

Witness Statement

Name: Valentine Wright

Occupation: Retired high school teacher.

1. This statement sets out the evidence that I am prepared to give to the Special Commission of Inquiry into Healthcare Funding as a witness.
2. This statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

A. My background and role

3. My name is Valentine Wright. I am referred to as Auntie Val in my community.
4. I am a Wiradjuri/Gamilaraay woman with strong family and cultural ties to the Walbundja area and the Walbundja people in the Batemans Bay area. I have lived in the Batemans Bay area since 2009. My parents retired at Batemans Bay in approximately 1975 after many years camping while my father was employed on the Snowy Mountains scheme.
5. I am a retired high school teacher. My role in Batemans Bay currently consists of participating as a Senior Elder in the Elders in Highschool Program at Batemans Bay High School, participating in the Auntie Jeans Program, and being available when needed in various speaking and advisory capacities. I am a member of the Katungul Aboriginal Corporation which is an Aboriginal Medical Service.
6. I am also a member of the "Don't Close Batemans Bay Emergency Department" Committee (**the Committee**). I joined the Committee on or about 27 November 2023 after the public forum as described by Peter Ryan, after I consulted with local Walbundja Elders.

B. First knowledge of the proposed new hospital at Moruya, NSW

7. In the early stages of consultation for the proposed new hospital at Moruya, which came to be known as the Eurobodalla Regional Hospital, I participated together with other Elders in a consultation session. The consultation session took place in the Centrelink building, now called Services Australia. I do not have a record of the date and time of the consultation session.

8. The consultation session was attended by some officials whom I believe were architects who were designing the proposed hospital. They wanted our views on designing the hospital in a culturally sensitive way. To the best of my recollection, a representative from NSW Health attended the meeting.
7. During the consultation session, I asked: "Will the Batemans Bay hospital stay open when the new hospital is opened?" The architects were not able to answer my question. I do not recall whether the NSW Health representative was present when I asked my question.
8. I asked that question because I did not know what was going to happen to the Batemans Bay Emergency Department upon the opening of the Eurobodalla Regional Hospital.

C. First knowledge of the proposed closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department

9. On around 27 November 2023, I attended a community meeting at the Batemans Bay Soldiers Club organised by Peter Ryan about the proposed closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department. I learnt about the meeting by word of mouth at my gym. It was when I learned about the meeting that I first became aware that the Batemans Bay Emergency Department would close when the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital opened.

D. Formation of and work on the Committee

10. After I attended the community meeting referred to above, and after consulting with Walbundja Elders, I joined the Committee.
11. The purpose of the Committee is to inform the community of Batemans Bay that their hospital would be closed, including the Emergency Department, and find out whether this was an acceptable outcome for the majority of the affected community. After consulting with other Elders, my role in the Committee is to ensure that an Aboriginal perspective is present.
12. In my capacity as a Committee member, I spoke to people in the community, and particularly the local Aboriginal community, about the proposed closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department. The people I spoke to were not aware that the Batemans Bay

Emergency Department was going to close once the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital opened, unless they had heard about it through Peter Ryan or the Committee. They had not been aware of any consultation processes about the closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department or the site selection for the new hospital.

13. From these conversations, I became concerned that Aboriginal families living in the Batemans Bay area would find it difficult to access the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital, and to visit their loved ones in that hospital, because:
- a. There is limited public transport between Batemans Bay and Moruya,
 - b. There are limited affordable accommodation and food options near the new hospital site in Moruya, and
 - c. Aboriginal families with limited resources may not have a telephone to call an Ambulance and it might not be feasible for them to drive a loved one all the way to Moruya for emergency care.

E. Presentation to Eurobodalla Shire Council

14. On 23 April 2024, I attended the Eurobodalla Shire Council's Public Access Session where I delivered a presentation on the proposed closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department. The written component of my presentation is exhibited to this statement and marked with the document sequence commencing SCI.0011.0337.0001.
15. In my presentation, I set out my concerns about the negative impact that the proposed closure would have on the community. I posed a series of questions to the Council about transport to and accommodation near the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital. My questions are set out at SCI.0011.0337.0001. I submitted my questions to the Council before my presentation and they were put on record at the front desk.
16. I have been made aware that at the Council Meeting held on 30 April 2024, the Council resolved the following motion regarding the Eurobodalla Regional Hospital:

THAT Council:

1. *Advocate to the NSW Government to prioritise construction of the Moruya Bypass to provide direct and efficient access to the hospital from the north of the shire.*
 2. *Advocate to the NSW Government for increased ambulance services in the north of the shire to coincide with the opening of the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital.*
 3. *Advocate to the Australian Government to extend opening hours of the Batemans Bay Urgent Care Clinic to 24/7 to coincide with the opening of the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital.*
 4. *Request the NSW Government reassess the need for the emergency department at Batemans Bay Hospital in light of demographic change and uncertainty around construction of the Moruya bypass.*
17. A copy of the relevant portion of the Council Meeting minutes dated 30 April 2024 is exhibited to this statement and marked with the document sequence commencing SCI.0011.0336.0001.
18. At other times, during informal conversations, the Mayor informed me that the Council had no power or input into the decision that had been made to close Batemans Bay Emergency Department.

F. My current knowledge about the closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department

19. My current knowledge about the closure of the Batemans Bay Emergency department has come from attending the community meetings held at the Batemans Bay Soldiers Club. At the last public meeting questions from the floor were not permitted, and only selected questions previously submitted were addressed. Any other information has been brought to the Committee's attention by Committee members' individual attempts contacting relevant departments and politicians at both formal and informal levels. Currently, there appears to be a settled proposal to build a community centre on the Batemans Bay Hospital site, and a plan to repurpose the existing building as a community centre. Information about the proposed community centre has been given out to the general public by a maildrop and at various Batemans Bay "pop up" stalls.

Signature: *Valentine A. Wright*

Name: *Valentine Allen Wright*

Date: *12th August 2024*