

## 6.2.25 Gulgong MPS Helipad

REPORT BY GENERAL MANAGER TO 7 NOVEMBER 2012 COUNCIL MEETING

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A0100055, P1014062

### RECOMMENDATION

**That:**

- 1. the report by General Manager on the Gulgong MPS Helipad be received;**
- 2. the Council make strong representation to the Western Area Health Service and the Minister of Health at State Government that there is an absolute need for the development of a helipad at the Gulgong MPS facility.**

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### Detailed report

The Western Area Health Service has announced that a helipad will not be reinstated at the Gulgong MPS when it is complete. The successful tenderer for the building of the MPS was released publicly on Monday 29 October 2012. It did not include a helipad. It is interesting to note that as late as last week the Western Area Health Service issued us with amended plans for the Gulgong MPS development and it still included a helipad, even though they have publicly stated one won't be built.

This report is recommending that Council make strong representation to the Western Area Health Service to demand the reinstatement of the helipad at the Gulgong MPS, and further make representations to the Minister of Health in Sydney. Mayor Des Kennedy and myself have a meeting with the new CEO of the Western Area Health Service, Dr Pim Allen, on Thursday 15 November 2012. Councillor Paul Cavalier has requested that he accompany the Mayor and myself on that meeting, which we have accepted.

Please find set out below comments that Councillor Paul Cavalier has made to me in regard to the need for a helipad which should form the basis of our strong representation to both the Western Area Health Service and Minister on the need to retain a helipad at Gulgong.

- Helipads are a proven tool in providing critical medical treatment and retrieval, especially in rural areas. This is especially important in time critical cases (such as major trauma, head injuries, stroke, severe respiratory illness, cardiac arrest and specialised NETS retrievals for paediatrics). In fact, on the day that the closure of Gulgong Hospital was announced, a gentleman was air lifted after suffering a heart attack, and as a result of that, his life was saved.
- If Gulgong is to lose its helipad, it will stand as one of very few health facilities in the state without one. I don't believe this is fair on our region, nor do I believe it is a wise move by NSW Health for the sake of saving what will ultimately be only a few thousand dollars in what is a major, multi-million dollar project. Let's just remember that a helipad basically just consists of a slab of concrete, and some electrical work. I doubt very much that the ongoing maintenance of any such thing would be anything even worth noting.
- A helipad isn't just of benefit to those that live in Gulgong, it's of benefit to each and every person that either travels or resides in our region. I could just as easily have a car accident

in Mudgee and need medical retrieval as I could in Gulgong, and the same can be said of anyone else that lives or travels here.

- Under Ambulance Service of NSW protocol, all patients requiring further medical assessment are referred to the nearest hospital. In the event that they are suffering from severe trauma, they are referred to the nearest trauma centre. In our region, that is generally Dubbo Base Hospital. However, under that same policy, the trauma hospital must be within one hour, which, as you know, simply isn't possible. In the case of Ulan Surface Operations, Ulan Underground, Ulan West, Wilpinjong Coal and Moolarben Coal, this is Gulgong. In the event that it is unsuitable for a helicopter to land on site at the local mines, being retrieved from Gulgong is the next option, and it is therefore imperative, especially given the sheer number of employees working at these mines, that Gulgong MPS has a helipad installed and operational.
- I do not agree, nor do any other workers in local emergency services that the low statistics for helipad usage are correct, and I would strongly suggest and recommend that Councillors speak with local Ambulance Officers and health staff before drawing any conclusions on the alleged "low usage" of the helipad at Gulgong Hospital. It should be noted, that in addition to this, the old helipad at Gulgong Hospital has not been operational since the closure of Gulgong Hospital in 2010. In a growing region, where population is increasing, along with the number of people travelling on our roads, it would be unwise to rely on what can only be described as a flawed set of statistics, and a now outdated set of statistics that are in no way relevant to the needs of our region.
- The State Government claims, in addition to all of the above, that the installation of a helipad at Gulgong MPS would be unsuitable, given the distance the health staff would have to push a patient from the facility to the helipad. I strongly believe that this is a flawed argument, given that hospitals including Mudgee, already push patients much further than the proposed distance they would have to at Gulgong MPS.
- Landing a helicopter at an alternative location (ie. on the road, or on a sporting oval) is not ideal, nor is it suitable in most instances. If any helicopters were to utilise the road directly outside of the MPS in Gulgong, somebody has to close the road while this occurs, and the stabilisation of patients can, in a number of cases, take a number of hours. In addition to this, inclement weather can prevent the use of sporting fields for landings, meaning that it may not always be possible to land on anything other than a helipad, in the event that somebody quite genuinely needs retrieval by helicopter. This is already an impossibility anyway, given the close proximity of high voltage power lines to the Gulgong MPS.
- In addition to my above point, MRU (the Medical Retrieval Unit), which is the section of NSW Ambulance Service that control aeromedical retrievals do not like landing on ovals, and would much prefer to land on a helipad in all instances. Not only does it add risk to their operations, it also means they cannot land in the immediate vicinity of their patient, and often require transport between the patient and their helicopter by Ambulance. In regional areas, this is a major concern, given the shortage of available staff, and the recurring instances of staff being out of the area on other jobs. This, in turn, causes unnecessary use of Ambulance resources, in addition to delayed treatment of patients, simply as a result of having no helipad available.
- Gulgong MPS will not carry blood, however helicopters have the capacity to do this. In the event of blood being required, due to the nature of the retrieval, a helicopter is able to bring life saving blood with them for the treatment of the patient. The value of blood transfusions in cases of major trauma or bleeding are quite simply, and in black and white, the difference between life and death.
- The construction of a helipad for Gulgong MPS was exhibited on the plans for the proposed MPS and approved through community consultation and by the residents of Gulgong. The

development plan for this facility was also approved by Council, which included a helipad. Therefore, if the helipad ultimately gets axed, this is just yet another broken promise from the State Government to our town, who are already quite upset with the events of the past two years.

- Health is an absolutely essential and vital part of our everyday lives. I know this not only as a constant user of health facilities, but due to my involvement with emergency services over the past eight years. Any attempt to cut funding from our health services, whether it's in Mudgee, Rylstone or Gulgong should be actively refuted by Council in order to protect what we've got, and what we simply won't have under what is undeniably a collapsing health system. I'd sincerely appreciate any support that you would give to me, and the community of Gulgong in recognising and tabling this issue at the next Council meeting.

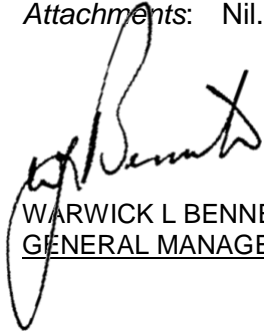
### Financial implications

Not applicable at this stage.

### Strategic or policy implications

Not applicable at this stage.

*Attachments:* Nil.



WARWICK L BENNETT  
GENERAL MANAGER