



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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COAG National Water Initiative a Win Due to Water Users' Perseverance

The Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor has welcomed the Water Agreements made by the Prime Minister and Premiers at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in Canberra today.

Mr Windsor said "the agreement finally broke the barrier of recognition of property rights for water entitlement holders where claw back of water for environmental purposes was required."

Appropriate recognition of property rights has been avoided for 10 years since being included in the initial National Competition Policy Agreement of 1994.

"It is better late than never", Mr Windsor said and "I'm sure that the farming community will view it in this light."

Mr Windsor congratulated the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Premiers and particularly NSW Natural Resources Minister, Craig Knowles, for their work on the process and the many advisors and groups that have applied pressure for the changes.

"Craig Knowles was the first Labor Minister to actually recognise the inequity of some of the adjustments that farm families were enduring. In doing so he has been able to work with the Commonwealth for the common good rather than continue the political conflict that has dogged this debate from its onset in 1994."

Mr Windsor said he was pleased that a water re-allocation formula along the lines of the one-third farmer, one-third State Government and one-third Federal Government model originally proposed by the joint Federal/State Namoi Groundwater Committee in October 2000 has been adopted as a national model. This type of model means that the broader community would bear portion of the readjustment costs of meeting environmental outcomes and not just the farmers.

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As Chairman of the Namoi Groundwater Committee, I think it can safely be said now that those water users in the Namoi Groundwater system will be part of an adjustment package that will involve both Federal and State Governments.

Mr Windsor said that he was also honoured to have been a Member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's Inquiry into Future Water Supplies for Australia's Rural Industries and Communities that had made recent recommendations to Government relating to property rights and environmental flows.

“Above all, this decision has been a victory for the long suffering water users who have lived with uncertainty in terms of their futures for many years and the numerous representative groups that have argued for recognition of property rights since the initial commitment in 1994,” Mr Windsor concluded.