



**The Hon Roger Cook MLA
Deputy Premier
Minister for Health; Mental Health**

Our Ref: 60-11933

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



Dear Senator McCarthy

Thank you for your letter dated 21 September 2018 regarding the provision of information with regard to assisting the Senate Select Committee on Stillbirth Research and Education.

Question 1

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

This question is best answered by the Office of the State Coroner. The amount of time a body resides in the State Mortuary is dependent upon arrangements for release made by the family and the Coronial authority for release (through the State and regional Coroner's offices) once the examination is complete and identification has been confirmed.

Question 2

How many deceased babies have been left in WA morgues for longer than three 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)?

In general terms, deceased infants, like other deaths in the State, are only held within the mortuary during the period of the examination and for confirmation of identification. Once these processes have been completed the release is dependent on Coronial authority and individual family arrangements. In most cases infants within the Coroner's system leave the mortuary within two weeks.

The only currently known recent case involves the remains of a foetus of unknown identity which was part of an exhumation from a burial that took place in Port Hedland 45 years ago. The remains of this baby have resided in the State Mortuary (Nedlands, Western Australia) since 18 August 2017. As a consequence of its unknown identity, no information relating to the ancestry (including Aboriginality) or parentage is available. Due to the skeletonised condition of the remains, no cause of death can be established. The Port Hedland Coroner may be able to provide more background information relating to this case.

I am advised that State Mortuary staff would need to identify a Coroner-cleared staff member, relieved from operational duties, to manually search and review the records of the State Mortuary database in order to ascertain if there are any other cases, and that this would involve a significant amount of off-line time. I would appreciate your further guidance if this is required, and if so, to what time period the Committee wishes to have reviewed.

There are also mortuary facilities at King Edward Memorial Hospital (Western Australia's only tertiary maternity and gynaecological hospital) and at Perth Children's Hospital. In the past 12 months, there have been no cases of babies being stored in these facilities for over three months.

Question 3

Have Rural Maternity Units been closed in WA over the last five years?

a) If so, how many and in what locations?

In WA Country Health Service (WACHS) regions, the only maternity unit that has closed in the last five years has been Northam in 2015. It since re-opened in 2017 as a midwifery model.

b) How many rural maternity units are currently operating in WA and where are they located?

Within WACHS, there are 18 maternity sites located at the following sites:

- Bunbury, Busselton, Margaret River, Warren (Manjimup), Collie, Bridgetown.
- Kalgoorlie, Esperance.
- Albany.
- Geraldton, Carnarvon.
- Hedland Health Campus, Karratha Health Campus.
- Broome, Derby, Kununurra.
- Narrogin, and Northam (Midwifery model).

Yours sincerely

HON ROGER COOK MLA
DEPUTY PREMIER
MINISTER FOR HEALTH; MENTAL HEALTH