



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Media Release

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Abbott's chance to support farmers

Windsor to re-introduce amendment on Liverpool Plains mining impacts on groundwater systems

Tony Abbott, the new Opposition Leader has his first opportunity to show that he will stand up for Australian farmers rights, a commitment he gave at the Farmers' Rally in Canberra on Tuesday, by supporting an amendment to a water management bill to be moved by the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor's amendment is to ensure that an independent study be undertaken into the impacts of mining on alluvial floodplains that have underlying groundwater systems forming part of the Murray Darling system inflows prior to exploration licences being granted for subsidence mining operations.

Mr Windsor first introduced this amendment in October 2008 when it did receive the support of the Liberal and National Parties in the House of Representatives and both parties also supported it in the Senate when it was first introduced by the Greens on November 26, 2008 however the Nationals and Liberals backflipped the next day following mining industry pressure.

Since then, Mr Windsor has continued his campaign along with the Caroon Coal Action Group.

"Mr Abbott, the new Leader of the Opposition, gave a commitment to farmers in Canberra yesterday that he will stand up for the rights of farmers.

"Mr Abbott now has the opportunity to clearly show this support of farmers by voting for my amendment as he did originally in October 2008.

"Since the Coalition backflip on the amendment in November 2008, there have been many visits to the Liverpool Plains by politicians from the Liberal and National Parties expressing their deepest concern and their support of the plight for the farmers there but their support has not been proven where it counts – on the floor of the Parliament.

"All these politicians now have a chance to redeem themselves by voting for my amendment to the Bill when it is debated this week and I call on Mr Abbott to lead the way on this," Mr Windsor said.

It has not only been Liberal and National Party members who have visited the Liverpool Plains voicing their support.

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“NSW Labor Senator Doug Cameron has also visited the area and has spoken in support of the farmers of the Liverpool Plains in the Parliament.

“The Leader of the Greens, Senator Bob Brown moved the amendment following his visit to the area earlier in 2008 and remains supportive,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor also points to the findings of the Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries’ Inquiry into Food production in Australia where all political parties are represented and specifically to point 2.104 in the Interim Report which states:

“The Committee considers that an independent water study should be an essential prerequisite before exploratory drilling commences in an area where mining exploration is to be undertaken.”

“With all these supportive statements being made by all sides of the political spectrum, I will be lobbying all parliamentarians to support my amendment to this Bill.

“The people of the Liverpool Plains farming community deserve this amendment to be accepted.

“If the Nationals and Liberals had supported the original amendment in the Senate in November 2008, I’m sure that the blockade at Tim Duddy’s property - now over 18 months old - would no longer have to be manned and people on the Liverpool Plains would be well on the way to having the knowledge they are seeking to protect the water resource of the prime agricultural land for future generations.

Talk is cheap, votes representing the needs of your people are what count,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor’s amendment states that

(1) Prior to exploration licences being granted for subsidence mining operations on floodplains that have underlying groundwater systems forming part of the Murray-Darling system inflows, an independent expert study must be undertaken to determine the impacts of the proposed mining operations on the connectivity of groundwater systems, surface water and ground water flows and water quality and

(2) Where a substantial risk is identified, exploration licences must not be granted