

PENRITH RADIO OPERATIONS CENTRE

The Hon. WALT SECORD – NSW Legislative Council - (November 23, 2021): As the Shadow Minister for Police, I oppose the decision by the Perrottet Government to relocate and amalgamate positions at the Penrith Radio Operations Centre, taking them from Sydney's west and moving them to Surry Hills police headquarters. The decision will see 70 jobs ripped out of western Sydney. This goes against years of decentralisation. It also goes against common sense.

The Penrith Radio Dispatch Centre is one of five such centres across the State, and they are under the jurisdiction of New South Wales Police Force Assistant Commissioner—Commander, Communications and Security Command, Stacey Maloney. They provide 24/7 radio coverage throughout the State. The other centres are at Newcastle, Oak Flats, Tamworth and Surry Hills.

I acknowledge the Public Service Association of NSW [PSA], the Penrith Mayor, Councillor Karen McKeown, Deputy Labor leader and Member for Londonderry Prue Car and Labor's Shadow Minister for Industrial Relations Sophie Cotsis for drawing the matter to my attention. I am calling on the Perrottet Government to scrap the decision.

I note that the PSA has today written to Police Minister David Elliott asking him to drop the plan.

Members would be interested to know that there is a meeting planned at the Penrith RSL this Thursday at 5.00 p.m. to update the staff and tomorrow, 24 November, the PSA has a hearing in the Industrial Relations Commission [IRC] regarding a lack of consultation on the decision to relocate the jobs. To say that there has been a lack of consultation is a massive understatement. The staff was told via a short email on 16 November that 70 communication officer jobs would be amalgamated into the Surry Hills headquarters and that this would occur in February. The PSA has said that there has been "zero consultation".

In the IRC hearing, the PSA will be:

... demanding a delay in the implementation of the decision to allow proper consultation and consideration of the many serious problems from the closure of the Penrith Radio Operations Centre. The PSA said that the decision would see a large number of resignations of highly skilled radio operators as they would not be able to make the daily 80-minute commute each way for a variety of reasons. Furthermore, the PSA believes that it is a decision that will also place stress on the entire radio operations system, which is already buckling under a heavy workload.

At the moment there are 20 vacancies at the other centres, so the decision to amalgamate is mind-boggling. Penrith staff have not been offered redundancies or re-deployments; they have just been told to take it or leave it. That is totally unacceptable. A PSA survey found that the initial indication of the staff affected is that 30 per cent are considering resigning rather than even bothering to try to commute to Surry Hills.

PSA General Secretary Stewart Little said:

It is astonishing and a lack of respect for these representatives. It is appalling. These are jobs being stripped from Western Sydney when the government is campaigning on decentralisation of public servants.

Penrith staff have also been critical of the local member, Stuart Ayres and western Sydney Minister, saying he has "responded to desperate requests for assistance from constituents by washing his hands of the issue and passing the buck to the Police Minister".

The Penrith decision by the Perrottet Government is very disappointing in light of the evidence revealed at a budget estimates hearing on 27 October that western Sydney had lost 80,000 jobs in the period between September 2020 to September 2021. The losses in the region account for more than 41 per cent of the State's total job losses during that period.

Residents in western Sydney felt the brunt of lockdowns far worse than any other region throughout the State—and those numbers confirm that. The Perrottet Government knows about the devastating number of job losses in western Sydney, yet it has no plan to help those residents get back into the workforce. Instead, it decides to take 70 jobs out of Penrith and move them to Surry Hills in Sydney's inner west. I thank the House for its consideration.

I urge the Perrottet Government to reconsider its decision and protect those jobs in western Sydney and to drop this cruel plan.