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MEDIA RELEASE

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Study confirms strong attachment to Kilkivan

An independent study of rural aging for residents of the Kilkivan area has highlighted the importance to wellbeing of being able to age in existing communities. The findings of the report, *Rural Aging in Kilkivan*, confirm that locals love living in the district and most wish to stay for as long as possible.

Conducted by Brisbane's QUT Business School academics, **Associate Professor Amanda Beatson** and **Dr Udo Gottlieb**, the study involved **47 in-depth interviews** conducted over four days in late 2020. The age range of interviewees was from early 20s through to early 90s and involved 18 males and 29 females.

Of the 47, 26 were retired, while 15 were in full-time work. Most interview participants had arrived in the Kilkivan district as adults. They had diversity in age and time spent in the Kilkivan area, with some living there for over 80 years, and others having lived there for less than a year.

The report asserts that there was "An overwhelming feeling from the participants that Kilkivan was home", with most identifying both the landscape and the people as contributors to this feeling of home. "There was general consensus from the participants about the importance of Kilkivan for wellbeing."

De-identified quotes illustrate the conclusions drawn in the report. One male participant who has lived in the area for 22 years observed: *This area means everything, absolutely everything. Life, work, living...It is an absolutely beautiful area...Most of us hate the big smoke, even the big smoke of Gympie, because the environment changes terribly from here to Gympie...*

The authors later observe that there was "**a strong sense of loss in the idea of moving away from Kilkivan**".

President of the Kilkivan & District Community Care Assn, Rosie Fitzgerald said on the release of the report last week that, although not surprised by the findings, she was relieved that the key findings of her organisation's 2020 survey results had been confirmed by the QUT study.

"People do not want to be forced to leave their home area when their circumstances change. We've been regularly highlighting over the last two years the **severe gaps in aged care service and facility provision** here in the Kilkivan, Goomeri & Woolooga areas, especially when the age and

socio-economic profile of the community is considered. When those elements are further complicated by the absence of other services, and by the limited facilities, many seniors feel betrayed and stranded by the society in which they have paid taxes and rates to help provide a civil, equitable life. We believe it is a **social justice issue** for our older-than-average population who until now have been forced to manage without public transport, without any local respite services and without an *efficient* delivery of in-home care services in our area.

Ms Fitzgerald continued: “I think all levels of government either make unrealistic assumptions about the availability of community members to provide the missing services to their local friends or they prefer, wilfully, to continue to prop up models of “care” that do not work for rural and remote people. The investigations last year by the Royal Commission into Aged Care highlighted those deficiencies, didn’t they?! Given that Meals on Wheels is no longer delivered to Kilkivan, and that alternative accommodation options are very difficult to find here when residents become less mobile, our district is left with a few volunteers trying to plug the gaps, and these people are under a lot of pressure. The negative impact of these gaps on mental health alone, for both seniors and their carers, seems to us to justify immediate investment by all levels of government to meet quite basic community service obligations.

“I think it’s generally accepted, especially in the era of Covid, that *local* solutions to problems like these are the most cost-effective and efficient. And for at least two decades, public consultation meetings in Kilkivan have instructed Council to prioritise ageing-in-place services and facilities! It’s time that elected representatives acted on the requests of their constituents,” she concluded.

The QUT report is available by emailing rosie.fitzgerald57@outlook.com

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