



M23/5182

Ambulances services in Tocumwal

Writer Dr Julia Cornwell McKean, Mayor, Berrigan Shire Council

Analysis In September 2023, NSW Ambulance Service Planning completed a review of regional NSW to identify locations that should be prioritised for an ambulance station or volunteer service. This review included Tocumwal and includes data from .id Consulting relating to future population growth.

Tocumwal is not a priority for a new ambulance station due to low incident volume. Tocumwal meets the criteria for a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) location, however, it is not the highest priority location for the establishment of a CERT model, relative to other locations.

Key issues

On 17 August 2023, Minister Park met with the former Mayor, Councillor and Chief Executive Officer of Berrigan Shire Council to discuss ambulance resourcing in Tocumwal

This meeting included 2 NSW Ambulance representatives, the Executive Director of Clinical Operations and the Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services.

NSW Ambulance advised of previous reviews that did not identify Tocumwal as needing a new ambulance station, due to its low activity levels. NSW Ambulance instead suggested a Community Emergency Response Team be considered. Berrigan Shire Council asked that NSW Ambulance consider .id data in their assessment of population forecasts and conduct a new review.

Service Planning use data from .id in their analysis, which includes population projections and predicted future demand.

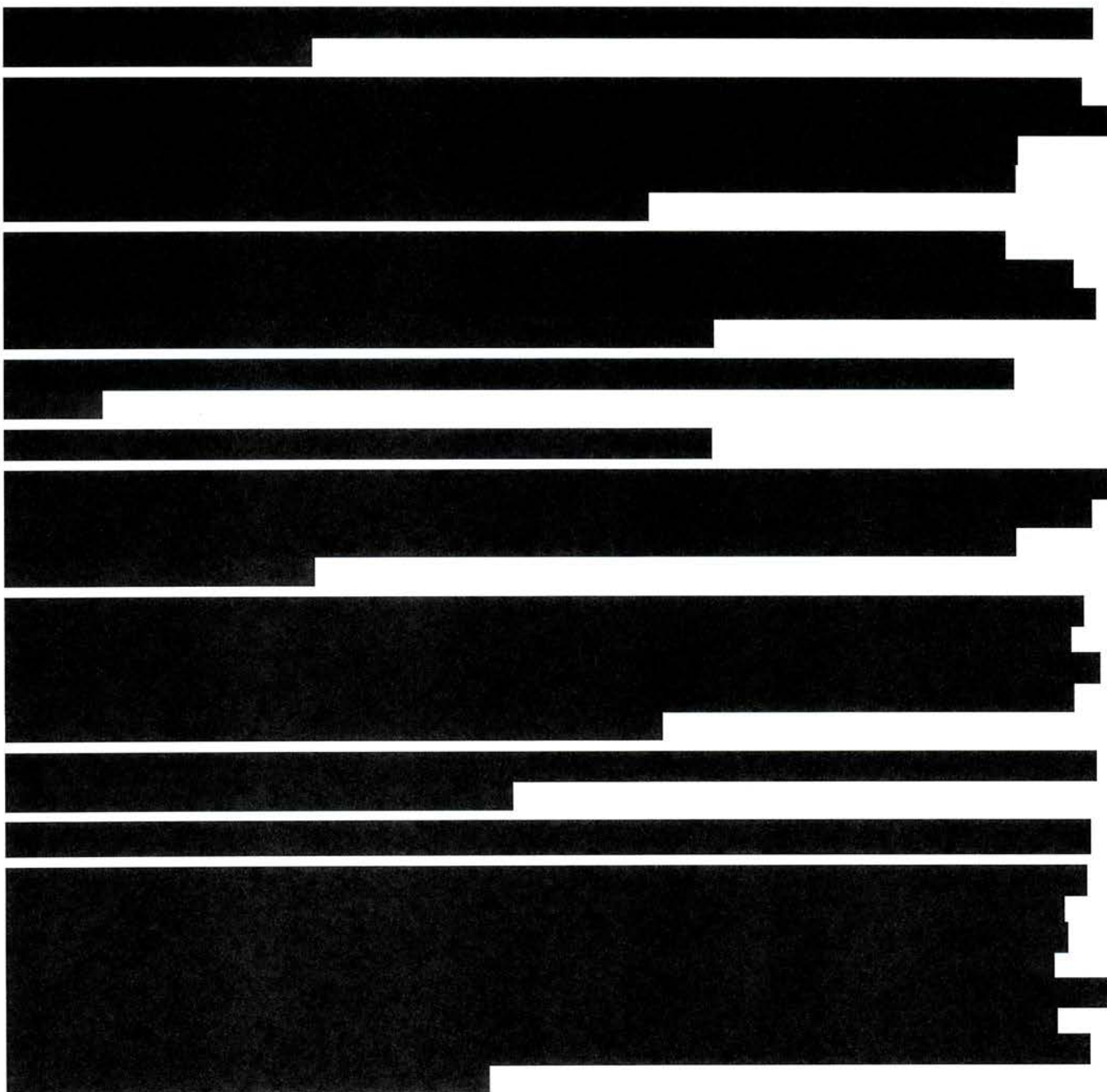
NSW Ambulance conducts regular analysis to prioritise areas of need

