

MI136967
MO: H/06/03040

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
Corner Alice and George Streets
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 30 March 2006, regarding the Petition received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly No. 636-06.

I have addressed the four key points of the Petition as outlined below:

1. Continue to maintain the ownership of Eventide Aged Care Facility.

The Forster Report recommendation (6.7) was that Queensland Health should sell its residential aged care places and where appropriate, associated facilities. Queensland Health is developing a long term strategy for the retention or divestment of Queensland Health's residential aged care services, in line with its *Action Plan- Building a better health service for Queensland* which stated that *Queensland Health will consider, on a site by site basis, whether the private or not-for-profit sector can deliver better aged care services.*

On 8 November 2005 the Minister for Health advised Parliament that:

- no decision had been made about retention or disposal of specific facilities;
- any decision will be made on a site by site basis after extensive consultation with staff, residents, their families and the community; and
- Queensland Health was asked to develop a process which consistently ensures that a fair approach is taken in each case, should divestment be the agreed option.

It is not current Queensland Health policy to sell its aged care places and no policy change is envisaged at this time.

The Minister for Health has stated on many occasions that before any decision is taken about retention or divestment, Queensland Health will consult on a site by site basis, including consultation with the broader community so that local issues will drive the process. Solutions that

deal with local circumstances will be sought. Any decisions will be based on a consistent set of criteria that will include ensuring that the welfare of the residents and their families, staff and the local community are not compromised.

With specific reference to Eventide Charters Towers, no decision has been made to divest any beds. Any decision with respect to Eventide Charters Towers would be jointly taken by the General Manager, Northern Area Health Service and District Manager, Charters Towers Health Service District after consultation with community, patients and staff.

2. Acknowledge part of this facility is vacant and can be used for the benefit of the community of Charters Towers particularly in the area of Dementia.

Allocation of beds and associated licences are transferable within Queensland Health. Due to nursing home bed shortages in Townsville, a number of eligible aged persons are required to be placed in Eventide Charters Towers.

Based on demand in Townsville and resourcing issues at Charters Towers, in particular registered nurses, a decision was made to transfer 20 nursing home beds from Eventide Charters Towers to a Queensland Health Townsville Parklands Nursing Home. Both communities fall within the same Aged Care Assessment Team catchment area.

On the 4th April 2006 residents of the Charters Towers Health Service District made up 67% of the resident numbers at Eventide Charters Towers. Despite the transfer of the 20 nursing home beds, Eventide Charters Towers continues to accept applications from residents of Townsville. As of the 4th April 2006, fifteen residents were residing in Townsville before their admission.

Dementia specific care is a specialised area of aged care. Residents with dementia require a specialised program to optimise their quality of life. Of priority for this type of resident is safety and security, as challenging behaviours (such as wandering) are often associated with dementia. Care is tailored to meet the individual needs of each resident. A combination of a safe and secure facility, specialised nursing care and therapies ensures the quality of life for each resident.

While the environmental issues of dementia specific care may be addressed the staffing issues can not. The level of specialised nursing care required for persons assessed as Dementia Specific is not available at Eventide Charters Towers and is not expected to be in the future given the ongoing workforce issues for registered nurses at Eventide.

3. Provide adequate funding and staffing levels to enable this facility to function at full capacity.

The transfer of resources, in this case Nursing Home Beds, was not taken lightly. The decision was a result of the demand for Nursing Home Beds across Queensland Health facilities and also in response to resourcing issues, in particular a shortage of registered nurses. Giving due consideration to the current national workforce shortage of registered nurses and our capacity to transfer Nursing Home beds back to Eventide, the recommissioning of nursing home beds at Eventide in the short to medium term is extremely unlikely.

4. Assure HAAC services will not be offloaded.

A recommendation from Peter Forster's Queensland Health Systems Review was for certain HACC services to be transferred from Queensland Health to alternative providers.

However, after extensive consultation, the Queensland Government has decided against transferring home care services to non-Government organisations throughout the State. This decision was not taken lightly and occurred after consultation with employees, unions, non-Government organisations, and importantly, the many consumers of the home care services throughout Queensland.

The Government remains committed to several other areas of reform that would make Queensland Health capable of delivering better services for Queenslanders. These areas of reform include an additional \$6.4 billion funding for the health system over the next five years, a sweeping recruitment drive for more doctors and nurses and a major restructure of Queensland Health.

We would like to take this opportunity to apologise to you for any distress that may have been caused by the announcement to transfer home care services late last year.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, Ms Cynthia Kennedy, Policy Advisor, will be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on telephone (07) 3234 1191.

Yours sincerely

STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP