

## **Flying Minute – WALGA Submission: Inquiry into the Delivery of Ambulance Services in Western Australia (05-030-03-0001 BW)**

*By Bec Waddington, Policy Officer, Resilient Communities*

**That the letter to the Standing Committee on Public Administration on the *Inquiry into the Delivery of Ambulance Services in Western Australia*, be endorsed.**

**RESOLUTION 206.FM/2021**

**CARRIED**

### **Executive Summary**

- The Standing Committee on Public Administration commenced an inquiry into the delivery of ambulance services in Western Australia on 23 June 2021 with submissions due by 23 July 2021.
- Given the short time frame WALGA emailed all CEOs directly and put an article in LG News encouraging submissions and that WALGA would also make a submission if there was sufficient sector interest.
- Three regional Local Governments provided feedback to WALGA that expressed support for the current volunteer based ambulance system in regional Western Australia and highlighted the potential risk to service levels if it is taken over by the State Government.

### **Attachment**

- WALGA Letter to the Inquiry into the Delivery of Ambulance Services in Western Australia

### **Policy Implications**

*Policy Position 3.2.2 – Regional Health Services:*

*The Association supports continuing to work with affected Local Governments and key stakeholders to identify and develop collaborative strategies. The Association supports continuing to advocate to the State Government to prioritise regional health and the regional health workforce. The Association supports developing a policy connection with the Australian Local Government Association as a pathway for advocating for stronger specialised regional health workforces.*

### **Background**

The Standing Committee on Public Administration commenced an inquiry into the delivery of ambulance services in Western Australia on 23 June 2021, with submissions due by Friday, 23 July 2021.

In particular the Standing Committee is considering:

- how 000 ambulance calls are received, assessed, prioritised and despatched in the metro area and in the regions;
- the efficiency and adequacy of the service delivery model of ambulance services in metro and regional areas of WA; and
- whether alternative service delivery models in other jurisdictions would better meet the needs of the community.

Given the short time frame for consultation WALGA emailed all Local Government CEOs directly on 28 June 2021 encouraging them to make submissions, and an article was published in LG News on



Friday 9 July inviting interested Local Governments to make a submission directly and indicating that WALGA would make a submission if there was adequate interest. Three Local Governments; the Shire of Lake Grace, Shire of Carnamah and Shire of Mt Marshall provided comment to WALGA.

## **Comment**

When announcing the Inquiry the Chair of the Standing Committee, Hon Pierre Lang MLC said:

*'Ambulance services constitute a vital part of our health system, directly impacting hundreds of Western Australians every single day. For this reason, ambulance services are always topical for the community'*

This is particularly the case in regional Western Australia.

The three responses received all emphasise the importance of the ambulance service in their regions, express support for the current volunteer based ambulance system in regional Western Australia and highlight the risk to service levels potential loss in volunteers if the service is taken over by the State Government.

WALGA's submission highlights that any changes recommended to the operation or ownership of the service must not negatively impact on regional areas where the current ambulance system provides an important contribution to community connectedness through volunteering and accessibility to health services at the local level.

## FLYING MINUTE OUTCOME

Total invited to survey: 24

Total finished survey: 15

Poll Created: 19/07/2021 at 16:43

Poll Closed: 22/07/2021 at 23:59

Endorse the Recommendation: 11

Endorse the Recommendation subject to comment below: 3

Oppose the Recommendation: 1

First Name	Last Name	Completed Date
Carol	Adams OAM	22/07/2021 at 15:06
Phillip	Blight	22/07/2021 at 18:12
Julie	Brown	21/07/2021 at 22:43
Ruth	Butterfield	Not completed
Karen	Chappel	21/07/2021 at 19:56
Cheryl	Cowell	Not completed
Malcolm	Cullen	21/07/2021 at 10:30
Frank	Cvitan	Not completed
Tony	Dean	19/07/2021 at 21:06
Catherine	Ehrhardt	Not completed
Russ	Fishwick	21/07/2021 at 11:49
Ronnie	Fleay	22/07/2021 at 14:10
Logan	Howlett JP	20/07/2021 at 14:18
Mark	Irwin	Not completed
Paul	Kelly	22/07/2021 at 19:13
Jenna	Ledgerwood	22/07/2021 at 13:12
Peter	Long	21/07/2021 at 11:30
Cate	McCullough	Not completed
Chris	Mitchell JP	20/07/2021 at 14:05
Les	Price	Not completed
Michelle	Rich	Not completed
Ken	Seymour	Not completed
Stephen	Strange	19/07/2021 at 17:14
Doug	Thompson	22/07/2021 at 15:25

