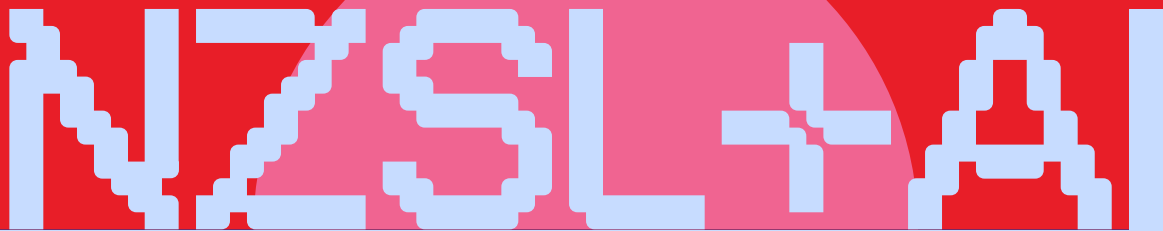


NZSL Board Position Statement



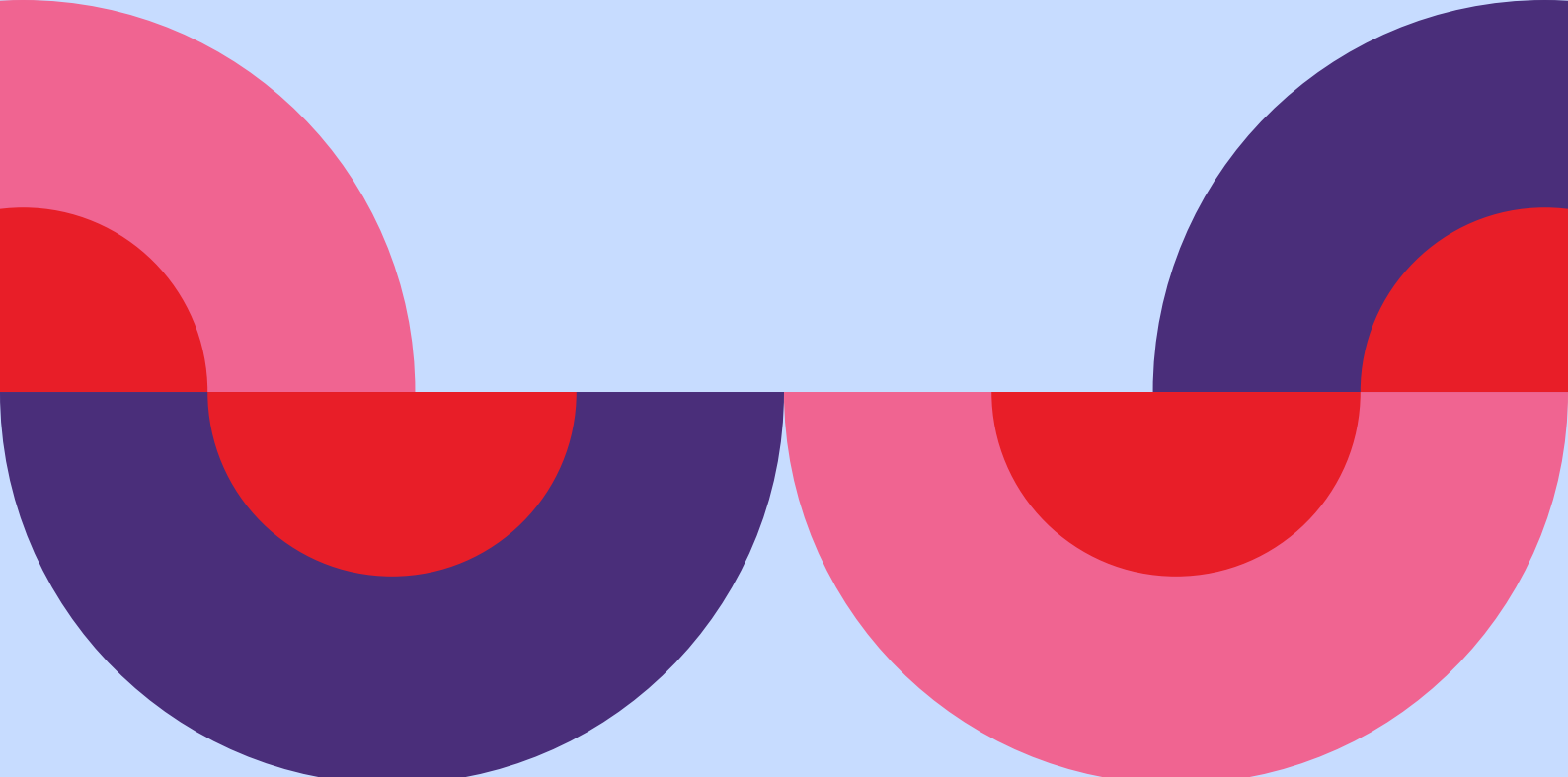
Purpose

The New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Board has developed this position statement to guide the use of artificial intelligence (AI) with NZSL. This includes creating NZSL translation, using NZSL data, and developing technologies that support NZSL.

