Mushroom magic

White, brown and grey patches of spongey mushrooms have sprouted at a number of parks and ovals in Alice Springs over the past week as Harold Huhns discovered at the Rural Health Education Foundation (RHEF) in Central Australia. It was earlier observed in the seat of Lingiari. It was earlier observed in the seat of Lingiari.

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Key health channel stops broadcasting

HEALTH REPORTER

Sasha Petrova

Healthcare providers living and working in very remote regions without internet will no longer be able to access educational material via free-to-air television, further resulting in negative health outcomes in the bush.

The Rural Health Education Foundation is shutting up shop as a result of a decline in government contracts that left the model of operation unsustainable.

CEO Helen Craig said government contracts had been steadily dropping for the last 18 months.

“The previous government didn’t contract us and the current one has given us contracts they’re going to,” she said.

Broadcasting on the Rural Health Channel for 24 hours a week, the Foundation shared a wide range of educational material, including panel discussions, documentaries, case-studies, seminars, workshops, community service announcements and other non-commercial content usually sponsored by the Northern Territory health service.

“The channel was a half-hour documentary that highlighted successful programs operating in the Northern Territory, covering prevention and treatment options to improve Indigenous eye health.

Healthcare practitioners told us that accessing education remains difficult and costly for them and that closing the Foundation and the Channel will leave a gap, but we have no choice,” Ms Craig said.

Professor Sasha Knight who worked as remote area nurse in Central Australia for 20 years said there was no other mechanism in place to reach healthcare professionals in remote communities.

“Practitioners will be forced to leave their communities to find continuing education and professional development,” she said.

One consequence of this will be that other practitioners will be without the information they need in a timely way or that some communities will be without their practitioners while they’re having to go away to access professional development.

“I worked in remote areas of central Australia. It was wonderful to be able to get education where I lived and worked,” she said.

Lines drawn in battle of bush

POLITICAL REPORTER

Corey Sinclair

WINNING back the bush vote is not a priority for Chief Minister Adam Giles as he nears the midway point of his term in Government.

He has denied that Labor winning the seat of Lingiari in the 2013 Federal election reflects poorly on the Country Liberal’s chances at the next NT election, calling it the best outcome they have ever seen in the seat of Lingiari.

“There’s a whole lot of different things in the Federal election compared to the NT election,” he said.

“I think people should be celebrating that and not talking about that pessimistically.”

“What you’re starting to see is people in the bush who have value in their votes more and more and are choosing to exercise their democratic rights in who they want to have representing them.”

Mr Giles believes in 15 to 20 years time, there will be a whole different dynamic in the way people vote and who they vote for in the bush.

“And that will be because of socially-economic advancement,” he said.

“I think it’s still a number of years away before we get to that point – particularly in Central Australia, it’s a challenge.”

“But all we want is for people to do is go and have a free vote where they vote for what they believe in.”

From a CLP point of view, it all comes down to a vote for economic change.

“What we’ve found over many years and decades is a rights-based argument to find issues in the bush about land rights and social rights.

“I’m a champion of economic advancement and for people having the opportunity to start a business and get a job.”

“We’ll keep driving it cause that’s the right thing for the Northern Territory.”

Member for Lingiari Warman Snowdon said while there is no automatic transference from the Federal election to the NT election, it does show very clearly that the idea that the bush had voted for Labor is 100 per cent incorrect.

“They’ll have to work very hard to keep the seats at the next election,” he said.

“It’s not a foregone conclusion for Labor but it will be very hard fought.”

Mr Snowdon has been elected four times in the electorate of Lingiari, which includes the whole of the Northern Territory excluding Darwin and Palmerston. Following the Federal election in September Mr Snowdon admitted he had been worried about the bush vote.

“There was a swing in Alice Springs, Katherine and the rural area outside of Darwin,” he said.

“If that swing had been maintained in the bush, I wouldn’t be the member but what happened was quite the opposite.”

Mr Snowdon won the 2013 Federal election by 90 votes in the two-party-preferred result despite a 2.82 swing against Labor.

Speed move bashed

THE Northern Territory Government cannot wait for a fatal accident to occur before scrapping the open speed trail, a leading road safety expert argues.

Director of the Injury Division at The George Institute Global Health Rebecca Ivers said speed is implicated in most crashes so the government should act before any one gets hurt.

She said compelling evidence shows that the fatal crash rate in the NT is 21 deaths per 100,000 whereas elsewhere in Australia it is 6 per 100,000.

“We’ve got a really high fatal crash rate in the NT. I think it’s highly likely there will be a fatal crash on that stretch of road, she said.

“I hope there won’t be a death or serious crash on that road but the reality is, it probably will happen.

“I don’t think it (open speed) is a sensible idea.”

Professor Ivers said there are many challenges involved from speeds including what Chief Minister Adam Giles described to the Centralian Advocate earlier this week as “driving to conditions”.

“We have a whole cocktail of risk factors, how do you actually predict the speed of someone driving (even overtaking), for example?"  People have got a very different idea of what driving to the conditions actually means,” she said.

“They are not things anyone including police can make a real judgement about and the government are going to have great difficulty understanding that as well.”

Professor Ivers more lived in the NT and recalls having numerous near-misses on the Territory’s deadly roads.

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