who we are. This is the group that I'm here to represent today. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Great. We'll consider that document tabled and submitted to the Committee. Thank you very much for those opening statements. I might just ask a question to start proceedings, if I could, open to who might like to take that. If you'd like to all address it, that's quite fine. I just wanted to ask you about how accessible closed captions are for you and how adequate you think that they might be and how we might improve that if there are shortfalls here in terms of proceedings of the New South Wales Parliament. Lorraine?

LORRAINE MULLEY: Yes. Thank you. I'd just like to say having access to all in Parliament is very important. We must remember the context of people coming from diverse backgrounds. Unfortunately, many people are not able to access technology when proceedings are broadcast. There can be internet connection issues. It also inhibits people's ability to see the clarity of the interpretation. The captions as well—there are often technical issues with those.

DARLENE THORNTON: I'd like to say that, yes, captions are good enough in some cases. But, for many people, they're not equal to receiving information in spoken English. Many people are not able to read and understand those captions. Like Lorraine said, there's a balance that needs to be considered, with some people being able to use captions but not all people being able to readily understand those captions, as well as being aware of the quality of the captions themselves. They need to be very closely monitored to make sure that they're a proper reflection.

The CHAIR: Indeed. We're certainly conscious that sometimes the captions aren't precise enough. It's something we are working on a lot in the Parliament to ensure we improve our captioning service. So these comments are very useful. Jessica?

JESSICA KIRKNESS: I would just add that, for many deaf people, Auslan is their first language and their preferred language. Captions in English are a useful start but they're not enough to fully include the nuances of important political information. In order to give full access, it's much better to have visual-spatial communication through Auslan so that the particularities of the decisions that are being made are reflected fully. I think you've raised the issue of malfunctions with captions and that does happen quite a lot. I had deaf grandparents who relied upon Auslan for communication and they often missed important social, cultural, political information as a result of poor captioning.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you so much for being here and giving us the benefit of your insights. This is an inquiry that we're very excited to hold and I'm very proud to be part of something so historic in this place. Could you explain—and perhaps I'll start first with you, Darlene—why is it that the written word is not equivalent to Auslan in terms of the richness of the communication? If you could explain to us around tone and—

DARLENE THORNTON: We need to understand that English and Auslan are two completely different languages with their own lexicon and grammar. English is written and spoken. Auslan is a visual-spatial language. So all the information is contained in that visual space. There's no written form of the language and that means it's more complicated for an Auslan user to comprehend written English, especially Auslan users who have grown up with Auslan as their first language. It's a different way of the brain comprehending the language in the first instance. Then you also notice, as in the case of the interpreters today, there's a time lag between the English that's spoken and the Auslan that's signed. You can't directly convey the emotion through the written form of English. It's not easy to ascertain as simply as it is in the visual-spatial field. And the tone of voice is what is missing and that is what is expressed in the visual form of Auslan.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Could you also explain to the Committee the way that Auslan goes far beyond the use of hands and the way that the entire face and body is used to convey communication in a richer format?

DARLENE THORNTON: Yes, certainly. It's really like a 4D situation—a 4D language. It involves the facial expression, the mouth, the movement in the shoulders and the upper body, pointing in different directions. It's a directional language. When you talk to a person, you don't say their name and when you refer to people, you use space. You set up the space to then point at people, so you need to conceptually know where the different people you're referring to are in that space of signing. That's another element to the difference.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: What is the difference then between having an interpreter in the room, in the space with you, verses having an interpreter on a screen being broadcast from a different room?

DARLENE THORNTON: It's a huge difference. I'm watching now this screen. It's not easy because of the time lag. So I actually prefer to watch the interpreter sitting over here in the room. It's easier to follow. It's more synchronous with the question, the English being spoken. I feel, as we all do, that it's more involved, more connected to the communication. It does feel more of a disconnect between watching what's happening on screen compared to what's happening when the interpreter is right there in person and you can see their body language in 3D. It's very important for deaf people to really feel like they're part of what's happening in that space and not at a distance from it. You pick up the underlying communication and subtext as well just by being in the same space.

LORRAINE MULLEY: Could I please add to that? It's very important when interpreters from different States, when we're looking at them, sometimes I prefer to be able to—my apologies—choose the interpreter that I'm familiar with. Captions at times have language that isn't known to me, but when I do look at an interpreter I'm able to relax and receive that information in a language that's meaningful for me.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thank you very much for coming in today and sharing your views. I'm curious to know how the Auslan language itself differs from worldwide languages that are used by deaf people. We know that with captioning the algorithms are improving all the time and the technology will be such, hopefully soon, that not only can we interpret the spoken English word into text via technology but inevitably that will then lead to translation into other languages. With Auslan, I understand it's very specific to what we do in this country. Is there an opportunity to use it to communicate to a wider audience or is it going to be very specific to what we do here in Australia?

DARLENE THORNTON: In each country there are their own spoken and signed languages. There are similarities between Auslan, New Zealand Sign Language and British Sign Language. But in terms of having a

worldwide sign language, that's an impossibility. There are too many barriers to that. In Australia we do have Auslan used nationwide but we do have a couple of dialects, specifically the northern and southern dialects. In recent times there is more of a blurred line between the two with more communication across the country. We use Auslan in Australia, yes, that is the case, because it is our language. Other people around the world wouldn't really necessarily be using Auslan; they'd have their own signed languages. But of course, English is used all around the world in various places but there is no international spoken language. It is the same situation as there being no international signed language. So, yes, Auslan is Australia specific.

The Hon. WES FANG: In that instance, when somebody comes to Australia who has hearing difficulties or is deaf, it's still important then to ensure that captioning is provided and potentially translated in order for them to understand our democracy and our democratic process until they become comfortable with the Auslan language, which I imagine they would learn after arrival?

DARLENE THORNTON: It really depends on what language the deaf person already has. If they already know English, there is going to be no problem with them accessing captions. But if they don't have any English then there are issues. They would need to have that access to language. It would be common for them to come to Australia without that language in the first place, so they wouldn't know Auslan and they'd need to have interpreters who are familiar with unpacking Auslan into a more accessible form of sign language for them until they became fluent in Auslan.

LORRAINE MULLEY: Yes. Also, previously I've worked as a deaf relay interpreter myself, and these are professionals who will come into a situation. They may meet somebody who's recently moved to the country and they will assess this deaf person's language that they have, and then I as a deaf interpreter would adjust my language to suit their needs. Over time of providing support to these people via Deaf organisations, deaf relay interpreters may eventually acquire Auslan language themselves.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Thank you all for attending this hearing on what is a very important subject matter for us to come to an informed conclusion about how we improve access to the Parliament. In the submissions I read, Auslan seems to be the overarching, encompassing preference for the Deaf community. How embedded is it in that community when someone has that condition? Is it something that kids are taught at a very early age throughout the whole community, or is it still a very limited language? I'm just interested to know the breadth of Auslan in the Deaf community in terms of people's understanding and education.

DARLENE THORNTON: Would you like to answer that, and then we'll take turns?

JESSICA KIRKNESS: Could you repeat the question, sorry?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: It's really just a question about how much penetration Auslan has in the Deaf community in terms of people's knowledge and understanding of it. Is it something that kids are taught from a very young age, and they grow up with it if they're deaf, or is it that some people are relying on the written language and others are relying on Auslan? Do we have any idea of the percentage of penetration into the community for Auslan?

JESSICA KIRKNESS: I think there are about 30,000 users of Auslan in Australia. That's the most recent estimation I have read. I think it's difficult to assess some of these things because, while Auslan is our "national" Deaf language—and I'm putting that in inverted commas because it's not recognised legally as such—it is the language of Deaf people in Australia, and it is the language that they would most commonly be using if they identify as Deaf. I think that it's important to make the distinction between people who are hard of hearing or who consider themselves to be hearing impaired, for example, and might not belong to the Deaf community.

The Deaf community see themselves as a linguistic and cultural minority, so Auslan is particularly important for them. This is a group of people who socialise regularly, who have their own cultural, social and political organisations, and Auslan would be the language that this particular group of people would use and rely upon. There are issues with hard-of-hearing children not getting access to language, which is a separate conversation, perhaps, but there are lots of children that end up language deprived because they're not given adequate access to sign language. Really, we actually need a cultural push towards seeing Auslan in all areas of public life so that we don't miss those children. Cochlear implants are a solution in part, but they are not a full solution. As soon as you take them off, there are still barriers to communication, and so providing bilingual education or bilingual access to information is really important.

LORRAINE MULLEY: I'd like to also offer an additional two points, the first being that English is not yet the legal language of Australia. It has not yet been officially defined as such. We also have two different points of view, and Darlene and myself are different ages. We have different families that we've come from,

myself from a hearing family who didn't sign at all. I was not allowed to try to sign as a child; I had to focus on attempting to lip-read and to speak myself. With my own children, when they were up to 11 and 12, we didn't yet have captions. Once I reached the teenage years, then it was wonderful to start seeing more access to interpreters and that natural progression. From then, I was absorbed into the Deaf community where I found support and 100 per cent belonging, and I've grown from there. Now children are able to grow up in those environments, but it is a very different scenario from when we grew up to children today.

DARLENE THORNTON: I'm one of the only 3 per cent of deaf Australians who come from a deaf family. A third generation deaf Australian, I am, so we've always used Auslan at home as our first language. When I went to school, it was then oral program, however, but at home it was full Auslan. So that's only 3 per cent of the deaf population in Australia. The majority wouldn't have Auslan as their native language in the home. So it's quite rare to be one of those cohort. Up until now, mostly the education system hasn't focused on Auslan language acquisition. There's been an English language policy. It hasn't been open to Auslan use in preschool and throughout schooling. As Lorraine has just mentioned, she didn't have access to it.