Projects involving NZSL and AI are underway across the public and private sectors and in research institutions. Now is the time to shape this work to strengthen NZSL, support Deaf and Turi Māori leadership, and build trust in how AI is developed and used in Aotearoa New Zealand.

This position statement sits alongside wider rights and strategy settings including the:

- NZSL Strategy 2026–2036
- New Zealand Disability Strategy 2026–2030
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



This statement applies these settings to work involving NZSL and AI particularly where decisions affect access to information, language rights, cultural and linguistic identity, data governance, community participation and the future vitality of NZSL.

The Board's position is informed by insights from Te Mana o te Reo Rotarota NZSL and AI Forum, held in Wellington on 3 and 4 June 2026 and hosted by Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People.

The forum brought together Deaf community members, Turi Māori, the NZSL Board, Te Rōpū Kaitiaki (Māori advisory group to the NZSL Board), NZSL interpreters, public sector agencies, academics and technology providers. They met to discuss the opportunities, risks, and conditions for the appropriate use of AI with NZSL.

The Board does not endorse any AI tool, provider, dataset or approach through this position statement.

Who should use this statement?

Anyone making decisions about funding, governance, research, procurement, development or use of AI in NZSL creation or in relation to NZSL data or NZSL users should use this statement.

It applies to individuals, groups or organisations, based in Aotearoa New Zealand or overseas, using AI with NZSL, NZSL data or NZSL users. This statement supports decision-making but is not a substitute for legal, privacy, procurement, ethics, technical or other specialist advice.

Status of NZSL as a language

NZSL is an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand. As a living language held and used by the Deaf community and Turi Māori, NZSL has cultural, linguistic, community and whakapapa value.

Work involving NZSL and AI should recognise and respect NZSL as a language, not simply an accessibility format or technical input.

AI involving NZSL includes AI tools, datasets, services, products, and decisions about how NZSL data is collected, funded, tested, commissioned or procured and used.

