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Mr N Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliamentary Service
Parliament House
Corner Alice and George Streets
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letters dated 27 May 2005 and 9 June 2005, regarding petitions received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly No. 477-05 and No. 485-05 from Mareeba Mothers and Midwives Alliance on maternity care services and birthing services at Mareeba Hospital.

I am pleased to announce that I have approved the establishment of a midwife-led birthing service at Mareeba Hospital. The service will be a pilot for a rural birthing option for Queensland women and independently evaluated after twelve months. It is planned to commence the service on 27 June 2005.

As you may be aware a maternity services review team visited the Tablelands recently and feedback from the team supported the establishment of a midwife-led birthing service. This is in keeping with the recommendations of the Queensland Maternity Services Review Report which I recently tabled in Parliament.

My approval is given subject to a number of changes and processes being introduced to ensure the safety of mothers and their babies. I am advised that these will be finalised over the next two weeks in readiness for the commencement of the new service.

As part of the new service, Mareeba midwives will be available for low-risk birthing only. The midwives will be supported by appropriately qualified doctors in general practice and from Cairns Hospital. Through consultations with visiting specialist doctors, women will be advised of their birthing options depending on the assessed level of risk of the pregnancy. The service's priority is to ensure women experience a safe environment in which to give birth, supported by qualified medical and midwifery staff.

All women will be able to access the childbirth education classes and midwife support during pregnancy at Mareeba Hospital, regardless of where they plan to give birth.

I fully recognise the concerns in the community and appreciate the very strong support for the hospital and in particular its well-respected maternity service. The District will continue its efforts to recruit procedurally skilled medical officers. I am delighted that a satisfactory and sustainable solution has been found that is not solely reliant on medical recruitment success.

Yours sincerely

GORDON NUTTALL MP
Minister for Health
Member for Sandgate