

Tony Windsor MP

The New England Independent

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The Official Newsletter of the Independent Federal Member for New England Tony Windsor MP



Transport Infrastructure and Services



At the opening of the much needed Tilbuster Bridge, New England Highway, with the Mayor of Armidale Dumaresq Council, Councillor Brian Chetwynd

The Roads to Recovery Programme – An update.

Roads to Recovery funds continued to be rolled out across the Electorate. Of the \$23,007,687 made available and announced well prior to June 2002, \$11,729,301 has been distributed to 30 June 2003. I believe this is one of the better programmes for Regional Australia and I have written to every Mayor in Australia to get behind the continuation of this programme beyond the initial closing date of 30 June 2005.

Recently John Anderson announced a revamped Roads to Recovery Programme that is to continue beyond this closing date. On the surface this is great news, until the method of funding is investigated.

The revamped plan is to be paid for by the saving that will be made by cutting the Fuel Sales Grant Scheme (FSGS) that was originally designed to help Regional Australia overcome the extra GST levied upon regional citizens due to the fact that petrol is considerably dearer in regional areas in comparison with metropolitan areas.

This is a classic example of robbing country people to pay country people less than they had before with the Government pocketing the surplus.

The following formula highlights the problem.

	R2R (\$M) PA	FSGS (\$M) PA	Total benefits to Country Communities (\$M) PA
Current Scheme	210	270	480
New Scheme (Commencing Jul 2005)	210	Nil	210
Net loss to country communities = increase in government revenue			\$270

Is this a positive initiative or highway robbery? You can be the judge!

To the Electorate

Election years present great opportunities for community and industry groups to put forward issues that need to be translated into policies. My aim as the Independent Member for New England is to ensure that these issues are translated into the political debate.

A Member of Parliament's primary role is to represent the community that has elected them. To do this, their time is split between:

- * Visiting the community and gaining an insight into the various problems that exist and work on possible solutions
- * Helping constituents with their problems relating to Federal Government Services
- * Attending Parliament to debate the issues of the day
- * Participating in the work of Parliamentary Committees

The work undertaken in such Committees is rarely publicised. This is where politicians of all persuasions co-operate and work towards making recommendations to the Government.

For example, I am a Member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry and have formed a positive working relationship with the other Members involved as we look into Australia's future water supply for rural industries and communities.

The fact that all legislation has to pass through both Houses of Parliament has made my role as an independent most rewarding as I have found that working with the Senators, particularly the Independents, has achieved a number of positive outcomes for the New England Electorate. Some of these are: -

- * Prevention of the sale of Telstra
- * Improved the UNE's position dramatically from the original Government proposals in relation to Higher Education reforms
- * Improved the Medicare position from \$917M to the current \$2.4B Medicare package
- * Enhance the chance of the Ethanol industry becoming a reality by working with the Democrats in the Senate.

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Transport Infrastructure and Services

continued from page 1 The Australian Trucking Association's National Drive for Safety.

I attended this excellent annual event held in Tamworth. It was an opportunity for me to better understand the challenges faced by Transport Industry. The Trucking Association is to be commended for their endeavours to lift the safety awareness of their members and the travelling Public.



Together with Australian Trucking Association industry representatives, Geoff Savage & Mick McCulloch with safety messages.

Community Pressure Ensures That Rail Services to Armidale Survive.

People power proved yet again that Government decisions could be changed. Congratulations to the Armidale City Council, the Armidale community and the Independent State Members for Northern Tablelands and Tamworth (Richard Torbay and Peter Draper) for showing that Governments are supposed to govern for the people and not in spite of them. The secure future of this line will depend on greater tonnages of freight being carried. To this end I have talked with a prominent regional rail company and along with our State Members, I will be meeting with representatives of this company to begin to detail the freight possibilities that exist in the region.

Werris Creek Loop line Could Be Re-Opened

The announcement of a proposed coal mine just south of Werris Creek provides an opportunity for the re-opening of the loop line between Werris Creek and the Gap with the creation of up to 50 local jobs.

NRMA Calls for Greater Share of Resources to be Spent on the National Highway System.

I came out in support of the NRMA's call for additional National Highway funding. The alarming facts are that whilst the Government currently raises \$13.6B from Fuel Excise, only 12% is spent on road funding for Local, Regional, State and National Highways, approximately \$400M of which is spent each year on the National Highways system. The NRMA has calculated that the financial cost of road trauma to be \$15B annually. I look forward to meeting with representatives from the NRMA to discuss further strategies to highlight the public awareness of the inadequacy of this funding.

A New Airline Service Starts in New England - Congratulations Inverell

The progress towards Inverell and Gunnedah regaining an air service has at last become a reality with Big Sky Express now in service. Special mention should be made of the Inverell Shire Council, lead by Mayor Cr Barry Johnston and airline proprietor Phil Gerathy and his team for not giving up under trying circumstances. It is now up to all those commuters who have indicated that they would use the service to actually use it. This also goes for the government departments located within these districts. The old saying "use it or lose it" is especially true in this case.

