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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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# **Nationals off the phone on Telstra**

Member for New England, Tony Windsor, said the National Party's comments on Telstra were becoming farcical and displayed the fact that no-one within the Party seemed to be able to communicate with one another.

Mr Windsor highlighted the different views all made on the same day (2 March 2005) by a number of Government players.

The following is a report on John Anderson speaking at an agricultural economics conference in Canberra:

*"I am not comfortable with the prospect that a company in Canada, Japan or Europe could have 20 times the capacity to handle information compared to an Australian company, in an environment where the exchange of large amounts of information will become increasingly important," he said. "I am not comfortable about establishing a private-sector monopoly that does not create the competitive pressures and tensions that we will need to get the best possible service and delivery outcomes, and price outcomes, in the future." Mr Anderson said the question of the telecommunications sector's ability to meet Australia's future needs had to be considered urgently. "It's a discussion we need to have now, not with the benefit of disappointed hindsight in five, 10 or 20 years' time.*

Meanwhile, the following report appeared on the same day regarding comments by Queensland National Party Senator Elect, Barnaby Joyce:

*Mr Joyce told The Courier-Mail newspaper the sale could have serious implications not only for services in the bush but smaller players in the market could be squashed by it being unleashed onto the market.*

*Mr Joyce, who will take his Senate seat in July, has raised several concerns about Telstra's privatisation, including about how well it will be regulated and the quality of its services in the bush.*

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On the same day, Nationals Leader in the Senate, Senator Ron Boswell, displayed no such concerns in Longreach where he said all National Senators and Members would stand united on Telstra's full privatisation.

"If the Nationals are having problems talking to each other, no wonder the community is having difficulties working out where they are coming from," Mr Windsor said.

"To add to the comedy, the Minister for Communications, Senator Helen Coonan, says the Government will outline 'new' laws designed to protect services in the bush."

"These laws are in response to the Estens Report three years ago in 2002."

"One must wonder if that is the speed of political response to problems with Telstra when 51% Government controlled, what response would occur when the Government has no involvement in the ownership," Mr Windsor said.