

# CHOPPER BID 'SHAM'

Rescue service tender brings South Coast outcry.....

The South Coast Labour Council has launched a scathing attack on the State Government's tender process to select the Illawarra's new rescue helicopter operator.

Labour Council president Joanne Kowalczyk described the process as a "sham" and a "disgraceful act" that denied the community any chance of running its own rescue helicopter service.

The tender document obtained by the Mercury revealed the NSW Ambulance Service had a "strong preference" to contract one

operator to cover the Wollongong, Sydney and Orange areas.

That is well outside the scope of the Illawarra-backed Guardian Air Rescue Foundation, formed by community members in 2005. It has submitted a bid for the South Coast contract individually. Ms Kowalczyk said the whole exercise excluded the South Coast bid, despite NSW Premier Morris lemma previously saying bids from regional operators would be considered.

Govt defends 'sham' rescue chopper tender process.....

However a spokesman for NSW Health Minister John Hatzistergos yesterday defended the process. He said tenders were being independently evaluated by a section of the Department of Commerce, which included an independent aviation expert. "The tender was designed to be flexible enough to accommodate tenders for provision of services at one location, or at all locations either solely or cooperatively with other organisations. Providers were consulted in the preparation of the tender," he said. Ms Kowalczyk said Mr lemma had assured the Illawarra community it could tender to cover only the South Coast contract in an "open and fair" manner.

Morris lemma, then Health Minister and later as Premier, made it very clear to the people of the Illawarra that our community would be able

to bid for our region's helicopter contract.

"He did not say that in order to do so we would have to bid for the whole of Sydney and Orange as well," she said.

"They must think the people of the Illawarra are either stupid or just prepared to put up with a sham exercise never intended to give our community a look-in, let alone fair opportunity to bid." Mr lemma's office referred the matter to Mr Hatzistergos yesterday. A community steering committee spent six months developing Guardian to be owned, operated and financed by the South Coast community. Illawarra workers have donated more than \$100,000 to the organisation.

Ms Kowalczyk said Newcastle operated its own service.