

Tony Windsor MP

# The New England Independent

MARCH/APRIL 2006

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



## Independent Candidate Advisory Network Launched



The initial ICAN Canberra meeting of Independent Federal and State Parliamentarian's Press Conference.

Late last year, I joined with fellow Independents Peter Andren (Member for Calare) and Bob Katter (Member for Kennedy) to launch the Independent Candidate Advisory Network (ICAN). Mr Gavin Priestly, former Telstra Country Wide Regional Manager for Western NSW, has volunteered for the job of coordinating ICAN.

Peter Andren has stated "ICAN can best be described as a resource centre, providing advice and support for those seriously considering running as Independent candidates at future elections. ICAN is all about returning Australian parliaments to the people and putting representation back into politics in this country".

Subsequently, an Independents' Conference was convened by the three Federal Independents. The Conference was attended by the three NSW Independents, Peter Draper (Member for Tamworth), Richard Torbay (Member for Northern Tablelands), and Dawn Fardell (Member for Dubbo) as well as other Independents from Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania.

The Conference was a great opportunity for Independents to share ideas and work together to strengthen Australia's democracy. A web page was also launched at [www.icanonline.net.au](http://www.icanonline.net.au)

## Telstra Sale - Where are the guarantees?

The Federal Attorney General, Philip Ruddock, has announced that a Family Relationship Centre will be established in Tamworth.

The Family Relationship Centre received strong support during the Vision New England Summit that I convened last year.

The aim of the Centres is to create a place where people can go when they need help in making their relationships stronger or to reach agreement that focuses on the needs of their children when relationships end. Sixty five such Centres will be established across Australia.

## To the Electorate

The Telstra Sale Bill was passed through the Parliament in September last year. Since then, those who supported the Bill have discovered that Telstra plans to shut down the CDMA network and replace it with 3G, shed 12,000 jobs, close down 5,000 public telephones and increase line rentals.

It has to be of concern these announcements were made after the Liberal and National Party MPs voted to allow the sale to proceed despite over 70% of Australians being opposed to the sale.

Some of these same MPs are now saying that they may have voted differently had these plans been known before the legislation was put to the vote and that they also voted on a number of other pieces of legislation because of the need for "Coalition unity".

It is disappointing that some of these members have now seen the error of their ways only after their vote rather than before it. If they had read the signs correctly they could have taken evasive action to prevent the above plans from being implemented.

I'm sure these plans won't be the only measures that a fully privatised Telstra will introduce as they seek to boost their return to shareholders. Unfortunately, the Future Fund may not cover some of the negative impacts of Telstra's recently announced plans.

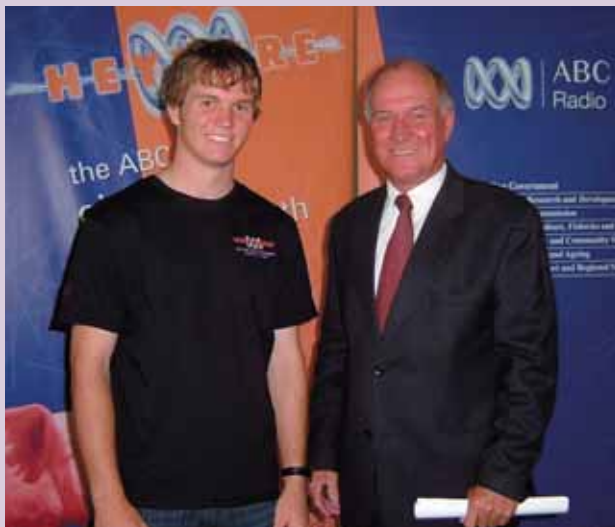
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I was pleased that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry recently met in Tamworth and Armidale. The Committee gathered feedback from the community regarding how to equip people involved in the rural sector with the necessary skills to ensure that rural industries are able to continue to contribute to our nation's economic and social wellbeing.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Tony Windsor".

