



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Media Release

30th November 2009

Senate Committee recognises Senate's own mistake on water study amendment

Whilst welcoming the findings of the Senate Select Committee on Agricultural and Related Industries' Inquiry into Food production in Australia, Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor has hit out at the Senate's creation of the problem it has recognised in its recommendations.

Mr Windsor is specifically referring 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."

Mr Windsor originally moved an amendment to the Water Amendment Bill 2008 in October last year that would have achieved this outcome.

It read:

255C Mitigation of unintended diversions

Prior to exploration licences being granted for subsidence mining operations on alluvial floodplains that have underlying groundwater systems forming part of the Murray-Darling system inflows, an independent study must be undertaken into the impacts of such mining on those systems.

"My Amendment was supported by the Opposition in the House of Representatives but not by the Government so it was moved by Australian Greens Leader in the Senate, Senator Bob Brown in November last year.

"It again received the Coalition support in the Senate on November 26 but after being leaned on by the Minerals Council of Australia's Mitch Hooke, they changed their position overnight and changed the amendment from "exploration" licences to "mining" licences and in doing so maintained the current State Government Planning Act processes.

"The Nationals let the people of the Liverpool Plains down badly and ever since they have been trying to salvage their much claimed mantle of representing the farm sector.

"Their efforts were scuttled by the NSW Minerals Council representative, Ms Rachelle McDonald when in the giving of her evidence to the Committee in response to a question by Nationals Senator John Williams who asked her, *'You are familiar that the federal parliament has passed a regulation that before mining can be carried out in that country a fully independent water test must be carried out on those underground aquifers?'*

"Ms McDonald replied, *'I do believe that the majority of NSW regulations actually meet the requirements of what was requested.'*

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“I’m pleased this Committee is seeing the need for an independent water study prior to exploratory drilling commencing but the people of the Liverpool Plains have spent nearly eighteen months manning a blockade at ‘Rossmar Park’ unnecessarily had the Nationals and Liberals passed my and the Greens amendment.

“Their support of the recommendation in the Select Committee is really quite hollow – the horse has bolted - and for any amendment to now get up to stop exploration or mining until a water study is undertaken will not be passed in the near future and therefore the people of the Liverpool Plains and the Caroon Coal Action Group will have to continue at the blockade till they get a result.

“The Senate Committee recognition is only a start but for it to become accepted policy and put into legislation, there is a long way to go,” Mr Windsor said.