

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



Health Infrastructure and Services



Former Uralla Shire Councillor Clr. Bruce McLean & Bundarra Action Group Chairperson Peggy Weiss with Tony Windsor at the Grace Munro Aged Care Facility Ground Breaking Ceremony In Bundarra

People Power Works! Bundarra's Aged Care Facility Underway.

The ground breaking ceremony celebrating the commencement of the construction of the new 11 bed Grace Munro Centre was 'ground breaking' in more ways than one! The facility is a first in terms of a partnership between the three levels of Government, the Community and the private sector, (i.e. McLean Village from Inverell). Bundarra could well become a model for other smaller centres

The Centre was made possible by a great effort by many people over a long period. It simply goes to show that if a community has the vision, drive, and a workable strategy and doesn't give up they can achieve positive results.

Source of Funding	\$ Amount
Uralla Shire Council Loan Funds	400,000
Federal Government Departments (3)	270,000
H N Mclean Retirement Village - loan & donation of 11 beds	115,000
Local Community Fundraising	75,000
Lions International Grant	50,000
Lions Club of Bundarra	35,000
NSW Department of Ageing and Disability	34,000
Country Women's Association	25,000
Inverell District Legacy	10,000
Anonymous	10,000
Total funds	1,024,000

The State Government also donated the original Grace Munro Hospital Building

Full recognition should be given to the all the people involved with the Centre. The following are just some of the people involved.

- The Bundarra community including Peggy Weiss and the Bundarra Community Action Group, the former Mayor of Uralla, Brian Eichorn, former Councillor Bruce McLean along with the other Uralla Shire Councillors and staff, the Board and staff of the HN Mclean Retirement Village, the Bundarra Lions Club, the Country Women's Association, and the State and Federal Governments

Special thanks should also be given to;

- The former Federal Minister for Ageing, the Hon Kevin Andrews MP and Minister for Ageing, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, the Member for Northern Tablelands, Richard Torbay, the State Minister Health, the Hon Morris Iemma and his predecessor the Hon Craig Knowles.

It was a pleasure to work with such proactive people.

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To the Electorate

The New England Electorate is currently seeing a number of projects being either implemented or in the process of being implemented. All the examples below have been driven by community members who have identified the various needs and worked diligently to bring about change.

- The provision of aged care services in smaller communities is being championed in Bundarra
- A consortium including the New England Area Health, New England Institute of TAFE and the UNE is pioneering the use of broadband communication technology to improve the provision of their services across the region at a cost of \$11M.
- A regional community transport strategy is currently being prepared that will see the better use of resources through co-operation amongst various service providers around the region.
- The development of a "sheltered workshop" strategy that will see the continued provision of services to disabled people in smaller communities similar to what is being achieved in aged care.
- The convening of the first Vision New England Summit bringing together over 60 diverse groups from across the region last October and agreeing to 23 resolutions.

I congratulate and thank all those involved in the above projects for their efforts and look forward to continuing to work with them to achieve positive outcomes for all concerned.

Our federal parliamentary system (the House of Representatives and the Senate) is often subject to criticism from various quarters, quite often from the Government of the day for the Senate being obstructionist regarding the passage of Bills.

I am pleased, however, to report that there have been a number of positive results achieved through this System as a direct result of negotiation with Independents and the Minor Parties.

These include;

- Medicare funding increasing from an initial proposal of \$917M to \$2.8 Billion.
- Higher Education Funding increased from an initial proposal (that would have seen the UNE worse off) to a better position with a regional loading.
- The ethanol industry being granted an 8-year excise free period compared with the unviable 5-year period initially introduced by the government.
- Telstra to be retained in majority Government ownership.
- Media ownership laws continuing to keep a diversity of ownership