## Around the Electorate

### ABC Heywire Winner



ABC New England/ North West's Heywire Winner Justin Watts shares a yarn with Tony at the Heywire Winners gathering in Canberra.

### UNE obtains \$1,396,000 Federal funding for research

The announcement made by the former Minister for Education, Science and Training, the Hon Dr Brendan Nelson, in late 2005 that the UNE is to receive up to \$1,396,000 funding over a four year period for six research initiatives is welcomed.

### Ben Lomond War Memorial Hall funded to restore service personnel photos

The Department of Veterans' Affairs "Saluting their Service" Program has supplied a \$2,500 grant to enable the Committee to restore photos of former Ben Lomond service personnel in the Ben Lomond War Memorial Hall.

Committee Chairman Mr Brian Badgery, the Trustees and Members of the Ben Lomond Memorial Hall Trust Management Committee are to be congratulated for recognising their forebears in such a significant and dignified way.

### Bingara and Tingha funding for the Multi Purpose Health Services (MPSs)

The above announcement will increase the number of MPS's in the New England Electorate to seven by joining with Walcha, Guyra, Emmaville and Barraba. Bundarra also has its own version of an MPS.

The community and the Hunter New England Area Health Service are to be congratulated for their excellent work in bringing these centres to fruition.

### Road Minister's response gives hope to Legume- Woodenbong Road upgrade

The Minister for Roads, the Hon Jim Lloyd, has indicated that the funding to upgrade the Legume to Woodenbong road may be available under the Auslink Strategic Regional Program. This Program has been recently received a boost with an additional \$100 million being made available to councils from 2006-2007 through a merit-based project selection process.

### Sunnyside Road intersection upgrade

The Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, the Hon Jim Lloyd, has confirmed that the \$8.5 million dollar project will include improvements to the intersection of the New England Highway and Sunnyside Road as a part of the proposed realignment works being carried out on the New England Highway. Construction is due to start some time in the 2006/2007 fiscal year.

### Challenge Armidale's work boosted by announcement of Government Funding

The recent announcement by the Council of Australian Governments that \$244 million is to be rolled out over a five year period to help reduce the number of young people living in Nursing Homes has been welcomed by the region. Challenge Armidale has been highlighting this problem for some time now and has undertaken community consultation to find out the needs and risks associated with inappropriate housing for young people with disabilities. A business plan has been drawn up so Challenge will be ready to lobby governments.

### Exceptional Circumstances finally granted

The recent announcement that farmers affected by the drought in Northern Tablelands Rural Lands Protection Board regions of Division B of Armidale and Division D of Northern New England can now apply for access the Exceptional Circumstance (EC) assistance is welcomed.

Applications for these regions were first submitted four years ago and it is puzzling why it took so long for the approval. In many cases the only thing that separated the farms that were approved and disallowed was a rural road.

The NSW Farmers, NRAC, the rural financial counseling services and the Member for Northern Tablelands, Mr Richard Torbay, are all to be thanked for their efforts over what can only be described and a very drawn out process.

## Glen Innes, Werris Creek & Armidale to share in Community Heritage Grants

The announcement late last year by the Minister for the Arts and Sport, Senator the Hon Rod Kemp, that the above Centres are able to share in the 2005 Community Heritage Grants was very welcome. \$16,180 will be shared between the Glen Innes & District Historical Society Inc, the Liverpool Plains Shire Council and the New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM). The aim of the program is to assist communities to preserve nationally significant, locally owned cultural heritage collections.



Neil McGarry (Liverpool Plains Shire Council), Tony Windsor MP, Narelle Jarry (NERAM), John Finlayson (Friend of NERAM) and Jean Lofts (Glen Innes & District Historical Society) at the announcement of Community Heritage Grants at the National Library in Canberra.

## Tamworth man leads fight for 'forgotten' war veterans

Whilst the new Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Hon Bruce Billson, has indicated that there are no plans to change the status quo of veterans that did not see overseas service, Tamworth identity Mr Ken Coulton has vowed not to give up on trying to obtain "Gold Card" justice for the "forgotten" veterans.

