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**AMA WILL SUPPORT NEW NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH
 COMMISSIONER ON BIG CHALLENGES AHEAD**

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today that Associate Professor Ruth Stewart is a fitting appointment as National Rural Health Commissioner at a time when rural and regional Australia continues to face significant challenges to achieve improved access to quality medical and health services.

Dr Bartone said that Associate Professor Stewart is a highly respected member of the profession who has made a substantial contribution to rural and remote health over many years through her work as a clinician, academic, and leading health reform advocate.

“The key role of the Commissioner is to ensure that rural health issues are always included in Government decision-making and health policy development,” Dr Bartone said.

“The appointment of a respected leader such as Associate Professor Stewart is a strong signal that the Government is taking rural health seriously.

“Progress was made under outgoing Commissioner, Professor Paul Worley, on major reforms like the National Rural Generalist Pathway, but there is so much more that needs to be done and this work needs to be prioritised.

“The full impacts of drought, extreme weather, bushfires, and COVID-19 are yet to be fully realised for many rural communities – and health services will be at the heart of their recovery.

“The AMA looks forward to working with Associate Professor Stewart to making real and enduring improvements in the health of rural Australia.”

Chair of the AMA Council of Rural Doctors, Dr Sandra Hirowatari, said that the AMA’s rural doctors across Australia are keen to engage with and support the work of the new Commissioner.

“The AMA has an extensive rural membership, including medical students, doctors-in-training, career medical officers, GPs, and other specialists,” Dr Hirowati said.

“Improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is another shared objective of Associate Professor Stewart and the AMA, and we will strive together to make improvements.”

Associate Professor Stewart has worked as a rural doctor for many years, and was recently the Senior Medical Officer on Thursday Island. In addition to her clinical work, Associate Professor Stewart was the Associate Professor of Rural Medicine and Director Rural Clinical Training with James Cook University, and is a former President of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine.

The AMA thanks outgoing inaugural Commissioner, Professor Paul Worley, for his dedication and contribution to rural health.

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