Vision New England Update

Resolutions

No	Issue	Action
1	Roads to Recovery	Continuation of the programme
2	Armidale Xplorer Service	Community action saves service, although there is a continued need to be vigilant
4	Rural Education	National Centre for Maths being considered in May Budget.
6	Rural Health	University Dept of Rural Health Facility nearing completion in Tamworth
10	Mental Health	Mental health telephone referral service under consideration.
11	Dental Health	Dental health included in revamped Medicare Plus Agreement although limited to chronically ill patients
12	Medical Indemnity	Federal Govt subsidy package announced mid-December
14	Charities Bill	Treasurer agrees that genuine charities will not be affected by tax law.
15	Disability Services	Successful retention of local Disability Employment Services in Safety Net Review.
17	Community Transport	Announcement pending of proposed co-ordination plan
19	Public Liability	Legislative changes in both Federal and State Parliaments continuing to be made.
22	Drought	Submission forwarded to the Drought Inquiry.
23	Telstra	Full sale of Telstra legislation rejected once again.

Independents "No Sale" Of Telstra

I recently convened a media conference with the Cross-bench Senators and Independents in the Senate and House of Representatives. Those in attendance were fellow MP's Peter Andren, Bob Katter, Michael Organ, and Senators John Cherry and Len Harris (with apologies offered by Independent Brian Harradine and Shayne Murphy).

During the Conference they confirmed their opposition to the full sale of Telstra was unchanged and consequently the sale was rejected once again when the Bill was re-introduced into the Senate.

The consensus view was that communications are such a crucial piece of infrastructure for country Australians that it is vital that some degree of public ownership is maintained.

There was also a lack of trust in the regulatory mechanisms that the Government suggests would ensure service delivery into the future. Our Constitution doesn't allow for one Government to bind a future Government in terms of policy. Even the Prime Minister has admitted this.



Democrat Senator John Cherry, One Nation Senator Len Harris, and MPs Tony Windsor, Michael Organ, Bob Katter and Peter Andren at the Joint Media Conference in Parliament House confirming "no" to the further sale of Telstra.

Funding for Schools Welcomed

Recently the Government announced a \$362M increase in funding for the Catholic Schools system. Much of this money will be directed towards the poorer schools including many in the Armidale Diocese, which extends from Boggabilla down through Walgett, south to Werris Creek, east to Walcha and north to Tenterfield.

There is no doubt that many of the smaller schools in the Catholic school system have been struggling for some time. This announcement should assist to improve their situation.

Regional Airports Security

I am very concerned that from the Government's point of view, Australia has adequate counter terrorism measures in the aviation transport sector.

Accordingly, I have reminded the Federal Government that it still has unfinished business regarding upgrading security at regional airports. Whilst our seaport security is important, there is still enough evidence to suggest that Regional Airports are a weak link in our security against terrorism attacks.

Public Meetings

I have held 22 public meetings over the March/April period. Some of the issues that have been raised are as follows;

- Access to health services
- Telstra services, in particular mobile phone and Internet connections
- Road and transport issues
- Defence issues
- Water quality
- Aged care
- Vegetation management
- Bulk billing by doctors
- Insurance issues including public liability, medical indemnity and private health insurance
- Landcare and environmental issues
- The US Free Trade Agreement
- Genetically modified foods

Launch of the Mt Tingha CDMA Tower



The joyous crowd at the launch of the Mt Tingha CDMA Tower - the 80th rolled out by Telstra Country Wide in the New England North West Region

Fuel Prices To Rise In Country Australia

The Government has decided to end the Fuel Sales Grants Scheme (FSGS). This scheme was designed to reduce the impost of the GST on fuel sold in regional Australia. The original aim was to offset the differential between Regional and Metropolitan fuels prices, thereby reducing or equalising the amount of GST (on fuel) by 1 to 3 cents paid by country people, therefore the scrapping of this will now increase fuel prices by 1-3 cents / litre for regional motorists.

Interim Report of the Inquiry into Rural Water Supplies

As a Member of the House of Representatives Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry Committee, I welcomed the Interim Report as the Committee believed the problems on the Murray/Darling Basin are so urgent that they could not wait for the publication of the Full Report.

