

MEDIA RELEASE



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Complex carbon plan finalised...but internal review of “crazy” classification system still M.I.A.

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has again called for the immediate release of a technical review into the Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas (ASGC-RA) system, saying the ASGC-RA is making it significantly harder to attract much-needed doctors to the bush.

RDAA President, Dr Paul Mara, said he cannot believe it has taken longer to implement and still not release an internal review of the ASGC-RA than it has to develop, finalise and reach consensus on the new carbon tax.

The technical review of the ASGC-RA is being undertaken by the National Centre for Social Applications of Geographic Information Systems (GISCA)—the organisation that developed ASGC-RA in the first place.

RDAA continues to call for an urgent and independent review of the ASGC-RA.

The ASGC-RA determines the level of incentives paid to doctors working in rural areas. However, it places many smaller rural towns in the same classification category as larger regional centres and even Hobart. This means that doctors now receive the same incentive payments whether they practise in the smaller towns or the larger centres.

“The crazy thing about the ASGC-RA is that it bundles in the same category small towns with a short main street, a Chinese restaurant, a war cenotaph and 24/7 on-call for the local doctor with large regional cities that offer theatres, numerous restaurants, numerous schools, shopping centres and wide-ranging medical facilities and supports...often against the backdrop of pristine coastal locations” Dr Mara said.

“While rural doctors will be the first to tell you that a medical career can’t get much better than one spent practising in a rural town, on paper at least is it any wonder that doctors would opt for the larger centres?”

“The ASGC-RA is based solely on geographic lines on the map and not on critical parameters such as social demographics or available local health services and health workforce numbers...this is the nub of the problem and this is where the ASGC-RA is letting down small rural towns so badly.

“We were informed last October that a technical review of the ASGC-RA was being undertaken. But months on, the review continues to be missing in action and we have still not seen a copy.

“In the time it has taken for this internal review to be undertaken and still not released, the Government has developed a complex carbon tax from scratch and managed to finalise negotiations on it!

“Surely if we can get a complex carbon tax finalised, undertaking a technical review of the ASGC-RA and making the results available publicly should be a walk in the park.

“More than just a technical review is needed, however. To get the system right, we need an urgent, full and independent public and peer review of the ASGC-RA system.

“Julia Gillard last week said she thought the ‘volume of crap’ in media reporting had increased. We respectfully suggest that if she ever wants a great example of this particular phrase, she need look no further than the ASGC-RA.”

Available for interview: Dr Paul Mara and RDAA CEO, Jenny Johnson.

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