## Responses

(11) Endorse the Recommendation: Stephen Strange (on: 19/07/2021 at 17:14), Chris Mitchell JP (on: 20/07/2021 at 14:05), Malcolm Cullen (on: 21/07/2021 at 10:30), Peter Long (on: 21/07/2021 at 11:30), Russ Fishwick JP (on: 21/07/2021 at 11:49), Julie Brown (on: 21/07/2021 at 22:43), Karen Chappel (on: 21/07/2021 at 19:56), Carol Adams OAM (on: 22/07/2021 at 15:06), Doug Thompson (on: 22/07/2021 at 15:25), Phillip Blight (on: 22/07/2021 at 18:12), Logan Howlett JP (on: 20/07/2021 at 14:18)

(3) Endorse the Recommendation subject to comment below: Tony Dean (on: 19/07/2021 at 21:06), Jenna Ledgerwood (on: 22/07/2021 at 13:12), Ronnie Fleay (on: 22/07/2021 at 14:10)

(1) Oppose the Recommendation: Paul Kelly (on: 22/07/2021 at 19:13)

## Comments

President Cr Tony Dean on 19/07/2021 at 21:06

*This is an issue in the Warren Blackwood sub region of the South West Zone. The majority of ambulance use within this region is for patient transfer and it places an unreasonable burden on our volunteers, who are often senior in years. There has to be a better system of patient transfer, which I don't believe is the core activity of a first responder.*

Mayor Logan Howlett JP (on: 20/07/2021 at 14:18)

*One matter to be reviewed in the penultimate paragraph:*

*"Finally, given the importance of ambulance services to regional areas, WALGA recommends that should the Committee decide to hold hearings, these be conducted in the regions to **engage ensure** that community stakeholders have the opportunity to provide their views directly."*

Cr Jenna Ledgerwood on 22/07/2021 at 13:12

*I support the recommendation. Given the current inability to properly support the country areas with Police, Doctors and teachers it is imperative that should they take over the service that services to regional and remote areas are not diminished in anyway.*

Cr Ronnie Fleay on 22/07/2021 at 14:10

*Ambulance services are vital & valued in the regions & current service is very well run although heavily dependent on volunteers. If Government wishes to improve the service they could do so via funding more qualified paramedics to be stationed in the region which would give volunteers vital support & would result in more community members being willing to volunteer.*

Cr Paul Kelly on 22/07/2021 at 19:13

*Very disappointing to present a neutral view. I don't think this contributes much to the process and has the potential reducing the relevance of WALGA in the view of the standing committee and potentially the government. I think we find a way to get members views quickly and form an*



*association view or we simply respond by saying that we have encouraged individual councils to directly respond.*

## **Secretariat Comment**

Comments from Cr Ledgerwood, Cr Dean and Cr Fleay are consistent with the submission.

The submission highlights the need to ensure services to regional and remote areas are not diminished (Cr Ledgerwood).

*“WALGA welcomes the review of ambulance services to improve health care for all Western Australians, but submits that any changes recommended to the operation or ownership of the service must not negatively impact on regional areas which value the current ambulance system”*

The current submission acknowledges the challenges of the volunteer workforce and considerations that will need to be made during the inquiry (Cr Dean, Cr Fleay)

*“.... changing demographic patterns and an ageing population means that in some areas there will be difficulty in attracting ambulance volunteers in the future. For these places a hybrid model of volunteers and career ambulance personnel may be appropriate. Additional State Government support for ambulance volunteer attraction and recruitment, training and retention in regional areas is recommended.”*

The comment from Mayor Logan Howlett JP is noted. The penultimate paragraph in the submission has been amended to remove the word 'engage'.

The comment from Cr Paul Kelly is noted. In developing the submission WALGA has sought to accurately reflect the views and circumstances of the regional Local Governments that provided feedback, the People and Place Policy Team and State Council.



