

Richard Torbay  
Member for Northern Tablelands

Peter Draper  
Member for Tamworth

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **Better options than full merger MPs tell Minister**

Service agreements and strategic partnerships were a better alternative than a full merger between the New England and Hunter Area Health Services, Independent MPs Peter Draper and Richard Torbay told Health Minister Morris Iemma at a meeting in Sydney today. The MPs asked the Minister to stall the process, which is now entering its final stages, until he had taken into consideration the submissions expressing strong opposition to the proposed changes from stakeholders in the north and north-west.

Mr Iemma has agreed to a further meeting this week to discuss the details of the submissions received so far.

“This is certainly an eleventh hour situation as the Minister has been convinced that the benefits of amalgamation would outweigh any disadvantages,” Mr Torbay said. “However, we have put to him that we can still proceed with the tertiary connection between NEAHS and the John Hunter and Mater Hospitals in Newcastle and other beneficial alliances without a merger.”

Mr Draper told the Minister that many smaller centres in the north and north-west would lose staff and local service operations if the merger went ahead. There were also concerns that jobs would be lost and that Tamworth would be bypassed in favour of hospitals in Newcastle, he said.

The MPs argued that there had been no detailed analysis of the impact of the merger on the communities involved and that there was little appreciation of the challenges and logistical difficulties of delivering health services across the vast distances.

They have also made a strong case for strengthening the powers of local Health Advisory Committees.

“The Minister believes that the carrot at the end of the stick is the tertiary connection and that has completely dominated the process so far,” Mr Draper said.

“However, while those operating in the field have no difficulty with fostering further cooperative arrangements with Newcastle, they see many problems and an inevitable loss of jobs and local services if the merger were to proceed.”

Mr Torbay said the New England Area Health Service had just emerged successfully from a restructure which had made it one of the most efficient and financially viable in the State.

“We have a model which has earned a reputation for high standards in NSW,” he said. “It is operating better than most of the other health services. To put everyone back to square with another restructure is wrong and we will be exploring alternatives with the Minister at our next meeting.”

### **Further information**

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