

**Submission
No 2235**

INQUIRY INTO MONA VALE HOSPITAL

Organisation: Community Expressions

Name: Mr Michael Darby

Telephone: 02 9972 9316

Date Received: 31/01/2005

Subject: Submission to Mona Vale Hospital lodged by Michael Darby

Summary

Michael Darby
Community Expressions (Save Manly Hospital Campaign)
PO Box 401 Manly 1655 darby@tpg.com.au www.savemanlyhospital.org
Phone 9972 9316 or 0413 348 843

31 January 2005

The Chair and Members
General Purpose Standing Committee Number 2
Legislative Council of New South Wales
Parliament House
Sydney 2000

Dear Legislative Councillors

Thank you for the opportunity of participating in your Inquiry, and I am pleased to contribute on behalf of the unregistered voluntary organisation, Community Expressions (Save Manly Hospital), and also on my own behalf. I shall focus my comments on Item C of your Terms of Reference.

While it is true that the members of Community Expressions are primarily concerned with the preservation and adequate funding of Manly Hospital, our members are also involved in two other closely related campaigns:

1. The preservation and adequate funding of Mona Vale Hospital
2. The preservation and adequate funding of the Cremorne Community Mental Health Clinic.

Lest any Honourable Member be uncertain of the relevance to your Inquiry of Manly Hospital and the Cremorne Community Mental Health Centre, I make the point that the fate of all three institutions should be considered in the same context, for these reasons:

1. The source of decision-making power in each case is the NSW Department of Health, acting through Northern Sydney Health.
2. The Director of Northern Sydney Health, Dr Stephen Christley, gives every impression that he sees his task as achieving the financial goals of the NSW Government, rather than optimising the delivery of health care to the residents of the Northern Sydney Region.
3. The plans to close Manly Hospital and the Cremorne Community Mental Health Clinic have been disclosed, while the open secret of the plan to close Mona Vale Hospital is still officially denied.
4. The intended closure of all three institutions relates directly to the State Government's ambition to profit from the sale of real estate. Claims of the benefits of consolidation or centralisation should be seen as tendentious, and viewed with great suspicion. When many millions of dollars of development can hang upon a bureaucratic decision, the possibility of corruption will not be far away.
5. The intended closure of Manly Hospital and Mona Vale Hospital are inextricably linked with the ill-advised plan to build a hospital on the present site of the Warringah Council, a wholly unsuitable site for a hospital. Under any elected Council there would have been no

prospect of obtaining consent of the Warringah Municipality for this unpopular proposal. With no evidence of any corruption or malpractice, and with no charge of any kind having been brought against any Councillor, the State Government engineered the sacking of the Warringah Council and its replacement with an Administrator. I attended the Inquiry conducted by Professor Daly. Matters of concern included an instruction to a witness that names of individuals not be mentioned in respect of events attested to by the witness. That Administrator's term has been arbitrarily extended, in contravention of all democratic principles. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the real reason for the sacking of the Warringah Council was to permit the appointment of an Administrator who would do the bidding of the NSW Government in respect of the Warringah Council site, and provide for the NSW Government the collateral benefit of creating an opportunity to abolish the Warringah Council.

In particular reference to community consultation, I submit the text of my letter of 7 December 2004 (attached) to Dr Stephen Christley, which incorporates a true account of one meeting which demonstrated Dr Christley's apparent lack of interest in genuine consultation. I can only hope that my letter may have encouraged a change of heart in Dr Christley, and the best evidence of such a change would be for Northern Sydney Health to conduct a genuine survey of public opinion on the Northern Beaches in respect of the future of Mona Vale and Manly Hospitals, and a survey of the views of clients and carers of the Cremorne Community Mental Health Centre.

In respect of all three institutions, "community consultation" is taken to mean that the bureaucracy makes a decision, and takes no heed whatever of the views of the community. Many thousands of residents have signed petitions supporting the retention of Manly and Mona Vale Hospitals, in contrast with public agitation by a handful of people in favour of the Dee Why site.

I invite Honourable Members to visit www.savemanlyhospital.org, the website of Community Expressions, which among other things quotes some of the extensive correspondence in the Manly Daily opposing the Dee Why hospital plan. Please also visit the website of the Northern Beaches Health Planning Group, www.savemonavalehospital.com.

The NSW Government and its agents and servants seem to have the mindset that every institution operated by the State Government is wholly owned by the State Government which need have no scruples about disposing of such institutions in any way it wishes. That wrong attitude ignores the selfless fundraising, the initial donations of land, and the tireless voluntary work over many decades. As an illustration, I recently attended a dinner organised by Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP, which raised over \$80,000 for equipment at Mona Vale Hospital.