In terms of deaf children automatically having sign language as a result of being deaf, that's not the case. Often, many come to Auslan later in their childhood or adolescence or even older. Most of it is language deprivation; that is the situation for most deaf in either language. There's delays in accessing both English and Auslan for many members of the community and that's why expecting deaf people to rely on English captions is an impossibility. There isn't the equality of language access for the deaf people in Australia. That's why there's such advocation for the use of interpreters. Cochlear implants, as you mentioned, are not a cure for deaf people as well. They are a tool—and they're a useful tool and they can provide support in certain cases—but that is all they are. I hope that answers your question.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Thank you. That's very, very helpful and that's exactly what I was after because this is a key point, I think, isn't it? If we have such a low level of penetration of that language into the Deaf community and it is such a valuable tool—which is, I think, what the evidence is stating—then it becomes incumbent on institutions like this one to promote and foster it because then it becomes systematic in that community, so the community gets more access by virtue of Government leading the way. That's what we're saying and this is one of the key things, I think, coming through from the evidence. Is that correct?

JESSICA KIRKNESS: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Okay.

DARLENE THORNTON: Yes, definitely.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: In terms of cutting-edge jurisdictions, is there any one that we should be holding up is the ideal model to aim for that you're aware of?

JESSICA KIRKNESS: Do you mean within Australia, or globally?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Well, globally, actually—anywhere.

DARLENE THORNTON: New Zealand, America, Finland as well. Finland is very good.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: So the parliaments in those particular countries?

DARLENE THORNTON: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Okay. All right. Just one more question, and it's along the same lines, I guess: In terms of the discussion around the captioning, I'm assuming that part of the problem is that when people are trying to read the captions, they can't concentrate on the aesthetics—the face and the expressions—so I'm assuming this is one of the main reasons why you can't rely on captions alone. Would that be a fair statement?

DARLENE THORNTON: Yes. A lot of the time you need to really decode what the captions mean at the same time as trying to understand what the English is and then you miss out on the natural expressions that are happening on screen and in the background. So here we've got captioning and interpreters on this screen, that's fine. I can choose myself which one I look at. I prefer when there's an interpreter to have them near the speaker, that's why they're in the same frame of vision so you see the expression on the speaker's face at the same time as seeing the interpretation. When they're separated, it's difficult; you're having to look from side to side. It's much more natural and it's a much simpler mental process to ascertain what's being said and conveyed.

LORRAINE MULLEY: I'd like to add to that also. Captioning is used on TV. When you look at that, like you may see, for an example, the *Sunrise* TV morning show, and you see the banner at the bottom of the TV and it's got their logo there in the corner and there's a reel with words moving. That part of the TV screen blocks

some of the layer because I've got the banner at the bottom and the captioning on top so that takes up a lot of the screen of the people's faces and the people that are doing something on the TV. So it makes it harder to get all the information needed. Those banners at the bottom of the screens are very detrimental to be able to access all the information but they need that there for their marketing.

DARLENE THORNTON: I have one more thing I'd like to add. One problem with captioning—I'm trying to think how to answer this one. Similar to what Lorraine was saying, captions need to be positioned in a good space but also, we're not just talking about televisions, we're talking about devices that might be very small—mobile phones, tablets. Me personally, I prefer to receive an English transcript rather than to watch captions, just in terms of how much time it takes to try to work out what's being said on the captions. It is much easier to just skim and take in what's in a transcript afterwards. So, it really does depend. For many deaf people who live in New South Wales, taxpayers in this State, they would like to get involved in what's happening in this area and they just cannot do so because of the barriers to language.

LORRAINE MULLEY: Also, when we're talking about older Australians, there is often some visual degradation that happens over time. When captioning changes suddenly, it reels across the screen at speed and it can be hard to follow. Sometimes that can be disorientating. So I feel like we're not getting the essence of what's being said on the screens. We may only be getting half the story or misinterpretations of the story, so please remember older Australians and the issues they may have with eyesight.

DARLENE THORNTON: It's not only older people. Really, there is another group that we've not mentioned yet, and that's those who are deaf-blind. They miss out on so much. They can't see the captions. It really depends also on their frame of vision as well. They can't hear, so they rely on whatever frame of vision they have and that can vary.

LORRAINE MULLEY: And people who have blindness, we need to remember that they've got different vision capabilities. Some of them have tunnel vision, some of them have good peripheral vision or not-so-good peripheral vision. There are different sections of their vision field that they're able to access. When we're talking about the deaf-blind community it is important to remember those variations.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We are considering whether or not we have an interpreter in the room. If we're talking about our parliamentary proceedings, what is the difference between having somebody translating from a different part of the building and that being broadcast alongside proceedings in the Chamber versus having somebody in the Chamber? I think it's been clear from what you've been saying about the delays and not being able to see the speaker at the same time as the interpretation, but could you just bring that together for us and make it clear why it's required to be in the room with the speaker?

LORRAINE MULLEY: For me personally, when I have an interpreter in the room, I feel like I'm communicating directly to you. I can see you and I can see your language. There's not the barrier of technology; there's not the time lag. I feel like I am personally involved in what you are saying in this room and that makes me feel comfortable. It makes me feel like we're virtually having a one-on-one conversation.

DARLENE THORNTON: I'd like to answer just to clarify. The idea of having an interpreter on a screen—you can see the picture there now in front of you here today. You can see that box and you can see me signing and you can see the interpreter there speaking, but you can't see all of that easily on a small device and see the interpreter clearly. The camera is set up onto this screen today. I personally, and most deaf people I know of, would prefer to have the interpreter in the same space as the speaker so that they're the same size and able to be seen in the same place.

If you've got a smaller device, the information is inhibited; it's blocked in a way. It's much clearer. The clarity of the screen. Here, you can see two different boxes. One's clear and one's a little bit fuzzy because of different cameras, and the different lighting, and the bandwidth that's being used. There are so many factors that impact how clear the interpretation will look on the screen, but the main thing is having the people in the same space but also having the interpreter next to who is actually speaking—not disconnected. Whichever person here in the room would be speaking, it would be great if the interpreter sat right near them at the same time.

LORRAINE MULLEY: Also, those who are over 65 may not have access to technology devices. It depends on their financial means to purchase those devices. Again, that's another disadvantage. I would love deaf people to feel that they are welcome to come to this Parliament and to sit in the gallery and watch what the speakers are saying. Like Darlene says, my preference would be to be able to come in person and see an in-person interpreter there. I feel like that would make me feel truly involved.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Logistically for us then, although what we've set up here is a huge step forward from when we had no interpretation, having an interpreter slightly behind us as we're talking, whether it's in a committee meeting or in the Chamber, is logistically what would be best then is what I'm hearing. Is that correct?

DARLENE THORNTON: Yes, that's right.

LORRAINE MULLEY: Yes. I'm sure that you've read my submission I wrote. I think it would be valuable to employ a full-time interpreter to work for the Australian Government here and for the Australian Government to pay them a wage and hire them out perhaps to different people that need them who are doing TV media appearances and press conferences. I think that that would be wonderful to have a team onsite who can manage that request.

DARLENE THORNTON: I have a bit of a differing opinion. We need to understand the statistics here in New South Wales. Presently, we have about 40,000 deaf people. We have 40 registered professional-level certified interpreters who are able to manage the content that would be required to be interpreted in Parliament. So that means if you actually employed a group of interpreters, or even one interpreter, you're removing them from the community and their utilisation in health, medical and education settings—any areas where they're required to interpret. You're reducing the pool of interpreters that are available that people need access to for their everyday lives. Really the problem is that we don't have sufficient interpreters for our basic needs in the community and in education. It's one of the biggest problems we have.

Most deaf school students are in mainstream schools, no longer deaf schools. The interpreters that are being used in those settings are not highly qualified, if they're accredited at all. If the Government were to perhaps pull the interpreter out of the community, it would mean there would be access to seeing Parliament regularly, but it might endanger the safety of deaf people in the community in their everyday lives in not having the access to the interpreting that they need in those other settings. It can take up to 10 years to train to become an interpreter. The idea of having a pool of interpreters here in Parliament is a lovely idea, but there just aren't sufficient resources in terms of interpreters in the State as a whole for community use. It's like a catch 22 situation—we need them here; we need them there; we want them in both spaces.

LORRAINE MULLEY: I like Darlene's point there that she's raised about training. If more funds could be invested into training interpreters in New South Wales, that would help to remedy the situation. It's a given that training is needed for everyone's work, to be able to work appropriately. There is a delay, a lag, in that and in the pool of interpreters. So if funding could be provided to train the professional pool of interpreters then there will be more resources available.

JESSICA KIRKNESS: After the first wave of the pandemic, I think there was something like a 400 per cent increase in enrolments to Deaf Connect as a result of seeing Auslan on screen. So we also need to think about the symbolic value of having an Auslan representative here so that deaf people firstly feel welcome to be part of these proceedings, or to observe these proceedings, but also so that aspiring interpreters will actually see that there are places for them to be welcomed to, that there is a cultural need, a push and a respect for these positions. You're absolutely right, I take the point that there is a limited pool. But perhaps if there's increased government push and visibility, there might be more of an investment across the board in interpreting.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: That is a very important point, isn't it? It's like any market: If you create the demand and the support, the supply will come up. But your point, Darlene, is that it takes a long time to bring them up to speed, so we need to get going on this quickly.

LORRAINE MULLEY: Yes.

DARLENE THORNTON: Yes, that's right.

LORRAINE MULLEY: Also, Deaf Connect, the organisation that represents deaf people in Australia, has provided a support document or report on the economic benefit of Auslan interpretation. It would be good to have that here today to read what is involved and see the true economic benefit that there is to have deaf people being able to participate.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: I have a final question, because I know we are running out of time. I take your point, Darlene. I think that's incredibly important to remember. But one of the things that comes through in the submissions that we've now touched on is the leadership that the Government could set here. If we were to do something as groundbreaking as beginning to involve interpreters in our proceedings, would that, in your view, encourage and give the respect to the interpretation that we need in order to get more people to be interpreters?

DARLENE THORNTON: Again, it really depends. It's a horse before the cart situation—having the balance of interpreters that can be seen, and then also interpreters that are available to work, and also having hearing people see interpreters and aspire to become interpreters. There's also a balance of interpreters in the wider community, having them available so that we can be participants in the community in a wider sphere. We also need to have a look at the language policies in all the government jurisdictions, education and mental health for deaf people. That mental health area—my goodness, interpreting access is almost non-existent in most cases. We really need the support, and we need that via language policy across the board. What's the point of building up a team of interpreters who aren't really there to provide what's needed for the basic human rights of the community they're there to support?

