



MEDIA RELEASE

RUTH FORREST MLC

PO BOX 104, WYNYARD TAS 7325 TEL: 03 6443 8600 FAX: 03 6443 8603

COMMONWEALTH HEALTH REFORM WARNING

Murchison MLC Ruth Forrest has urged that caution be exercised by the Premier and State Government, especially in the absence of a Health Minister, when considering the proposed National Health and Hospitals Network reforms proposed by the Federal Government.

Ms Forrest suggested that whilst there are many potentially positive outcomes that could result from the proposed reforms, much hinges on a full acceptance at short notice, with considerable detail lacking. "Many questions need to be answered including matters regarding the economic and practical consequences of the commitments and proposals related to these reforms" Ms Forrest stated.

"Whilst some of these questions may have been discussed at recent meetings of Premiers, the role Tasmania has taken in these discussions has been limited due to the delayed appointment of a Government, a caretaker Premier until April 13, the current Premier preoccupied with meetings to form a new Government, and no Minister for Health in place to argue Tasmania's unique circumstances and needs. How can Tasmanians be assured that our interests have been fully considered in the undue haste to have Premiers sign off next week?" Ms Forrest asked.

"In the interests of ensuring the best health and economic outcomes for Tasmania, it is vital that the full implications of the proposed reforms are revealed and understood as appropriate for Tasmania, rather than being coerced under the threat of a withdrawal of funding should a State not wish to proceed until all the finer detail is available and comprehended" Ms Forrest stated.

"With the funding model itself unclear, poorly articulated and lacking vital detail, the impact on the States GST revenue must be considered and the implications of this model fully understood before any agreement is signed" Ms Forrest cautioned. "In last year's State and Federal Budgets all States were told to expect large reductions in future GST revenue as a result of the GFC, however, just before this year's revelations about expected future GST revenue, the States are being asked to hand over 30%" Ms Forrest said.

Ms Forrest also questioned the appropriateness of the proposal for primary health care organisations and Local Hospital Networks which effectively separate primary and acute health care into discrete areas with unconnected funding models, that are then required to link into aged care.

"An integrated health care approach would be preferable to avoid fragmentation of care, within a comprehensive health plan where links are built between hospitals and primary care, integrating the roles of health professionals across the health service" Ms Forrest suggested.

“Tasmania has been moving successfully down the path of Area Health Services that provide such a model. Does this reform undo the progress being made in Tasmania that has resulted in reductions in waiting lists and times for surgery in a number of areas on the North West Coast where it has been progressively implemented?” Ms Forrest asked.

“Many questions remain unanswered regarding the flow-on effects of some policy positions related to emergency department management, aged care, elective surgery and the impact on State Government costs” Ms Forrest said.

“The omission of mental health and dental health as an integral part of primary health services, receiving the briefest of mentions under ‘next steps’, must surely be an oversight and ignores the need for these areas of health to be included in an integrated health service” Ms Forrest stated.

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For further information contact Ruth Forrest on 0419 879 524.