The correct interpretation of the State Government's status is that the Government operates hospitals and community clinics IN TRUST for local communities. That trust is breached by unilateral action on the behalf of the State Government which involves closure (or unwarranted relocation) of community facilities.

I would welcome the opportunity of giving oral evidence to the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Michael Darby

Attached: Letter of 7 December 2004 to Dr Stephen Christley

Michael Darby
Community Expressions (Save Manly Hospital Campaign)
PO Box 401 Manly 1655 darby@tpg.com.au www.savemanlyhospital.org

Tuesday 7 December 2004

Dr Stephen Christley
Chief Executive Officer
Northern Sydney Health
Level Five Executive Unit
Royal North Shore Hospital 2065
Fax: 9926 6025

cc: Ministers for Health, State & Federal
Shadow Ministers, State & Federal
Selected Parliamentarians
Media & community organisations

Dear Dr Christley,

In a letter published in the Manly Daily on Saturday 26 June 2004, you wrote:

As chief executive officer of Northern Sydney Health, I am committed to realising the goals agreed with the community in previous consultation of a new hospital in the Brookvale area to replace Manly Hospital, an upgraded Mona Vale Hospital and the provision of health services by an integrated network of the two hospitals and associated community health services.

Five months later, your June 2004 statement deserves two important observations.

Firstly, having seen you in action at close range, I now know what you mean by “*goals agreed with the community in previous consultation*”. On Wednesday 17 November 2004 I attended a “consultation” at Royal North Shore Hospital on the subject of the Cremorne and Chatswood community mental health facilities.

You arrived late, and without even nodding to the gathering of around 100 persons, you sat in the front row with your back to the crowd. You should have picked up a chair which was close handy and sat on the stage facing the gathering. Through a long succession of personal anecdotes from persons who suffer from mental illness and from carers of sufferers, you did not bother to take a note. You did not think it important to record the names of speakers, a task which the scrivener was demonstrably not performing. Moreover, you did not bother turning your head to look at even one of the many individuals courageously baring their souls in the course of speaking up about the shortcomings of the system you represent, while begging for the continuance of the community mental health clinics at Cremorne and Chatswood. When challenged on this point, you pleaded a “sore neck”. All the more reason to sit on the available chair facing the people who felt threatened by your intentions.

Speaker after speaker from the floor demonstrated the unanimity of the gathering, by calling for the continuing operation, in their present locations, of the community clinics which you have resolved to close. Not one speaker gave any encouragement or support to the closure of these facilities, and not one speaker was in any way prepared to accept the relocation of services from those facilities to the Royal North Shore Hospital. Yet in your own speech you announced that you had been pleased to hear a range of views!

Very likely you have used those very words in your report of the meeting, a report which will be used by the Minister to demonstrate to the Parliament that “community consultation” has taken place.

Let us call things by their real names. There was no “range of views” at the 17 November meeting. There was patent unanimity of opposition to your goal of closing two valuable community facilities upon which needy people depend and selling off the real estate. By your body language, by your blandishments and by your misconstruction of the tone of the meeting, you demonstrated that the so-called “consultation” was a mere artifice, lacking any intention to allow even a unanimous public view to exert an influence on the decision-making process.

Your demonstration of apathy and even contempt towards the views of the participants was unkind. Most people who spoke are in straitened circumstances because of their own minimal earning capacity as victims of mental illness, or because of the huge financial strains imposed by their roles as carers. Your large guaranteed income is far beyond the wildest dreams of those good people, for most of whom every week is a financial struggle. You and every other highly-paid senior public servant should feel a powerful obligation to treat such people with courtesy and respect. You failed the test. For example, one lady asked you whether you had any personal experience of mental illness among family or friends. You ignored her, and made no attempt to answer.

The meeting concluded with the passage of two resolutions, despite your undisguised attempt to close them out. The gathering passed, UNOPPOSED in each case, a resolution calling for the continuation of the Cremorne Community Mental Health Clinic and a Resolution calling for the renewal of the Chatswood facility. I challenge you to show that you have reported these resolutions. I challenge you to affirm that the Minister now understands that there is no sign of community support for closing Cremorne and Chatswood. And I challenge you to affirm that the Minister knows that a genuinely representative community group has resoundingly rejected the concept of relocating community mental health clinics into a hospital environment.

The conclusion I draw from observing your staged “consultation” is that no weight can be attached to any claim made by you of “*goals agreed with the community in previous consultation*” in respect of the Northern Beaches hospitals. A very important aspect is the absence of any community support for the closure of either Manly Hospital or Mona Vale Hospital. Nor is there any community support for the plan proposed by the unelected Warringah administrator for construction of a hospital on the site of the Warringah Council at Dee Why.

