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MEDIA RELEASE

Independents demand safeguards for health services

Independent MPs Richard Torbay and Peter Draper rejected the proposed merger with Hunter and presented a list of demands to safeguard New England north west health services at a meeting with Health Minister Morris Iemma in Parliament today.

They presented hundreds of letters and petitions carrying thousands of signatures from community members with concerns about loss of jobs and reductions of services should the proposed amalgamation proceed.

They also conveyed the outrage and frustration over the lack of information and community consultation voiced at rallies across the New England north west today.

At the meeting Mr Iemma repeated his assurance that a final decision would be made at the beginning of July and invited the Independent MPs to list their regions' health priorities and concerns for his consideration.

The list includes

- new hospitals for Armidale, Glen Innes, Moree, Narrabri and Tenterfield and a total redevelopment of the Tamworth base hospital; a new Multi Purpose Service for Werris Creek and guaranteed completion dates for MPSs at Walcha, Guyra, Tingha, Warialda and Bingara.
- retain payroll activities and staff numbers at Inverell
- guaranteed funding to enable Kolora Low Care Hostel to become part of the Guyra MPS; funding for a new MPS at Manilla incorporating aged care beds at Manellae Lodge.
- upgrading of the University Department of Rural Health to a Clinical School in partnership with the University of New England and Newcastle University and upgrading the Cardiac Catheter Laboratory in Tamworth to clinical status.
- Retaining a local office structure with local management in Tamworth to oversee and coordinate the day to day running of the service; maintaining and extending local and visiting health services in small communities and increasing the range and number of visiting specialist medical and allied health clinicians across the region.
- increasing access to tertiary mental health acute and long-stay in-patient services and establishing a 12 hour 1800 telephone help line to improve access to services.

At the meeting the Minister said the NEAHS region lacked a tertiary referral hospital and faced a declining resource base. Unless there were changes it would face further problems to recruit and retain staff and would find it difficult to compete against larger and wealthier regions.

The MPs said strategic alliance and cooperative agreements should be further explored to deliver the outcomes without the need for a full merger.