When time came to debate this issue the Leader of the House, Tony Abbott used parliamentary procedure and the Coalition's numbers to gag any discussion on the subject, thereby further delaying the prospect of these veterans achieving justice. The situation is becoming tragic, as over 800 of these veterans are dying each month.



**Ken Coulton vows not to give up**

Mr Ken Coulton and Tony Windsor seen recently discussing the plight of the forgotten war veterans

## Comments on the Treasurer's taxation reform investigations

Recently I spoke in Parliament about the need to have a balancing act between the desire to give taxation deductions and the need to increase spending in certain vital areas. I mentioned that "it would be counter productive to give back \$2 to \$3 per week if it meant that people were not able to engage a doctor or find a bed in a hospital or send their children to university".

Other issues that were mentioned included;

- Remove all taxation from Superannuation thereby sending a positive message about saving for retirement.
- The Commonwealth raises \$14 Billion in fuel taxation and only spends about \$2 Billion on roads. Surely this inequity needs to be addressed in any review.
- A serious look at increasing production and employment through Zonal Taxation is well worth reviewing especially if connected with the renewable energy sector.

The whole area of taxation is disjointed and does not serve the community well.

## Water Structural Adjustment payments can be considered as income and therefore can be taxed. Is this fair?

Recently, I received advice from the Prime Minister confirming that the Commonwealth is going to treat as income for taxation purposes any payment received by irrigators from the joint State/Commonwealth water structural adjustment payments.

I again took up the problem during the last parliamentary session. In response to a question that in part asked the Prime Minister if he thought it was fair that the Commonwealth should not only tax its own one-third contribution of the \$150 million program but also the contributions from the NSW Government and the Irrigators, the Prime Minister replied that he would "look into the methodology" and that he "would provide whatever information that I can find that might help explain the rationale for a policy that has been adhered to by Governments for a long time."

In response to the Prime Minister's reply the fact that it's been an accepted practice for years doesn't mean that it should not be changed. In some cases the Government could claw back all of its one-third contribution by taxing the full amount. If Australia is serious about environmentally sustainable resource management the Government must recognise that those who will be negatively impacted and stand to lose a substantial part of their capital assets should not be penalised by a taxation system that predates the new environmental policies.

## Delungra receives grant

Delungra District Development Committee and the Inverell Shire Council are to be congratulated for their work in obtaining a Regional Partnerships Grant for \$9,770 to enable them to develop the Delungra Tourist Information and Recreation Park.

## Senate's Regional Partnership Inquiry Update

In the final report of the Finance and Public Administration Senate Committee Inquiry into the Regional Partnerships and Sustainable Regions Programs, reference was made directly to evidence given by Tamworth businessman, Greg Maguire. The following are excerpts from the report. "Mr Greg Maguire, a witness central to the allegation made by Tony Windsor MP that he was offered an inducement not to stand for the seat of New England at the 2004 Federal Election, failed to provide evidence to the Committee that he had previously undertaken to provide on notice" ... "his refusal to provide the information made it difficult to not only corroborate his evidence before the inquiry but also to verify whether Mr Maguire had disclosed these elections contributions to the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC)" ... "the Committee is concerned that Mr Maguire may be in breach of the Electoral Act. The Committee therefore intends to refer this matter to the AEC for examination."

The Committee has done this and I await the AEC investigation results.

## Results from the Industrial Relations Survey

The Government has used its control of both Houses to force through the Industrial Relations Bill. It is of interest however to note that the Electorate was overwhelmingly against the Bill being passed.

Within seven days I received over 2,300 surveys with 77% being against the changes, 20% in favour and 3% undecided. I also received over 1,300 letters, e-mails and faxes with over 90% being against the changes.