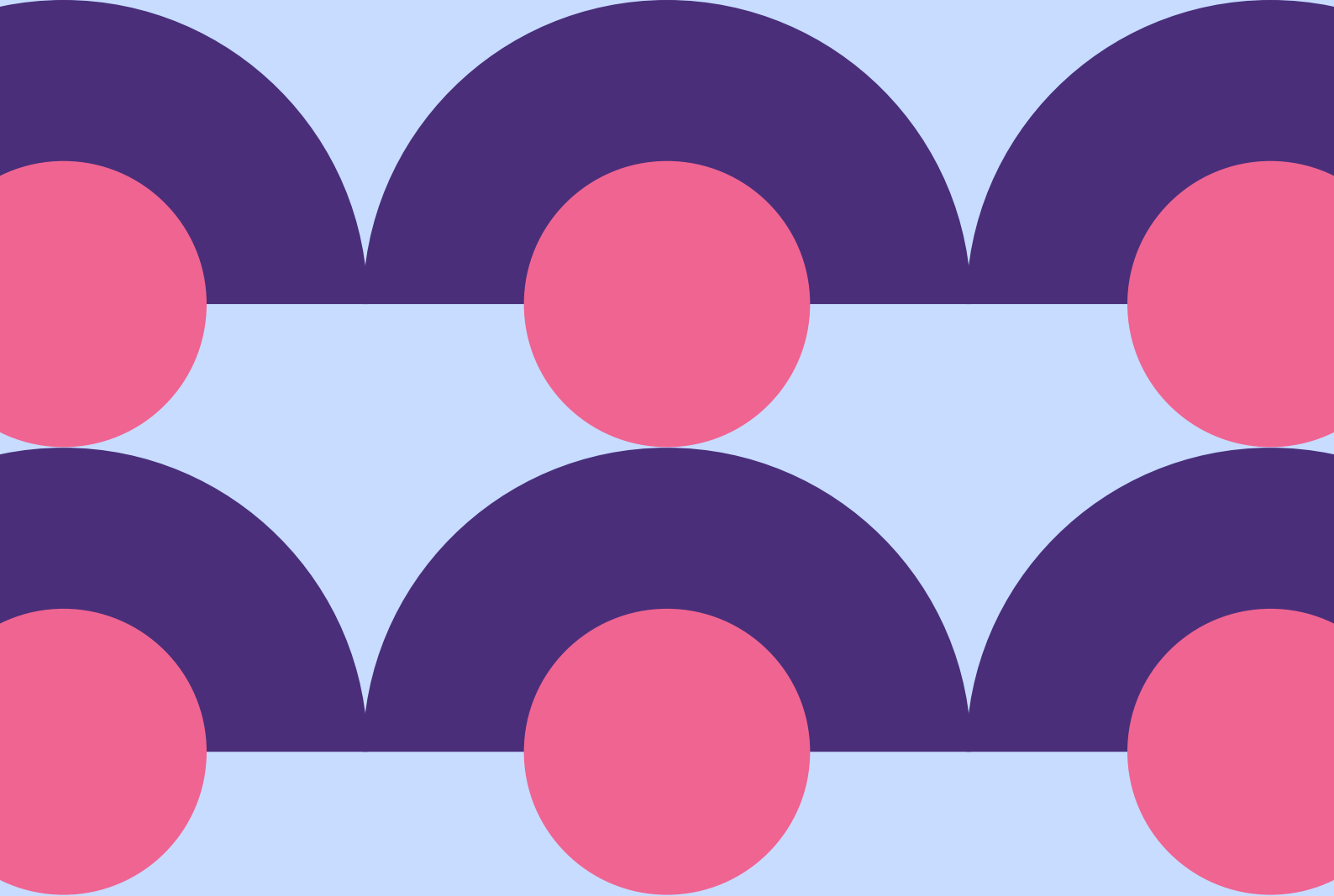
The Board recognises that AI has the potential to:

- improve access to information and services in NZSL
- increase the visibility of the NZSL
- support new ways for Deaf people to access public information and services.

To realise these opportunities AI should be developed with the Deaf community, not simply for the Deaf community. “Nothing about us without us” should guide decisions about how NZSL within AI is used, governed and developed. There should be Deaf and Turi Māori leadership, community governance and accountability, and clear community benefit.

Deaf community engagement should be broad, representative and throughout the life of a project. It should be with more than a small number of Deaf individuals or organisations. Engagement with Turi Māori must be representative and appropriate, not a conversation with one person.

Engagement is more than seeking information or one-off feedback but a real opportunity to shape the project or work.



Data sovereignty and community control

Data sovereignty is central to the Board's position. NZSL data is more than a technical input for AI systems. It is language, culture, community, physical, behavioural and, where relevant, Māori data.

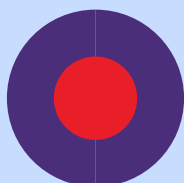
Because NZSL is a visual and physical language, NZSL data can include people's faces, bodies, movement, identity, language variation and cultural knowledge. NZSL data is more than a record of signs or words it is personal, cultural, physical and behavioural.

NZSL belongs to the Deaf community, including Turi Māori, who have collective responsibility for its stewardship and future vitality. Decisions about NZSL data should be made by, and with, the community it comes from. This includes decisions about collection, storage, access, labelling, use, sharing, commercialisation, and consent.

Benefits from work involving NZSL and AI should be shared fairly and support the long-term wellbeing and vitality of NZSL and the Deaf community.

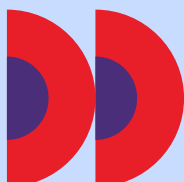
Guidelines for responsible use of AI with NZSL

The following expectations support responsible innovation, so AI strengthens NZSL, Deaf participation and community outcomes.



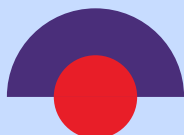
Put Deaf leadership and community governance at the centre

Work involving NZSL and AI should be led by, or governed in genuine partnership with the Deaf community, including Turi Māori and other NZSL users, from the beginning. Community involvement should be broad, representative, and ongoing throughout the life of the work.



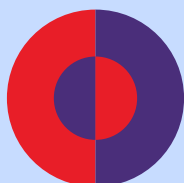
Turi Māori leadership

Turi Māori leadership should be embedded through appropriate and representative processes. This is important where work involves Māori concept signs, te reo Māori, mātauranga Māori, tikanga, whakapapa, marae contexts or content connected to Māori communities. Signs for Māori concepts must not be created, changed, standardised or automated without agreement.