The CHAIR: On that note, we might leave our questioning there. I thank you again for coming today. It has been wonderful to have you here. I think we've learned quite lot from listening to you this morning. We may have some further questions and we will put those to you, if you could respond to those within 21 days. It's not a strict time line, so if you have trouble with that, then please let us know and we can accommodate that. I think it has been a really productive discussion this morning. Thank you again for coming to us and being part of this historic Committee hearing.

The Hon. WES FANG: You may have to encourage Nathan to do some interpreter training.

The CHAIR: Indeed. Hopefully we'll see you again in the Parliament of New South Wales and under different circumstances with an Auslan interpreter. Wouldn't that be good? Thank you again for coming.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Ms KAHLI BENNETT, Auslan Interpreter, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn

Professor MIKE KENT, Head of Department, iSchool, Curtin University, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Professor KATIE ELLIS, Director, Centre for Culture and Technology, Curtin University, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Ms JEN BLYTH, CEO, Deaf Australia, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined through interpreter

Mr BRENT PHILLIPS, Chief Impact Officer, Deaf Connect, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined through interpreter

The CHAIR: I now welcome our next panel of witnesses.

KAHLI BENNETT: Before we proceed, is it possible for the Auslan interpreter in the room to be zoomed in on? It's actually quite hard to be seen. Also, Jen is just adding that it's blurry.

The CHAIR: We might just get our technical people to look at that for us as we proceed, and we'll just see how we're able to enhance that for you.

KAHLI BENNETT: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you and welcome. Wonderful to have you here with us. Would anyone like to start with a short statement? Please keep it short, as we have a range of questions to ask.

KATIE ELLIS: I do have a statement, but I'm happy to follow the people from Deaf Australia and Deaf Connect if they want to give their statements first.

JEN BLYTH: Sure. I do still have a question. I just want to make sure that we're able to be seen. I want to make sure that it's not the interpreters being shown or that they're seeing the interpretation of what we're being signed, just to make sure it's an authentic representation.

The Hon. WES FANG: You are able to be seen on the broadcast.

JEN BLYTH: We can see what's currently being broadcasted and we actually can't be seen at all.

The CHAIR: There is a way to change that—how you present on your device. I might just ask the secretariat to explain that.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Through you, Mr Chair: To enlarge the interpreter, if you scroll over, there are three dots. If you click "Move to stage", you can expand the size of the interpreter on the screen, I understand.

JEN BLYTH: But what I mean is—so, on the live stream, I'm looking at what can be seen through that broadcast and, currently, what we can see is the interpreter box and the gentleman.

The Hon. WES FANG: They're seeing you on the broadcast.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Again, through the Chair, our Webex is audio function, so once sound is made the camera will then go to the witness, I understand.

JEN BLYTH: Okay, well, I just would like to flag that as an issue before I begin with my statement. So this is—

COMMITTEE SECRETARIAT: So if you just want to—

JEN BLYTH: Sorry?

COMMITTEE SECRETARIAT: If you just want to make sound and then sign, that will then enlarge your picture to be on the live stream, and then when the interpreter starts to communicate your Auslan to English the interpreter then will go large on the live stream. You just need to make sound before signing.

JEN BLYTH: Well, that won't work because once I make a noise then the interpreter starts interpreting into English, it will revert back to seeing the interpreter, not us signing. So I just would like to flag that we are not being seen in a live stream and that isn't an authentic representation. Having to go through a third party to have that information interpreted into English back into Auslan is not a true representation of what I and Brent will be signing today.

The Hon. WES FANG: It is Wes Fang here. The way that the Webex system works is it's a voice-activated system or a sound-activated system, so when—

JEN BLYTH: I'm aware of that.

The Hon. WES FANG: If you make a noise now, you should then be transferred to the active speaking box. If you're signing, you should be moved to the broadcast position.

KATIE ELLIS: Could I interject here too? I don't think the point being made is about Webex. I think it's about the live broadcast. We can see you in a window within Webex, and within that window there is also the Auslan interpreter. But we can't see ourselves in that window.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Could I ask for clarification? Just to be specific, when we have Deaf Connect up on the screen, will the broadcast have the interpreter in the box as well on that, or is the interpreter in the box only when the committee room is live?

KAHLI BENNETT: Can you see what Jen is holding up currently on her laptop? This is what is currently being live streamed. Just to be clear, what Jen is asking for is for Jen and Brent to be seen, not the interpreter, Kahli, to be seen. Jen is just mentioning here that if we're using the Webex application it means that any Deaf signer will never be seen on live stream.

JEN BLYTH: That's okay. I don't want to continue discussing that. I just wanted to flag that as an issue, moving forward. But I'm happy to proceed with my statement, and I apologise for the impact that's had on the time.

The CHAIR: I understand that we are now trying to do what you have just put to us. We can proceed and see how that develops. It's an important point you've made. Perhaps we could just wait until we have a moment to try a few things. In the meantime, we might start with Mike and Katie while we try to enhance the system. Katie or Mike, if you have something to say, as a short statement, that would be great.

KATIE ELLIS: Sure. I think I'll go first, Mike. Thank you for the opportunity to come and speak with you today about this important issue. Professor Mike Kent and I are researchers from the Centre for Culture and Technology at Curtin University's iSchool in the faculty of humanities. In our work we examine questions around how cultural practices are changing in relation to digital technologies and digital media platforms. A key part of this work focuses on disability and accessibility in digital environments. About 10 years ago we collaborated on a book called *Disability and New Media*, where we argued that when it comes to digital technology there is no reason why environments shouldn't be accessible to people with all kinds of disability. Once digitised, information should be accessible in a diverse range of formats: from audio to braille to large print to sign language.

Our work proceeds from a social model of disability. This way of understanding disability sees disability as related to how we've created the world, including our digital environments. Disability is caused by social structures and is done to people who have impairments—for example, in the absence of accessibility features such as captions, audio description and sign language interpretation, audiovisual mediums are disabling to people who can't see or hear. So the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities extends this social model of disability and creates a framework for removing socially created barriers. It is our road map toward ensuring that people with disability are able to enjoy human rights. The CRPD creates a number of digital rights, particularly in relation to communication, information and freedom of expression. For example, article 21 requires that:

> States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that persons with disabilities can exercise the right to freedom of expression and opinion, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas on an equal basis with others and through all forms of communication of their choice, as defined in article 2 …

Article 2 defines "communication" as taking place across a diverse range of alternative modes, means and formats. Sign language is one such format and is also highlighted in article 21 as a step towards achieving the goals of the convention. In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations encouraged Australia to do more to promote and support the use of sign language and take steps to ensure the availability of qualified sign language interpreters. Throughout the pandemic we saw a definite promotion of Auslan interpreters at the daily coronavirus press conference briefings. This inclusion not only provided vital health communication to people who communicate via Auslan, but also it normalised the presence of an Auslan interpreter. Australians came to accept this interpreter as a valued and valuable part of government communications.

In closing, we argue that the presence of an Auslan interpreter should not only be reserved for emergency settings and that an interpreter should be included whenever citizens seek, receive and impart information. On-demand environments offer the flexibility to include Auslan interpreters as an option. The New South Wales Legislative Council has an opportunity now to show leadership on this issue and make steps towards achieving

[inaudible] the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by introducing Auslan interpretation to the broadcasting of proceedings.

MIKE KENT: Following up on what Katie has said, access to government is an important aspect of access to citizenship. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities we have an obligation to progressive realisation regarding accessibility. This means that we as a country, through the UN, have recognised that what is considered acceptable accessibility evolves and changes over time. We can see that just recently Australia has been found in breach of this convention regarding audio description, and that is currently under adjudication. It is our position that the New South Wales Parliament should be an exemplar and should lead a process of this evolving accessibility. Beyond our international treaty obligations, this creates more inclusive citizenship for people with disabilities in New South Wales and across Australia.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mike. Jen and Brent, I understand that we can now manually flip to you. Is that coming up for you?

JEN BLYTH: There perhaps is a bit of a delay.

The CHAIR: When we do this, could everybody please be quiet so we don't have the system trigger on someone saying something. We will see if we can manually fix that.

JEN BLYTH: I have a really short statement just talking about accessibility and equality for deaf people and hard-of-hearing people in Australia, the same as those people who are able to hear and also other people within Australia. It all connects to all things, from education to government. In New South Wales, the Disability Inclusion Act states that it's about accessibility and having those equal rights to anybody else, having the right to participate in social and economic benefits. Also inclusion is within that space. The UNCRPD has ratified that on a few different articles—article 9, 21 and 29. Specifically, that's about participating and making decisions in regards to your personal life, being able to make those decisions in regards to voting, receiving information, also including being included in those different areas.

That is all part of this. It means that a deaf person is able to access information in regards to all information that they require as part of their life and could become and choose to become a politician or any type of career that they might like to have in their life. It's about that accessibility. Our position is to make sure that information is there not just in regards to emergencies but in relation to anything that they might need to know that is relevant to them as a person, regardless of their demographics or their history or their religion. It's about making sure that they have the right to access all information within a time frame that's appropriate so that they can make an educated decision on anything that might affect them as well. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. I presume, Brent, that you're not making a statement?

BRENT PHILLIPS: I would like to make a short statement.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Brent. If we can then pass to you. Just give the system a moment to catch up.

BRENT PHILLIPS: Great, thank you. I'm from Deaf Connect. We're the largest service provider and social impact organisation in Australia. I'd like to acknowledge the New South Wales Parliament for actually opening this inquiry to ensure that the needs of the Deaf community in New South Wales and their ability to access information in understanding Government conversations and procedures is really important. So thank you. We provide Auslan interpreting services in New South Wales. We also provide Auslan training, as well as interpreting training, within New South Wales, as part of our RTO.

We have a really in-depth understanding in regards to current challenges and issues in the provision of Auslan interpreters and also about accessibility for deaf people in New South Wales and the training pathways available. Our strongest recommendation is, yes, to continue exploring the possibility of provision of interpreting within New South Wales Parliament's parliamentary events, debates, hearings and all of that information, at the same time considering strategically a broader approach in regards to the interpreting situation. There are a lot of people in New South Wales that are unable to access interpreters in hospital appointments, in their employment, in schools, and in police and justice systems.