Australian Rail Monument

The refurbishment of the exterior of the Werris Creek Railway Station is well underway with construction of the monument and landscaping to commence soon.

Local Government Amalgamation Debate

Walcha Amalgamation Protest Rally

Whilst this is primarily a State Government matter, I recently attended the Walcha Protest Rally, as this is an issue I feel very strongly about. Big is not necessarily better. I know there are many smaller viable councils that are providing excellent services to their local communities.

Examples of smaller councils working well for their respective communities abound and in my role as the Federal Member for New England I have recently been involved with some projects managed by some of the smaller councils, such as:

- Uralla Shire Council's leadership in gaining the Grace Munro Aged Care Facility for Bundarra
- Guyra Shire Council's proactive stance regarding the Tingha Multi Purpose Service Facility
- Walcha Shire Council's excellent work in developing a Softwood Timber Strategy for the Walcha and Nundle areas

How are these projects going to be improved by amalgamation?

Offering support at the Walcha amalgamation protest rally with Councillor Bill Heazlett, Mayor of Walcha Council, Peter Draper, Independent Member for State seat of Tamworth and Belinda Burgess



Higher Education and the UNE

Independents and Minor Parties Have a Positive Effect on the Funding for Regional Universities.

It was a pleasure to work with the peak bodies, the community, the UNE and other independents and minor parties in both Houses of the Federal Parliament to ensure that the original funding (proposed by the Coalition) for Universities was increased. This means that the financial position of the UNE has improved dramatically from the original proposal in the Government's Higher Education Reform package. This package would have seriously disadvantaged regional universities.

UNE Council Elections.

I am proud to have been elected as a Member of the UNE Council. As an ex-student of the UNE, I look forward to making a positive contribution to the University through the Council and continuing to support regional universities in general. I would like to congratulate John Cassidy on his recent election to the position of Chancellor. John has a wide range of experience in both the private and public sectors and I am sure that he will make a valuable contribution to the UNE.

Australia Day Honours Recipients

Volunteerism is a vital link in any community's wellbeing. Too often the volunteers receive few accolades. Whist I am sure volunteers undertake their excellent and necessary work without thinking of receiving acclaim, it is essential for the wider community that these volunteers do receive recognition.

Congratulations to the following residents of the New England Electorate who have been awarded an OAM for services to their communities.

Anthony Bock OAM (Warrant Officer Class Two) for meritorious performance in training a range of senior Regimental appointments within the 12th/16th Hunter River Lancers.

Miss Enid Isaacs OAM for service to the community of Armidale, particularly through the production of audio books for the Australian Listening Library.

Mr Alan Kennedy OAM for services to the community of Armidale, particularly to people with drug and alcohol dependencies through Freeman House and the St Vincent de Paul Society.

Mr Ken Lyttle OAM for services to veterans and their families, particularly through the Tamworth Sub-Branch of the Returned and Services League of Australia.

Mrs Laura Philp OAM for services to veterans and their families, particularly through the Woman's Auxiliary of the Inverell Sub-Branch of the Returned and Services League of Australia.

Mr Lex Ritchie OAM for services to tourism in the Glen Innes Region

Health Infrastructure and Services

Independents and Minor Parties Encourage Government to Improve the Medicare Package.

In the last half of 2003 an interesting thing happened in the Federal Parliament. The Government accepted the criticism of the Independents and the Minor Parties regarding the Medicare Package. They increased the Package from \$917M to \$2.4B, a stunning and substantial increase. This will go some way to halt the decline in bulk billing as the gap has been reduced. This is especially relevant to regional communities as they have lower disposable incomes and therefore any gap in magnified in its effect.

The increase has vindicated my opposition to the original package. It is a good example of the Government having to negotiate with the Parliament rather than using the Parliament as a rubber stamp. In fairness, however, the Government did change their mind so they should be congratulated. It also puts paid to the statement that "independents have no power". At the time of going to press, negotiations in terms of an increase to the \$2.4B package are still ongoing.

New England Leads the Way in the Rollout of Multi-Purpose Service Centres in Smaller Communities

One of the goals I had when I entered Federal politics was to make sure that aged care and health services in smaller communities were improved. If we can't deliver health care for all communities, then it is extremely difficult for those smaller communities to survive. The following small communities are now, or are soon, to enjoy upgraded health facilities: Tingha, Emmaville, Walcha, Barraba, Bingara and Guyra. The MPS model has become a reality due to the review process headed by the former Member for New England, the Rt Hon Ian Sinclair. Credit should also go the various councils and communities involved, along with the former Minister for Ageing, Kevin Andrews and current Minister, Julie Bishop. It has been a pleasure to work with them to achieve such an outstanding result. I sincerely hope that the above list is not the end, but a very good beginning to improving aged care and health services within the Electorate.

Bundarra – Grace Munro Aged Care Facility

Work has recently commenced on the construction of the Grace Munro Aged Care Facility. Without the financial commitment shown by the Uralla Shire Council to this project the work would still be on hold. Well done Uralla Shire Council. This is another great achievement for a community that wouldn't give up. It is also an excellent example of what can be achieved when the State and Federal Governments work towards a common goal.

