

File Ref: E10.4139

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22 December 2011

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Secretary

Re: Inquiry into the factors affecting the supply of health services and medical professionals in rural areas.

The South East Regional Organisation of Councils (SERO) welcomes this opportunity to make a Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs regarding the factors affecting the supply of health services and medical professionals in rural areas.

SERO represents twelve (12) Local Government Authorities in the South East region of New South Wales with a total population of 185,000. The region includes communities located in the diverse sub regions of the Sydney-Canberra Corridor, South Coast and Snowy Mountains. The area comprises a number of regional centres such as Goulburn and Queanbeyan and many rural and coastal towns and villages such as Crookwell, Moruya, Cooma and Bombala etc. A varying range of health and medical services are provided within these communities.

All our towns are suffering from a shortage of medical professionals, including General Practitioners, specialists and allied health and there needs to be far greater incentives to assist in attracting medical professionals to the rural areas of Australia.

Most of the small rural towns in our region have lost out under the Federal Government's Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas (ASGC-RA) system. Under the previous Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas classification system the majority of towns were RRMA 5 (Other rural centres). The majority of the towns are now Inner Regional RA 2 which puts them in the same classification as many larger regional cities which were previously RRMA 1 – 3.

How will the small rural towns compete for doctors when they receive the same (or very similar) relocation and retention payments whether they practise in the smaller towns or the larger cities. When you take into account all the professional, family and social support services and infrastructure the cities offer, it makes it extremely difficult for small rural towns to compete. In

addition there is very little, if any, on-call responsibilities for city based GPs compared to the rural towns when the workload and on-call responsibilities are increasing due to the shortage of GPs.

The Government needs to correct this anomaly and/or significantly increase the relocation and retention incentives for our small rural towns.

Yours faithfully

Don Cooper
Executive Officer