



Hon Steven Miles MP
Minister for Health and
Minister for Ambulance Services

1 William Street Brisbane Qld 4000
GPO Box 48 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3035 6100
Facsimile +61 7 3220 6231

C-ECTF-18/8837

Senator the Honourable Malarndirri McCarthy
Chair
Senate Select Committee on Stillbirth Research and Education
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Email: stillbirth.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator

Thank you for your letter dated 21 September 2018, in relation to the Senate Select Committee on Stillbirth Research and Education (the Select Committee), seeking a response to written questions. The Queensland Government's responses to these questions are set out below.

1. For how long can a body be stored in a Queensland morgue? Is this time limit articulated in legislation, regulation or policy?

In Queensland, there is no legislated time limit regarding the storage of bodies in mortuaries.

Mortuaries in Queensland exist in both public and private hospitals. Pathology Queensland (PQ), a commercialised business unit of Queensland Health, has visibility over those public hospital facilities where post mortem examinations are conducted. This includes the mortuaries in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, the Sunshine Coast University Hospital, the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital (RBWH), The Prince Charles Hospital, the Princess Alexandra Hospital, Toowoomba, and the Gold Coast University Hospital. There are a large number of other public hospitals with mortuaries, together with private hospitals with mortuaries where post mortem examinations are not conducted. PQ does not have oversight of these facilities, and there is no system-wide policy regarding the storage of bodies in public mortuaries in Queensland.

For mortuaries operated by PQ and Forensic and Scientific Services (FSS), there is currently no defined time limit on the storage of bodies. Bodies are kept until they are claimed and transported to a funeral director for a respectful cremation or burial. The preference is to have deceased people released to families' funeral directors at the earliest opportunity to enable funeral services to proceed without delay.

Those hospitals within the jurisdiction of PQ have comprehensive tracking of all bodies (including those for autopsy, memorial services and temporary storage pending release to funeral directors). This includes all bodies that have been received and handled by PQ at the central laboratory located at the RBWH and are tracked from the time of receipt (including between hospitals and into and out of the mortuary at the RBWH). Currently, where a transfer for autopsy has occurred to a PQ mortuary, there are procedures in place to return those bodies to the hospital of origin. Normally, these bodies are returned within four weeks; however, issues arise where the associated documentation requires further clarification before the body is able to be released. This can cause delays in the process. Clarification of documentation may be necessary, for example, where further information or clarification of the wishes of a parent is required.

2. How many deceased babies have been left in Queensland morgues for longer than 3 months?
 - a. What were the circumstances of those babies (that is, was the baby Indigenous or non-Indigenous, and what was the cause of the baby's death)?

There is currently no database which records the number of deceased babies left in Queensland mortuaries for longer than three months, as requested by the Select Committee in its question. The current process for long-term data collection involves review of paper records (mortuary books) and would require staff at each mortuary to manually review the records of all deaths. While these records are available, this is a very labour-intensive task that would need to be conducted at all sites with a mortuary, and the data is not readily extrapolated within the timeframes and for the purposes of this submission. It is a small minority of cases where a body stays in a mortuary for longer than four weeks, and this is usually due to extenuating circumstances beyond the control of both PQ and that of the relevant hospital.

- a. There are four identified cases of a deceased baby being left in a Queensland mortuary for longer than three months. It is understood that three cases were non-Indigenous, with one possibly Indigenous. Given the small number of deceased babies being left in a mortuary for longer than three months, providing further information would possibly identify those cases.

The single mortuary operated by FSS only receives deaths reported to coroners which, under the legislation, generally excludes stillbirths. As with mortuaries operated by PQ, it would be difficult for FSS to determine the exact number of deceased babies (however defined) remaining for over three months or the circumstances of these babies. As noted under question 1, the aim is always to return deceased to families' funeral directors at the earliest opportunity. For babies, this is almost always achievable well within three months.

3. Have rural maternity units been closed in Queensland over the last five years?
 - a. If so, how many and in what locations?
 - b. How many Rural Maternity Units are currently operating in Queensland where are they located?

Tully Hospital

- a. Tully Hospital ceased birthing services in 2014. Tully Hospital had consistently declining birth numbers since 2010. In 2012, 10 births occurred at the hospital, and this number further declined to five births in 2013. The small number of births at Tully Hospital made the provision of birthing services unsustainable from a safety perspective. The community is aware that no birthing services have been provided at Tully Hospital since 2014.

Chinchilla Hospital

Chinchilla Hospital Maternity Services Unit has been temporarily closed since December 2017 due to availability of key staff. Recruitment has occurred to staff the service with a midwifery group practice to ensure women in Chinchilla have continuity of care, and the theatre used for birthing has been upgraded. The maternity service reopened on 5 November 2018 and allows for low-risk births to resume at the facility.

- b. There are currently 41 public maternity services in Queensland (including the Mater Mothers' Public Hospital). In accordance with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas Classification, 10 Queensland Health maternity services are classified as metropolitan, 22 services are classified as rural, and nine services are classified as remote. A list of Queensland's rural and remote birthing services is provided at Attachment 1. These facilities have been classified using data from Queensland's Perinatal Data Collection.

I can also advise that Queensland Health will be making a submission to the Senate Select Committee on Stillbirth Research and Education.

Should you require any further information in relation to this matter, I have arranged for Ms Danielle Cohen, Chief of Staff, to be available to assist you.

Yours sincerely

STEVEN MILES MP
Minister for Health
Minister for Ambulance Services

Table 1 Queensland Rural and Remote Birthing Services – Hospitals reporting lowest numbers of birth

Facility	Number of babies born in 2017
Ingham Hospital	43
Theodore Hospital	3
Cooktown Hospital	24
Charleville Hospital	52
St George Hospital	48
Chinchilla Hospital	54
Biloela Hospital	56
Longreach Hospital	57
Goondiwindi Hospital	88
Ayr Hospital	93

Table 2 All Queensland Public Maternity Services

HHS	Facility	Number of babies born in 2017	Classification	
Cairns and Hinterland	Atherton Hospital	141	Rural	
	Cairns Hospital	2,310	Rural	
	Innisfail Hospital	222	Rural	
	Mareeba Hospital	191	Remote	
Central Queensland	Biloela Hospital	56	Rural	
	Emerald Hospital	265	Remote	
	Gladstone Hospital	566	Rural	
	Rockhampton Hospital	1,226	Rural	
Central West	Theodore Hospital	3	Rural	
	Longreach Hospital	57	Remote	
	Darling Downs	Chinchilla Hospital	54	Rural
		Dalby Hospital	188	Rural
Goondiwindi Hospital		88	Rural	
Kingaroy Hospital		359	Rural	
Darling Downs	Stanthorpe Hospital	104	Rural	
	Toowoomba Hospital	1,979	Rural	
	Warwick Hospital	154	Rural	
Gold Coast	Gold Coast University Hospital	5,134	Metropolitan	
Mackay	Mackay Base Hospital	1,349	Rural	
	Proserpine Hospital	215	Rural	

Attachment 1

Metro North	Caboolture Hospital	1,868	Metropolitan
	Redcliffe Hospital	1,605	Metropolitan
	Royal Brisbane & Women's Hospital	4,662	Metropolitan
Metro South	Beaudesert Hospital	230	Rural
	Logan Hospital	3,346	Metropolitan
	Redland Hospital	1,771	Metropolitan
North West	Mt Isa Base Hospital	441	Remote
South West	Charleville Hospital	52	Remote
	Roma Hospital	134	Remote
	St George Hospital	48	Remote
Sunshine Coast	Gympie Hospital	323	Rural
	Nambour General Hospital/Sunshine Coast University Hospital	2,869	Metropolitan
Torres and Cape	Cooktown Hospital	24	Remote
	Thursday Island Hospital	131	Remote
Townsville Hospital	Ayr Hospital	93	Rural
	Ingham Hospital	43	Rural
	Townsville Hospital	2,569	Metropolitan
West Moreton	Ipswich Hospital	2,502	Metropolitan
Wide Bay	Bundaberg Hospital	989	Rural
	Hervey Bay Hospital	854	Rural
Mater Health Services	Mater Mothers Public Hospital	6,135	Metropolitan