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**Queensland
Government**

Queensland **Health**

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File Ref: DG050072

Ms Isabelle Arnaud
Director
Adjudication Branch
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
GPO Box 3131
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Ms Arnaud

Application for authorisation A91078 lodged by the Rural Doctors Association of Australia Limited – interested party consultation

I refer to your letter dated 17 December 2007 regarding the above. I note the content of the application of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia Limited (RDAA) and the summary of the Authorisation Process. Our submission in response is as follows:

Facts

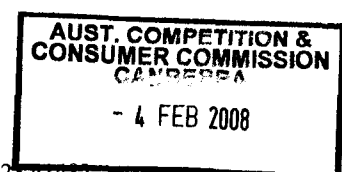
1. The State of Queensland negotiates an agreement with doctors supplying services as Visiting Medical Officers (VMOs) to various Government Departments, to District Health Services and to the Mater Misericordiae Health Services Brisbane Ltd.
2. The title "VMOs" encompasses Visiting Senior Specialists, Visiting Specialists and Visiting Medical Officers (General Practitioners including Rural General Practitioners/Rural Generalists).
3. This agreement is the outcome of negotiations between the State (acting through the Department of Health, the Department of Corrective Services, and the Department of Communities) and VMOs who are represented by an agent. The agent is The Queensland Branch of Australian Medical Association.
4. The current agreement referred to as the "VMO Agreement" was made on 28 October 2005. It commenced from 1 March 2005 and operates for a period of four years to 28 February 2009.

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Notes relating to the Application

1. The statement of section 2. (a) that the agreements proposed by the RDAA “will build on the processes already in place in most States where the State health department unilaterally determines the arrangements for the contracting of doctors in state hospitals and facilities” cannot refer to Queensland.
2. Granting of an authorisation would not streamline the process of contracting of VMOs in Queensland as proposed in section 4 (a).
3. VMOs in Queensland are not burdened with responsibility for negotiating an agreement with the State as argued by the RDAA in section 4 (a).
4. The statement in section 4 (a) that “various schemes and programs have been put in place by the Federal and State governments to support the recruitment and retention of the rural health workforce and to date these have been largely ineffective” is not supported by evidence in Queensland where strategies are, amongst other things:
 - a. Providing a package in excess of \$205,000 per year to retain, for public service, private rural practitioners in small Queensland towns;
 - b. Granting Rural Generalist VMOs participating in rural maternity services access to VMO specialist contract rates of remuneration;
 - c. Granting Rural Generalist Senior Medical Officers a level remuneration package equivalent to that received by their specialist colleagues;
 - d. Increasing recruitment to the State’s Rural Scholarship Scheme;
 - e. Establishing a premier vocational pathway to Rural Generalist Medicine which is now becoming competitive.

Response

1. Queensland Health does not oppose the RDAA’s application for authorisation.
2. Should the authorisation be granted by your Commission, it would be necessary for the RDAA to apply to the State for recognition as an agent for rural VMOs subject to the State’s Agreement and if successful to participate as co-agents with The Queensland Branch of the Australian Medical Association.

Should you require further information Queensland Health’s contact is Dr Denis Lennox, on telephone 07 4699 8671.

Yours sincerely



Professor Andrew Wilson
Acting Director-General

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