



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.

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A Hearing for the Bush?

A minority government supported by the Independents could be just the tonic for a stronger national focus on the future of rural and remote Australia.

With neither the Coalition nor Labor able to govern in their own right, they will have to give attention to the issues which caused them to lose ground to the Greens and Independents. It is already clear that, after stability of government, one of the central issues for those two groups will be the sustainability of communities and businesses in rural areas.

This was number one in the Alliance's list of issues for the election campaign, not only because rural and remote regions contribute so much to the Australian economy, but also because the infrastructure and services available in rural areas are key determinants of health and wellbeing.

Bob Katter has summed it up emotively by saying that all he is asking for is "the right of rural Australia to survive".

Dr Jenny May, Chairperson of the Alliance, has pointed to a number of specific issues of potential benefit to rural people which could well be advanced through the new Parliament.

One is high speed broadband for people wherever they live, for business and communications as well as for telehealth. Another is an improved dental care system for those currently disadvantaged in this respect, and this includes people in the bush," she said. "These are some of the issues that a minority government would find widespread support – including from the Independents and the Greens."

There are three levels at which the new government can signal its support for the 32 per cent who live and work in rural areas. First, it can consistently show it understands their special circumstances. Second, it can begin to act on a medium-term vision for rural areas through regional development, taxation reform, telecommunications, health and educational policies. Third, it can act to improve equity of access to health services and education, and to invest urgently in a better distribution of the health workforce.

These things should be part of the agenda for a stable and ethical national government which does not merely 'permit' rural areas to survive, but will underpin their economic and social contributions to Australia and deliver health equity to their residents.

Further Contacts

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