

Red annotations have been added by the Assisting Team to identify exhibit numbers of documents referred to in the statement.

Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding

Statement of Margaret Bennett

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Occupation: Chief Executive, Southern NSW Local Health District

1. I am the Chief Executive of Southern NSW Local Health District (**SNSWLHD**, the **District**), a position I have held since March 2020.
2. I have previously provided two statements to this Inquiry dated 9 February 2024 (**MOH.9999.0007.0001**) and 6 August 2024 (**MOH.0011.0041.0001**).
[B.9] [I.30]
3. This supplementary statement further addresses the letter from the Inquiry dated 26 July 2024, and in particular outlines various community consultation activities undertaken during the planning and development of the new Eurobodalla Hospital and the associated closure of the Batemans Bay Hospital. The statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief, and sets out the evidence that I would be prepared, if necessary, to give to the Special Commission of Inquiry into HealthCare Funding.
4. This supplementary statement should be read in coordination with the Capital Works [I.30] section of my statement dated 6 August 2024 (Section E, paragraphs 52 to 79), my oral evidence of 16 August 2024, and the outline of evidence of Amanda Bock of Health Infrastructure (**MOH.9999.1060.0001**) and exhibits to that outline.
[I.45]
5. Where in this statement I refer to activities that occurred before March 2020, I do so on the basis of knowledge I have acquired in the course of performing my duties as Chief Executive.
6. Generally, Local Health Districts (**LHDs**), guided by their Boards, have a responsibility to undertake planning to inform the delivery of health services, the end result of which is then set out in health care service plans. Health care service plans articulate particular service priorities and directions, including major capital proposals, in light of the characteristics of the community and projected demand and capacity.
7. LHDs' health care service plans inform their Strategic Asset Management Plans and Asset Management Plans, which are prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Health (**MOH**) in accordance with the NSW Health Policy Directive *Asset Management* (*PD2022_044*, **MOH.0001.0150.0001**). Section 3.1 of the Policy sets out the asset
[B.23.43]

planning and procurement requirements. Those plans then form the basis of MOH's *Capital Investment Strategic Plan*.

8. The *Capital Investment Strategic Plan* is the aggregation of NSW Health's capital projects based on needs and priorities, including estimated total costs and cash flow for the annual budget process and forward estimates period. As it has a ten year horizon, future priority projects that are likely for inclusion in the outer years are also identified. The *NSW Health Capital Investment Strategic Plan* is submitted to the NSW Government Cabinet for consideration.
9. Additionally, the planning and delivery of approved capital projects/programs valued at \$10 million and above is undertaken in accordance with the NSW Health Guideline *Facility Planning Process* (GL2021_018, **MOH.9999.0896.0001**), NSW Health State- [D.1.142] wide Investment and Prioritisation Framework and other relevant government policy directives.

(1) Eurobodalla Health Services – Batemans Bay and Moruya

10. In June 2014, SNSWLHD developed a five-year *Eurobodalla Health Service Health Care Service Plan 2014 – 2019 (the 2014 – 2019 Eurobodalla CSP)*, a copy of which is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0519.0001**). That document summarises the community consultation undertaken in the development of the 2014 – 2019 Eurobodalla CSP. The plan in that five-year period was to provide services within the current physical infrastructure in a more streamlined manner. The long-term aim, beyond the plan, is stated to be new infrastructure and services to meet future demand.
11. The 2014 – 2019 Eurobodalla CSP identified that the Moruya site would become the hub for the majority of services, providing more complex care while the Batemans Bay site would provide complementary services, developed in consultation with the community. This Plan also identified the future need for additional infrastructure and working towards developing 'one service' for Eurobodalla. The Plan was developed with wide consultation with both staff and residents throughout a 10 month planning process, including community forums and public consultation on a draft of the plan prior to finalisation.
12. On 13 October 2017, the then Member for Bega announced the allocation of \$500,000 to advance the planning for future health services in the Eurobodalla region. A copy of that announcement is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0463.0001**).

