

MI121884

Mr N Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 18 June 2004, enclosing a petition on behalf of Ms P Croft MP, Member for Broadwater, regarding the shortage of general practitioners in the Runaway Bay area.

I acknowledge the impact such a shortage has on the residents and on the general practitioners in the area. However, as stated in the petition, this matter comes under the jurisdiction of the Federal Government.

The major barrier to employing an overseas-trained doctor for general practice is access to a provider number that attracts Medicare benefits. Overseas-trained doctors are subject to 19AB of the *Health Insurance Act 1973*, which places a bar on access to Medicare benefits for a period of 10 years. Exemption from 19AB may be granted if the overseas trained doctor is working in a *District of Workforce Shortage*. Decisions regarding *District of Workforce Shortage* falls within the Australian Government's jurisdiction. Exemption would be required from the Workforce Distribution Section at the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing for the practitioner to access a Medicare provider number to allow billing of private patients. It is noted that, as indicated in the petition, exemption for the Runaway Bay area has been denied by the Workforce Distribution Section, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

District of Workforce Shortage assessments are based on figures available to the Workforce Distribution Section and these are reviewed every three months based on population data, medical practitioner numbers within each area and Medicare billing information. I recommend that general practitioners in the Runaway Bay area request the Health Workforce Distribution Section review the *District of Workforce Shortage* status for Runaway Bay. To have a practice in the area assessed contact should be made to the Workforce Distribution Section, on telephone (02) 6289 5903, or by facsimile (02) 6289 1352.

Yours sincerely

GORDON NUTTALL MP
Minister for Health
Member for Sandgate