

PETER DRAPER

INDEPENDENT
MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH

RICHARD TORBAY

INDEPENDENT
MEMBER FOR NORTHERN TABLELANDS

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

Lemma takes time to consider Independents' demands on health service merger

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The future of the New England Area Health Service may not be known for another month according to the NSW Health Minister Morris Lemma who responded to representations from Independent MP's Peter Draper and Richard Torbay in Parliament yesterday.

Mr Lemma told the House the members for Tamworth and the Northern Tablelands had relayed concerns of community members in their electorates in regard to the NEAHS' possible merger with the Hunter Area Health Service.

He said the concerns had been heard and considered and a decision on the matter was "approximately three to four weeks away".

In his speech to Parliament Mr Draper said he remained opposed to the proposal, but in order to secure the future of health outcomes in the region, the Minister had to agree to a list of guarantees he and Mr Torbay presented earlier this week.

Some of the key demands included:

- a complete redevelopment of Tamworth Base Hospital and new hospitals for Armidale, Glen Innes, Moree, Narrabri and Tenterfield;
- new Multi Purpose Services for Werris Creek and Manilla; and guaranteed MPS completion dates for Walcha, Guyra, Tingha, Warialda and Bingara.
- services in smaller communities to be maintained or increased; and
- the range and number of visiting medical and allied health clinicians from Newcastle to Tamworth and Armidale be increased.

"If the Minister agrees to these demands, the concerns expressed by communities in my electorate regarding the delivery of health services, equity of access to health services and the retention of health jobs will be alleviated," Mr Draper said.

Mr Torbay said the Government's strategies regarding restructures and amalgamations in country areas were "extremely flawed".

"Since the election in March last year our communities have faced major restructures in local government, education, health as well as the threat of losing the Armidale to Tamworth passenger rail link," Mr Torbay said.

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Mr Torbay said the Independents' argument was that effective health service delivery across the region could be achieved through strategic alliances and co-operative agreements between the two health services without the disruption of a full amalgamation.

Mr Torbay said the strategic alliance between Armidale Dumaresq, Walcha, Guyra and Uralla councils was a relevant precedent in the local government area.

"The honourable Member for Tamworth and I believe a similar alliance between the New England and the Hunter area health services could deliver the outcomes the Minister for Health is seeking," he said.

A Hansard copy of the speeches made in Parliament yesterday is attached.

End Release

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