13. During the next two years, SNSWLHD undertook detailed planning and consultation to understand the health service needs responsive to the Moruya and Batemans Bay communities. This included detailed service and workforce planning to ensure a sound foundation for investment decisions which also informed the Eurobodalla Health Service Clinical Services Plan. The following occurred during 2018 to 2020:
- a. Media communications: press advertisements in print and online in the Bay Post, Moruya Examiner, Narooma News, Beagle Weekly and Beagle Weekender; a radio community service announcement featured on 2EARFM, PowerFM and 2EC; social media coverage on the consultation sessions included SNSWLHD social channels, the Primary Health Network (PHN), Eurobodalla Community Representative Committee, PowerFM and 2EC Facebook pages; and a flyer distributed to the community during weekend market stall events and at consultation sessions.
 - b. Consultation sessions in 2018 included three days of community consultation sessions in Narooma, Batemans Bay and Moruya; informal meet and great session at Batemans Bay shopping mall; and market stalls at the Eurobodalla markets.
 - c. Surveys – the community members who could not attend the above sessions were given the opportunity to comment via survey boxes placed at convenient locations, and to participate in an online survey.
 - d. In March 2018 and May 2018, groups of staff, medical officers and stakeholders (for example General Practice and the PHN) were consulted to discuss future needs of the population and consider new models of care for Eurobodalla Health Service.
 - e. On 27 October 2018, a community group delivered the One Eurobodalla Hospital petition, with over 3,000 signatures, to the office of the Member for Bega.
 - f. On 31 October 2018, the then Premier of NSW and the then Member for Bega announced the allocation of \$150 million to build a new hospital for the Eurobodalla region. A copy of that announcement is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0464.0001**).
 - g. On 13 November 2018, the then Member for Bega certified the petition as containing over 500 signatures, and the petition was received by the then Minister for Health on 15 November 2018, and a copy of this certification is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0508.0001**). A copy of a letter dated 17 December 2018 from the then

Minister for Health to Ms Helen Minnican, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0014.0239.0001**). In the letter, the then Minister for Health referred to development being underway for a new Eurobodalla Health Service Clinical Services Plan, and that community consultation has occurred and will continue through all stages.

- h. In March 2019, SNSWLHD held a series of workshops across 8 days to refine preliminary models of care and consider workforce planning requirements for changes in service provision. Invited guests were clinical and non-clinical Eurobodalla staff, NSW Ministry of Health, Agency of Clinical Innovation, ACT Health, Sydney Children's Hospital and NETS, the PHN, NSW Ambulance and NSW Health Pathology.
 - i. In April 2019, follow up community consultation sessions were held again in Narooma, Moruya, and Batemans Bay, to provide an update on the planning progress made, discuss new models of care and services for the new facility, and to ensure that main concerns had been considered and addressed where possible.
 - j. In May 2019, a further workshop took place with key partner organisations (page 24 of the 2020 Eurobodalla CSP).
14. On 3 July 2019, the Eurobodalla Clinical Service Plan was submitted to the Ministry of Health. Following input from the Ministry of Health, I endorsed the 2020 Eurobodalla CSP on 2 April 2020 and it was submitted again to the Ministry of Health.
15. In May 2020, the 2020 Eurobodalla CSP was endorsed by the Ministry of Health (**the 2020 Eurobodalla CSP, MOH.0014.0245.0001**). **[I.30.3]**
- [I.30.3]**
16. The 2020 Eurobodalla CSP sets out that future services will not be duplicated but rather provided across one main campus with networked outreach programs to support peripheral communities.
- [I.30.3]**
17. The 2020 Eurobodalla CSP sets out the key themes from the community consultations were the need for easy and free access to specialist services, long wait times for allied health appointments, access to community health services, lack of communication and education of services available, the need to provide more services locally to reduce travel, that all services need to be inclusive of all, the need for more/better transport options, lack of General Practitioner services, and lack of orthopaedic and paediatric services.