We need to really consider the strategic approach there on what that impact has. So what we're recommending is that an Auslan workforce—a work task force—should be implemented, focusing on the language and communication needs of deaf people in New South Wales. Accessing Parliament is just one part of people's lives within New South Wales. There are also other people that will be talking about the UN in regards to the context of the CRPD. I definitely support those comments that have already been made, understanding that

people need to be aware of governmental information and to be able to make informed decisions as well so that they can access and be equal citizens. So I am very much looking forward to this conversation. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much, Brent. I might just start right there, given your expertise and the expertise of the panel in terms of Auslan interpreters. I understand there are only about 40 in New South Wales and it takes quite a long period for them to reach a highly qualified level—up to eight years. What is the unmet need in relation to Auslan interpreters in New South Wales? What sort of level of investment, do you think, is required in order to ensure that unmet need is met? What processes, besides the Auslan work task force, do you think need to be put in play in order to ensure that we can effectively move forward here in Parliament with Auslan interpreters in the future?

BRENT PHILLIPS: I think Darlene did talk about some of those statistics this morning. There are about 155 qualified interpreters in New South Wales. Some 107 are provisional certified interpreters, which means they aren't appropriately qualified to be able to interpret in complicated settings like this or mental health and so forth. There are 47 fully certified interpreters, which is quite a small pool of interpreters for the 4,000 or more signing Deaf people within the New South Wales community. I think really what is critical is looking at this from a long-term perspective—that this is not something that can be fixed overnight.

Really consider about developing that strategy in regard to increasing the level of interest in Auslan as well as encouraging people to learn Auslan but investing in the teaching and the workforce so that we have appropriately skilled people who are able to teach Auslan as well so that that can therefore create further pathways for people to become interpreters. There are a lot of gaps there as well as—I'm thinking about professional development and mentoring and also making sure that those people that do become interpreters do have a variety of different pathways that they can pursue, whether that be legal, government, politics, mental health and so forth. So it's really a collaborative effort. That can be led by the New South Wales Government working with the Deaf community.

JEN BLYTH: I fully support what Brent has said there. It's also important to recognise that unmet need for interpreters also covers a variety of areas. Those 47 interpreters have to meet the needs of interpreting in court, serious situations where a high-level interpreter is required. Given that that small pool of people that can interpret for those types of situations are also interpreting for that, that can have an impact—so just considering that as well.

BRENT PHILLIPS: If I could add, the service from a service provider perspective—about 80 per cent to 90 per cent of jobs are provided. So the more that we are aware of in regard to—sorry, so some people, we are aware, cannot access interpreters so they find other ways to do that, or the schedule is adjusted to try to allow for more interpreting to be provided. Sometimes there can be the occasion that an incorrectly skilled or incorrectly qualified person is provided. So there's no one easy solution to that question.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you to all of you for attending today and for your advocacy in this area. We've touched on the workforce issues a little bit, but could you perhaps elaborate on the impact beyond simply—I say "simply"; it's not simple—making Parliament's proceedings more accessible to the message that it sends when a government provides leadership on an issue like this to the Deaf community as a whole?

JEN BLYTH: If New South Wales Parliament had interpreters there, that really does demonstrate that deaf people are citizens and that they're being seen as people that are worthwhile to have information received through their language. It also has an impact on their ability to vote as well and that's a powerful statement. Having that access means that there's also more opportunity to have further conversations. Voting will be more appropriate because they'll have a more informed decision to be able to make appropriate decisions as well. So that would have quite a powerful impact.

We've seen overseas that there are numerous countries that have interpreters provided in Parliament. It's seen there that it meant that there are more Deaf politicians as well as more informed decisions and people are able to have those further debates. But thinking about people as well, those that are literate or have further English literacy skills do have the time to be able to research that information further and that's a very entitled cohort. It means that those people who are able to hear information through verbal means have further access to that information compared to deaf people. Really, having access to that information, you can't put a price on it.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: We know that this is an international human rights obligation—or at least I know that is the case—yet we have a number of jurisdictions around the world that don't provide this sort of access. Of those that do, which would you view as being the gold standard? Where should we be looking if we want to follow suit?

BRENT PHILLIPS: That's a great question. I think our colleagues in New Zealand have a very good approach to providing the Deaf community in New Zealand access to parliamentary proceedings and information. You can see that the Prime Minister always has an interpreter beside them, and parliamentary debates and discussions regularly have interpreters as well. Really, I would like to acknowledge New Zealand and the sign language that they have there, which was established as the New Zealand Sign Language Board so that those key strategic workforce and investment decisions in regards to sign language can be preserved and grow. I think there is a lot to learn from our neighbours in New Zealand.

JEN BLYTH: As well as Europe.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Sorry, before I hand over to my colleagues, did anybody else want to contribute to that question?

MIKE KENT: Yes, if that's okay. As a wealthy, developed country, we should really be looking to ourselves as leaders. Australia traditionally has been a bit of a laggard when it comes to different aspects of accessibility, particularly in relation to communications technology. But there is a changing media landscape and we really have the opportunity now to lead the world. Perhaps it should be more a question of what can we do best rather than what other people are doing that we can emulate.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: There has been mention in the submissions that during the pandemic, particularly with the press conferences of the former Premier, there was a conscious effort to provide Auslan interpreting and how that was a very positive thing in terms of access. I'm just interested to know your insights into the motivation behind that and why that would have dropped off afterwards. It's not necessarily a political criticism of the Government. I'm more interested to know whether that's emblematic of a passive view towards Auslan—in other words, "Let's do this because obviously during such an existential threat we need to provide all people with information, but when it dies off it's not really that important." Is that an example of the general government attitude towards the Deaf community?

JEN BLYTH: Yes. I do want to acknowledge that it did originate from the fires in 2019. The Deaf community, with Deaf Australia, really advocated for interpreters to be on those conferences because of not having access to information with regard to when they needed to evacuate and so forth. That then linked into COVID so it had that momentum there to make sure that interpreters would be provided for emergencies. You are right, though: It did become something that was only in regards to those emergencies. After that crisis there, it did mean that those interpreters did start to dwindle. But interpreters should not be the canaries for all hearing people to be able to see an interpreter and therefore it means that this information is serious. It should be that interpreters should just be provided. We do appreciate that there were interpreters throughout that emergency period, absolutely, but it should not be that it is the common practice to only provide them through those situations.

BRENT PHILLIPS: I could add, there were also the floods in Queensland and the bushfires as well. Throughout the Australian community, it is known to see an interpreter on TV when there is bad news coming or there's that emergency situation. But you don't see interpreters for good news—for funding allocations, for other fantastic things that are happening. It is important to us and would assist us in understanding about what is happening in our country—why the interest rates are going up or down. That way we are able to make informed decisions in regard to our lives. At the moment, it's only when things are bad that we see an interpreter. Having access provided for all situations, regardless of their nature—if it's boring or exciting or an emergency or not—having access. But there is a delay there in regard to having access to what our peers do have here in Australia.

JEN BLYTH: If I could just add to that, as well, it's not okay for the Government to make that decision with regard to which announcements should have interpreters or not. I would like to acknowledge that there are more interpreters being seen on occasion, but they are still very ad hoc and dependent on what are the whims of whoever it is that wants an interpreter for that information. The history there is often missing; it's just quite randomised. Being aware of who makes those decisions as far as who provides an interpreter or when one is provided—it's not okay. It needs to make sure that there is a standardisation in regard to when interpreters are provided and how. If that decision means that it's not all the time, that needs to be well considered.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Just following up from the earlier point about the gold-standard jurisdiction of New Zealand, where there seems to be a systematic approach to this, earlier evidence mentioned an issue with the supply side. In other words, we just don't have enough Auslan interpreters to meet the demand. Do we have any feeling or statistics on the amount of available Auslan or New Zealand Sign Language interpreters that came up to meet the demand as a result of New Zealand being more proactive? In other words, has that supply problem been fixed in New Zealand because of their more proactive approach?

BRENT PHILLIPS: From my understanding, it would be great to have somebody from New Zealand Parliament representing here today. We can't really speak for them. What we know is that the supply-demand issue is not unique to just Australia; it is a global challenge. I think there is more so an issue in Australia because the Government and State governments have made different types of commitments in regard to the provision of interpreters through NDIS or also through the Employment Assistance Fund. The need for interpreters has increased but the workforce hasn't been able to keep up with that demand, and so that gap has become more pronounced. Regardless of what's happening out there, we really do need to take a good look at our own pathways and our own workforce challenges, and how we might be able to mitigate or resolve some of those issues. Parliamentary interpreting is one of those more holistic approaches as part of the interpreting industry workforce issue.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Can you just elaborate on that point you made on what appears to be a disparity between the Federal Government emphasis on this and the resourcing vis-a-vis State jurisdictions? Is the implication that the Federal Government is doing a lot more in this space?

JEN BLYTH: Sorry, who was that question directed to?

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Anyone that would like to answer.

JEN BLYTH: Look, I wouldn't say either is doing better or worse compared to each other. They're just different. I wouldn't be able to give you an absolute, concrete answer to your question there. I don't think in Australia we do have that gold standard yet.

BRENT PHILLIPS: And if I could add there, just to clarify my point from before, it was more that there are different programs and services and access to funding that Auslan is included as part of, so it is a very ad hoc approach to interpreting provision rather than a joint strategy to ensure that all the different programs and services are able to meet the needs of the Deaf community. So that's where we're trying to come from—to make sure that the Government, in that commitment there to deliver, also invests in the workforce so that that can be achieved.

The Hon. WES FANG: Hello, and welcome. Thank you very much for appearing today and providing us some insights. The question I have is around the use of technology and the ability for technology to be employed to accurately convey to a deaf person or somebody who has hearing difficulties the emotion that Auslan, in an interpreter sense, can provide to a deaf person. With that I mean we're getting much better with technology that we can use—voice recognition during captioning and in certain instances we can use the ability to communicate with the broadcast system and the technology so that we have a written word—but it appears to me that Auslan provides an emotive experience that is lost through captioning. Is there on the horizon at all a technology that will be able to communicate in a similar way that Auslan does without being reliant on interpreters? Is there any technology or any works that are happening in order to provide algorithms or a computerised system that might be able to sign with emotive sense a human-like figure that could perhaps be used with voice recognition to be able to communicate across a digital medium? I hope that wasn't too complicated.