The Member for Wakehurst, Brad Hazzard MP, has made a sincere attempt to poll his constituents, reaching the conclusion that 90% of them are opposed to construction of a hospital at Dee Why. In Manly, where the local State Member is the only Parliamentarian in history to demand the removal of a major hospital from his own electorate, public feeling – demonstrated by petitions, by letters to the Manly Daily and by calls to radio stations – is overwhelming against the closure of Manly Hospital. I understand that during this week the NSW Legislative Assembly will receive a petition calling for both hospitals to be retained in their present sites, signed by eighteen thousand persons including the Federal Minister for Health, and I am aware of two other petitions on similar lines with lesser numbers of signatures.

The Manly Council has declined to poll its citizens on the issue, and neither Northern Sydney Health nor the State Government has polled the residents.

No genuine case has been made for the closure of Manly Hospital, and the residents of Manly and District commonly understand that the closure plan is driven by the real estate revenue priorities of the State Government. Manly Hospital and Mona Vale Hospital represent between them around sixteen decades of community fundraising, and are based upon purpose-specific donations of land.

These community assets are properly held in trust for the community by the Government and should not be sold.

A health planning process has proceeded on the false assumption that members of the public deserve no right of choice between hospitals. The same mentality could lead to the closure of many schools. Someone in Government may be ready to suggest that one major supermarket chain can serve the population more efficiently than two.

You have the opportunity to show leadership by becoming an advocate in the upper levels of Government for the principle that the right of choice between hospitals is as fundamental as the right of choice between schools, or between radio stations or between butchers.

Secondly, your June letter referred to "*an upgraded Mona Vale Hospital*". From the recent announcement by Northern Sydney Health that the Intensive Care Unit at Mona Vale will be closed, we now know that your commitment to "*an upgraded Mona Vale Hospital*" is less than robust. On Sunday 5 December I attended a rally at Mona Vale organised by the Save Mona Vale Hospital campaign. Estimates of attendance ranged from 2,000 as high as 4,000. The meeting was unanimously opposed to the closure of the ICU at Mona Vale and the meeting was unanimously opposed to the closure of Mona Vale Hospital. Speakers were also cheered for calling for the retention of Manly Hospital on its present site and for expressing opposition to the Dee Why proposal. The meeting was addressed by Hon Bronwyn Bishop MP and John Brogden MP, elected representatives of the local population for Federal and State Parliaments respectively. Hon Bronwyn Bishop is renowned as a major fundraiser for Mona Vale Hospital. Speaking not only as the Member for Pittwater, but also as Leader of the Opposition, John Brogden MP made clear that closure of the Mona Vale ICU represents a declaration of war by the NSW Government.

I'll quote from the report of the event which appears on the Manly Daily Website and in the Manly Daily of 7 December:

General surgeon Stuart Boland spoke at the rally and warned that surgeons would not process emergency admissions at Mona Vale without existing intensive care services. He said it was not a form of industrial action but a matter of safety. "If ICU (intensive care unit) is moved, what we're saying is it won't be safe."

Dr Boland said surgeons would not be satisfied with having their patients moved from Mona Vale to a different intensive care unit where they would not be able to monitor them personally. "Intensive care is the heart and soul of the hospital, if it's gone there are consequences."

Dr Boland said his view was the unanimous one of Mona Vale surgeons and anaesthetists.

The Dee Why proposal involves placing a hospital on a tiny site in the midst of the most densely populated square kilometre north of the Spit Bridge, where traffic density is already excessive and where exhaust fumes preclude any construction without full airconditioning, where helicopter operation would be dangerous and noisily objectionable. Yet this risible project suits the undisclosed goals of the State Government. It is now clear that the Warringah Council was replaced by an administrator, not because of any shortcoming of the Councillors, but because no elected Council would approve the construction of a hospital on such an unsuitable site. Nor would any elected Council be expected to applaud the elimination of its own administrative base and the destruction of its award winning library.

The health system should not exist for the convenience of health administrators, nor for achieving collateral political goals of the government. Surely you must by now have realised that the Dee Why site has been proposed as a step towards achieving the State Government's goal of abolishing

the Warringah Council. Do you really believe that a blatantly political objective justifies the abandonment of the world's best and second best sites for hospitals? (Others may disagree, but I rate Manly slightly ahead of the second place-getter, Mona Vale, only because of the extra elevation).

Dr Christley, you presently wield great power. You have the capacity to perform great services in protecting the interests of the mentally ill, by ensuring that the Cremorne and Chatswood community health facilities continue in operation. You also have the capacity to defend the residents of Manly, Warringah and Pittwater from the political plot which threatens the loss of two wonderful community hospitals. Please use your power wisely, and please resist political pressures by genuinely assessing the views of the community and then taking those views into account.

Finally, I invite you to visit the website: www.savemanlyhospital.org.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael Darby". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Darby