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For Immediate Release

Prominent Medical Authorities Call on QLD Government to Reform Abortion Law

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RANZCOG), Family Planning Queensland (FPQ), and leading specialists from James Cook University (JCU) and the University of Queensland have expressed concerns that those Queensland doctors performing abortions still risk prosecution under Queensland's Criminal Code. They are calling on the Queensland Government to reform abortion law by removing it from the Criminal Code to ensure that doctors can provide women with ready access to a safe service free from the risk of subsequent criminal prosecution.

'Following the outcome of the recent court case in Cairns, we ask that the Premier and the government of Queensland reconsider their recent decision not to examine the state's abortion laws, first included in the Criminal Code in 1899, and largely unchanged since. We ask that a process of review and reform of these laws be undertaken as a priority,' according to Cairns obstetrician and gynaecologist and Director of the Clinical School at JCU, Professor Caroline de Costa.

'If the government is unable or unwilling to undertake such review and reform, we ask that the issue be referred to the Queensland Law Reform Commission in order that a public inquiry, similar to that conducted by the Victorian Law Reform Commission, be undertaken and recommendations made to the current parliament in a timely manner,' said Professor de Costa.

Professor Nicholas Fisk, a leading Brisbane based obstetrician who gave evidence for the police in the recent case, explained, 'It was not just doctors but hundreds of thousands of Queensland women who were at similar risk of prosecution. On this occasion the court appreciated the absurdity of reproductive laws construed in the 1800s, but the threat of criminal charges remains.'

'The recent Cairns court case, and the decision by the jury, have exemplified again that Queensland abortion law is out of step with current practice and community attitudes, and

abortion should be a private matter between a woman and her doctor,' said RANZCOG President Dr Ted Weaver.

'This is of great concern to those Queensland doctors practising in this area, who want to be able to provide a safe service for women, without the risk of criminal prosecution subsequently. Equally, Queensland women need to be able to seek care and be secure in the knowledge that such care is provided within the law,' said Dr Weaver.

FPQ Medical Director Dr Caroline Harvey asserts, 'Abortion is an important health issue for all Australian women, and Queensland doctors believe that reform of the 19th century laws is urgently needed for the women of Queensland.'

For further information or to arrange an interview with Dr Weaver, Professor de Costa, Professor Fisk or Dr Harvey, please contact:

**Julia Serafin, Marketing, Media & Communications Senior Coordinator, RANZCOG
(w) 03 9412 2961 (m) 0488 367 476**

**Janelle Weissman, Director of Communications & Development, FPQ
(w) 07 3250 0222 (m) 0423 408 830**