KATIE ELLIS: Maybe I can respond to this question. There's always technology being developed around these kinds of ideas and we have seen, as we mentioned, massive progress in terms of accuracy on captions. But I think in the sign language and in the Auslan space, the technology is just not there yet to achieve what you're talking about, because Auslan is a whole-of-body communication experience. It's not just about having avatars of hands. So, there is international work, and I could find something to answer that for you. I don't have any to mind. Maybe Mike can help me out here, but I think these technologies are a long way away. They're not something that you could achieve in the short to medium term for what we're talking about here today. This technology will come and it is always being worked on.

MIKE KENT: I would probably say I would be more optimistic, I think, and say that it's probably a medium-term potential. It just requires resources and a focus.

JEN BLYTH: If I can also add to that, I do appreciate your intentions behind asking that question, and I can see where you're coming from. You're thinking about possible solutions to a very humanistic issue that is highly germane, and I do appreciate that point of view there. But from a Deaf community perspective, it really is something, it is really something that is hearing-driven and researched by people who are hearing, it is that focus on avatars and AIs. Without having the Deaf community's involvement as part of that process or without having the Deaf community's intent as well as part of that process, it is quite an issue. Definitely worthwhile in regard to that research, there is no substitute in regard to having an avatar instead of an Auslan interpreter. Auslan is a real language. It has its own emotions, its intonation. All of that is part of that language. Within one sentence, how you could sign it would

be very different, dependent on the emotional intent behind there. So having an avatar to be able to interpret that information could change, depending on one tonal change of word and how it's used.

If I give you an example of the word "run", if someone runs fast you can sign that differently, or if someone is running excitedly you sign it differently, and you can see how they are actually signing the different intent behind how that person is running, which is very different. So thinking about how artificial intelligence or an avatar might be able to convey that is very difficult. Just to add to that as well, in regards to live captioning, I am aware that there are improvements there. But captioning, again, doesn't capture the nuances or the tones or the intended meaning there. If you think about someone who regularly relies on captions, you actually wouldn't recommend that as an appropriate substitute, regardless of how good it is. There are still delays, there are still technical issues, and there is still information that is missed.

The Hon. WES FANG: I was going to say it's surprising; I think maybe something was lost in translation, but in the fact that it was lost in translation, we have just got the perfect answer. What I was seeking was how reliant Auslan is on that personal emotive connection during the signing, because much of what we do in politics is often about emotion when we're talking. Where words on paper may convey a certain meaning, the way that we deliver it sometimes completely changes the words to mean and communicate something else. I imagine when Auslan interpreters are speaking, through their emotions and their facial expressions, as much as they use their hands, they are communicating something completely different. How much of that would be lost if we went to something like a caption system but an AI system that can sign the words but not convey the emotion?

BRENT PHILLIPS: If I could add to that as well, particularly in the context of Parliament, the conversations there, the word choices that are picked often have numerous different meanings. You might be saying one thing but mean something else, and you might be asking a question deliberately and there is a lot of not innuendo but a lot of subtext there that isn't just about what words are being used alone. That's quite a skill in regards to understanding that and understanding the motivation of each party, each MP, their life journey and also their portfolio, and everything that comes into play there and the ability there to interpret that information to ensure that that is conveyed. Having an avatar, you would lose all of that. Yes, it is quite nice to have that inspiration perhaps in 50 or 100 years, but it is not something that is coming any time soon in regards to that.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thank you.

JEN BLYTH: Sorry, if I could just add one further thing. I guess why, thinking about Avatars, having a replacement for people who are using English in Parliament is nothing that would ever be thought of either. So, why are we pushing for this for Auslan?

The CHAIR: That's a good segue into a question I would like to ask. It is going back to resourcing and the practical, perhaps, realities of not having enough fully certified interpreters to meet the need across the State. The perfect gold standard would be to have all proceedings in the New South Wales Parliament with an Auslan interpreter. Given workforce constraints, are there particular areas that you see as a priority that we could perhaps do a pilot program on to start the ball rolling so we can learn incrementally how to do this better, as we are learning today how to run these sorts of committee hearings better? Would it perhaps, in the experience overseas, be to focus on question time and particular large statements? Or, indeed, if we look at how it was used in emergency services announcements, perhaps a cascading level of engagement but obviously looking at the most important areas that would be of interest to people who are looking for that service? I would be interested in your views on that.

BRENT PHILLIPS: I would look at this as a five-year project or a five-year road map. You could start currently with having interpreters for all press conferences whether the news being given is good or bad. That could be done fairly quickly. At the same time, in parallel with that, having that workforce, and that focus there, in order to be able to design an Auslan workforce or Auslan strategy for New South Wales. That would, therefore, ensure that the New South Wales Deaf community have access to interpreters in all avenues of their life. In addition to that, developing a pilot, as you have mentioned, perhaps a small team of interpreters for Parliament so that in five years' time that can continually be building over that point to get to providing further access. And so that won't have as much impact on the Deaf community by taking away too many interpreters from other avenues of their life but also have that focus on a long-term phased approach and with deaf people being involved every step of the way of that.

JEN BLYTH: I will just add to that, I do agree. One area that interpreters need to be aware of is about those life skills and having the different pathways to interpreting, and if people only interpret in Parliament, those that want to become interpreters might not be interested in working in other avenues, but that's okay, because they are interested in working in that particular field of interpreters. So we are able to cover the provision of interpreting

and that won't have an impact on other aspects of interpreting provision for the community. So that is also something else to look at.

The CHAIR: Would Mike or Katie like to comment on that?

KATIE ELLIS: I would just really like to echo the point that has been made a few times already that we should have Auslan interpreters on news that is good or bad. I think if you want to do a pilot really include interpreting around non-emergency settings as well. I really like that idea. I think also part of my research is looking at representation as a way towards inclusion and I think by having more Auslan interpreting happening, such as in the context we are talking about, people become exposed to it and attracted to Auslan interpreting as a career choice, so it feeds into the supply issue there. I have a colleague in the US, Professor Beth Haller, who does work on this. She has found that following increased visibility of American Sign Language in popular culture it then became a language that high school students started learning and that feeds into that supply chain we have also spoke about here today.

The CHAIR: Mike?

MIKE KENT: I suppose it's also illustrative of where we are, that when you ask that question around parliamentary proceedings where you go straight to press conferences, which obviously are a different form of political communication, that seems the level of access that we can hope for at the moment. I think the point that everyone has made around constraints around the workforce are really important. Going back to my earlier statement about the parliament being an exemplar, trying to develop that workforce to then fill the role, I suppose, of making parliamentary procedure accessible, which obviously is going to require the development of the workforce further—the potential for Parliament to be the place that drives that is really important. Sorry, that doesn't answer your question. That's more a comment around your question.

The CHAIR: It's useful nonetheless.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Reflecting on that, I hear the point about the press conferences. When we were pushing the Government to include interpreters in every public announcement, the response we got was basically that people should tune in to see if there would be an interpreter rather than being able to expect that there would be an interpreter, which is clearly problematic. But, in a similar light, what we're doing at the moment is trying to identify the most important of the information to then have a translation for. Is that missing the point, do you think? Should we also be looking at providing interpretation of some of the more minor things in Parliament?

I'm thinking here—and bear with me—of, for example, in a Chamber proceeding in the Legislative Council. There will be somebody speaking but there will be a whole lot of heckling. There will be a whole lot of other things in the Chamber that are going on that actually inform what the speaker is saying at that time and what the mood and the vibe of the Chamber is at that time. If you were reading *Hansard*, you wouldn't necessarily pick up on that. Not everything is recorded. In the interim should we also be trying to somehow capture that more fully in the written record of proceedings? Is there something we can do in the interim to help bring that colour for people who can't hear it for themselves? Does anyone want to have a stab at that?

JEN BLYTH: That would be great for accessibility overall for everyone, but part of the challenges we have are that not all deaf people have great literacy skills. A high percentage of deaf Australians, of the signing community—their literacy levels are roughly the same as a grade 6 to grade 8 student. So thinking about someone with that level of literacy to be able to understand those proceedings in a written text, but also the amount of time it would take to read it as well. That's definitely a fantastic recommendation for accessibility for everyone to access that. But in regard to a solution for deaf people, I would say it's not really a recommendation.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: In terms of other jurisdictions that have made some progress on this, to what extent have they been required to change their practices for the interpretation to work? For example, I can imagine if you were giving a set speech like an adjournment speech, where people are encouraged not to interrupt, it seems it would be a much easier thing to have somebody interpreting live as opposed to question time, for instance, where you have multiple people yelling at once. Have other jurisdictions solved for the more chaotic procedures in parliament or have people had to moderate themselves in order for that interpretation to make more sense?

JEN BLYTH: I actually don't know the answer to that, but I'm happy to take that on notice.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: That would be incredibly useful. I don't think it would be a bad thing if we calmed our proceedings slightly to accommodate. I think it might be better for democracy, anyway. Thank you. It's one of the challenges we'll need to deal with.

The CHAIR: You certainly won't have an objection from the President of the Legislative Council for no yelling in the House. That brings us to a close. I thank you all for being with us today. It has been terrific to have the chance to have a discussion with you about, indeed, a most historic area for the Legislative Council and this Parliament. We are very keen to move down that pathway, and how we manage to bring that to reality is a challenge that we will continue to grapple with. Thank you for your contribution today.

Questions that have been taken on notice or other questions that Committee members might have, which we will send to you, if you could be so kind as to respond to those within 21 days. If you need more time, just let us know. It will be most appreciated. Again, thank you very much for being with us today, and we will have a short break from the proceedings for morning tea and reconvene with some of those panellists you might wish to also listen to about what's happening in other jurisdictions to pick up some of the experience in New Zealand and other Australian jurisdictions. We are looking forward to that as well. Thank you once more.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

(Short adjournment)

Ms NICOLE LAWDER, Member for Brindabella, Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Mr TOM DUNCAN, Clerk, Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

Mr DAVID MONK, Director, Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Mr DAVID WILSON, Clerk, New Zealand House of Representatives, before the Committee via videoconference, affirmed and examined

Mr ANDRES LOMP, Community Engagement Manager, Victorian Parliament, before the Committee via videoconference, sworn and examined

The CHAIR: Welcome, everybody. My name is Matthew Mason-Cox. I am the chairman of the Procedure Committee, President of the Legislative Council of New South Wales. We are glad to have you with us today and appreciate you spending the time with us on a very important area. I know some of you are a little bit more advanced than we, and we are certainly looking forward to learning from you today. It is a most historic inquiry and committee hearing here today in the New South Wales Parliament House. We have just heard from representatives of a range of groups across Australia about the use of Auslan. Indeed, some of your jurisdictions were invoked in those discussions, and we are very keen to understand what's happening in each of your jurisdictions and, indeed, what might be planned in the not-so-distant future. Perhaps we could start with a short statement from each of you as to where things are at, and we might take it from there. Perhaps we could start with you, Nicole.