The Interim Report recommends that the Australian Government urge the Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council to postpone plans to commit an additional 500 gegalitres in increased river flows to the Murray until:

- A comprehensive program of data collection and monitoring involving independent scientists is completed
- Non-flow alternatives for environmental management are considered and reported upon more thoroughly; and
- A full and comprehensive audit focusing specifically on the Murray Darling Basin's water resources, including new data, is conducted.

The report is available on the Federal Parliamentary Website;
www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/primind/waterinq/index.htm

Certificates of Appreciation

In Glen Innes, Mrs Joyce McDonald received a Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of her late husband Gordon McDonald's service to Australia during World War II along with her son-in-law Mr Ian McBain, who received a Certificate of Appreciation for his service to Australia during the Vietnam War.



Electorate Roundup

Delungra – I had the pleasure of attending the Opera in the Paddock at Delungra. It was a great night full of high quality entertainment. Congratulations to Peta and Bill Blyth and their band of enthusiastic helpers for adding an extra dimension to living in the country.

Inverell – As a regular passenger and supporter of the Big Sky Express Airline servicing Inverell, Gunnedah and Sydney, I am pleased to see that the airline is meeting its projections.

Tingha – I attended the launch of Telstra Countrywide's latest CDMA tower situated at Tingha. The tower will go a long way to improving mobile coverage in the Tingha region. This is a part of Telstra's ongoing roll out of CDMA towers within the region.

New England Highway – As a constant traveller on the New England Highway, it is pleasing to see that the Devil's Pinch is to be upgraded. In fact there has been a 73% increase in funding on the New England Highway since 2001.

Armidale – The 2004 NSW Rural Mental Health Conference was held in Armidale in March. The networking, benchmarking and learning that the conference provided is an essential part of understanding the impact of this issue and the positive outcomes that can be engineered.

Mingoola and Glenlyon to Receive New Television Services - I was pleased to be advised by the Minister of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, the Hon Daryl Williams, that funding of \$74,760 has been provided to implement a direct-to-home satellite solution for Mingoola and Glenlyon.

Glen Innes Sheltered Workshop
 I was delighted with the recent announcement by the Prime Minister that the Region's sheltered workshops will survive the new \$99 M Disability Services Package. There were real concerns that the smaller facilities may be forced to close. Community outrage at Public Meetings such as the one held in Glen Innes late last year no doubt assisted in ensuring a positive outcome.

Tenterfield – Congratulations to Tenterfield for another successful Oracles of the Bush Festival. I urge anyone who hasn't attended this great festival in the past to keep it in mind for next April. You will have a wonderful time.

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Interviews

Please contact my office so that an appointment can be arranged. Don't hesitate to inform my staff of your enquiry, as they may be able to assist you on the spot.

Health Infrastructure and Services Continued from page 1

Victory for Pharmacists against National Competition Policy

I have constantly advocated that some of the National Competition Council (NCC) decisions are not necessarily beneficial to Regional Australia. I am therefore pleased to see that for the first time the government has over ruled a national competition commission recommendation to deregulate pharmacies thereby allowing supermarkets to offer some services.

To allow supermarkets to dispense products over the counter in competition with pharmacies would certainly impact not only on the viability of pharmacies and force many to shut down, but also the vital service they provide to the community. The knowledge and understanding of pharmacy employees is invaluable to many customers and I doubt the quality healthcare advice could be matched by a supermarket.

Further information on this issue can be found on my website including the reply from Treasurer Peter Costello in response to my question in question time. Perhaps now the Government can address the proliferation of Liquor outlets in the same way.

Medicare Plus Improvement - An Example of Need for Independents Influence

I congratulate the Independents in the Senate for their success in achieving the Medicare Plus Package passed by the Senate and accepted by the Government. It shows that a Government does not necessarily have a mortgage on good ideas and their best offer can still be improved by sensible negotiation. Some of the improvements are as follows:

- New safety net thresholds of \$300 for low income earners and \$700 for others, spent on out-of-hospital procedures. For people in the safety net, the rebate will be the standard rebate plus 80% of any gap between the rebate and the fee charged.
- Added bulk billing incentive payments of \$7.50 for doctors in non-metropolitan areas and all Tasmania for concession cardholders and under 16s.
- Medicare rebate eligibility for allied health services such as podiatrists, dieticians etc where extended care plans are established for people with chronic and complex conditions.
- Dental treatment is limited to chronically ill patients where dental problems exacerbate their condition.

