

Hospitals with no doctor; moves to get emergency action

I will meet with the CEO of Hunter New England Health Michael DiRienzo this morning Friday and I'm hopeful we will get a very clear picture of what is in place and planned to tackle the very real problems we seem to have in some of our hospitals in regard to emergency and medical staff shifts.

Certainly I'm looking for answers to some questions that I've asked about recent shift decisions and the management structure – but more than that to get answers that hundreds of people in our Glen and Inverell communities have been asking too.

Specifically, we need to know how many patients have been presenting at our hospitals – and then being transferred on, or being told there's no doctor on duty to attend to them at that point.

Mayor Paul Harmon will be with me at the meeting – and he will have with him a petition which has been circulating in Inverell that shows the strength of concerns – we're talking something like 1,500 signatories – about what many see as completely inadequate health servicing.

There's been some horror stories that we believe are a symptom of a more pervasive problem where doctors are not available for emergency department duty at hospitals including Inverell and Glen Innes.

I've already spoken publicly about HNEH's reliance on locum shifts, which are at the core of the problem I think in some instances, and I am not convinced the locum system is the way for us to go, and what we have to accept. I think it's fraught with danger - a system that is costly, unreliable and not good enough and I don't believe it should be part of the medical management structure.

Fixing rail results bring big economic benefits: so will replacing trains

A project investing \$2 million to reinstate a disused section of rail line at Moree, enabling hundreds of thousands of tonnes of grain, cotton and pulses to be railed to Newcastle instead of being sent by truck to Queensland, is due to be completed early next week.

I inspected the work yesterday. It's being funded by the NSW Government and will link Broadbent Grain's receival facilities, on the abandoned Moree-Inverell rail line, with the main line servicing Moree.

There's been an intense three-week construction job using 10 men and five contractors on this new 2.8 kilometre line and we're all hoping it will be complete by Tuesday.

It means that about 250,000 tonnes of grain and 6,400 twenty foot containers of cotton and pulses – the equivalent of 6,000 trucks per year – can be moved by rail to Newcastle instead of having to go by road to Queensland ports.

This is a big win for Moree's rural economy and for jobs in country NSW. It's an investment in appropriate transport options, better roads, and greater efficiency.

When completed, the project will have seen 1,600 new steel sleepers laid on top of 574,000 tonnes of new ballast, which was sourced at a local Moree quarry.

Broadbent will soon construct its rail loading facility, which will pave the way for the first train to use the line early next year.

And there was more good news for rail upgrades at Armidale this week too with a six-month, 50km major rail maintenance project being completed, improving the train ride and reliability of services for local rail passengers.

More than 60,000 old timber sleepers were replaced with new long life steel sleepers in a stretch between Armidale and Wollun, just north of the Walcha Road rail station.

The northern train travelling public can look forward to more reliable services and a smoother ride as a result of the vital upgrade which included resurfacing the track and laying out more than 15,000 tonnes of stone to support the track.

The resurfacing of track means train trips won't be as bumpy, and replacing sleepers means trains won't be slowed down by maintenance work.

BUT while it will help reduce costs for future maintenance work, I am not slipping a gear in my calls to have the aged Xplorer train fleet fast-tracked because the current fleet we use is becoming increasingly unreliable.

There's some 120,000 seats booked in and out of Armidale each year on our Xplorer services and if we want to increase our passenger numbers further we need to provide a service that is more reliable and more comfortable.

A little bit of extra investment by government now will save millions in the long run.

First White Rock now Sapphire set to wind up wind farm developments

Great news this week that the Sapphire Wind Farm project has secured its investment funding and flagged a start on what will be the largest wind farm in NSW early next year.

It's more good news for northern NSW's renewable energy drive that will cement us as a powerhouse in production.

Sapphire, a 270megawatt wind farm, with 75 turbines, secured financing for the \$588 million farm, on a site near Kings Plains, 18km west of Glen Innes and 28km east of Inverell.

The developer CWP Renewables has basically given us a great Christmas gift on top of the White Rock wind farm beginning the first of their 700 loads up the highway to Glen two weeks back.

What we will see in 2017 is two massive wind farms, almost neighbouring each other between Glen Innes and Inverell, under construction over the next year – and combined the Sapphire and White Rock farms will actually generate more energy for more households and businesses than we have right across the New England and North West.

