

No. 2, 2006

June 2006

Deaf community celebrates

The Deaf community has been in celebration mode since 6 April, when the New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Bill passed its third reading in Parliament by 119 votes to 2.

More than 150 members of the Deaf community were in Parliament to witness the third reading. When the Speaker announced the final vote and that the motion was passed, the crowd in the public galleries broke into an uproarious Deaf applause of waving hands, cries of delight and stamping feet. The MP's on the floor joined in the hand-waving. The atmosphere was emotional and jubilant and there were many happy tears.

Minister for Disability Issues the

Hon. Ruth Dyson said it was the first time she had shed tears in Parliament. She hosted a post-third reading party for the Deaf community in the Beehive with speeches and sign-singing. Members of the Deaf community went on to celebrate well into the night.

The live webcast of the third reading was watched by more than 300 people, including large groups in Auckland and Christchurch and people in Australia and the UK.

On 10 April the NZSL Bill received its royal assent and a few Deaf community leaders were in Government House to witness the Governor General's signing of this Bill.



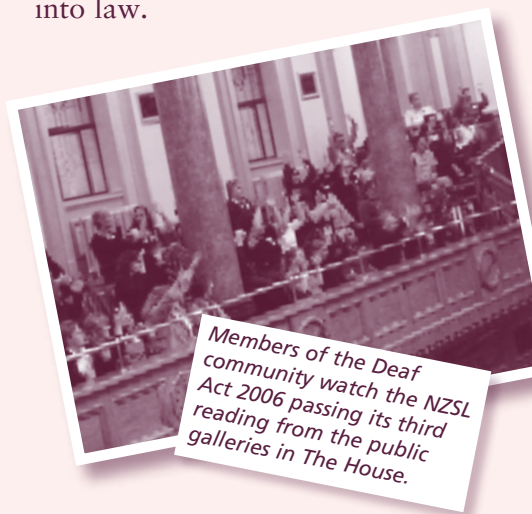
From left to right at the signing of the royal assent were: David McKee (Victoria University Deaf Studies Research Unit), Victoria Manning and Bob Hillier (Office for Disability Issues), Governor General Dame Silvia Cartwright, Lynette Pivac (NZSL Tutors' Association), Kim Robinson (Deaf Association representative), Shona McGhie (NZSL Tutors' Association) and Hon. Ruth Dyson.

NZSL planning and reporting

The Ministries of Social Development, Education, Health and Justice and public broadcasting agencies will now be required to include in their annual Disability Strategies their plans for implementing the NZSL Act 2006.

Progress in implementing the Act will be monitored by the Office for Disability Issues by way of the Minister's annual progress report on implementing the NZ Disability Strategy (section 10 of the NZSL Act 2006).

The NZSL Act also provides for a review of the overall operation of the Act three years after it comes into law.



Members of the Deaf community watch the NZSL Act 2006 passing its third reading from the public galleries in The House.

NZSL interpreters working group

Interpreter standards have already been agreed for legal proceedings in the Courts. A working group, chaired by the Office for Disability Issues, is looking at competency standards for interpreters working in other criminal justice settings such as police interviews.

The working group includes leaders from the Deaf community, NZSL interpreters and officials from the relevant government agencies.

UN Convention to protect rights of disabled people

The United Nations is currently developing a binding international convention to protect the rights of disabled people.

New Zealand is taking a lead role in the negotiation process and has won strong international praise for its disability policy.

New Zealand ambassador Don MacKay chairs the UN committee considering the convention.

The Office for Disability Issues is leading the New Zealand delegation, which includes the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and representatives from the disability sector.

If good progress is made on the convention when the UN committee next meets in August 2006, it may possibly conclude its work. If so, the convention could then be adopted at this year's session of the full General Assembly of the United Nations.

When the Convention is adopted, countries that ratify it will be expected to make changes to their



Members of the New Zealand delegation from left to right: Tessa Thompson, Chris Hansen, Andrew Begg, Alexandra Grace and Don Mackay. Absent Gary Williams (and Bob Hillier, who took the photo).

laws and systems if necessary, to ensure the rights of disabled people are recognised and supported, and are consistent with the rules. It is not anticipated that New Zealand will have to make any significant changes.

Office hosts visitors from Irish disability sector

Comparisons between Ireland and New Zealand were topics for discussion recently when representatives from Ireland's disability sector met with the Office for Disability Issues.

The Office hosted Angela Kerins – National Disability Authority (NDA) Board Chair, and Frank Flannery – Chair of Workability International

and Group Chief Executive of RehabGroup. He also chairs NDA's Mental Health Advisory Committee.

Ireland has several pieces of legislation that deal with education, employment for disabled people and a Disability Act 2005. It is NDA's role to develop codes of practice and monitor standards to enable the

legislation to be implemented. See more at www.nda.ie

Office Director Jan Scown says it was interesting to compare what Irish and New Zealand governments do and to learn about NDA.

“The NDA takes a more enforcement than advocacy role, and there is no equivalent organisation to it in New Zealand. Despite Ireland having legislation, guidelines and standards around specific disability areas, the issues and problems we discussed are held in common, especially in the education and employment areas.”

New Zealand Disability Survey

The New Zealand Disability Post-Census Survey is to be conducted by Statistics New Zealand in July 2006.

The Office for Disability Issues has provided input into the survey which will help advance objective 10 of the New Zealand Disability Strategy – to collect and use relevant information about disabled people and disabled issues.

The information gathered will contribute to policy work, service development and monitoring.

Victorian delegation

A delegation of researchers, advisors and MPs from Australia's Victoria State Parliament recently visited the Office for Disability Issues.

They were on a fact finding trip to investigate how to build and strengthen diverse communities by engagement, strengthening social capital, community enhancement technologies and barriers faced by groups within the community.

They were interested in knowing how the Office had promoted and made government information more accessible for disabled people and in ways to include disabled people in policy development.