

Gunnedah Ambulance Station.

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GUNNEDAH AMBULANCE STATION

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Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [5.36 p.m.]: Today I ask all members of the House to consider the working environment in which they operate. It would be fair to say most of us work in offices that are comfortable and serve the purpose for which they were built. I ask honourable members to paint this mental picture so that they can draw a comparison with the workspace this Government is providing for a group of government employees in my electorate that is falling well short of being adequate, let alone functional and comfortable.

The working conditions that seven NSW Ambulance officers based in the town of Gunnedah endure were recently brought to my attention and now I bring them to the attention of the House. I was invited to tour the station in the town's main street by Gunnedah Mayor Gae Swain, and after viewing the standard of the facility I felt compelled to bring the issue forward for immediate attention by the Minister for Health. The station employs seven officers, who man the facility from 8.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m. These officers service not only the township of Gunnedah but also the outlying areas of Breeza, Mullaley, Tambar Springs, Lake Keepit and Kelvin.

The building itself was constructed in the 1950s and was originally intended to be a temporary facility. In fact, I have been given a copy of a design concept commissioned by the New South Wales Government in 1974 for a spacious and functional looking station entitled "Proposed new premises for the Gunnedah District Ambulance Service". The Askin Government in 1974 recognised the need for a new station and had a vision for the future. However, 30 years later the plans are still on the drawing board and the reality of 2004 is nothing like the vision drawn up in 1974.

The brick building has severely water-damaged eaves on both sides, leaving them open to the elements and to vermin such as mice and rats. Guttering on all sides of the building is leaking and most of the external windows on the main building no longer open. Summer temperatures in Gunnedah often reach the 40s, but the station manager's office does not have any cooling or heating facilities, despite winter temperatures of below zero being common. I was not surprised to learn the manager's office has not been used for a number of years. Staff have installed a gas stove and heating in the main part of the building after salvaging the units when the 100 year-old hospital in the nearby town of Boggabri was refurbished. The Ambulance Service also owns a brick house adjacent to the station that is currently privately rented. Based on external appearances, it seems as though nothing has been done recently by way of maintenance or refurbishment. Another major issue of concern for staff is security; they cannot actually lock the station building. There are no longer doors on the garages to secure the vehicles, as they were removed two years ago and have not been replaced. The most obvious example of how the facility is failing is the fact that officers are unable to park two brand new Mercedes Benz ambulance vehicles, valued at more than \$100,000 each, under cover. Unfortunately the officers are not able to properly protect these significant Government assets, as the clearance of the roof is too

low. The vehicles simply do not fit under the structure and are therefore left outside in the weather to suffer the elements.

Water from the wash bay goes straight into the town sewage, so officers have stopped using the bay due to water, oil and chemicals being washed off the vehicles. Officers have investigated an oil water retention system for the wash bay and obtained numerous quotes but no funding has been forthcoming. Last year staff raised concerns about security at the station, the wash bay, jammed windows, and carpet for the muster room, but they were told there was no money for improvements. The officers reported having to do battle with the department to get ceiling lights replaced when they began falling out of the roof. The lights were eventually replaced on occupational health and safety grounds. Since the wash bay has been out of operation the officers are taking the vehicles to the local car wash and paying out of their own petty cash. This unnecessarily costs about \$100 a month.

Mr Richard Torbay: It's a scandal.

Mr PETER DRAPER: As my colleague the honourable member for Northern Tablelands points out, it is a scandal. I urge the Government to urgently consider these issues and come to the conclusion, as I have, that the station must become a high priority for an injection of funding either for renovation to an acceptable standard or for construction of a completely new building, which I think would be the optimum. The officers want a building that is functional, sufficiently heated and cooled, and that has space for the main tools of the trade, the vehicles, an operational wash bay and security for peace of mind. These are basic requirements in any working environment and should not be beyond the reasonable expectations of the officers.

I am sure that the honourable member for Menai, who is at the table and who has a clear interest in ambulance services in New South Wales, will support my move to have the Minister recognise the adverse circumstances under which these hardworking officers are labouring. I call on the Minister to re-examine urgently the issue of Gunnedah ambulance station and come to the logical conclusion that we either fix it or move it and provide the people of Gunnedah with a facility that is deserving of the officers who work so hard for the community.

Speakers: [Draper, Mr Peter](#).

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