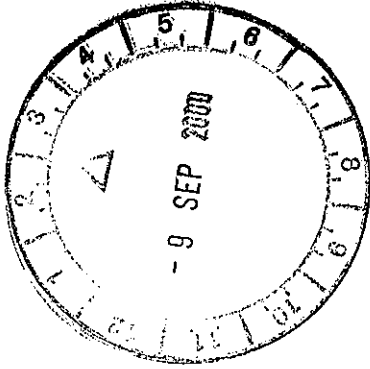


PUBLIC



Gary Norden
Busselton Hospital Community Action Group

2 September 2009

Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs

Re: Petition No 39 – Busselton Hospital – Immediate Construction of a new Hospital

Dear Committee Members,

I write this submission as a representative of the Busselton Hospital Community Action Group (the Group) in support of the above Petition to respectfully request that the Committee inquire further into the delay in the construction of the new Busselton Hospital.

For quite some years, Busselton has been among the fastest growing Shires in Western Australia. The population of the Local Government Area of Busselton will likely be greater than that for the LGA of Bunbury by the next Census and will most likely catch up with LGA of Albany within a few years too. In addition the wider Capes region including Margaret River has also seen strong population growth.

The current hospital was completed in 1978 to cater for a population of around 8,000; currently the Shire of Busselton has over 26,000 residents, increasing at around 1,500 per year. The Capes region has approximately 40,000 residents now. It should also be noted that as a popular tourism centre, the population of the region roughly trebles during summer holidays and other events such as Ironman.

It is not surprising therefore that the current hospital infrastructure has been regarded as insufficient for some time. In 2005, the current Member for Vasse, the Hon Troy Buswell MLA stated that the current Hospital is, "...well past its use by date" and that "...report after report to suggest it be upgraded urgently".

It was not before time therefore, that the previous Government set aside funds for the construction of a new Hospital to service the wider Capes Region. Construction was due to begin this year. However, there was concern among some sections of the community about the location of the Hospital which resulted in the current Government promising to build the new Hospital on the current site at Mill Road, Busselton (2km west of the town centre) rather than at Vasse (9km west-south-west of the town centre) as had been planned.

The Minister for Health, the Hon Kim Hames MLA and the local Member Mr Buswell reassured the community that there would be no delay to the new Hospital and that it would be a new hospital. Mr Buswell told a local newspaper that the hospital was "...top of his list of priorities", reiterating how urgent the new hospital is.

However, in the May Budget our community was told that the construction would be delayed, primarily due to financial reasons. Almost half of the funding is not included in the Forward Estimates, meaning that these funds will not be coming until after 2014. It should also be noted that both Minister Buswell and Minister Hames have suggested there might also be other reasons such as environmental behind the delay.

Our Group was created in response to community anger at this decision and we quickly gathered a ground swell of support. We requested information from Ministers under the Freedom of Information process and the documents we received showed us many areas for concern. Among these included; a blow out to the cost of the Hospital; the fact that it will likely not be a new Hospital but a great deal of refurbishment; significant environmental issues that could jeopardise the whole project including site contamination and a large Western Ringtail Possum population on the Mill Road site. There is even a briefing note to the Minister (that was exempted from our enquiry) titled 'Contentious Issues'. It should be easy to understand why we are concerned that there is a great deal more to this matter than simply a lack of funds.

Currently over 1,000 Busselton patients a year are transported by ambulance to Bunbury at a cost of roughly \$750,000 because Busselton does not offer a full range of services. For a town the size of Busselton this is unacceptable and causes significant distress to patients and their families. Any delay and possible downgrading of facilities and services will thus have a significant impact on Busselton and the Capes region as well as Bunbury Regional Hospital.

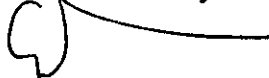
A hospital is arguably the most important service in any community and it is vital that nothing is compromised during its planning and construction. We have great concerns that a number of compromises are currently being considered and that the provision of healthcare to our community will suffer because of them. Any compromises will be suffered by our community for years to come.

On behalf of our Group and community, I respectfully ask the Committee to launch a thorough inquiry into the delay in the construction of the new Hospital in order to ascertain; the effects of this delay on our community; the effects that the delay will have on funding for the project given the need for further cuts to the Health budget in future years; whether there are other reasons for the postponement and whether these issues may have impacts on the range of services that will be provided and the potential for future growth to the Hospital.

I would like to state that I have not taken this complaint to the Ombudsman.

We also have further information on our website www.whereisourhospital.com and would be happy to provide copies of our FOI documents or media articles if required.

Yours Faithfully



Gary Norden