



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Windsor Expresses Safety Net Concerns**

The Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor, today expressed his concerns that the current disability employment reforms are moving the disability employment sector towards a work place relation's style outcome that could fail the needs of their clients.

Mr Windsor said, "The issues raised by the Commonwealth disability workplace reforms have been put before me by a number of local groups involved in the sector with the chief concern being the future of people with disabilities who will be deemed to be unproductive under the proposed new scheme."

"Challenge Industries Armidale CEO, Mr Kevin Mead introduced the issue at the Vision New England Summit and received support from several speakers involved in this area of work. The resolution was seconded by Mr Bob Dwyer, Mayor of Glen Innes and board member of Glen Innes Sheltered Workshop. The Summit unanimously supported Mr Mead's call for a working group to be set up to ensure the current reforms do not remove opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in a workplace environment that allows them to establish and maintain self esteem and social contact."

Mr Windsor said, "The focus on workplace efficiency at the detriment of supporting the broader social value of these workplaces could lead to many being unviable under the new Commonwealth scheme to be introduced in December 2004."

"Today I met with the board of the Glen Innes Sheltered Workshop as well as family members and some employees, and I was informed that they will not be able to continue under the new arrangements. This possible closure alone would see 25 people out work and I am very concerned at the levels of anxiety and stress that are building in staff and employees as the uncertainty over this reform grows."

"This new policy appears to have missed the mark by not valuing the contribution these workplaces achieve in giving people with disabilities esteem and providing a supervised and stimulating environment. There is a high potential for the new policy to involve carers and people with disabilities in a cost shifting argument between the State and Commonwealth as the efficiency drive dislodges people with disabilities from the long established practise of providing them supervised employment."

"I will urgently request the Commonwealth to enter a new round of discussions at a more detailed level on the future of the possible 25% of existing clients who could be displaced and the real risks of workplace closures under the new system."

"The wellbeing of these people with disabilities is far too important to allow them an uncertain future and the Commonwealth needs to provide much more detail to our local groups before it attempts to progress. The December 2004 deadline appears unrealistic to me at this point in time," Mr Windsor concluded.

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**Further information from Tony Windsor - Mob 0427 66 8868 or 02 6761 3080**