Sapphire is due to become operational in the second half of 2018 and will become the biggest wind farm in NSW – a title that White Rock will own until then – but between them they are a super windfall for us in this regional area, because they are creating massive investment and jobs for locals in the lead-up construction stage and later in maintenance and servicing.

Both projects include plans for smaller solar farm operations on their sites – adding another feather in the renewable energy cap for the region. The 56 megawatt Moree Solar is one of three operating solar projects in NSW and began feeding into the grid earlier this year.

CWP Renewables Chief Operating Officer Ed Mounsey estimated over \$10million would be injected into the local economy during the construction phase of Sapphire – but significantly there would be more investment in community projects and initiatives after that.

It's like a breath of fresh air for our jobs and local economies - Goldwind, who are developing White Rock have already told us their project will inject in the vicinity of \$30-\$40 million into the local economy during construction. Over 200 people have been involved during construction and a 10-15 local service team will be needed once the wind farm is operating.

Moree energy opportunity workshop a clean air success

From all reports the Energy Opportunity Workshop held this week in Moree attracted about 50 people and the feedback I've been given suggests the session was very informative and positive.

Moree council is looking to provide some more community information about the changes coming for those who've been on feedback tariffs and what they need to do to take advantage of the new world

order and hook up with the renewable push. There might also be a chance the organisers will return to do some follow up sessions with more information about solar installations for households and businesses.

Certainly we've seen great interest in that in other parts of the electorate.

Glen Innes named as one of the new TAFE Learning Centres

Glen Innes will reap big benefits from the new education digital age with its naming this week as one of four centres to provide greater access to vocational education and training for students across country NSW.

It was a great announcement from Deputy Premier and Minister for Regional Development, Skills and Small Business John Barilaro to locate one of the first four of a planned 12 sites as part of the TAFE new Connected Learning Centres in the highlands town.

Glen Innes will become another centre of education excellence in the tablelands region by providing for TAFE's new, digitally enabled, next generation learning environments for students in regional NSW.

The first four CLCs will be located in Quirindi, Coonabarabran, Glen Innes and Tenterfield while eight more are to be rolled out across regional NSW next year.

I've been advocating for greater regionalism of government services since my election in 2013 and this is another great win for regional NSW and particularly for this region.

It comes off the back of Armidale being named a regional TAFE Digital Education hub only a few weeks ago and is part of the government's TAFE reforms.

This is about regional communities being given access to state-of-the-art facilities which people in metropolitan areas may take for granted and which prove my point that government services don't always need to be located in the big cities; they can deliver efficiently and effectively from regional centres.

Glen Innes is proving itself to be a progressive new technology-renewable energy hub which is seeing massive investment in wind farm projects in that area.

Makeover on the way and beaut new facelift for NERAM

ARMIDALE'S New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM) is closer to having a new and refreshed facelift with a **\$60,000** State Government grant that I announced last week – and confirmation of a Stronger Communities Funding grant of \$240,000 through Armidale Regional Council from the State Government this week is more good news.

With these two grants the gallery is looking at only a shortfall of a final \$15,000 which they say they'll achieve through NERAM fundraising.

The cultural complex in Kentucky Street is waiting on cosmetic surgery to replace the cladding on the exterior of the building – giving it a dash of fresh colour, the first since it was built more than 30 years ago.

The existing fibre cement sheeting on the exterior is weathered and has cracked extensively and there's also a bit of mould, but the facelift is more than just a cosmetic job, it's also a financial and environmental one too because the new cladding will improve energy efficiency too because there will be some insulation in the sub wall which has deteriorated to the point of being ineffective, so this would make it more sustainable and obviously more cost effective in relation to energy use.

NERAM director Robert Heather hopes the work will be undertaken in early 2017.

Kamilaroi Colouring-in project gets a \$3,000 brush up

It was good this week too to announce an arts grant that will help a group of Moree indigenous artists produce a special Kamilaroi colouring-in book.

The Colour Me Kamilaroi publication will design, select and produce the images and art work for e-book publishing and use in local educational circles.

Already there's been a series of workshops with local artists to come up with some preliminary designs of Kamilaroi-inspired pictures, designs and Dreamtime stories that could be incorporated into the colouring-in book.

The **\$3,000** grant from the Country Arts Support program will underwrite this and not only entertain and educate readers and colour artists, but also unearth and promote some more up-and-coming indigenous artists in the Kamilaroi clan.

The head teacher of multi discipline business and education at the Moree TAFE campus Elizabeth von Gavel said the book was a contemporary approach to the traditional passing on of knowledge and a vehicle to address the issues facing Aboriginal people today.

The local Aboriginal community helped identify the need for a project that addresses the promotion of traditional art forms delivered in a contemporary way which provides a means of preserving the rich Aboriginal cultural heritage of the region.

The project team hopes to publish a hard copy edition later on but an exhibition of the works is planned later on for the Mehi Gallery and Studio at the TAFE in Moree

Local farmers contribute to huge growth in primary industries

Great reading this week with a new report into primary industries production which highlights the huge value and contribution of our northern region of the NSW agricultural sector - we've hit a record high value of \$13.9 billion.

The 2016 Performance, Data and Insights Report into primary industries showed the massive impact of New England and North West production levels across the 13 local government areas in the region. The report has revealed the Gross Value of Production (GVP) in the sector has jumped 17 per cent – that's \$2.1 billion more – over the past two years.

The report provides a simple and clear analysis of key NSW primary industries each year – and what it shows is that our New England and North West agriculture sector is a pillar of that performance.

We're the number one beef producing region – in fact we produced as much as the rest of the state combined in 2015 to 2016 – nearly half of the state production and worth \$679 million to our producers, and to us.

And our region was the biggest producer of cotton in this state – we produced 47 per cent of the crop, worth \$273 million.

Our barley production was worth \$129 million and we rank the second biggest region in NSW in it, and when it comes to sorghum, NSW produced some 585,000 tonnes of it and as a key production area, the NENW contributed a sizable part of that crop.

We were responsible for \$14 million in egg production and our pig production value was \$4 million.

The northern region in 2014-2015 had produced more than \$100 million worth of wool and strong results were expected for the latest figures.

The report data paints a positive picture for our farmers and graziers and good outlooks for increased markets and market share in a number of sectors.

Despite the increasing mechanisation of the sector and more aggregation of land, this northern region employs a significant number in primary industries, nearly 10,000 people in agriculture, so the continued improvements in our production levels have tremendous impact in our local economies.

Key findings of the 2016 Performance, Data and Insights report:

- China remains the State's largest export market, with exports equalling \$1.4 billion
- The estimated combined GVP of NSW cropping was almost \$5.2 billion in 2015- 16, up 7 per cent on the previous year
- The estimated combined GVP of livestock and livestock products was more than \$6.5 billion in 2015-16, up 11 per cent on the previous year
- The estimated combined GVP of NSW fisheries was more than \$1.4 billion in 2014/ 15, up 1 per cent on the previous year
- Beef and wheat provided the highest GVP for 2015-16, while beef, cotton and wool were the highest-value export products.
- NSW pulses surged by a massive 91 per cent to \$348 million, due in large part to chickpeas.
- China remains the State's largest export market, with exports exceeding \$1.4 billion.
- There were 87,325 directly employed jobs in the NSW primary industries sector in 2015-16.

Five new police on the beat for Moree and Armidale

The Barwon and New England Local Area Commands last Monday welcomed five new probationary constables from the latest Police Academy attestation parade of *Class of 329*.

Four police officers began at Moree and one at Armidale – and I know local communities will welcome them with open arms.

On behalf of our region, I would like to congratulate them to their commitment to training and moving into our local areas to help to combat crime and protect the community.

Policing can be a very challenging career and our officers encounter the best and the worst of humanity, so I'm very pleased that those forces in this region will benefit from the enthusiasm of five new officers starting their job on the beat.

But I also know they are moving into areas that overwhelmingly are honest, law abiding and welcoming and they are communities that are generous and considerate of new comers and will make them feel right at home.

We really have increased our strength over the year, with seven new recruits from the academy allocated to Moree and three at Armidale.

ADAM MARSHALL
Member for Northern Tablelands
Parliamentary Secretary for Northern NSW and Renewable Energy