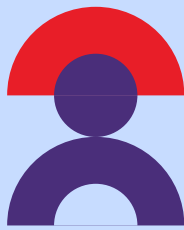
Protect NZSL as a living language

AI systems can influence how NZSL is learned, represented, standardised and used. Work involving NZSL should protect the language's integrity, cultural context, and community variation. It should be accurate NZSL which is informed by appropriate NZSL expertise and Deaf community knowledge.



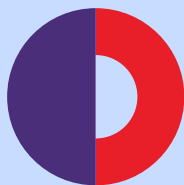
Use AI only where the context is appropriate

AI may be more appropriate for lower-risk information where content is factual, one-way, easy to check and not the only way to access or understand a service. Examples include general service instructions, website navigation, transport updates and some public information. Even in these contexts, accuracy, transparency, quality assurance and access to human support remain important.



Keep Deaf-led human expertise and relationships in place

AI should support, not replace, interpreters, translators, NZSL teachers and community-led NZSL services. Extra care is needed in high-stakes situations where accuracy, trust, safety, rights, cultural context or informed decision-making are critical. This includes, but is not limited to health, justice, education, emergency management and cultural settings such as marae and pōwhiri. In these contexts, appropriate human support should remain available as the primary option.



Make consent, data governance, quality, and accountability clear

Any use of NZSL data must have clear arrangements for consent, governance, access, storage, reuse, withdrawal, deletion, and benefit sharing.

Organisations should be able to explain how accuracy has been tested, what NZSL expertise was involved, what Deaf-led quality assurance has occurred, and who is accountable if an output is wrong, misleading, culturally inappropriate, or not understood.

NZSL expertise should be appropriate to the purpose and complexity of the work. It may include people with recognised expertise in NZSL linguistics, translation, interpreting, teaching, research, language documentation, language planning or language stewardship, alongside Deaf community knowledge and lived experience.



Avoid creating new inequities or weakening community-led NZSL work

AI should support access and choice, including for people with different access needs, limited access to technology, or limited digital skills.

Work involving NZSL and AI should reflect the diversity of the Deaf community, including Deaf children, Turi Māori, Pasifika Deaf people, older Deaf people, and rural communities. People should be able to understand, challenge, and opt out of AI systems where appropriate.

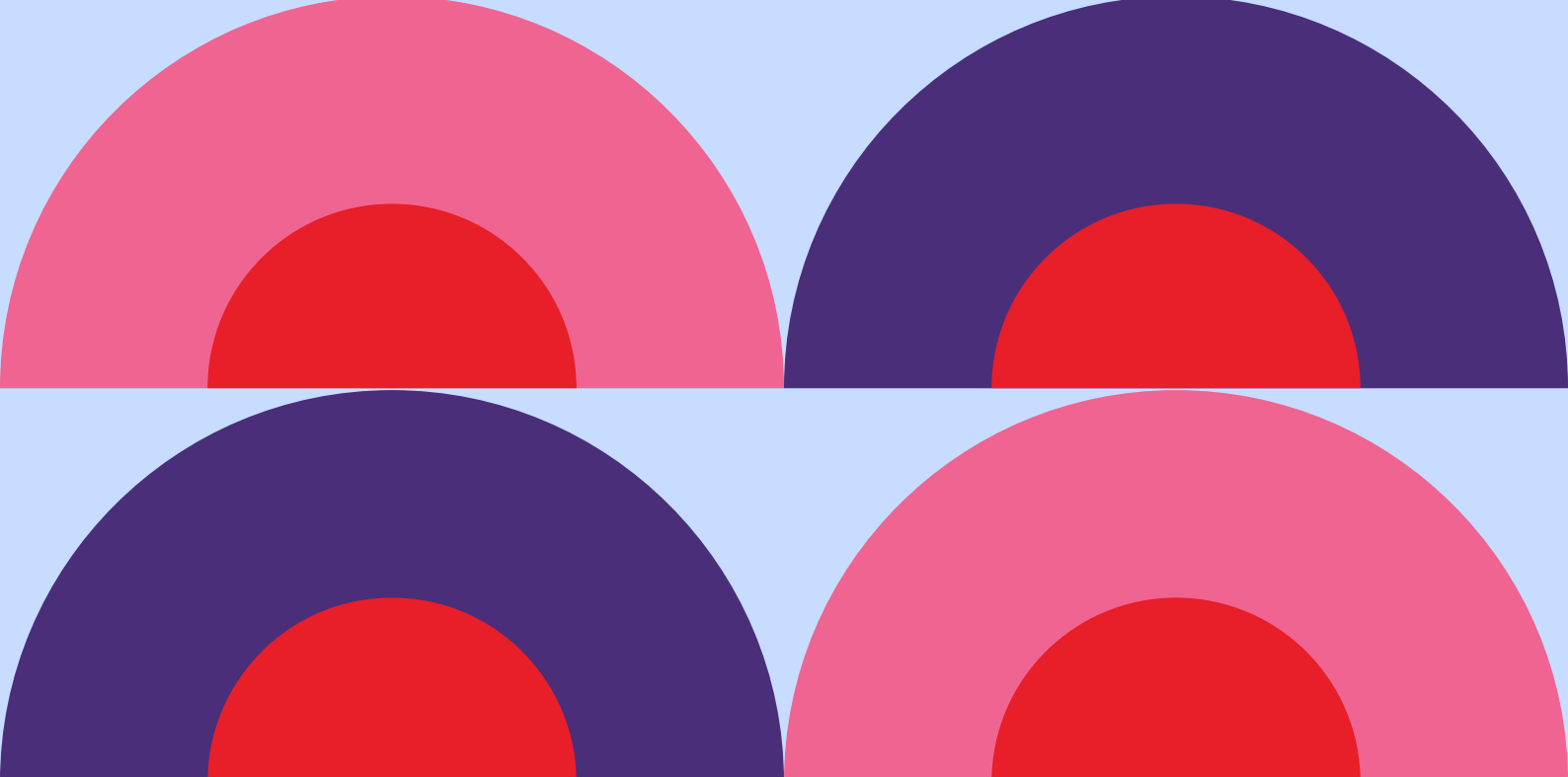
Expectations of the NZSL Board on use of AI