NICOLE LAWDER: Thank you, Mr President. Thanks for inviting representatives of the ACT Legislative Assembly to appear before your Committee today. We've had about seven or so years of [inaudible] with Auslan interpreters. But what we currently have not, as I understand are what your Committee might be considering—I will briefly explain our journey and how we got to where we are at the moment. It largely came about because, prior to my election, I worked in the deafness sector for some time as CEO of Deafness Forum of Australia, where I had considerable engagement with the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, meetings with the Australian Human Rights Commissioner during discussions on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I was a member of the National Accessible Public Transport Advisory Committee, for example, and a member for about five years of the National People with Disability and Carer Council that advised Bill Shorten as Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities at that time. I was on, like I said, many other committees and forums right up until my election as a member of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory in 2013.

I went to the Canberra Institute of Technology two nights a week for a couple of years to learn Auslan. So I have a very basic ability to communicate with my deaf friends, but I'm nowhere near fluent and certainly not able to interpret. But it meant that when I was up there I saw the need for at least occasional Auslan interpreting in the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly. This began in October 2014 when I wanted an Auslan interpreter present for an adjournment speech on the National Week of Deaf People. Under our standing orders, specifically Standing Order 210, strangers were not allowed on the floor of the Parliament. However, special permission was granted in this instance. About a year later, I moved an amendment to our standing orders to allow an Auslan interpreter to be allowed onto the Chamber floor without seeking permission. The matter was referred to our Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure to consider that change to Standing Order 210. In 2015, in October, the change was debated in the Chamber, with an Auslan interpreter on the floor by leave, and the amendment to Standing Order 210 was approved.

Since then, an interpreter has been requested and used on the floor five times, usually for matters relating directly to deaf people—for example, a private member's motion on deaf mental health—and because of that change to the standing order, we don't have to seek leave for this. Now, I should also mention at this time that the Australian Capital Territory only has a very small number of qualified Auslan interpreters, and creating a pipeline of emerging interpreters is very challenging. The few that we do have are in high demand during emergencies. They are outstanding interpreters and advocates for and with the Deaf community.

While the change to our standing order—allowing an Auslan interpreter onto the floor—has been welcomed by members of the Canberra [audio malfunction] community, I feel it is only [audio malfunction] because, quite obviously, deaf people will have an interest in all matters affecting Australian Capital Territory residents, not just about deaf-specific issues. They are interested in the budget, rates, youth employment, new

suburb development, et cetera, et cetera. So whilst our journey has led us to this point of having an interpreter on the floor without seeking leave, I'm sure there is a way to go. So I'm very much looking [audio malfunction] submissions and recommendations of this committee. I am sure they'll be keenly watched by other parliaments too. Thank you to the interpreters for today. I'm sure the Clerk and Dr Monk and I are happy to take any questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Nicole. I should note that the Clerk of the Parliaments, David Blunt, has appeared in the audience. No doubt he will be listening very closely—and a friend of many of you, I'm sure, from many years ago, and that continues to this day. I might just ask you, Tom and David, if you wanted to add anything to what Nicole has just said?

TOM DUNCAN: Mr President and members of the Committee, I'm conscious of the time constraints of your Committee and I'm conscious that my colleagues, David and Andres, have got contributions. So I don't really have anything to add, except to congratulate Ms Lawder, because Ms Lawder was really the pioneer and the instigator of many of these changes. We've got to where we are now mainly because of Ms Lawder. But, as Ms Lawder said, I'm happy to answer questions after we've heard from our New Zealand and Victorian colleagues.

The CHAIR: David, nothing else from you?

DAVID MONK: No.

The CHAIR: If we could perhaps listen to David Wilson then.

DAVID WILSON: Good afternoon from New Zealand. New Zealand Sign Language is an official language in New Zealand. All members have the right to address the House in New Zealand Sign Language. Sign language interpretation is provided for question time during New Zealand Sign Language Week and every year during the budget statement and leaders' replies to budgets, as well as during debates of particular significance to the Deaf community or other significant debates. It's also provided on demand for select committees where people wish to give evidence in New Zealand Sign Language.

The standing orders don't make any particular provision for sign language interpretation. But, as Clerk, I've got responsibility for broadcasting, so decisions about providing sign language interpretation are at my discretion, though members can request that it be provided for particular items of business. Our sign language interpreters aren't participants in the proceedings of the House, so the rules state they shouldn't be brought into proceedings or involved in subsequent discussions of proceedings by members.

In 2018 I considered expanding our sign language interpretation coverage for House broadcasts to provide oral questions interpretation every sitting day. After a trial period we went to market to look for expressions of interest. The only organisation to express interest in providing the service withdrew from consideration though because there were not sufficient qualified interpreters available to provide the service and still meet the regular needs of the Deaf community. Consequently, that further rollout was suspended, and we've been unable to find any alternative ways of providing the service to date, though I remain open to doing that. I'm happy to answer any questions about the New Zealand experience of providing New Zealand Sign Language if that's of help to the Committee.

The CHAIR: Andres, would you like to comment on the Victorian experience?

ANDRES LOMP: Thanks, Mr President and Committee members, for this opportunity. Over the past five years we've been looking at ways in which to make parliamentary information more accessible to all Victorians. We've had a particular focus on members of the Deaf community. It really began after we had a group of deaf people participate in our Youth Parliament in 2017. We met with them afterwards to find out what their experience was like in terms of the services and arrangements. We found out some really interesting things: that a number of parliamentary terms aren't available in sign language. There aren't specific signs for parliamentary language. So they suggested to us a project to develop signs for parliamentary terms. We accepted their proposal. We started to work with this group of young Deaf community members on a range of projects that would provide better access for Deaf community members to parliamentary information and parliamentary channels.

One of the projects we adopted was the development of an Auslan Parliament bulletin, which was produced in conjunction with these young Deaf community members, where we would produce a video bulletin once a month for most of the year in sign language, providing information about Parliament's committees, Parliament's legislation and parliamentary events to the Deaf community in video format. That's been a really successful program for us. We've had lots of really good feedback from the Deaf community about providing parliamentary information in an accessible format.

We worked with the Deaf community on conducting some workshops with community members around the Parliament vocab project, and that's a continuing project for us. Last year we brought in just some initial parliamentary signs in Auslan. We'll be continuing that work over the next few years. As part of the project, we also introduced public tours specifically in Auslan for our building, where we invited Deaf community members to participate with an Auslan interpreter signing on those tours. Over the course of the year, we have a number of events. We do Facebook Live webinars and we included Auslan interpreters in all those webinars to ensure that all those webinars were accessible to the Deaf community. Again, we've had good feedback on that.

We have a program here at the Victorian Parliament called a youth associate program, where we employ young people for around 160 hours over a three-month period, where they work on a community engagement project with us to engage members of their community. For the first time last year we employed a deaf youth associate. She worked with us on a number of projects to make parliamentary information more accessible to the Deaf community.

During the National Week of Deaf People and the International Day of Sign Languages we ran some deaf awareness training for parliamentary staff to make them aware of Auslan and how to use it and the different parts of sign language. We also ran a Facebook Live event where we had a Deaf community member participate to sign about sign language. That also connected with First Nations languages. It was a really interesting Facebook Live event. It is available on our Facebook page if anyone wants to view it. We have also been working with our committees to try to get information about committees out to the Deaf community, including having Auslan interpreters for particular hearings.

In one case we had an inquiry about access to TAFE for people with a disability. After the report was produced we produced a video summary of that report in sign language to ensure the Deaf community could understand the recommendations and get the sense of what the report was about. Now we continue to have Auslan interpreters for all of our webinars. We are now looking forward to the opening of our Parliament after the upcoming State election and we are aiming to provide Auslan interpreters for the opening of parliamentary proceedings. That is a bit of a summary, Mr President, of some of the work that we have been doing with the Deaf community.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Andres. That's terrific. It gives us a good flavour not only of what is happening but also what is about to happen. Obviously we are on this path as well. One of the issues that most of you have touched on is the workforce issue. It is something that has come up every time we have this discussion, given that there are a limited number of fully qualified Auslan interpreters or, in the case of New Zealand, New Zealand interpreters and, indeed, how we manage that workforce issue to ensure we don't take away much-needed interpreters from other needs that the Deaf community might have and how we build a workforce, if you like—that pipeline, as you mentioned, Nicole—of interpreters over time and through Parliament as an exemplar.

So moving down that path to try to bring that pipeline to the fore and perhaps focus some resources on the development of that expertise in the wider community. I would be interested in your experience specifically about how you have addressed that issue and any initiatives you might be thinking about in that area as to improving your access to Auslan interpreters more generally. Who would like to go first? Nicole?

NICOLE LAWDER: I think this issue about the availability of interpreters has been developing over many years here in the ACT. Our Canberra Institute of Technology stopped offering the Auslan course, which was a very accessible, quite cheap course. Now that a private provider has come in to provide that course, it is quite expensive for the average person. Then, if you are very interested, you've got to go to Sydney or Melbourne to do an interpreting course. We don't have one here in the ACT because of the numbers. Sometimes when students go to Sydney for that interpreting course, of course, they don't come back. They stay where they have done their uni course and made some other connections. It is a complex issue but, on the other hand, I feel if there are more stable employment opportunities, more guaranteed income, then that would encourage more people to think about interpreting as a career and, indeed, move to come back to the ACT after they have completed an interpreting course.

The CHAIR: What about the New Zealand experience, David?