The project for the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital formally commenced with the capital budget allocation through the 2020-21 NSW Health Budget of \$200 million.

Subsequent events

18. To enhance resilience measures in relation to drought and bushfires, the estimated total cost for the project was revised to \$200 million. The additional funding of \$50 million, announced by the NSW Government on 11 June 2020 was to allow for appropriate site acquisition and increased drought and bushfire resilience measures.
19. In July 2020, a Eurobodalla Health Service Clinical Service Plan update was published. A copy of this update is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0471.0001**). The update noted that that services would be provided at one site with strategically located outreach services.
20. In August 2020, a Eurobodalla Health Service fact sheet was published. A copy of this factsheet is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0472.0001**). It notes that the new health facility was in the planning stage and that Health Infrastructure was working closely with SNSWLHD and other government agencies, including Transport for NSW and the Department of Planning Industry and Environment. The factsheet also notes that community consultation was taking place to provide feedback on site selection, with a site expected to be announced in 2020. In relation to current facilities, page 5 of the factsheet stated that the existing hospitals at Moruya and Batemans Bay were to be decommissioned.
21. In December 2020, the then Member for Bega announced that the preferred site for the new Eurobodalla Hospital was in south-east Moruya. The announcement states consultation with the community and consumers, local Aboriginal groups and key stakeholders, helped identify the preferred site. A copy of the announcement is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0465.0001**).
22. In May 2021, a Masterplan Report Summary was endorsed by the Executive Steering Committee of the new Eurobodalla Hospital. A copy of the Report Summary is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.9999.1060.0001**).
23. In June 2021, local Aboriginal community representatives took part in the first Design Jam and Walk on Country.

24. The need to plan for a continued health presence in the Batemans Bay region once the new Eurobodalla hospital was commissioned was recognised by Southern NSW Local Health District. On 19 August 2021, the then Member for Bega, announced \$300,000 for the planning of a new community health facility at Batemans Bay. A copy of that announcement is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0466.0001**).
25. On 30 August 2021, an online community information sessions was held. The link is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6g7zILvfkM>. Closure of Batemans Bay Hospital was discussed.
26. On 1 September 2021, another online community information session was held. The link is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cXslUhEWKxY>. Closure of Batemans Bay Hospital was discussed.
27. On 27 November 2021, the Government announced it would invest an extra \$60 million (a total investment of \$260 million) for the new Eurobodalla Health Service.
28. On 22 December 2021, the then Minister for Health and Medical Research wrote to the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly regarding a petition for the delivery of a level 4 Eurobodalla Hospital, oncology and healthcare services. A copy of that letter is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0510.0001**).
29. In December 2021, the then Premier announced the masterplan for the new Eurobodalla Hospital. A copy of the accompanying media release was published on the Eurobodalla Hospital at the following webpage: <https://www.eurobodallahs.health.nsw.gov.au/news-and-publications/latest-news/2021/more-beds,-more-services-for-new-eurobodalla-regional-hospital>.
30. In March 2022, a New Eurobodalla Regional Hospital Development factsheet was published on the Eurobodalla Regional Hospital website titled '*Planning services at the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital development*'. On page 2, the factsheet states the existing hospitals at Moruya and Batemans Bay will close once the new hospital opens its doors to patients. A copy of the factsheet is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.9999.1101.0001**). [1.8]
31. Also in March 2022, a New Eurobodalla Regional Hospital Development factsheet was released titled '*Strengthening the region's Coastal Network*'. On page 2 it states the existing hospitals at Moruya and Batemans Bay will close once the new hospital opens

its doors to patients. A copy of that factsheet is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0511.0001**).

