



## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Health Dept DPA expansion leaves carrots the last resort for rural GPs

DOCTOR shortages in regional and remote GPs may be a thing of the past if a decent federally funded incentive program is offered, luring them to country areas, Kennedy MP, Bob Katter, has said.

Mr Katter who has been in state and federal politics for nearly 50 years said the fight to maintain an adequate health workforce in North Queensland had been a constant battle. Mr Katter said he feared that the Federal Government's recent expansion of the distribution priority area (DPA) will lead to an immediate exodus of doctors out of rural and remote areas.

The changes enforced by the new Government sees all GP catchments in Modified Monash Model 2 (MM 2) areas automatically gain DPA status with immediate effect. It means places like Sunshine Coast can compete for medical staff from the same pool that very remote parts of the country like Cloncurry tap into.

These inclusions in priority status also enables them to recruit from an expanded pool of doctors, including Overseas Trained Doctors (OTD).

In a question with notice submitted to the Minister for Health, Mark Butler, Mr Katter asked, "Is the Minister aware that recent changes to the scheme has allowed areas such as Canberra, Hobart and the Sunshine Coast to be classified as 'regional', and therefore are now eligible for OTDs that were formally destined for genuinely rural areas?"

Mr Katter said he has also asked the Minister to reverse the decision to water down the regions ability to attract doctors but conceded it was unlikely to be overturned.

"Half my term in office was spent fighting for a North Queensland medical school, which we got at James Cook University (JCU)," he said.

"Our kids previously went to Brisbane's University of Queensland, and they never came home. Townsville's JCU has been turning out over 200 Doctors a year now for 15 years and yet our doctor shortages are higher now - even though in theory we've trained 3000 extra doctors locally.

"Two of the doctors in my electorate, Grant Manypenny from Mareeba and Rod Catton from Innisfail, are working into their 70s. They are still working because they don't want to let their communities down.

# BOB KATTER

Katter's Australian Party

**Federal Member for Kennedy**

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“Medical graduates should be made to complete two years’ service in country areas and the Federal Government should pay doctors serving in rural and regional areas an extra \$80,000 a year to retain them.

“It will not be a great cost to the taxpayer. People are in pain waiting for doctors. People are dying waiting for doctors and the answers are there right now,” he said.

Deloitte issued a General Practitioner workforce report earlier this year which said the nation was facing a doctor drought of up to 9,000 doctors by 2030.

Innisfail local, Dr Rod Catton, who has been fighting the issue for nearly two years now and travelled to Canberra to make representations to the former Minister for Health, said the Government had very little control in solving the problem and the only solution left was financial incentives.

“It has to be carrot or stick, and I don’t think there is any stick left in our society, however you look at it. Most have been tried and tossed out,” Dr Catton said.

“The Government needs to cook up some new carrots and we need to know from them, what are the incentives they are offering to attract doctors to the regions?”

Dr Catton said a number of possible solutions had been floated throughout northern GPs including a double or tripling of the rural incentive payment.

Mr Katter intends to make submissions to the Minister for Health over the coming weeks in anticipation of a meeting at the September sitting.

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