



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

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ADJOURNMENT

Rural Doctors, Recruitment

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (7.08 pm): We have a health crisis in the bush and I do not say that lightly. This health crisis revolves around attracting and retaining doctors. What would people say if I said that for four years the Mackay health service had been advertising unsuccessfully for a second doctor in Collinsville, or that Clermont was being serviced by locums because those places cannot attract a single permanent applicant? In short, the current system for recruiting medical practitioners and retaining them in rural communities is broken.

If a person lives in a community such as Collinsville, Dysart or Clermont, they do not have the luxury of shopping around for a doctor. There is one doctor, and that is it. If for any reason that doctor is tied up, if they are unable to fit that person in because of their workload, or they are called away, the only option that person has is to drive to the nearest town and source another doctor. In the case of Clermont, that is a 200-kilometre round trip.

Last month, an elderly resident of Clermont rang me to advise that she needed to drive to Emerald to see a doctor because she could not get in to see her local doctor in Clermont. This elderly lady has not driven out of Clermont for some 15 years and here she was undertaking a 200-kilometre round trip, running the gauntlet of road trains, kangaroos and highway traffic. It is not good enough. I certainly hope that it is not going to take a death before this government acts on this issue.

I have spoken to the Queensland Health minister. I have written to the federal health minister as well. There is no question in my mind that this is an issue that will require a commitment from all levels of government, medical schools and colleges. There is no easy fix to this problem. However, I would like to think that we live in a First World country, not a Third World country where access to basic medical services should be the norm, not the exception.

I am passionate about attracting people back to the bush, but that task is made so much harder if our rural communities are unable to provide basic services such as health and education. This is a serious problem that needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency and I will continue to fight to have this system overhauled so that country people have access to the same basic health services as their city cousins.

When one sees the growth in these communities, in particular in our mining towns, there is a need to have medical practitioners based in those communities, not only to service the local community but also to be there in case of an emergency. We have had a number of fatalities in the resource sector in recent months which highlights the importance of having medical practitioners available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This is a serious issue and I am not about to give up the fight to have this matter addressed.