National Equine and Livestock Centre Progresses To Next Stage

NSW Premier The Honourable Bob Carr visited Tamworth recently to announce the formation of the National Equine and Livestock Centre Board. Those appointed to take this exciting project to the next stage are as follows:

Greg Maguire (Chairman), Gail Ritchie (National Cutting Horse Association), Hunter Jones (Australian Quarter Horse Association), Rosemary Harmer (Australian Bushman's Campdraft & Rough Riders Association), Scott Higginbotham (Pro Rodeo Association), Terry Keating (Chairman, Tamworth Development Corporation), Dick Cameron (President, Stock & Station Agents Association), James Treloar (Administrator, Tamworth Regional Council), Ray Tait (Community Representative), Paul Anderson (Tamworth Regional Council), Peter Draper (Member for Tamworth) and Tony Windsor (Member for New England).

The Board will be in charge of completing this project as quickly as possible so that the events that bring so much value to the region can be maintained and expanded.



Tony Windsor MP, Peter Draper MP Member for Tamworth, Greg Maguire - Chairman National Equine & Livestock Centre, The Hon Bob Carr, NSW Premier and James Treloar - Administrator Tamworth Regional Council at the confirmation of the untied NSW Government funding of \$3.35m for the Centre and announcement of the Board to undertake the project.

Government Accepts The Independents And Minor Parties' Recommendations Re Ethanol And Votes For A Workable Deal.

A Chance for \$300M Investment in North West NSW and South West Qld as Industry Gains Start Up Incentives

The Government has finally accepted the industry position of an 8 year exemption from excise on the production of ethanol. The change was negotiated in the Senate after the Independents in the House of Representatives discussed the amendments needed with the Minor Parties in the Senate.

Whilst Mark Latham was in the Electorate recently, I took the opportunity to brief him on the importance of the industry both for the environment and for Regional Australia. Consequently I was able to convince him of the importance of the project. I was therefore pleased that when the final amended legislation was put to Parliament, it had the support of all Members of Parliament.

The passing of the Renewable Energy (Cleaner Fuels) Bill through the Senate in a form that will be acceptable to the industry will allow proposed plants in Gunnedah and Dalby to become a reality. This could bring \$300 million of direct investment to Western NSW and South West Queensland.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Democrats' Spokesperson for Energy and Resources Policy, Senator Lyn Allison for her excellent work. I have no doubt that if the Democrats had not taken such a principled position, there would not have been such a satisfactory outcome. I also acknowledge the hard work put in by the Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson in a difficult situation when negotiating with some recalcitrant Liberals.

Mr Bill Elliot, Ethanol Project Manager of the Dalby Bio-Energy Refinery and Mr Matthew Kelley, proponent of the Gunnedah Plant should also accept accolades for never giving up on their vision regarding their proposals.

Congratulations

Birthdays - 100 years

Mrs Ruby Hickey of Tenterfield
Mr Alfred Barnes of Glen Innes

A special mention goes to Mrs Ethel Barrett of Tamworth who recently turned **108!**

70th Wedding Anniversaries

Mr & Mrs Athol & Thelma Philp of Uralla

65th Wedding Anniversaries

Mr & Mrs Noel & Lillian Starr of Tamworth

60th Wedding Anniversaries

Mr & Mrs Joe & Patsy Hogg of Tamworth
Mr & Mrs Graham & Valerie Jeffrey, Tamworth
Mr & Mrs Ronald & Doris Kennedy of Inverell
Mr & Mrs Ray & Joan Lynn of Glen Innes
Mr John Rodgers & Mrs Audria Rodgers OAM

Reminder: If you know anyone celebrating a special milestone, please notify my office 4-8 weeks prior to the event so that congratulatory messages can be arranged.