32. Additionally on 18 March 2022, a community information session was held with the then Minister for Health, where there was discussion about locating the hospital in Moruya and not Batemans Bay. A recording of that information session is available via the following webpage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-DoZjXvoKo&t=3s>. There were close to 100 attendees.
33. In April 2022, a New Eurobodalla Regional Hospital Development, Project Overview factsheet was released. A copy of that factsheet is exhibited to this statement (**SCI.0011.0317.0001**).
34. Between February and August 2022, the hospital project team held a series of events, drop-in sessions, and targeted information sessions to seek the views of the community on the plans for the new hospitals. An online survey was also conducted. Overall during this period there were:
 - a. 9 community drop-in and information sessions,
 - b. 4 dedicated sessions for neighbours living in close proximity to the new hospital site,
 - c. 5 community focused Connecting with Country sessions with the local Aboriginal community,
 - d. 4 community information pop-ups across the region including Wallaga, Narooma, Batemans Bay and the Moruya,
 - e. The townhall community information session referred to above in paragraph 28,
 - f. 10 staff newsletters, 10 staff information sessions (including Connecting with Country with Aboriginal Health Service staff and community members), and 220 meetings with staff user groups,
 - g. 47 survey responses, and
 - h. more than 4,100 unique users of the project website.
35. In August 2022, a New Eurobodalla Regional Hospital Development, Project Overview factsheet was released. A copy of that factsheet is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0012.0083.0001**). The concept designs were released in August 2022.

[I.10]

36. In November 2022, a New Eurobodalla Regional Hospital Development factsheet titled *What we heard* was released. A copy of that factsheet is exhibited to this statement (**SCI.001.0311.0001**).
37. In December 2022, a factsheet setting out the floor plans for the New Eurobodalla Regional Hospital Development was released. A copy of that factsheet is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0514.0001**).
38. On 12 December 2022, the then Minister for Health and the then Minister for Women, Regional Health and Mental Health issued a media release titled *Community to Have Say on New Batemans Bay Healthcare Facility*. Community members were invited by the Batemans Bay Community Health project team (including a SNSWLHD representative) to a meet and greet session on 13 December 2022 in relation to the new Batemans Bay community health facility, with ongoing community consultation planned in the development of the master plan expected to be completed in mid-2023. A copy of that media release is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0467.0001**).
39. In January 2023, a New Eurobodalla Regional Hospital Development, Project Overview factsheet was released. A copy of that factsheet is exhibited to this statement (**SCI.0011.0312.0001**).
40. On 21 February 2023, Ethos Urban finalised a Consultation Outcomes Report on behalf of Health Infrastructure (**MOH.9999.1105.0001**). The Report outlined the communication and stakeholder engagement undertaken for the project and presented feedback received during the preparation of the State Significant Development Application for the Eurobodalla Regional Hospital. The Report notes:
 - a. A variety of communications and engagement tools were used over 2021 and 2022 to promote the consultation and seek feedback. These included:
 - i. Social media and newspaper advertising,
 - ii. Targeted letterbox drops to nearby landholders,
 - iii. Community information sessions (available in person and via livestream), pop ups and meet and greets,
 - iv. Online surveys, and
 - v. Stakeholder and hospital user groups meetings.

- b. Feedback received from close to 700 community members and 19 stakeholder groups focussed on:
 - i. Significant support for the concept to build a modern and fit-for-purpose consolidated hospital to serve the people of Eurobodalla Shire, which would meet the needs of a community highly in need of health care due to being one of the oldest populations in the country and having a large Indigenous population,
 - ii. Varied and disparate feedback about which medical services should be included/excluded at the hospital,
 - iii. Concern amongst a minority of residents, particularly those living nearby to the proposed hospital site, about the amenity impacts of including a helipad,
 - iv. Concern amongst a minority of residents, particularly those in Batemans Bay, about losing the Batemans Bay Hospital and other smaller health services and being forced to travel to further afield Moruya to access Eurobodalla Regional Hospital.
 - v. Queries about how the construction and operation would coordinate with the planned Moruya Bypass.
 - c. In section 4.2, quantitative aspects of community engagement are specified, including stakeholder group briefed, letter drops, newspaper advertisements, community sessions, email and phone queries, community survey responses, website visitors.
41. On 30 May 2023, the Batemans Bay Community Health Clinical Services Plan (**Batemans Bay Community Health CSP**) was finalised. The Batemans Bay Community Health CSP sets out SNSWLHD's eight-year plan for community health care services in Batemans Bay. The Batemans Bay Community Health CSP also refers to an urgent care centre, particularly in section 12.2. A copy of the Batemans Bay Community Health CSP is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0014.0246.0001**). [1.30.6]
42. In July 2023, two New Eurobodalla Regional Hospital factsheets were released, '*The Planning Approval Process*' and '*Frequently Asked Questions*'. Copies of those

