

## Witness Statement

**Name: Dr Andrew Gibson**

**Occupation: General Practitioner**

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 qualifications**

3. My name is Dr Andrew Gibson. I am a semi-retired General Practitioner (**GP**) in Batemans Bay, NSW, where I have lived and worked for approximately 25 years.
4. My qualifications are MB.BS University of Sydney, (1973), and Fellow of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.
5. I have been a medical practitioner for 51 years, working as a GP for 48 yrs.
6. During that time, I was also a Visiting Medical Officer (**VMO**) at Batemans Bay Hospital for approximately 20 years, working in the wards and the Batemans Bay Emergency Department (**BBED**).
7. I left my GP surgery practice in 2022 to establish Batemans Bay Aged Care which services Residential Aged Care Facilities in Batemans Bay. I currently care for approximately 90 aged residents.
8. Since December 2023, I have also been a member of the "Don't Close Batemans Bay Emergency Department Committee" (**the Committee**).
9. Exhibited to this statement and marked with the document sequence commencing SCI.0011.0340.0001 is a copy of my curriculum vitae.

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

10. In the lead up to the March 2023 NSW State election, the Labor candidate for Bega, Dr Michael Holland, ran a campaign to the effect that if he was elected, he would ensure that the proposed Eurobodalla Regional Hospital would be a Level 4 hospital.

11. Dr Holland was subsequently elected.

12. At that time, I was not aware of:

- a. The proposed site for the new hospital, although I was aware that there was to be a new hospital in the area.
- b. The proposed closure of the Batemans Bay Emergency Department upon the opening of the Eurobodalla Regional Hospital, or
- c. Any consultation having taken place with Batemans Bay residents and/or health practitioners practising in Batemans Bay about the site selection for the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital or that the BBED would be closed.

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

13. In around November or December 2023, Peter Ryan informed me that he wanted to form a committee to prevent the proposed closure of BBED.

14. Mr Ryan has told me that some time before then, when he had seen me as a patient, I had told him of the proposed closure of the BBED. I do not recall that conversation, but I have no doubt that it occurred if Mr Ryan states that it did.

15. I was not aware at that time, and I am not aware now, of any consultation having taken place with Batemans Bay residents and/or health practitioners practising in Batemans Bay about the proposed closure of Batemans Bay Emergency Department.

**D. Formation of and work on the Committee**

16. On or about December 2023, I joined the Committee. The purpose of the Committee is to ensure that the BBED would not be closed when the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital was opened.

17. In my capacity as a Committee member, I discussed the proposed closure of BBED with a number of local GPs, who were unaware of the proposed closure. I had also discussions with community members, who were also unaware of the proposed closure (unless they had learned about it from a community meeting arranged by Peter Ryan shortly before the Committee was formed) and were astounded by the proposal and expressed their concerns to me about it.
18. They also shared my concerns with them that:
- a. Once the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital opens and the BBED closes, there will be no medical services available in Batemans Bay after 6pm.
  - b. There is a lack of public transport between Batemans Bay and the site of the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital in Moruya.
  - c. The corridor between Batemans Bay and the site of the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital in Moruya has single lane roads and is bushfire- and flood-prone.
  - d. The only access to the proposed new hospital site from the north (Batemans Bay and surrounding area), is via the two- lane bridge across the Moruya River, and during holiday times there can be a queue to the north for up to 4-5 km.
19. In my capacity as a Committee member, on 6 December 2023 I attended a meeting with Margaret Bennett and Dr Michael Holland in the conference room at Batemans Bay Hospital about the site selection process for the new Eurobodalla Regional Hospital. I was informed that the site selection criteria included that the site needed to be:
- a. Within a five-kilometre radius of the centre of Moruya or Batemans Bay, and
  - b. Neither bushfire- nor flood-prone.
20. At the meeting, Ms Bennett and Dr Holland reiterated NSW Health's decision to open the new hospital and close BBED. In my view, the meeting was not consultative.

21. Dr Michael Holland informed me that an assessment had been made by NSW Health that there was no available land within a five-kilometre radius of Batemans Bay, which immediately excluded the Batemans Bay area from consideration.
22. The site at Moruya was subsequently identified and selected.
23. NSW Health confirmed the planned closure of BBED at a public meeting at Batemans Bay Soldiers Club on 16 January 2024.
24. I am not aware that any consultation with community or local doctors regarding the closure of the BBED took place until after the plan was brought to the attention of the community by our Committee.

**Signature:**



**Name: Dr Andrew Gibson**

**Date: 13 August 2024**