

STRENGTHENING REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

Position:

- FAMILY FIRST shares farmers' concerns that their water entitlements are the last priority after water for industry, domestic use and the environment;
- FAMILY FIRST supports the coal industry and the forestry industry and recognises they are vital sectors which employ tens of thousands of workers and form the backbone of many small and large communities across Australia. Global warming is a big issue and a real concern for families and FAMILY FIRST believes we must explore every option to reduce our carbon emissions. But we must carefully examine every possibility and that includes potential job losses. Coal and forestry workers should not be punished for a global problem for which there is no quick-fix;
- FAMILY FIRST is concerned about the critical lack of GPs and specialists in regional areas. Most medical professionals in regional areas are nearing retirement age and FAMILY FIRST does not believe the Government is doing enough to attract new medical professionals to these areas;
- FAMILY FIRST is concerned about the difficulties facing students from regional and rural areas who want a tertiary education or to attend university. FAMILY FIRST understands the pressures on families in rural areas and that sending a child to university, often in a capital city, can burden the family budget.

Actions:

- FAMILY FIRST calls on the Government to take a stronger stand to secure water for agriculture. FAMILY FIRST calls on all governments to invest more in upgrading antiquated irrigation systems and allow farmers to share with domestic users in the water savings made;

- FAMILY FIRST calls on the major parties to reassure coal and forestry workers and their families that their jobs are secure, not making them feel unsure and fearful of the future.
- FAMILY FIRST calls on the Government to urgently increase medical places at universities for doctors. The numbers of graduating doctors are insufficient to meet the needs of regional areas and our ageing population;
- FAMILY FIRST proposes the government wipe HECS debts for medical graduates who commit to work for a minimum of five consecutive years in a regional or rural area. (FAMILY FIRST proposes a similar scheme for medical graduates who commit to work for at least two years in remote Indigenous communities). This would be a real incentive for younger medical professionals to practice, and hopefully remain in regional and rural areas;