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Fiscally responsible budget but - Windsor

Independent Federal Member for New England, Tony Windsor has described the Federal Budget brought down last night as fiscally responsible showing a surplus of \$2.1B and focussing largely on defence, but patchy in terms of who pays and who benefits.

“I recognise the need to maintain defence capabilities and border protection along with the economic imperatives of low interest rates and controlled inflation however there are a few points I would make.

Aged Care

On a positive note, Mr Windsor was pleased to see some flexibility come into the aged care debate, highlighted by a \$25 million program which will upgrade or replace high care homes in rural, remote and urban fringe areas is to be implemented.

“I look forward to this fund being able to assist Bundarra with its aged care facility.

Also subsidies for residential aged care will be increased to allow better pay rates to be offered to aged care nurses so providers can attract and retain more aged care nurses.

I trust that this increase will also filter through to other aged care workers who have worked tirelessly to provide a high quality of care to our aged community members often at minimal pay rates,” Mr Windsor said.

Primary Industries

The Budget recognises the contribution that the agriculture and mining industries have made to the wellbeing of the Australian Community in terms of growth, production, employment and balance of trade.

The volume of rural and resource commodity production has increased by 7% and the volume of commodity exports has increased by 10%.

However Government Expenditure on Agriculture Fisheries & Forestry has declined from \$1,797M last year to \$1,792M this year and is forecast to reduce by another \$178M over the next three years.

Also approximately half the expenditure by government is funded by levies on those agricultural industries,” Mr Windsor said

Doctors

Mr Windsor believes that a major disappointment country people should feel outraged by is the plan to encourage 150 doctors to work in the outer metropolitan areas of the six State capital cities.

“Under the plan, doctors who agree to work in designated outer metropolitan areas and register on an alternative pathway to achieve vocational registration will be eligible for higher Medicare rebates.

The recent Rural Doctors Summit in Tamworth identified this as a way of encouraging doctors in to country practices and here we see it being used to increase outer metropolitan areas without even a mention of country areas.

It is an \$80M plan for more doctors for the outer suburbs of major capital cities and nothing for the country,” Mr Windsor said.

Pensioners and Low Income earners

Pensioners and Low Income earners will feel the brunt of the Government’s attempt to rein in the escalating cost of subsidised prescriptions according to Mr Windsor.

“By increasing the upfront payment by \$1 to \$4.60, the Treasurer has harshly treated pensioners at a time when they are still suffering a real reduction in income in the wake of the introduction of the GST,” Mr Windsor said

Road spending

New England Highway roadworks have been confirmed in the budget, the commencement of work on the Devils Pinch north of Armidale (south of Guyra) as well as works on the way into Tenterfield and in the main street of Tenterfield, however other stretches in need of upgrade have been overlooked with the bias towards the Pacific Hwy continuing to dominate funding of major roads in New South Wales.

In terms of Road funding excluding the untied normal Federal Assistance Grants to Local Government, the actual spend has dropped by 17% or \$275m from last year and is budgeted to fall further over the next three years.

“I am very concerned that the Budget indicates that the significant decline in expenses in 2005-06 reflects the rescheduling of Projects and the conclusion of the Roads to Recovery program in 2004-05.

Country people must maintain the pressure on the Federal Government to ensure that programs like the Roads to Recovery do not end,” Mr Windsor said. (See table below)

Components of Road Transport Funding (Budget Paper 1 Page 6-51)

Table 15.1 Trends in major components of the Road Transport sub function

	2001-2	2002-3	2003-4	2004-5	2005-6
	\$m	\$m	\$m	\$m	\$m
National Hwys & RoNIs	1,093	981	929	1,245	1,050
Black Spot Program	49	45	45	45	45
Roads to Recovery	418	202	302	252	0
Other	41	99	40	32	32
Total	1,602	1,327	1,316	1,573	1,127

Social and Community Services (SACS) Award

The Federal Government has not seen fit to match the New South Wales Government’s Commitment to increase their contribution to assist many community groups funded to provide essential community services like those to youth, disabled, women, homeless and other groups. The Federal Government has continued to argue that their contracts are indexed and should have been sufficient to take into account any increases in wages of the dedicated people involved in providing these services.

Further information from Tony Windsor on 0427 66 8868 or 6277 4722