factsheets are exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0515.0001** and **MOH.0010.0516.0001** respectively).

43. In January 2024, a Batemans Bay Community Health and Eurobodalla Regional Hospital Project Update was released, a copy of which is exhibited to this statement (**SCI.0011.0314.0001**). It also sets out the new Medicare Urgent Care Clinic was now open at Batemans Bay Hospital.
44. In January 2024, a Batemans Bay Community Health Project Update and FAQs was released, a copy of which is exhibited to this statement (**SCI.0011.0309.0001**).
45. On 22 January 2024, the master plan was released for the Batemans Bay Community Health Service.
46. In March 2024, a Batemans Bay Consultation Outcomes Report was developed by NSW Health outlining the consultation processes undertaken for the Batemans Bay Community Health Project. A copy of that report is exhibited to this statement (**SCI.0011.0307.0001**).
47. In July 2024, a Eurobodalla Regional Hospital and Batemans Bay Community Health Community Update was released, a copy of which is exhibited to this statement (**SCI.0011.0306.0001**). That update advertised a Eurobodalla Health Planning Update event to be held at Batemans Bay Soldiers Club on 24 July 2024, attended by myself, Dr Michael Holland (Member of Bega, Parliamentary Secretary for Health), and Brad Scotcher, Coastal Network General Manager at SNSWLHD.
48. On 24 July 2024, I attended the Eurobodalla Health Planning Update event at Batemans Bay Soldiers Club.
49. Resources are also available through the Eurobodalla Regional Hospital Development website: www.eurobodallahs.health.nsw.gov.au.
50. As set out in my evidence on 16 August 2024:
 - a. From everything I have seen from 2018 onwards, there has been clear and consistent communication that two hospitals will be closing and a new one would be opening,

- b. Despite a level of community information and consultation regarding the closure of Batemans Bay Hospital, some sections of the community were still unaware that the Batemans Bay ED was closing, and
- c. My ongoing responsibility is to allay ongoing community concern regarding the transition to the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital.

(2) Cooma Hospital

- 51. On 3 April 2014, the Cooma Community Consultation Committee met and discussed the Monaro Clinical Service Plan, including ways to involve the community in discussions of the Plan. A copy of the minutes of that meeting are exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0671.0001**).
- 52. In May 2014, SNSWLHD held staff and community consultation sessions in relation the development of the Monaro Health Service clinical services plan, which geographically includes the Cooma area and the Cooma Hospital. A copy of the flyer promoting those sessions is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0543.0001**). I understand from the documents available to me that that service planning process formed part of a strategic asset plan and included a priority to redevelop Cooma Hospital.
- 53. On 12 March 2015, the then Minister for Health and Medical Research and then Member for Monaro announced "*a re-elected Baird Government will invest \$10 million in the redevelopment of Cooma Hospital*". A copy the media release is exhibited to this statement (**MOH.0010.0531.00**).
- 54. Additional funding was announced as part of the 2018/19 NSW Budget which enabled the progression of an expanded scope for the redevelopment with a then total estimated cost of \$18.6 million.
- 55. Paragraphs 58 to 62 of my statement dated 6 August 2024 set out the balance of the steps, including the role of the clinical service plan and related community engagement.


Margaret Bennett


Witness: Danielle Hansen

20 September 2024

20 September 2024