

Summary: NZSL Board Position Statement

NZSL + AI

The New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Board has published a position statement about artificial intelligence and NZSL.

AI is already being developed and used in ways that may affect NZSL. It is important this work strengthens the language and benefits Aotearoa New Zealand's Deaf community, now and in the future.

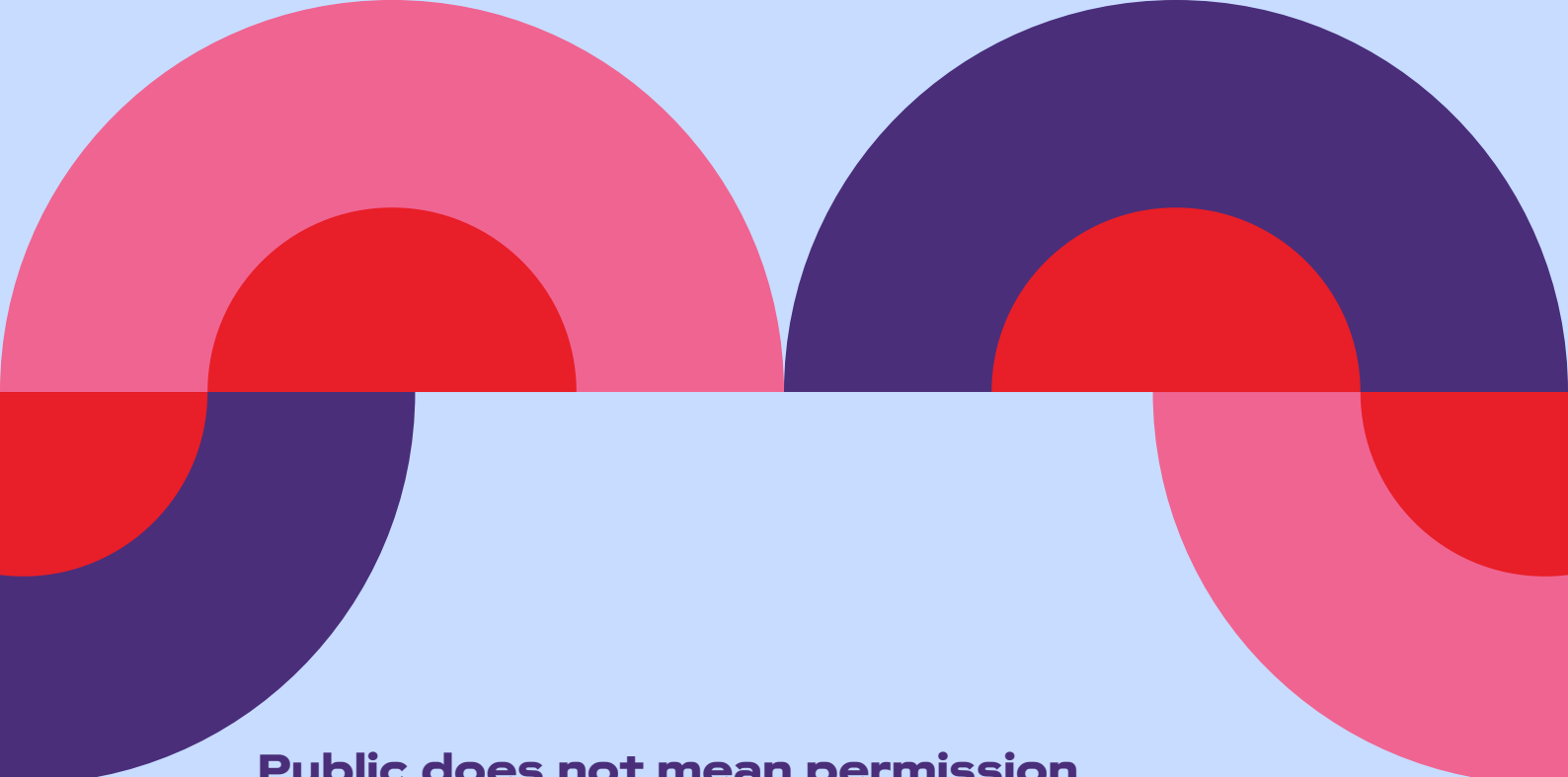
This summary gives the main points from the position statement developed with Deaf, Turi Māori and expert perspectives. It is for people working with AI, NZSL, NZSL data or NZSL users. The Board does not endorse any tool, provider, dataset or technology.

NZSL is our language

NZSL is an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is the living language of the Deaf community, including Turi Māori.

NZSL is not English on the hands. It is a full language with its own grammar, history and visual ways of sharing meaning. Our language, culture and community cannot be separated.

“Nothing about us without us” means more than asking Deaf people for feedback. Build with us, not for us.



Public does not mean permission

NZSL data can include people's language, bodies, movement, identity, cultural knowledge and language variation. People must clearly agree before their NZSL data is collected or used. They should know:

- why it is being collected
- who can use it
- how it will be stored and shared
- whether it can be reused or removed
- who may benefit.

Content being available online does not make it free to use for AI training, research, testing or commercial products. Being public is not the same as giving permission.

Decisions about collecting, storing, sharing or transferring NZSL data should be made with the Deaf community.

NZSL data should be held in Aotearoa New Zealand unless another approach is agreed with through Deaf community governance.

AI should support people and strengthen services

Used well, AI could improve access to information and services, support the autonomy and participation of Deaf people, and create new opportunities.

If it is not well designed and governed, AI could misrepresent NZSL, expose people's information, and affect Deaf people's access to important services including education, health and justice.

AI should support interpreters, translators, NZSL teachers and other Deaf-led and community-led services. It should not replace people or lower the quality of access. This is particularly important in situations which require accuracy, trust, safety and informed decision-making.

What we are asking you to do

- Check your project against the full position statement: Use the full statement before making decisions about funding, buying, developing, researching or using AI with NZSL.
- Ask whether AI is the right tool for the situation: Start with the need, not the technology. Think about the level of risk, what could happen if the AI gets it wrong, and whether people will still be able to get human support.
- Involve Deaf people and Turi Māori from the beginning: Bring in people with relevant expertise before key decisions are locked in and make sure they can influence the work.
- Ask hard questions about data: Check consent, storage, control, reuse and who benefits.
- Protect privacy and quality: Keep Deaf people and NZSL experts involved in designing, testing and checking the technology.
- Keep human support and choice available: AI can help make more information available. However, it should not replace people where human support is needed. People should still have a choice about how they access information and services.
- Share the position statement: Give it to your team, decision-makers, funders, suppliers and anyone else planning AI work involving NZSL.

Before a project moves ahead, those involved should be able to explain the governance, data control, how NZSL will be represented, the expected benefits, and who will be accountable if something goes wrong.

Responsible innovation must be led by the people and language it affects.

If you are planning work involving AI and NZSL, the NZSL Board and Whaikaha are happy to discuss the position statement with you and help you plan any support you may need.

Contact the NZSL Board and Whaikaha
nzsl@whaikaha.govt.nz

Find out more

NZSL Board Position Statement on NZSL and AI
www.NZSL.govt.nz/AI

NZSL Strategy 2026 – 2036
www.NZSL.govt.nz/26-36

Human Rights Commission Report on AI and Digital Technologies Commission calls for human rights-centred approach to AI and digital technologies
<https://shorturl.at/G1boG>