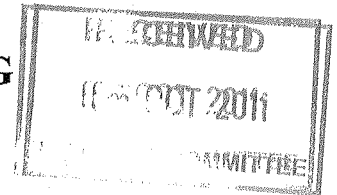
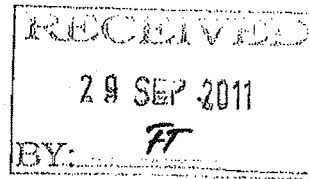




**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AGEING**



The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Mr ~~Murphy~~

Thank you for your letter of 25 August 2011 regarding a request to retain Dr Christoph Ahrens in the rural community of Bega.

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) for health professions commenced on 1 July 2010 and is the result of agreement between the state, territory and Commonwealth governments, through the Council of Australian Governments, to align the previously disparate state and territory registration schemes for health practitioners. Key aims of the NRAS include increasing public safety and providing mobility for health practitioners.

While the NRAS is a national scheme, it operates independently of the Commonwealth under state and territory legislation. The *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009* (the National Law) provides for the full operation of the scheme. Oversight of the operation of the scheme is provided jointly by state, territory and Commonwealth Health Ministers through the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council (the Ministerial Council).

Under the NRAS there is a national registration board for each participating health profession. Members of a national board are appointed by the Ministerial Council and are independent in the implementation of their responsibilities. The national boards are supported in their role by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), an independent statutory agency. Section 11 of the National Law provides that the Ministerial Council may give direction to a national board in respect of policy, but may not give direction in relation to individual registration matters.

The Medical Board of Australia (MBA) has responsibility for the registration of medical practitioners; the development of professional practice standards for medicine; handling complaints and matters of professional discipline; and approving standards for the accreditation of Australian training programs and assessment of the skills and qualifications of overseas trained practitioners.

As you may be aware, an application for registration passes through stages which may include various tests or examinations. Following that process a recommendation is then made by AHPRA to the Board.

Should a medical practitioner be refused renewal of his or her registration by the Board, an appeals process is available. The process is set out under Part 8, Division 13 of the National Law.

It may interest you to know that the MBA has announced a review of the implementation of its assessment pathways, to make sure they are as effective as they can be in ensuring that all overseas trained doctors who have the skills, qualifications and experience to provide safe care to the community can be registered. Information regarding the MBA review of the assessment pathways will be available on the MBA website at www.medicalboard.gov.au

In addition, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing is currently completing an inquiry into and report on Registration Processes and Support for Overseas Trained Doctors. More information on the inquiry can be found on the Parliament of Australia website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/haa/overseasdoctors/index.htm

I note from the public register of practitioners on the AHPRA website at www.ahpra.gov.au that as at 14 September 2011, Dr Ahrens is registered to practise. He has Limited Area of Need registration. Dr Ahrens has conditions attached to his registration pertaining to required supervision arrangements, locations of practice and professional development activities.

I trust that the above information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

NICOLA ROXON

27 SEP 2011