Future of Ethanol Industry and Hence Regional Jobs to be Decided in the Senate

The latest on this issue is that due to the work of the Independents, Democrats and other minor parties, amendments are being introduced in the Senate that accurately reflect the industry's needs.

If the government accepts the amendments not only will the regions have an ethanol industry but also the flow on effect will be more value added industry in the region with a parallel increase in jobs both in the agricultural and industrial sectors.

As the industry has asked for these amendments, it is now up to the Government to support their requirements.

Tony with Matthew Kelley, proponent of the proposed Gunnedah Ethanol Plant



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Interviews

If anyone would like to meet with me during one of my regular trips around the Electorate, please contact my office so that an appointment can be arranged. In addition, please inform my staff of your enquiry, as they may be able to help you.

The Parliamentary web page contains excellent information for those who wish to know more about the people, processes and functions of our Parliament.
The website address is: - www.aph.gov.au

Telstra Country Music Festival

Congratulations to all those involved with Tamworth's very successful Telstra Country Music Festival. Special thanks should go to the major sponsors Telstra and Toyota along with the staff from Tamworth City Council and the State Emergency Service who were kept very busy having to relocate the campers during the floods. I understand the campers were all evacuated in less than 3 hours.

The Toyota Golden Guitar Awards were magnificent and congratulations to Sara Storer who walked away with a record 7 Golden Guitars. This event is one of the Top Ten Festivals of its kind in the World and again shows that country people can match it with the best.

Latest on National Equine Centre

I was delighted to be present at the meeting between representatives of the Equine Industry and Premier Bob Carr during which a \$3.25M untied grant was announced towards the new Equine Centre to be located at Tamworth.

The group who met with the Premier included the State Member for Tamworth, Peter Draper, the Mayor of Tamworth, James Treloar, Country Labour MLC, Christine Robertson, Tamworth City Councillor Ray Tait and the CEO's from the NCHA, AQHA, and the ABCRA, Gail Ritchie, Hunter Jones and Rosemary Harmer.

Disability Employment Services - Sheltered Workshops

Arising out of the Vision New England Summit recommendation, the Disability Employment Services in Tamworth, Armidale, Inverell and Glen Innes have banded together under the co-ordination of Kevin Mead to monitor the Government's reform process and to lobby where necessary. Like all reform processes, there will be negatives as well as positives.

I have been active in Parliament (and am also working with the four service providers) to make sure that the Government knows some of the unintended consequences of the reforms. We have received comforting words from the Prime Minister as well as the relevant Ministers.

However, staving off closures and job losses will take more than comforting words. The jury still remains open and whilst it is, the New England group and I will continue to lobby and apply pressure. After all, it is the people with disabilities who will eventually suffer if the reforms mean closures or downsizing in services.

A section of the large crowd in attendance at the Glen Innes meeting, held to express concern regarding the Government Reform Package. Courtesy Glen Innes Examiner



Congratulations

70th Wedding Anniversaries

Jack & Gladys Hickson, Tamworth

60th Wedding Anniversaries

Tom & Heather Blackler

Dan & Phyllis Donaldson

Gordon & Irene Miller

Bill & Joan Harris

Victor & Enid Field

Alric & Joyce Newby

Stan & Marj Payne

Cyril & Elsie Fulker

Jim & Doreen Wait

Edward & Lucy Ivey

Reminder:

If you know of anyone celebrating a special milestone, please notify my office 6-8 weeks prior to the event so that Congratulatory Messages can be arranged to be sent to them.

Forthcoming Public Meetings

Further to the Visitation Programme that I initiated last year, I propose to hold a further series of public meetings around the Electorate. Full details will be announced in the local press and can also be sourced through my office. The itinerary is

TOWN	DATE	TIME
March		
Urbenville	Tues 16th	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Tenterfield	Tues 16th	7.00 – 9.00 pm
Deepwater	Wed 17th	3.00 – 5.00 pm
Glen Innes	Wed 17th	7.00 – 9.00 pm
Emmaville	Thurs 18th	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Ashford	Thurs 18th	7.00 – 9.00 pm

April

Ebor	Tues 6th	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Armidale	Tues 6th	7.00 – 9.00 pm
Barraba	Thurs 8th	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Manilla	Thurs 8th	7.00 – 9.00pm
Bundarra	Tues 13th	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Inverell	Tues 13th	7.00 – 9.00 pm
Yetman	Wed 14th	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Bonshaw	Wed 14th	7.00 – 9.00 pm
Delungra	Thurs 15th	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Bingara	Thurs 15th	7.00 – 9.00 pm
Uralla	Wed 21st	7.00 – 9.00 pm
Walcha	Thurs 22nd	7.00 – 9.00 pm
Tingha	Tues 27th	12.00 – 2.00 pm
Guyra	Tues 27th	7.00 – 9.00 pm
Nundle	Wed 28th	7.00 – 9.00 pm
Werris Creek	Thurs 29th	7.00 – 9.00 pm

June

Tamworth	Tues 8th	7.00 – 9.00 pm
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