



Petition

Registration No:	11
Title:	Indigenous Women's Protest on the Closure of Ward 2 Birthing Service – Gove District Hospital
Presented on:	28 April 2009
Presented by:	Ms Walker
Referred to:	Health (Vatskalis)
Date referred:	28 April 2009
Response due:	13 August 2009
Response received:	13 August 2009
Response presented:	17 August 2009

Petition

February 11th 2009, Gove Hospital announced the closure of the birthing facility ward 2 as from 31st March 2009. The Indigenous Women of East Arnhem Land wish to submit our protest to this closure.

1. It is our cultural belief that where we are born is where we are from, travelling to Darwin is too far away from where we culturally belong.

2. Cultural Birthing Practices will be lost.

Currently the elders of the community work closely with the pregnant women during the pregnancy and offer this continuity during the birth and directly after. This continuity will be lost from a region where these practices are essential for the well being of the mother and baby. It is not correct to take away the cultural ways. The relevant family must be involved for each individual woman.

This is going directly against the recommendations of the recent Maternity Services Review.

We the undersigned are calling on the N.T Government and DHF to take action to protect an indigenous families of East Arnhem Land, to enable our cultural Birth practices to continue to survive and grow.

Response

On 11 February 2009, Gove District Hospital announced that it could no longer provide a birthing service from 31 March 2009, due to an inability to recruit suitable qualified doctors with obstetrical skills. Although Gove District Hospital had no intention to close the maternity service, it was acutely aware of the national and international shortage of suitably qualified doctors.

This announcement was made early so that it could prepare the women in East Arnhem for a smooth transfer to the nearest centre should Gove District Hospital not be able to recruit doctors in time.

The closure of maternity services for the birthing of women in East Arnhem resulted in enormous pressure on the pregnant women, their partners and families, and resulted in some financial and social hardship. Gove District Hospital acknowledges and understands the strong cultural aspects of birthing and has worked extremely hard to restore birthing services in Nhulunbuy, focussing on the short and long-term goals.

It was unfortunate that Gove District Hospital was unable to avoid a temporary closure from 1 April to 4 May 2009. The hospital has now been able secure long-term locum cover until November 2009 and is looking to extend this to January 2010, in order that it can finalise a more permanent solution to the provision of maternity services for East Arnhemland.

Given that the only reason for closure of maternity services has been a recruitment/retention issue, there has not been any community consultation about alternative models of care with the community.