**xx July 2021**

**Our Ref: 05-030-03-0001\BW:TR**

Via email: [lcpac@parliament.wa.gov.au](mailto:lcpac@parliament.wa.gov.au)

Standing Committee on Public Administration  
Parliament House  
4 Harvest Tce  
WEST PERTH WA 6005

**SUBMISSION TO THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE DELIVERY OF AMBULANCE SERVICES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into the Delivery of Ambulance Services in Western Australia.

The Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) is an independent, membership based organisation representing and supporting the work and interests of 139 Local Governments in Western Australia. WALGA provides an essential voice for over 1,200 Local Government Elected Members, approximately 14,500 employees and over 2.5 million constituents of Local Government in Western Australia.

Noting the very short timeframe provided for making a submission to the Inquiry WALGA has been unable to undertake a comprehensive consultation process. However a number of regional Local Governments have considered the Inquiry Terms of Reference and provided feedback which is summarised below. It should be noted that this feedback relates to regional ambulance services only.

Local Governments, including Shire of Lake Grace, Shire of Mt Marshall and Shire of Carnamah, have expressed support for the current volunteer based ambulance system in regional Western Australia. There is concern that if the service were to be taken over by the State Government it would impact negatively on the level of service for regional communities due to:

- The potential for a reduction in service levels particularly in the smaller, more remote communities.
- If a government owned or run service was to move away from the use of volunteers there would be a need to employ a significant number of people to replace them. In many areas across regional Western Australia this would not be feasible and may lead to a reduction in ambulance numbers and service capacity.
- The potential for services to be moved from local sub-centres and placed in larger regional towns; essentially removing the only medical service that many of the regional areas have nearby. This has the potential to significantly increase response times and reduce service levels.

The current ambulance service delivery model in regional areas, which relies heavily on volunteer services, provides an effective service for regional communities, particularly where there are no alternative medical facilities. It seems the most significant barrier in healthcare is when a patient is transferred to the nearest country health facilities where

there is often inadequate services and staffing levels to support the patient; not the ambulance service itself. In this context the Shire of Carnamah highlights that additional resources are required to improve the overall outcome for improved health services in regional WA, not just within St Johns, but also within the WA Country Health Services and Royal Flying Doctor service models.

Any change to the ambulance service in regional areas has the potential to have a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of people within these communities. Many towns in regional Western Australia are already finding it difficult to attract people to live and work. Having a diminished medical support system would make this even harder.

In many country towns, volunteering is an important contributor to community connectedness. If the ambulance service were to move away from the use of volunteers in regional areas it would reduce volunteering opportunities, with potentially negative social impacts. Any changes to the ambulance service should protect and enhance the ethos that attracts volunteers. At the same time, changing demographic patterns and an ageing population means that in some areas there will be difficulty in attracting ambulance volunteers in the future. For these places a hybrid model of volunteers and career ambulance personnel may be appropriate. Additional State Government support for ambulance volunteer attraction and recruitment, training and retention in regional areas is recommended.

There is also a concern, that if the service was to be taken over by the State Government, there would be a push to move to a model where Local Governments would be required to manage the volunteer service, similar to volunteer Bush Fire Brigades, which would not be supported.

As a result of Government policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic tourism in Western Australia has increased significantly, particularly to remote locations. This has increased demands on regional health services, including ambulance services. It is submitted that given the interconnected nature of the health care system, the Inquiry consider making recommendations that address resourcing issues currently faced by regional health services including regional hospitals, General Practitioners, other medical and allied health services and the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS).

A number of Local Governments operate airports which are utilised to support patient transfer between ambulance and RFDS. In this way Local Governments are partners in the provision of regional health services.

WALGA welcomes the review of ambulance services to improve health care for all Western Australians, but submits that any changes recommended to the operation or ownership of the service must not negatively impact on regional areas which value the current ambulance system.

Finally, given the importance of ambulance services to regional areas, WALGA recommends that should the Committee decide to hold hearings, these be conducted in the regions to ensure that community stakeholders have the opportunity to provide their views directly.

For further information please contact Susie Moir, Manager Resilient Communities, on [smoir@walga.asn.au](mailto:smoir@walga.asn.au) or 9213 2058.

Yours sincerely,

**Mayor Tracey Roberts JP**  
**President**