

**Submission  
No 27**

**HEALTH SERVICES AMENDMENT (SPLITTING OF THE MURRUMBIDGEE  
LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICT) BILL 2025**

**Organisation:** Tocumwal Ambulance Steering Committee

**Date Received:** 16 December 2025



Tocumwal Ambulance Steering Committee

Secretary – Gail Horan

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Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Inquiry into the Health Services Amendment (Splitting of the Murrumbidgee Local Health District) Bill 2025

This submission is made by the Tocumwal Ambulance Steering Committee. By way of background, the committee has existed since 2001 and has an active membership of a dozen people. The committee meets most months to discuss advocacy on this important issue for Tocumwal. While we recognise that the provision of an ambulance service is not directly in the ambit of MLHD, it is one that impacts significantly on the quality of care for locals.

Campaign for an Ambulance in Tocumwal

Tocumwal, the largest township in Berrigan Shire, has been advocating for a permanent ambulance station for more than 20 years. As a committee we have actively engaged with government on this matter for years. This has included petitions, meetings, letters and submissions to government.

In more recent times, prior to Covid, our members met with the previous health minister Brad Hazzard in Sydney. The costs of our travel was self-funded. Minister Hazzard commissioned a report into an ambulance station in Tocumwal. That report indicated that Tocumwal was not suitable for an ambulance station at that time but would be in the future. Times have changed since Covid and we have experienced significant population growth and housing development over the intervening years with more to come as explained below.

Following Covid, the government was silent on the issue. The reviews that Minister Hazzard promised don't appear to have actually occurred.

To make any progress on this matter our local Council (Berrigan Shire Council) has been forced to undertake three GIPA requests and leverage support from the State Opposition to have the NSW Ambulance Service directly engage. In more recent times, a professional business analyst has kindly lent their assistance on a volunteer basis to the

analysis of the data that has been received for three consecutive financial years ending in June 2025.

Previously, we have been told by government officials that the numbers do not stack up for an ambulance in Tocumwal. So, let's talk about numbers.

The analysis of GIPA data indicates that the median wait time for an ambulance in Tocumwal in a priority 1 emergency is around 24 minutes. Less than 2% of calls meet the target time of 8.6 minutes.

However, NSW Ambulance will tell you that ambulances for the 'Upper Murray' meet target times. 'Upper Murray' extends along the Murray River and has a population exceeding 40,000 people. Tocumwal is a tiny part of that region with a population of just under 3000. The use of 'Upper Murray' is misleading, insulting and inappropriate.

The actual statistics for Tocumwal are even more concerning when you consider them in the context of proximity to core services. The nearest major hospital is 55 minutes away. We do not have key diagnostic tools such as a CT scanner at our MPS and until this year the MPS did not have a doctor with privileges. The long and the short of it is that if you have a priority 1 emergency you are unlikely to get to hospital emergency in less than 90 minutes.

Tocumwal, is a rapidly growing population (up to 32% increase is expected in the next 5-10 years) with substantial residential developments. Earlier this year a manufactured housing estate of 319 homes for the 55+ age group was approved.

Tocumwal is currently serviced by a first responder model. The first responders are provided by FRNSW. NSW Ambulance have acknowledged the first responders are already at the limit of their capacity. In response to this, NSW Ambulance offered a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) model. While there were a number of public meetings and promotion of the initiative by our committee only three volunteers came forward. We believe there were two key reasons for a reluctance of volunteers to participate. The first one is age. The average age in our shire is approximately 55 and because of this, in our view, people are reluctant to participate in a program such as CERT. The second is unresolved matters between FRNSW and NSW Ambulance about the continuation of the first responders. First responders in Tocumwal are paid and there was widespread concern how the CERT model would impact on their income and employment.

Further, through the most recent GIPA request made by Council it has come to light that the business rules for the deployment of first responders has changed several times over the last 18 months. This, in our opinion, means that in addition to being no longer sustainable this model is no longer fit for purpose.

It is our view that a thorough and contemporary review of Tocumwal's paramedic requirements is essential to ensure the growing population receives timely and effective emergency care. CERT models and first responders are not the answer.

Ensuring the equitable distribution of paramedics, including Extended and Intensive Care Paramedics, is crucial for meeting present-day and future demand. The current reliance on first responders and ambulances dispatched from Finley, Berrigan or Cobram (Victoria) is clearly insufficient to meet Tocumwal's current needs, let alone support the expected growth. The statistics we present highlight a significant gap in service provision.

Our committee appreciates this opportunity to express our opinion.