

Birth of a new era in Mullum

Maternity unit has reversed national trend

By HOZANNA TAENI

EXPECTANT mother Kinda Wilson of Byron Bay can't hide her relief at the announcement birthing services at the Mullumbimby Hospital will continue as normal.

At 34-weeks pregnant, Ms Wilson was shocked to learn only yesterday morning of the potential closure of the place where she planned to give birth to her first child.

"My partner heard it on the radio and I couldn't think what people like us would do," she said. "The alternative would be to go to a hospital, but I would rather opt for a homebirth, even though I can't afford it. I'm all for the natural process, without too much interruption and advice," she said.

After concern that Mullumbimby would be another victim of the nationwide trend which has seen 130 rural maternity units close over the last 15 years, yesterday's meeting at the hospital announced that the Birthing Centre is no longer under any threat. The hospital has offered maternity services to approximately 200 low-risk women per year and has



RELIEVED: Byron Bay's Kinda Wilson and Ricky Vidler are happy their baby will be born in Mullum. Picture: JACKLYN WAGNER

maintained a positive reputation in the area as a safe and supportive environment to give birth.

"I am aiming for a water/lotus/hypnobirth," Ms Wilson said. "I know Mullum will understand."

Vicki McAllister, of the

Northern Rivers Maternity Action Group, said the threat of closure originally came about because of staffing issues at the unit.

"A couple of midwives left and it was really difficult for the hospital to replace them," she said. "There's also a hiring

freeze, which means they only hire internally within the NCAHS."

Ms Wilson said closure of the unit would have affected many local pregnant women.

"I'd feel sorry for the women due after me that didn't have that option," she said.

