



MEDIA RELEASE – James Harker-Mortlock – Independent for Hume – Monday 25th March 2013

RURAL AGED CARE FACILITIES – NEED FOR FUNDING REFORM POINTS TO A WIDER ISSUE

James Harker-Mortlock, independent candidate for the seat of Hume, made the following statement this morning :

“As I travel around Hume talking to those involved with operating aged care facilities, I am becoming increasingly concerned at the apparent lack of interest shown by government for the plight of ageing members of rural communities and for the need to keep rural communities together.

Too often I hear of elderly couples having to sell the family farm in order to raise the capital to acquire a retirement unit in the closest town. If one partner becomes seriously ill, the couple find that the town has inadequate medical facilities - often due to government funding cuts. The couple also find that there is no public transport of any kind to take them to the nearest larger centre where those medical facilities might be found. Lack of rural public transport is – once again - often due to government funding cuts.

Ultimately, the couple sell their retirement unit to move to an aged care facility in a larger centre such as Canberra or even Sydney. When one partner dies, the remaining partner is left alone in a city far away from their family and friends where they know nobody and with their capital expended already through the various moves all this has entailed. Are we happy as a nation to force this fate onto our elderly rural Australians?

I hear of aged care facility providers in country towns being told that they are not viable with the number of beds they are offering and yet, when they ask for funds to provide more beds, are told that no funds are available for a town of their size. Government argues ‘the market will decide’. However, is not the community more important than the market? Are not people’s lives more important than numbers on a spreadsheet?

Government seems to miss the point that, ultimately, it is healthier for the community and for the elderly themselves if they are accessible to their family and friends. If the argument is about cost, then government also appears to miss the point that it would actually be cheaper for society overall if the elderly were to remain in their own community for as long as possible.

The deeper question here however is whether government is actually interested in and concerned at all about maintaining the viability of Australia's many rural communities? Is government saying through its policies that it would prefer people to move to the cities? Because this is the feeling many people in rural Australia are getting. Is rural Australia destined to become made-up of large corporate farms, often owned by absentee landlord foreigners, interspersed with mining activities and various industrial level energy developments of all kinds, and serviced by drive-in, drive-out staff? Because this is the feeling many people in rural Australia are getting.

We need a radical change of direction focussed upon the maintenance and future development of Australia's many rural communities, not the current policies of death by stealth through constant reductions in the provision of services which are forcing people to move away from rural communities.

In regard to aged care – we need to see funding reforms which encourage the development of aged care facilities in rural communities. We also need to see policies which provide the appropriate medical facilities to back-up those aged care facilities, and provide benefits to the whole community. We need also public transport facilities to enable rural communities to connect with each other and the wider world. Overall, we need to have a significant re-think about policies developed in the cities, by people from the cities, which have little relevance to, or concern for, rural communities.”

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