This analysis identifies locations that need new or additional ambulance services, based on demand levels resulting from changes in:

- the volume of demand in a town and surrounding area
- distance from any ambulance service
- current response times to emergency incidents
- assessment of capacity and condition of the closest ambulance station.

There are over 20 other locations throughout regional NSW that have a higher priority for new services than Tocumwal.

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Request for an Ambulance Station in Tocumwal

In 2022-23, NSW Ambulance responded to 562 incidents in the Tocumwal response area, including 212 Priority 1 (P1) incidents and 204 Priority 2 (P2) incidents. This is an average of 1.1 P1 and P2 incident every 24 hours.

BHI data for the April to June 2023 reporting period shows the median time it took an ambulance to reach the highest priority (life threatening P1A) emergency cases in the Upper Murray exc. Albury Statistical Area Level 3, which includes Tocumwal, was 7.8 minutes, which is within the 10 minute target set by NSW Health.

Quality and safety challenges of stations with low demand

The establishment of stations in locations with sufficient demand is a significant factor in the assurance of the quality and safety of paramedic services. The level of demand ensures that staff have sufficient engagement with patients that supports their ongoing ability to maintain safe clinical practice.

The preferred staffing profile for a new service is 12 full time paramedics. A station with a demand level of 416 emergency (P1 and P2) patients a year would only offer each paramedic an opportunity for one patient contact every 2 days on average, resulting in significant challenges for maintaining

safe clinical practice. The alternate, but not preferred model of 5 paramedics, would re-introduce on call and would still only result in just over one patient contact per day.

The Tocumwal community is serviced by the Murrumbidgee Zone

The Riverina and Murray communities are serviced by the Murrumbidgee Zone.

In June 2018, NSW Ambulance received funding for 700 additional paramedics over 4 years under the Statewide Workforce Enhancement Program (SWEP). As part of SWEP, the Murrumbidgee Zone benefited from an enhancement of 37 paramedics.

NSW Ambulance has received government funding for up to 2500 staff and 30 new ambulance stations over the coming years. As part these enhancements, the Murrumbidgee Zone has benefited from an extra 12 paramedics.

During periods of higher demand, resources are fluidly deployed where they are needed most, helping deliver the best possible out-of-hospital care for the community

Paramedics are a mobile workforce and respond from one patient to the next across locations, regardless of whether they are located at a hospital, an ambulance station, or another location.

The Tocumwal community has NSW Ambulance Community First Responders (CFR)

NSW Ambulance has Clinical Volunteer units across NSW, which are made up of either community-based volunteers, emergency service partners (Fire and Rescue NSW, State Emergency Service and the Rural Fire Service), or district models. Members of these units are trained, credentialed, and provided with clinical equipment by NSW Ambulance, to deliver immediate care in advance of paramedics arriving on scene.

The Tocumwal CFR unit was established in 2010 in partnership with Fire and Rescue NSW. Under the CFR model, there are 5 Fire and Rescue NSW personnel at Tocumwal who are provided with NSW Ambulance equipment to respond to emergency incidents. When needed, NSW Ambulance will send a request to Fire and Rescue NSW for a CFR response. The Tocumwal CFR unit is dispatched, they assemble at the fire station and then proceed to the incident in a Fire and Rescue NSW vehicle. On arrival, the CFR volunteers provide emergency assistance until paramedics arrive.

Under the CFR model, Fire and Rescue NSW personnel are given NSW Ambulance employee numbers. They are paid a retainer fee by Fire and Rescue NSW to respond to incidents and attend monthly training sessions run by NSW Ambulance. They can advise of their availability or if they are unable to respond.

NSW Ambulance Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

Under a CERT model, members of the community can apply to be NSW Ambulance clinical volunteers. NSW Ambulance provide the volunteers with a non-transport capable response vehicle and clinical equipment. CERT members must attend monthly training run by NSW Ambulance. When needed, NSW Ambulance will task the CERT team, who respond directly in the NSW Ambulance vehicle. On arrival, the CERT members provide immediate clinical care until paramedics arrive.