The Board has the following expectations of anyone using NZSL with AI.

- NZSL data should be held in Aotearoa New Zealand under governance arrangements agreed with the NZSL community and Turi Māori, where relevant. Any proposal to store or transfer NZSL data offshore should be subject to an agreed community governance process.
- Community governance should guide how NZSL data is accessed, used, shared, stored and managed. This means more than consultation with a small number of individuals or organisations. Significant decisions should be supported by representative, transparent and accountable processes to enable the Deaf community, including Turi Māori, to influence decisions, set conditions and raise concerns.
- AI tools and outputs should be checked to ensure they do not reinforce stereotypes, inaccurate representations, or deficit-based assumptions about Deaf people, Turi Māori or NZSL users.
- Procurement, funding, commissioning, and commercial arrangements should support community control of NZSL data and language use, strengthen community-led work, and avoid creating dependence on proprietary datasets, platforms, licences, or subscriptions.
- Any organisation collecting or using NZSL data should clearly explain when data is being collected and how it may be used, including whether it will be used to train, test, improve, or commercialise AI systems. This information should be provided plainly, upfront, and in NZSL.

- Any use of NZSL data to train, test, benchmark, improve or commercialise AI systems should be agreed through appropriate community governance processes, and with Turi Māori where relevant.
- Organisations should use strong privacy and security protections and ensure that legal, ethical, and technical safeguards sit alongside Deaf-led and Turi Māori governance. Data sovereignty includes the ability to set conditions on use, pause work, withdraw participation, remove data, and determine that some uses are not appropriate.
- Organisations should use appropriate NZSL expertise, Deaf-led quality assurance, and community governance throughout the work.
- Publicly available NZSL content should not be treated as freely available for AI use. Public visibility does not mean people have consented to their language, image, identity, movement or biometric data being used for AI training, research, testing or commercial purposes.

Some public NZSL content is also translated, scripted or produced for a specific purpose, and may not reflect natural NZSL use, community variation or appropriate data for AI development. Agreed governance and consent arrangements should apply before public NZSL content is copied, scraped (automatically collected from websites or online platforms) reused, labelled, assessed or commercialised.



Closing statement

The choices made now will influence how NZSL and AI develops in Aotearoa New Zealand for years to come. Developed responsibly and under appropriate governance, AI has the potential to improve access to information and services, increase the visibility of NZSL and support the language's ongoing growth and use.

The Board supports work that is led with the Deaf community, protects NZSL and NZSL data, and delivers clear benefits for Deaf people and future generations of NZSL users.