



## **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH OFFICER POSITION CEASED**

**26 February 2003**

Member for Flinders Liz Penfold said it takes a Labor Government to remove a necessary service from the country without consultation.

She also castigated the Member for Gordon, Rory McEwen, for turning away from country people who are his particular responsibility under the Ministries he has accepted from the Labor Government.

Mrs Penfold was commenting on the removal of Regional Environmental Health officers from Port Lincoln and Mount Gambier, the latter being Mr McEwen's home town.

Mr McEwen is the Minister for Local Government, and for Trade and Regional Development. Whyalla and Ceduna mayors have spoken out strongly against the cost shifting that will inevitably occur as the Local Government bodies are forced to take on more duties from the state. No discussions have indicated what will happen in those areas not covered by councils.

Mrs Penfold said the South Australian Health Commission considered revoking the appointments in 1998.

"In a media release at the time, Mr McEwen said, 'This ridiculous approach of cutting country jobs every time a government department's budget is under review must stop. I will fight to stop any further job losses in any government department and ask that wherever a job is under threat that I am advised.'"

Mrs Penfold said the decision to close the Port Lincoln and Mount Gambier offices was taken without consultation with the community or even Labor's own union, and she understands that Mr McEwen may have been left out of the decision making. No Regional Impact Statement was prepared.

The former environmental health officer who was based in Port Lincoln covered one third of the State from Jamestown to Andamooka in the north, across to the West Australian border taking in Oak Valley and Border Village.

The officer's duties were as diverse as food sampling and septic tank inspections (both in and out of council areas) to attending Opera in the Outback and shack freeholding.

The officer played a significant role in aspects of the development of the aquaculture industry, and provided remote Aboriginal communities with education on a wide range of topics such as limiting the spread of infectious diseases.

Mrs Penfold said that, when the Port Lincoln office closure was mooted in 1998, the most probable outcome then was a black hole in environmental health service for one third of the State since head office staffing levels at that time claimed they had difficulty in servicing Adelaide, let alone taking on the whole of South Australia.

The then Liberal Government rejected the SA Health Commission's proposal to close the Port Lincoln and Mount Gambier offices.

“This decision by the Labor Government leaves this area without coverage by a person who has actually been there and knows the issues.

“With the limits on driving that public servants are allowed to undertake, Eyre Peninsula and the Far West will effectively be left out.

“I certainly hope that we are never faced with a health issue like the Garibaldi affair that actually claimed a life, but the potential for disaster has been magnified immensely by the removal of the Environmental Health Officer from Port Lincoln,” Mrs Penfold said.