

Our Ref: (DES/03/0796-2264)  
Min Ref: (E/03/03038)

Mr Neil Laurie  
The Clerk of the Parliament  
Parliament House  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to your letter of 21 August 2003 concerning petitions received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly in relation to ambulance response times to the areas situated west of Mackay along the Peak Downs Highway and the Pioneer Valley.

Firstly, I would like to assure you that this Government is committed to providing the best possible ambulance service to the people of Queensland.

Advice was sought from the Commissioner, Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS) on the issues raised

The Commissioner has advised that Queensland is one of Australia's most decentralised states, with high population densities and growth rates along the Coast and in the South East of the State. Geographically isolated communities, an ageing population and a large mobile population all create service delivery challenges. Managing and maintaining appropriate levels of resources to provide services that reflect demographic and demand profiles within communities, will continue to be a key priority of the Beattie Government.

The petitioners' concerns relate to the timely response of the ambulance service to the townships of Walkerston, Marian and Eton, and for areas along the Peak Downs Highway and the Pioneer Valley.

The Mackay Ambulance Station is the primary response station for all cases in the Walkerston, Marian and Eton areas. To provide improved response times to these areas the QAS is relocating its Mackay City Station to South Mackay. This will be part of a \$5.5M investment in the Mackay-Whitsunday area.

Nebo Ambulance Station and Finch Hatton Ambulance Station service the Peak Downs Highway and the Pioneer Valley. These stations primarily treat cases past the Eton range as well as the townships of Mirani, Finch Hatton and Eungella. A secondary response is provided from Mackay and the community based helicopter.

Some of these townships are more than 10 minutes from the nearest ambulance station but there are many good reasons why the best care for any patient is to call Triple Zero and wait on scene for the ambulance to attend. The ambulance does not just provide transport but expert care for the condition.

Ambulance officers are health professionals and can usually provide all immediately required treatment on scene. Simply rushing a patient to hospital may in fact delay important care. The ambulance will usually be dispatched while the caller is still on the telephone providing information to the Communication Centre and a Communications Officer can provide expert first aid advice to bystanders. It is much easier to provide appropriate first aid at the scene rather than in a moving vehicle. Moving a patient, whether severely ill or injured, is commonly harmful.

With the stress of an ill or injured relative, someone may drive too fast or inappropriately and injure themselves, the patient, or other road users. Meeting halfway is a particularly problematic method as it entails all the problems of untrained movement of a casualty together with the risk of the ambulance and patient passing each other on the road.

I trust this information is of assistance to you. However, should further information be required, please contact Mr Russell Bowles, Assistant Commissioner, QAS Central Region on telephone number (07) 4938 4896.

Yours sincerely



**HON MIKE REYNOLDS AM MP**  
Minister for Emergency Services  
Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland