



**MERSEY COMMUNITY HOSPITAL
SUPPORT GROUP**

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The Minister for Health,
The Hon. Michael Ferguson MP,
1st Floor, Public Building,
53 St. John Street,
Launceston, TAS 7250.

19th January 2015

Dear Minister Ferguson,

THE GREEN PAPER

As you may be aware, our committee has been lobbying State and Federal Governments for over a decade in regards to the Mersey Community Hospital (Mersey), its services and staff, conveying our stance of; -

"Return services to the Mersey, then let's sit down at a table and discuss the health needs for our region for the next 10, 25 and 50 years and if that means building a new hospital on a greenfield site in Ulverstone, then let's start planning."

We still feel this is relevant and even moreso today, especially when you stated 26/7/14 that "the missing ingredient in the reform agenda over the past decade is political will, the leadership and the staying power to ensure change is delivered."

The Mersey has a catchment area of 65,000 and boasts one of the fastest growing areas in the state, also the largest population catchment in the region. It has continuously been the most accredited hospital in Tasmania, even in comparison with the Royal Hobart, the state's leading tertiary facility.

Over the past three decades or more there has been equipment relocated, specialist positions not re-appointed, services reduced to an unsafe level and transferred. This occurring in an environment of high demand and a willingness by the medical fraternity to support increased service provision. All occurred against the will of the people, "real" statistics and resulting in having to rely on the highly expensive contracting of locums.

The Heads of Agreement contract for the Mersey is set to be negotiated with the State Government in the upcoming months and

there are strong community concerns in regards to its current operations: -

- The Federal Audit to assess the administration of the Mersey highlighted: -
 - Differing objectives between the State and Federal Governments, where Federal relates to the provision of a set of core clinical services whilst the State has rationalised services in line with their State Health Plan. E.G. changed from a seven day surgery facility to a mixed day and short stay facility.
 - There is a lack of complete transaction listings for Mersey expenditure and as such did not allow the Audit to form an overall judgement on the appropriateness of use of funds.

Until this is transparently cleaned up, it will not provide a clear picture of the performance of the Mersey or what the Mersey should have been. Therefore no assumptions should be made and the Heads of Agreement should not be altered in service delivery until that picture appears and is analysed.

It is quite clear statistically and resource wise that the Burnie and Mersey Hospitals do not singularly have the capacity to cater for the NW region, always competing for resources, services and staff. Additionally, each catchment certainly will not and has not condoned the loss of any level of service, with the issue creeping largely into election cycles and therefore pandering and the spending of millions of dollars on bandaid so called solutions occur.

Whilst this may be a simplistic view, our fear is that in 50 years' time when our children most need immediate medical assistance, we will be still experiencing the same many problems, as in the previous thirty years.

If there is leadership, political will and staying power, if there is seriousness, then we say that planning, implementing and building a new hospital located in Ulverstone in the next 10 or 20 years is essential for health service and health funding sustainability.

In reference to the Green Paper, respectfully, it has a taint of service and personnel reduction in the NW region both at Burnie and Mersey, under the guise of another Issues Paper, community consultation and slogan.

Having fought for retention and maintenance of services through the Richardson Report and the Heather Wellington Tasmanian Health Plan, (where Ms Wellington publically stated categorically that “no lives will be lost with any ambulatory transference”), and previously mentioned concerns, we make no excuses for any cynicisms.

Previously, the Mersey was identified and structured to become a centre of excellence for endoscopy, however that procedure was still performed at other hospitals with the reasoning that the surgeons at other sites had to keep up their skills – thus not a centre of excellence by definition or as promised.

The North West Coast has one of the highest rates of unemployment in Australia, especially in the category of youth. The region have three areas in the top ten of disadvantage in the state (SEIFA) – low income, low education attainment, high unemployment along with job availability in relatively unskilled occupations. Plus, around fifty percent of NW residents are on some variety and or scale of social service payments

Even battling through all that, NW coasters find themselves having to travel out of region for treatment or procedures at a high cost to each patient and family – travel, time off work, accommodation, food and other necessities. These having a negative economical multiplier effect for our region as funds are spent outside. Yet this burden or part thereof is not experienced by other regions.

With the Green Paper and tainting of the NW Coast, we can only perceive the White Paper is already written.

It is with this in mind that we say to you **EQUITY** for our region, **equity in**: -

- Service provision
 - Medical & emergency coverage
- Employment
 - Including speciality areas
- Training & educational opportunities
- Accessibility to services
- Intra and inter regional travel and interstate travel
 - Costs – medical and travel
 - Red & green tape

If not equitable, then it is not a One State, One Health System.

In closing, building a new hospital in Ulverstone to help allay the problems our region currently and continuously has suffered would be futuristic, show leadership, political will and staying power.

Look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Martin', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Steve Martin
Chairman

CC: onehealthsystem@dhhs.tas.gov.au