## Notice of Public Meetings around the Electorate – April & May 2006

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|-------------------|---|
| <b>Armidale</b>   | Tuesday 4 April at 7.30pm<br>Armidale City Bowling Club     |
| <b>Tamworth</b>   | Wednesday 12 April at 7.30pm<br>Tamworth Community Centre   |
| <b>Glen Innes</b> | Tuesday 16 May at 7.30pm<br>Glen Innes & Dist Services Club |
| <b>Inverell</b>   | Wednesday May 17 at 7.30pm<br>Inverell RSM Club             |

Details for other locations will be announced in the near future.

## Congratulations

Congratulations to the following people as well as to all those celebrating 50th wedding anniversaries and 90th birthdays throughout the Electorate:

### 101st Birthday

Mr Ah Wai Jow, Tamworth

### 100th Birthdays

Alward Wyndham, Armidale  
William Thomson, Kootingal  
Teresa Schmude, Armidale  
Ivy Perfrement, Tamworth

### 70th Wedding Anniversaries

Sonny & Nellie Smith, Glen Innes  
Clarrie & Rita Yeomans, Arding

### 73rd Wedding Anniversary

Allen & Hazel Norris, Tamworth

### 60th Wedding Anniversaries

Dudley & Hazel Lewis, Delungra  
Charles & Betty Coleman, Moonbi  
Keith & Bernice Jamieson Tamworth  
Bill & Grace Lucas, Armidale  
Max & Lola Roach, Glen Innes  
Lucas & Enid Barwick, Tamworth  
Reginald & Thelma Hewat, Inverell  
Ross & Audrey Smith, Armidale  
Roy & Kathleen Manser, Tamworth  
Roy & June Griffin, Manilla  
Doug & Vi Wilkinson, Tamworth  
Robert & Dorothy Campton, Kootingal  
Kevin & Kathleen Johns, Tamworth  
Keith & June Hutchinson, Armidale  
Stanley & Elizabeth Wolfenden, Armidale  
Max & Ella Groth, Inverell  
Arthur & Edna Drage, Walcha  
Jim & Joan Walker, Guyra

**Reminder:** If you know anyone celebrating a special milestone, please notify my office 6-8 weeks prior to the event so that congratulatory messages can be arranged.

## Contact Details

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**Interviews:** - 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.

## Hunter and New England North West Community forms Taskforce to progress the Murrurundi Tunnel Upgrade



Forty community representatives from the New England North West and the Hunter Valley met in Tamworth recently to support the proposal to upgrade the Murrurundi Tunnel and associated works.

During the meeting it was agreed to form a small focus group to meet with the consultants that are currently undertaking the feasibility study for the Murrurundi Tunnel.

Members of the Taskforce are as follows:

Clr Gae Swain – Mayor of Gunnedah, Clr Steve Toms – Mayor of Glen Innes Severn Council, Clr Meryl Dillon – Moree Plains Shire Council and Chair of the New England North West Regional Development Board, Mr Keith Ross – Whitehaven & Werris Creek Coal Mines, Clr John Tate – Lord Mayor of Newcastle, Mr Ian Pedersen – Hunter Business Chamber Director and Hon Fellow of Institution of Engineers, and Glenn Thornton – Chief Executive Officer, Hunter Business Chamber, who will act as Co-ordinator.

Recent announcements regarding the expansion of the coal industry in the Werris Creek and Gunnedah areas and the need for modern infrastructure to link the Port of Newcastle with the proposed Inland Melbourne to Brisbane line have highlighted the need for this upgrade.

## Windsor renews call for a Renewable Sustainable Energy Authority and strengthening the role of the CSIRO in Alternate Energy Research

A recent leaked Government report has indicated that funding for cropping and livestock research is to be scaled back. Included in this cut will be funding for renewable energy research.

The role that agriculture will play in the development of ethanol and other bio fuels in the future will be crucial to the attempts to place less reliance on imported oil. It is unrealistic to expect that we can reach world best practice in this area without a focussed and well thought out research program.

In a speech to Parliament, I renewed my call for a Renewable Sustainable Energy Authority to advance the pursuit of new energy sources and the development of existing alternate energy resources. The Authority would strengthen the hand of the research community as well as encouraging both government and private investment.