

The Committee Secretary,  
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs,  
Parliament House,  
Canberra.

Dear Secretary,

I write in regard to proposed new Government initiatives regarding the provision of rural health services in Australia.

I can only imagine that such initiatives are recommended with the best of governmental intentions, but regrettably, I have serious misgivings about several aspects of the proposals.

The new categories of Rurality ignore the realities of service provision in country towns, without a Base hospital, and provide a metaphorical "kick in the guts" to those devoted and uncomplaining doctors in those towns who provide after-hours services. This year, I will be giving up my New Year's Day public holiday so that our town has medical services not only for the locals, but also itinerants and holiday makers fortunate enough to be able to enjoy the public holiday. Last year, it was Christmas Day. Local GPs will volunteer to cover all Public Holidays, weekends and after hours shifts. No locum services exist here.

The remuneration for on-call is trifling, and is certainly no incentive to work, and deny the family opportunity to relax together. But financial incentives are not the reason dedicated bush doctors make themselves available, but it would help. We do feel that Governments, unwittingly perhaps, takes us for granted, and recent proposed measures will do nothing to attract and retain doctors in rural areas of need.

After 33 years of providing comprehensive rural general practitioner services and after hours care to my town, and now in my 65th year, I have grave misgivings about the sustainability of rural services if proposed changes are introduced. Perhaps it is fast approaching the time when I reappraise my commitment to the cause, but funnily enough, I am probably not sufficiently funded to entertain retirement. I suppose it could be argued that if benefits to rural doctors are cut even further, doctors will need to stay in the workforce longer.

Yours sincerely  
Dr Geoff Courtis