



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**TONY WINDSOR MP**  
**INDEPENDENT**  
**FEDERAL MEMBER FOR NEW ENGLAND**

Shop 5  
259 Peel Street  
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

**All Mail:** PO Box 963  
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

**Ph:** (02) 6761 3080

**Toll Free:** 1300 301 839

**Fax:** (02) 6761 3380

**e-mail:** [Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au)

**Web Page:** [www.tonywindsor.com.au](http://www.tonywindsor.com.au)

## Opinion Piece

14 September 2010

# Opportunities of a hung Parliament

There has been much comment about my role in the formation of the new Government and I would like to let people know what has transpired.

By a quirk of the election result we ended up with a “Hung Parliament”.

In a “Hung Parliament”, where neither major party has a majority in their own right, there becomes a need for the cross bench (the unaligned independents or minor parties) to become involved in the determination of a government.

The result of the election was 72 Liberal/National MPs, 72 Australian Labor Party (ALP) MPs and 6 cross bench MPs (1 Green, 1 Western Australian National Party and 4 Independents) with a target of 76 to be able to form a Government.

The Independent WA National and the Independent Member for Kennedy supported the Coalition, giving them 74 votes. The Greens Member for Melbourne and the Independent Member for Denison supported the ALP giving them 74 votes.

It then became obvious that my vote and that of Rob Oakeshott would be critical to the formation of Government. It was decided after much consideration that our votes would allow the ALP to form a Government with 76 votes.

It has been suggested by some people in the electorate that I should have supported the Coalition. If that was the case and Mr Oakeshott remained in support of the ALP, there would have been a 75/75 deadlock which would have created the need for a new election. Both sides of Parliament and the majority of the community opposed another election.

Both Mr Oakeshott and I sought advice a week before a decision was made from the Parliamentary Clerks as to what would happen if as independents (uncomfortable with choosing a side) we did not support either the ALP or Coalition in writing prior to the recall of Parliament. The advice suggested that, as Prime Minister, Ms Gillard would:

- convene the House,
- elect a Speaker,
- then the Opposition Leader would test the confidence of the House as to whether Ms Gillard had a majority by way of a no confidence vote.

The Independents, who have never supported a no confidence motion, presumably would still not have supported such a motion.

Under these circumstances, Ms Gillard would have maintained her position as Prime Minister.

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By having a **written** agreement, we were able to obtain a massive regional development package for ALL of regional Australia along with a package for the New England Electorate and also have the capacity to remove the Government, if in fact it did not adhere to the package or introduced anti-regional legislation.

The support that I offered to Ms Gillard was given on the basis that I maintain the right to vote on all legislation according to the needs of the people.

The agreement states that I would vote with the Government to ensure Supply (Budget) and that I would oppose any frivolous politically motivated no-confidence motions in the Government. However, I have reserved the right to move or second a serious no-confidence motion if I feel there is no other option left.

I have maintained my Independent ideals and my ability to represent you without fear or favour as I have in the past to Governments of both persuasions.

**I have always maintained that the 30% of Australians living in regional areas have been disadvantaged by the political system by having their vote taken for granted.**

If you feel my decision to allow Labor to form Government was a bolt out of the blue, I refer you to my maiden speech in February 2002:

*“...I would say at the start of this delivery that one of the things that has always fascinated me in relation to country representation is that, even though we have 30 per cent of the population in terms of the vote, most of that vote historically has been taken for granted by one side of the parliament. We are in a unique situation politically, and have been for the last decade, in my view, where the basic policy framework that the nation is operating under has been by way of agreement by both sides of the parliament.*

*.... With 30 per cent of the vote, country Australia has the potential to have the balance of power—irrespective of who is in power in this chamber—and influence the political process far more than it has in the past. There has been a lack of flexibility. The only way to influence that is through the federal chamber.*

I have restated this position on innumerable occasions since being in the Parliament in various debates and during election campaigns.

The “30% of the electorate” vote has not been used effectively in the past. **That has now changed for the duration of this Parliament.**

I would like you to be aware that in my deliberations of determining who to support, my Independent colleagues Bob Katter, Rob Oakeshott and I met and developed a process through which we worked with both the Caretaker Prime Minister Julia Gillard and the Opposition Leader Tony Abbott.

This process included briefings from Departmental Secretaries including Treasury Officials, Ministers and Shadow Ministers and I thank both Ms Gillard and Mr Abbott for their co-operation in agreeing to and organising these meetings.

**Our priorities were to achieve stability, longevity and workability over a three year period.**

Some have suggested that the decision should have been made on philosophical grounds. I disagree. The decision in front of us was to determine if a **workable** Parliament could be formed at all and, if so, who with.

It was obvious that some within the Coalition were keen to go back to the polls which demonstrated, understandably, their desire not to work within a hung Parliament situation.

It was also obvious that the nature of the Senate as from next July would become difficult for an Abbott led government.

We discussed this issue with Mr Abbott.

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Both sides offered **significant regional development** packages thereby acknowledging that both had neglected country issues in the Parliament and in their election campaigns.

Some key points of the agreement reached include:

- Chaffey Dam upgrade
- Barraba Water
- Namoi Water Study
- Murrurundi Rail Tunnel
- Tamworth Base Hospital funding
- Local Government recognition in the Constitution referendum at the next election
- \$440m assistance to biofuels industry
- Consideration of New England Highway works at Bolivia Hill and a heavy vehicle bypass for Tenterfield
- Dental services to be improved
- Bioregional assessment of sensitive agricultural lands
- Review of Agricultural Research and Development funding
- \$8m for a Regional Development Policy Centre
- Equity for country people regarding wholesale pricing of broadband services

As a result of this agreement, the Parliament will become what was originally established under our Constitution - a **House of Representatives, not a House of Rulers.**

I am delighted that people like Tony Abbott and Senator John Williams see this Parliament as an opportunity for any member to raise issues, introduce legislation, argue logically and convince the other Representatives of their views.

I certainly look forward to working within this new framework to make the most of opportunities as they present.

No one has a mortgage on good ideas and if we always do what we have always done, we will always get what we always got.

Regional Australians need to grab this opportunity with both hands and make the most of the next three years.

A hung Parliament doesn't happen very often, but used responsibly and appropriately, its benefits could be felt for many years to come.

A copy of the "Agreement to Form Government" and the letter from the Prime Minister is available on my website at: [www.tonywindsor.com.au](http://www.tonywindsor.com.au) or if you would like a copy posted to you, please contact my office on 1300 301 839 or 6761 3080.

Yours sincerely



Tony Windsor MP  
Member for New England