

10 September 2009

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Lindsay Electorate: Australian Red Cross

Mr BRADBURY» (Lindsay) (9:51 AM) —I rise to speak about my disappointment with the decision taken by the Australian Red Cross to close its voluntary aid service in New South Wales. The Red Cross movement right around the world performs outstanding work helping those most in need and is supported by global networks of dedicated volunteers, individual and corporate sponsors and the goodwill of the general community. The Australian Red Cross is no exception. They are at the front line of natural disasters and national tragedies, offering a consoling word while helping people to piece their lives back together. They played a key role in mobilising the nation to dig deep for the victims of the Victorian bushfires earlier this year and they perform outreach services in some of the most remote parts of the country with vulnerable Indigenous communities.

As one of the patrons of the Penrith branch of the Red Cross and as a long-time supporter of the organisation's activities in my community, I can attest to the incredible passion of the volunteers and the enormous contribution they have made over a long period of time. That is why I was disappointed to learn that the Red Cross plans to close the 95-year-old voluntary aid service in New South Wales. The VAS has sent qualified first aid volunteers to sporting and community events for almost a century, and I could not begin to imagine how many people have benefited from the work of these volunteers. The VAS does not charge a fee, which makes it an accessible first aid service for many struggling community and sporting organisations—many of which are in the most disadvantaged communities and cannot afford to pay for the services of the New South Wales Ambulance or St John Ambulance.

Any donations the VAS receives for its work are sent to the Red Cross to be included in its larger fundraising pool, which supports the full breadth of services the Red Cross provides. On 13 June this year, the men and women of the VAS were called to a meeting by the Red Cross and told that they no longer fell within the organisation's strategic priorities and they would be shut down, effective from 1 December. There was no consultation with any of the regiments before the decision was made, a process that has deeply hurt the volunteers who joined the VAS and donated their time on weekends and public holidays because they believed in the integrity of the Red Cross.

In my community, the 15 members of the Nepean VAS between them have more than 300 years worth of experience and the group's regional liaison officer, Mrs Yvonne Cassidy, has given 31 years of service to not only the Nepean VAS but also the broader Red Cross organisation. The Nepean VAS has been self-sufficient for a number of years and fundraises extensively for the Red Cross, even being named last year the most outstanding VAS regiment in New South Wales. In my view, the Red Cross is turning its back on the experience and dedication of these dedicated volunteers. I would hope that they recognise the incredible service that these volunteers and the VAS perform for the community and that they reverse this short-sighted decision.