DAVID WILSON: It has been an issue for a number of years. I think we've been providing sign language interpretation of the kind I mentioned for about 10 years and we did run into that same workforce problem. One of the things we have been considering doing is having an in-house interpreting unit. We do at the moment for Māori language so that members can speak Māori in the House and it gets interpreted into English. We do have some experience of running an in-house interpretation service. That's also quite difficult for staff but hasn't been as difficult. It's fair to say at the moment that's an easier workforce to staff. What that really is

dependent on is some funding. We currently couldn't afford to operate something like that, but it does seem to me like it's probably the best way ahead and that it would grow the total number of sign language interpreters available without taking any away from the Deaf community for essential services. I suppose that's my idea, but it's not happening at the moment because of funding constraints.

The CHAIR: Thanks, David. Andres?

ANDRES LOMP: Thanks, President. I think I concur with the statement about providing employment or work for people that are in the interpreting space. When we started our Auslan bulletin, we used our broadcast team here in Parliament to work with the young Deaf community members. Eventually, because they were going into other employment, it wasn't possible for us to continue. But they recommended a very good company, Auslan Consultancy, here in Victoria. One of the reasons they did that was because they said it would also continue to support Auslan interpreters being employed because it gave them employment by us giving the video work to them. It becomes a steady—opportunities to give Auslan companies work, I think, is a really important part of encouraging that. I think also raising awareness of Auslan has been an important part of making people aware that they could have a career path in interpreting. Parliaments are supporting that by doing as much as we can to provide opportunities but also to raise it. That includes in our education programs.

One of the things that we heard from the young Deaf community members was that often, when they were going through school, they were often having to learn sign language and they might've been missing out on civic education because while the other members of the class might've been doing civics, they were learning sign language. They said some concentrated sort of effort at Parliament, reaching out to Deaf community schools or Deaf schools, to look at ways in which we can also encourage interaction with Parliament but also Parliament showing that we are connecting with the Deaf community, I think, helps to raise awareness of that and shows the employment possibilities. Again, some employment programs at Parliament, as the New Zealand Clerk mentioned, provides opportunities for Deaf community members to work at Parliament, whether it's through sign language or other. I think it's a really good way to encourage greater awareness and employment avenues.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Thank you to all of you for coming and giving us the benefit of your experience. In relation to the number of interpreters available, it does seem like we have a sort of chicken-and-egg problem here, where we don't have enough interpreters but then we don't have enough opportunities for people should they become interpreters. It would strike me that the one way to try and address that is to have a staged implementation approach where you say, "In the next three years, this is likely to be the types of circumstances in which we would be requiring interpretation and then after that we would be looking to ramp up", giving that expectation for people, that there is that opportunity for them once they get in. To test that hypothesis—perhaps I could start with you, David. When you first introduced interpretation—noting what you've said about the constraints on capacity going forward and not being able to expand it—did you at least see a positive impact of what you were doing on the numbers of people who wanted to be interpreters at that time, even if it wasn't enough? Is there any evidence you can show us that including it in Parliament helped to increase that pool of interpreters?

DAVID WILSON: From the New Zealand perspective, not really. I don't think I could make that connection because we use a company which provides interpreting services. Because we don't deal directly with the individual interpreters but with the company who provides us the interpreters, we don't know if it changed the level of interest in that sort of work. I think if we were to implement it, we would be looking at a full-time or permanent part-time so we could guarantee people would have work, as much work as they could do. It would probably be a matter of picking which proceeding each day is interpreted, because I understand it's a pretty physically intensive job that requires a lot of concentration as well. You'd need a reasonable pool of people if you were to cover all of the sittings of the House. The idea was to start with question time and then probably build it from there.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Andres, from a Victorian perspective, my understanding is that the Premier, for instance, has a standard practice of including interpretation in all press conferences. Have you seen any of what you've been doing as helping to increase that available pool of interpreters?

ANDRES LOMP: We haven't really had an issue with availability, I suppose, because one thing that we've really made sure of is to plan our events where we've needed interpreters quite a way ahead. Because we've got a few companies that we can use here in Victoria, we've been able to, through good planning, I suppose, and making sure of quite lot of advanced notice. Another strategy, I suppose, has been to look at where demand might be quite high during weekdays. We also hold events over weekends so that's Facebook Live events at weekends when maybe the demand from, say, other public service areas or government departments may not be as high.

Also what we've found has been helpful to them—and it really came up during the pandemic—was, rather than calling the interpreters on site, getting them to do interpreting from online. Our broadcast unit has been

able to work with them for events where the interpreters can actually be at a different location and so they don't have to spend much time travelling in, which can also be a cost here in Melbourne if you have to travel half an hour or an hour to get to the venue to do the interpreting. Doing it online has sort of meant that we can limit the time that we actually need the interpreters. As I said, because of the arrangements that we've put in place to plan well ahead, we haven't had such an issue with availability.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: Nicole, did you want to comment on that from an ACT perspective then?

NICOLE LAWDER: I know during emergencies, you know, bushfires et cetera, our interpreters here were really under the pump at every media conference et cetera—very exhausting for them because of the very small pool of interpreters. On an average parliamentary day you would need a minimum, I think, of three interpreters available for that day, possibly more, so it does become quite an expensive exercise. But I think that is where the wonder of technology that we have more at our disposal comes in. They don't necessarily have to be on site, for example, which for the ACT meant—to be on site sometimes we had to bring interpreters in from interstate. But now I think we have other options. It's pretty complicated. In some ways you might think, with the Federal Parliament here, we could share some resources but of course we often sit on the same day as the Federal Parliament, so that may not really help.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: David, again, from a New Zealand perspective, I think it was you that said that during that sign language week there is interpretation of question time. How does that work? Do you have multiple interpreters? How do you capture the entire proceedings? Or is your Parliament just more orderly than ours?

DAVID WILSON: No, I wouldn't say that! We do have several interpreters on site but one working at a time who signs the question and the answer and any interjections. Generally, presiding officers have required silence during the asking of a question and questions have to be very short. They're usually 15 or 20 seconds. They can't be a speech. So that can be interpreted and then followed by the answer, and they will just ignore any interjections. That seems to work out okay, but we do need to have multiple interpreters because they can't keep it up for very long before they need a break.

I'll just add to a point that was made about virtual interpreting as well. It is something we're doing with the Māori language interpretation and we brought that in during COVID because all of our interpreters live in other cities other than Wellington. It was difficult to get them here so that worked okay there. We've been thinking about that for sign language as well—a little bit more complex only because, obviously, people have to be able to see the sign language interpreter whereas they only have to be able to hear the Māori interpreter, because they're interpreting verbally. But it is something we're thinking about as well—whether that would be a time saver and perhaps make people more available because we would only need them for an hour or so.

Ms ABIGAIL BOYD: One final question before I hand back to my colleagues. The ACT submission talked about the challenge of ensuring that the camera angle captures both the speaker and the interpreter. Can you tell us a bit more about that challenge? Again, if there's one interpreter and you've got multiple people in the Chamber, how do you ensure that you could be having the interpreter as well as the person speaking in the shot?

NICOLE LAWDER: I'm happy to answer, Tom, unless you'd like to?

TOM DUNCAN: Over to you, Ms Lawder.

NICOLE LAWDER: The person requesting the interpreter lets the Office of Legislative Assembly—the Clerk's office—know and the person requesting the interpreter, for example myself, books the interpreter. Then Hansard has to be advised, and for the camera angle, all of those arrangements made so that they pan out slightly so that the speaker and the Auslan interpreter are visible on the camera. When it comes to another speaker who may be responding, we have just a pause while the interpreter walks over to the other speaker. We have a bit of a slowdown—not particularly slowed down but a slightly slowed-down experience. As we've already heard, interjections just pretty much get ignored. You can't interpret two people speaking at once. It's very difficult.

The CHAIR: I might pass to Mr Buttigieg.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Thank you, President. I suppose I'm interested in the different levels of provision of interpretation. I wasn't paying perhaps as much attention as I should have. None of the jurisdictions—ACT, Victoria or New Zealand—provide permanent interpretation for all parliamentary proceedings, is that correct?

TOM DUNCAN: Yes.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: Given that you're a lot more advanced than we are here, I wonder if you've come to the view, in the context of some of the evidence we've heard earlier, that it might be a good model

for parliaments—in other words, government—to lead the way, because in essence what's happening here is you've got a form of market failure. You've got a minority group who is being under-provisioned because no-one's prepared to step in and put the necessary investment into creating the supply and the infrastructure for these people to have equal access. I wonder if this full-time model of parliaments employing people to do this and creating, if you like, the cutting edge of what in our case Auslan would be, and then that providing a feed-in for the rest of the market—are there any plans from any of your jurisdictions to eventually transition to that more permanent state, I guess is my question?

The CHAIR: Why don't we start with the ACT?

NICOLE LAWDER: Tom, do you wish to respond?

TOM DUNCAN: I will, but feel free to cut in. I think from the ACT's perspective, we haven't considered that option yet but it's not to say that we wouldn't. Ms Lawder is a member of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure. That is comprised of the Speaker and the three Whips of the Assembly. It advises the Speaker on members' entitlements and facilities, and they in turn advise the Speaker on what to put in the budget submission. I guess it would be up to that committee to decide whether it was a priority to go down this path that you have mentioned. Then it would be a matter for budget Cabinet, I guess. At this stage, as you can see, we've pretty much dipped our toe in this. You can see from our submission that we haven't gone down as far as the New Zealand example. We've covered some debates, but as Ms Lawder indicated, the Deaf community want to know everything that goes on in the Assembly. Yes, ideally that would be a good position, but it would be the subject of a successful budget submission to Government. Ms Lawder?

NICOLE LAWDER: I was just going to add that we've recently begun, on the education and community inclusion committee, an inquiry into access to services and information in Auslan in the ACT. We haven't started public hearings yet, so I'm unable to talk too much more about it, but I imagine these types of issues may well be broached during the parliamentary inquiry as well.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Nicole. What about New Zealand, David?

DAVID WILSON: Yes, I think it's a similar situation. I would like to, and I think the only solution will be to have a unit of our own interpreters employed permanently. Whether that's full-time or not, we could work out with them, and possible other work opportunities for them. In order to have a team that covered all proceedings—because we sit from 2.00 p.m. to 10.00 p.m. on two days and 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. the other—it would need to be quite a large team. I suspect what we would start with, if we could get the people and get this going, would be covering some of the most significant proceedings each day, probably starting with question time and building up from there. But as with the ACT, there would need to be a successful budget bid. We can't afford to provide it at the moment.

The CHAIR: And lastly Victoria—Andres?

ANDRES LOMP: It is something that is under discussion by our Hansard unit. I'm not aware of exactly the discussions, but it is something that the Hansard team is discussing as to how that might be possible in the future. As I mentioned, we are planning to look at that for the opening of the Sixtieth Parliament, and so that would be an example of how it might work in the future. One thing I would say, though, is that it shouldn't be a constraint for parliaments to look at perhaps producing more curated content based on the proceedings, using either their broadcast units or others to produce more newsworthy information for the Deaf community—so to give summaries, if we can, of the full broadcast and, if we can't do the full proceedings of committees, the ability to actually give access to information in a curated way.

Most people probably wouldn't watch Parliament full-time anyway. A hearing might go for six hours, and people aren't going to sit, necessarily, through a whole hearing. But giving highlights of what was discussed and things like summaries of committee reports and interviews with chairs and deputies is something we've been working on here at the Victorian Parliament—just making more of that information accessible through Auslan interpretation or direct Auslan signing. Someone with Auslan skills to actually present those segments, at least, would go a much further way to getting the Deaf community involved.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I'm conscious of not taking Wes's time if he wants to ask a question.

The CHAIR: I think we can go over a little bit.

The Hon. MARK BUTTIGIEG: I have a quick follow-up that stems from evidence we've heard earlier and in some of the submissions regarding the United Nations articles. Have any of your jurisdictions done a gap

analysis on the level of compliance with those requirements to provide equality of access? If so, how big are the gaps?

NICOLE LAWDER: I guess I'll have a quick comment. I don't think we've formally done a gap analysis. But quite obviously you would start with article 9, which is about information and communication technologies, and article 29, which is about participation in political and public life. Once again, I'm pretty sure that many of these issues will arise during our currently underway committee inquiry about access to services and information here in the ACT.

DAVID WILSON: Just speaking from the New Zealand context, we haven't done a formal gap analysis either. There's been a select committee inquiry into accessibility in Parliament, which made a number of recommendations. It was some years ago now; that's been acted on. We have an accessibility reference group, as well, made up of staff from my office and members of the community with lived experiences of disabilities. They also provide some advice and input into what the priorities should be. That's a fairly new group that's just started working this year.

ANDRES LOMP: In Victoria, we've established a disability action and inclusion plan that's working through four key elements, which is the Parliament's built environment, the Parliament's communications, Parliament's receiving evidence at like hearings, seminars and other events, and Parliament's and parliamentary staff's knowledge of disability, and we have a working group that is going through an analysis of what needs to be done, the recommendations or the actions that need to be taken in our work with community groups to identify the gaps and address those as we go forward.

The CHAIR: Thanks. I will pass questioning now to the Hon. Wes Fang.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to all the witnesses for appearing today. Given the time, I will leave my concerns about Mr Lomp's comments that somebody might not want to work in Parliament for a whole day. Putting that aside, I want to ask in relation to where we have the opportunity to see *Hansard*, the record after it's recorded and perhaps correct issues that might be of a technical or recording nature, given that sometimes the substance of what we speak about can be very technical in nature or very personal in nature, that probably isn't available so much in relation to a live interpretation of what it is that we're saying, given the nature of Auslan. Have you turned your minds at all to the issue of how correcting the record might be considered in this instance, because it is a live translation? We find that sometimes it's hard enough to have people that understand the political context in the Hansard world, let alone the Auslan world where we have just heard there is a limited number of translators. So I imagine that sometimes misinterpretation could occur. Has there been any consideration around addressing that?

NICOLE LAWDER: I don't think it's been thought about specifically, certainly within our Parliament, but in my view the live Auslan interpreting gives deaf people the same opportunity to follow what's happening at the same time as a hearing person. There may be mistakes or things that get corrected later that a hearing person does not necessarily find out about either. But it's giving the deaf person the opportunity to follow at the exact same time. They don't have to go back and read a transcript later or look at a video later. They have the same rights, the same access and communication rights at the same time as anyone else. Correcting the record would have to be addressed in the exact same way as a written correction of the record. I think we certainly have a lot of faith in our really experienced and professional interpreters to do a fantastic job.

DAVID WILSON: We've given this some thought in New Zealand, but not specifically in relation to NZSL interpretation, the Maori language interpretation—which we've had since the 1860s, but as an online service obviously for a much shorter time than that. Speakers have ruled on that at the time and said that the interpretation at the time is not an exact translation and even said that it'll always be to a certain extent rough and ready and that the *Hansard* record might then vary from that. The purpose, as Ms Lawder just said, is to help members understand what's being said at the time or to help viewers understand what's being said at the time. So there may be some—you know, it may be somewhat at variance with *Hansard*. I think that's true of all of our videos of proceedings now anyway. Our *Hansard* is a reasonably light touch. We try and make it pretty much verbatim, just take out redundancies, but there'll always be some variation between the live video and the *Hansard*. So I don't think it's an insurmountable problem.

ANDRES LOMP: In Victoria, I suppose we've experienced both the difference between the video and the *Hansard*, particularly when we do a lot of video material; and it's not necessarily even video material, it's Auslan interpreted. When we're doing closed captioning, particularly for any news videos we do, we do notice the difference obviously between the spoken word on what's written in *Hansard*. If people ask us, we refer people on to the written *Hansard* to confirm. But it's something that we haven't really looked at in detail, mainly because, I

suppose, our parliamentary proceedings, the Chamber proceedings, aren't Auslan interpreted at the moment. Another small point I want to make, just on the accessibility of Auslan interpreters, what we have found sometimes is—there was one occasion when we couldn't get an Auslan interpreter for a webinar that we were running. What we did was, after the webinar, we sent the video recording of the webinar to the Auslan interpreters and they were able to overlay the Auslan interpretation.

So there are other ways to work around that, going back to an earlier question, where if you can't do everything live you can at least send the—even though it might be a week later. Channels like YouTube are great to use like that, because you can then make it available on YouTube and say to people, "Look, there is an Auslan-interpreted version of these proceedings, or this hearing, or this segment", and it can be done at a time when the Auslan interpreters are available.

The Hon. WES FANG: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I just wanted to ask a final question in relation to more of a procedural matter—so the Clerks will, no doubt, be getting excited—but perhaps a practical one too. Nicole, you mentioned in the Australian Capital Territory you amended Standing Order 210 to allow an Auslan interpreter on the floor of the House. I know the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory; you've got a bit more room than particularly the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly here. And I know the Victorian Parliament is similarly constrained as we are.

We've had some evidence this morning from some of the organisations saying it's better to have the Auslan interpreter in screen next to the speaker, but there are some practical difficulties with that in our Parliament. Obviously, we can work through these issues and understand how we might come to a resolution. But I wondered, in terms of having the Auslan interpreter in another room, so to speak, or in the Parliament or at a place where it can be streamed directly, what has been the feedback from the Deaf community about that being a pragmatic solution to that issue and satisfactory for their purposes? Perhaps we'll start with you, Nicole, and just work through those things again. Sorry, Tom?

TOM DUNCAN: I think it's less procedural in nature than I thought it was going to be, Mr President, so I might defer to Ms Lawder.

The CHAIR: I'm sorry about that, Tom.

TOM DUNCAN: That's fine.

NICOLE LAWDER: Obviously, yes, a bit more space in the Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly, especially at the moment when we're quite spread out with our COVID-safe arrangements. But I think it could easily be addressed, just as the way we are with this Committee hearing where, if you do have your interpreter in another room nearby, you have the little box on the screen which shows the interpreter at the same time. I think that works very well.

The CHAIR: David?

DAVID WILSON: That's the system that we use in New Zealand. The picture-in-picture sort of goes on the top right or top left, which means the interpreter always appears beside the member who is speaking. We have a room set up for that purpose. It works pretty well. I've not had any complaints from the Deaf community about it. We do get occasional complaints from other viewers who don't like it being on the screen, but we just ignore that. We've got no time for that.

The CHAIR: Fair enough. Andres?

ANDRES LOMP: One thing, Mr President, we've done is worked with our broadcast team and the Auslan interpreters to rather than just have a box in the window, we actually have a split screen approach, so the presenter appears in one screen and the Auslan interpreter on a different screen. That's been really helpful with things like seminars, because sometimes if people share their screen and put statistics or things like that in a PowerPoint, then you often find that the Auslan interpreter might block that PowerPoint. So by having a sort of a—working with the broadcast team, we've been able to look at the various scenarios of what people are presenting and making sure that both the Auslan interpreter is clear, but the people presenting and also the information they're presenting through PowerPoints is clear as well.

It took us a while to get to that. But it was just when we were watching back the videos we realised that some of the information had been covered over by the interpreter. So we've worked with them to set up a model on our screen. And what we're seeing, particularly with people with larger screens and wider screens, is that it

actually works really well. So that's one thing I'd suggest, that always work with the Auslan interpreters and the broadcast people to come up with a solution.

The CHAIR: Terrific. We might just leave it there. Can I thank you all for joining us today. It's been terrific to hear from you in person and understand some of the things you're doing in your Parliaments. A big shout-out from the Clerk of the Parliaments here, who is still here and has been enjoying the presentation. And, indeed, I just wanted to also thank our Auslan interpreters here, who have been magnificent this morning. Bettina, Kirri and Kate, thank you all for your work here this morning, and also our Hansard team, and our video team who are putting it all together, down in a remote location, so that everybody can see what's going on in real time.

It's been a very historic committee hearing and we are very pleased to have been a part of it. We're very much looking forward to putting together a report which will build on, I trust, what's happening in each of your jurisdictions. We are certainly looking very closely at what you're doing next. I think, together, we can all move down that pathway of making our Parliaments a much more accessible place for everybody in our community. Thank you, once again, and we may have some questions that we'll put to you. We will do that forthwith. If you're able to get back to us within 21 days or thereabouts, it would be most appreciated. I look forward to, no doubt, catching up with you in person in the not-too-distant future as well. Thanks again.

(The witnesses withdrew.)

The Committee adjourned at 12:37.