



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### The Mersey Hospital: ongoing saga: “Back to the Future”

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#### 1. Letter from Minister Abbott on August 14 and Commonwealth Implementation Plan

We are struck by the emphasis on “process” and vagueness on clinical detail. The main short term purpose of the Mersey Interim Community Advisory Committee seems to be to undertake yet another review of clinical, safety, quality and sustainability issues around the Mersey Hospital, and how it should operate in the context of the rest of the state health infrastructure. This is exactly the same as the last enquiries, including the most recent Richardson and Wellington reviews / reports.

Presumably the outcome of yet another review will be the same, that only one acute general hospital is viable in the North West. Perhaps the Commonwealth will spend enough to make the Mersey that single ongoing acute hospital, which then puts a huge question mark over the future of the Burnie Hospital. The implication of that for the costs of the lease arrangement at Burnie needs to be stated. If there is an attempt to try and continue with two competing acute general hospitals, then both will limp forward until both just fall over. The worse case scenario then, which is not at all unlikely, is that there will be no long term sustainable acute hospital in the North West.

#### 2. Letter from The Hon Kevin Rudd to Burnie Mayor

We feel it might be appropriate for the opposition to declare how they will sort out the impending mess in the North West. However, we especially appeal to Mr Rudd to use any new investment to ensure both a regional approach to health needs in North West Tasmania itself, but also that it is done in the context of the Health Services Plan which is about all Tasmanians. Any attempt to try and create a self – standing and independent health system for the 110,000 people of the North West and West Coast will fail – back to the future again!

#### 3. What needs to be the Tasmanian response?

One thing we can learn from the Commonwealth “wedge” intervention is that broad policy can be quickly followed by an implementation time - line. Mr Abbott’s beaurocrats were able to come up with a detailed time – frame and action points within

10 days – why has it taken four months for our Department of Health and Human Services to come up with nothing to date. Indeed the lack of a time – frame and action points for implementation of the Health Services Plan and the fear and uncertainty that has created is what has led to the crisis at Mersey Hospital. Further , any closures or clinical changes even based on safety issues ( e.g closure of ICU at Mersey) are then blamed on the implementation plan, when they are not....because there isn't one! The same destructive cycle of rumour and conspiracy theory now seems to be underway at the Launceston General Hospital. (The Examiner August 15) - it is important that the true implementation plan for “Future Health” and its related Clinical Advisory Committee is available NOW.

It is also an imperative that Minister Giddings , backed by the Tasmanian Government, moves forward with urgency to develop plans for all the other outcomes from the Health Services Plan, even if it is forced to put change in the North West “on hold”. Far, far too much is now at stake.