Initially there would be no clinical enhancement by transitioning to a CERT model, as both the CFR and CERT models have identical qualifications, receive identical training from NSW Ambulance, have an identical scope of practice and do not transport patients. However, because a CERT team has a marked NSW Ambulance response vehicle with clinical equipment and is always mobile in the community it serves, the advantage would be a reduced mobilisation time leading to faster response times to patients. Reduced mobilisation and response times result in quicker clinical intervention, leading to improved patient health outcomes. A CERT vehicle would also provide an obvious and highly visible NSW Ambulance presence in the Tocumwal community, as the vehicle is rostered and driven 24/7 by CERT members.

Extensive consultation is needed before a transition to a CERT model is proposed

While several members of the community, including the Berrigan Shire Council, have progressed requests for a full-time ambulance station, it would be important to understand the view of the broader community, including their views on transitioning to a CERT model. It would also be

important for the community to have confidence in a transition to a CERT model as an alternative to the current CFR model or a full-time ambulance station.

CFR volunteers in Tocumwal are members of Fire and Rescue NSW. These personnel are paid a retainer fee by Fire and Rescue NSW to undertake NSW Ambulance CFR workload. A transition to a CERT model would mean that while Fire and Rescue NSW personnel could apply to be a clinical volunteer in the CERT, they would no longer receive a retainer fee from Fire and Rescue NSW. It would be important to consult with Fire and Rescue NSW to consider the impact any transition would have on the current Fire and Rescue NSW personnel, and the relationship between Fire and Rescue NSW and NSW Ambulance.

The clinical volunteer models across NSW should evolve as community need and workload demand profiles change. Tocumwal is an example of where the original agency partnership with Fire and Rescue NSW was developed to meet community needs at that time. The community profile and workload demand has evolved, and an opportunity may exist to review the current model to better serve the community.

A CERT model in Tocumwal would need a minimum of 8 volunteers. Consideration should be given to consulting with the Tocumwal community to assess whether there are enough volunteers willing to attend training and provide unpaid volunteer support to appropriately resource the CERT model.

Initial forecasting indicates that establishment of a CERT model would require capital funding of about \$155,000 for training, equipment and supplies, and recurrent funding of about \$40,000 per year for training and consumables. This is indicative only, and further assessment and consultation prior to the establishment of a CERT model would be needed.

Establishment of a CERT model in Tocumwal would also need to be considered among other high-priority areas for CERT establishment. The latest analysis shows that there are more than 30 locations in NSW that would be a higher priority for the establishment of CERT.

Contact

Name	Position	Phone and email
Clare Beech	Executive Director, Clinical Systems, NSW Ambulance	[REDACTED]

Approval

Name	Position	Date
Matthew Daly	Deputy Secretary, System Sustainability and Performance	16/11/2023
Joanne Edwards	Executive Director, System Management Branch	13/11/2023
Dr Dominic Morgan	Chief Executive, NSW Ambulance	10/11/2023

The Hon Ryan Park MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Regional Health
Minister for the Illawarra and the South Coast



Ref: M23/5182

Dr Julia Cornwell McKean
Mayor
Berrigan Shire Council
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Ambulance services in Tocumwal (your ref: KE:2324/32)

Dear Mayor

Thank you for writing about ambulance services in Tocumwal.

I acknowledge your concerns and appreciate your advocacy on this matter.

NSW Ambulance conducts regular analysis of all locations in NSW to identify areas of growing demand for the prioritisation of resources. This includes using best practice modelling software that maps Triple Zero (000) calls to determine the most suitable location for emergency care, including examining current response areas and modelling potential station locations to meet community needs.

The Department of Planning and Environment provides NSW Ambulance with the most up to date population projections. NSW Ambulance uses this and other data streams including .id Consulting to monitor factors such as demographics, population growth, utilisation rates of existing services and planned future development when planning for future services.

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The establishment of stations in locations with sufficient demand is a significant factor in the assurance of the quality and safety of paramedic services. The level of demand ensures that staff have sufficient engagement with patients that supports their ongoing ability to maintain safe clinical practice.

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Thank you again for writing. For more information, please contact Clare Beech, Executive Director, Clinical Systems, NSW Ambulance, at clare.beech@health.nsw.gov.au or on 9320 7870.

Yours sincerely

Ryan Park MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Regional Health
Minister for the Illawarra and the South Coast