

**Submission
No 89**

HEALTH SERVICES AMENDMENT (SPLITTING OF THE HUNTER NEW ENGLAND HEALTH DISTRICT) BILL 2025

Organisation: Wee Waa Chamber of Commerce

Date Received: 30 April 2025

Wee Waa Chamber of Commerce Inc.

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29/4/2025

Dear NSW Parliament (Splitting the Hunter New England Local Health District Bill) Committee

The Wee Waa Chamber of Commerce and its members would like to submit their endorsement in favour of splitting the Hunter New England Local Health District into two health services.

Wee Waa is part of a large rural shire of roughly 13,000 square kilometres, servicing several towns and villages both within the Narrabri Shire and on the borders of the Walgett and Coonamble shires. This area services a range of important resources in the energy, food and fibre sectors which are important to Australia's national security needs. Wee Waa and the surrounding communities support the production of wheat, sheep, cattle, cotton, solar farms, gas fields and coal mining operations. On top of this, it services several large exporting businesses which creates hundreds of jobs in the area. At this time, the current Hunter and New England Health Service is not fit for purpose to meet the needs of both urban and rural health needs.

If the Wee Waa hospital were to close, or be permanently reduced under its current arrangements, the above businesses and the community would be devastated.

It is important to understand that during the town's separate harvesting and ginning seasons, businesses need to work 24/7 for at least 4 months of the year. This means the community needs suitable healthcare support, otherwise accidents and emergencies would take an extra 40-80 minutes travel, depending on where the incident had occurred. This becomes an unreasonable burden on the lives of the Wee Waa and district community. This would never be accepted in urban areas like Sydney or Newcastle.

Wee Waa, unlike Sydney or Newcastle, does not have a large workforce it can rely on. Wee Waa must entice workers to move and settle in our community, so that it may thrive with the state and the economy. During peak seasons, Wee Waa like many communities rely on workers from a variety of areas, this includes local and international backpackers, working holiday visa holders and locals where practical. However, if the community hospital is not functional, this places both the community and visiting workers at risk. Farming and industrial work is accident prone. Where there are people, there is always the risk of injury or death. A fully functional hospital that is available 24/7 is paramount for a productive community to maintain its workforce. I again state that the current Hunter New England Local Health Service is not fit for purpose to meet the needs of rural communities.

In relation to other health services, Wee Waa has a local ambulance that is used across large parts of rural NSW. The NSW Ambulance website, states that Rural NSW ambulance services cover vast areas and its reach can depend on various factors. It is well known that the Ambulance located in Wee Waa has travelled hours away to support many other communities and towns when their very own local ambulance is busy supporting other areas. So it should be noted that after 5.30 pm, if the Wee Waa ambulance is out of town, the community has no health services available. Requiring extended waiting periods or requiring the locals to transport themselves during health crises. Wee Waa should not be treated any differently than people in Sydney and Newcastle. Our lives are worth just as much as theirs. The community is fortunate to have several General Practitioners who provide preventative health care during the day, however they are not available in the evening either. It is also understood that our GPs have offered to support our hospital on multiple occasions through discussions with Hunter New England Local Health District, however have had no success. The community does have suitably qualified health professionals, including nurses and support staff. Which makes it more concerning that Hunter New England has either not been sympathetic to rural health care needs, or the current Hunter New England Health Local District does not meet the needs of both urban and rural health care needs.

The Wee Waa Chamber of Commerce asks the committee to consider the safety of its members and their staff by splitting the current health district. The Wee Waa Chamber of Commerce fully endorses the re-opening of a fully capable hospital under new management who is willing to place the lives of rural people first.

Yours Sincerely

Andrew Dewson

President

Wee Waa Chamber of Commerce

Andrew Bowen

Secretary/Treasurer

Wee Waa Chamber of Commerce