



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

TONY WINDSOR MP
INDEPENDENT
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR NEW ENGLAND

Shop 5
259 Peel Street
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

All Mail: PO Box 963
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

Ph: (02) 6761 3080
Toll Free: 1300 301 839
Fax: (02) 6761 3380
e-mail: Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au
Web Page: www.tonywindsor.com.au

MEDIA RELEASE

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Budget proves no need to sell Telstra Equine Centre finally guaranteed funding

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor says that the Budget introduced by the Treasurer last night proves that there is no need for the Government to sell off their majority shareholding in Telstra.

“The Government said when it first mooted the full sale of Telstra that it was needed to reduce Government debt left to it nearly ten years ago by the then Labor Government.

The 2005 Budget shows a surplus of \$8.9 billion and projections indicate that Government debt will be wiped out by mid 2006.

Therefore the Government’s prime argument of needing the proceeds of the Telstra sale to fix our debt problem is now no longer the case meaning that the Government can now keep this highly profitable contributor to the nation’s income,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor said comments by the Prime Minister and Access Economics in recent days have reinforced his view that the Government has no need to sell the rest of Telstra.

“The Prime Minister is quoted as saying, “**We have no debt to speak of.** We have low inflation, we have still very strong business investment, we have 31 year lows in unemployment, and we have historically low interest rates”.

Access Economics is also quoted as saying “The projected surpluses would allow the Government to pay off all remaining debt by the middle of next year, **whether or not Telstra was sold**”.

So as there is now no need to sell off the rest of Telstra why is the Government still proceeding down this path?” Mr Windsor questioned.

Mr Windsor has welcomed the announcement of the \$6 million for the Australian Equine & Livestock Centre in Tamworth.

“The guarantee of funding of \$6 million for the Equine and Livestock Centre in Tamworth previously announced during the election last year is a very welcome inclusion in the Budget and recognises the hard work of the equine groups and the broader community in perservering with the task over many years. I congratulate all involved and look forward to seeing the commencement of works in the very near future,” Mr Windsor said.

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Mr Windsor also noted that the Treasurer had not recognised in his speech the hardship being experienced by country communities as a result of the continuing drought conditions.

Mr Windsor said that he was pleased to see the initiation of the \$15 million Rural Medical Infrastructure Fund, changes to the Family Law Act, funding for isolated school children and recognition of the need for skills training as being imperative for Australia's future – particularly country Australia's future.

Tax cuts of \$21.7 billion over four years and the abolition of the Superannuation surcharge of \$2.5 billion over four years are centrepieces of the 2005 Budget which will also be welcome.

Other positives include grants for practice nurses in rural medical practices, increased funding for dementia care, mental health, respite services and pap smear rebates.

Road and rail projects remain as announced last year as part of the Auslink program.

Further comment will be made in the coming days as more analysis is undertaken and feedback is received from community groups and individuals as to the impact of the measures announced in the Budget.

Other Budget Comments

ABC Regional and Local Programming boosted by \$54.5 million over three years

Extra funding for ABC Regional programming is very welcome in the broad terms and I will look forward to seeing how this extra funding will be expended. Representations have been made to expand the reception of ABC New England North West to Tenterfield and I will be working with the Tenterfield community to help them achieve this outcome.

CRC funding confirmed

Funding has been confirmed for both Beef and Cotton CRC's to be based at the University of New England.

Transport Infrastructure – Road and Rail Funding

Auslink funding announced before and during the 2004 election has been confirmed in this budget with no new projects being recognised.

Drought support

Whilst drought assistance figures have been quoted as delivering hundreds of millions of dollars in concessions to assist farmers in drought preparedness, especially through the Farm Management Deposits Scheme, there is no relaxing of criteria that will enable the farming sector to access assistance to hang on until the drought is truly over – not just having a significant rain event. A \$600,000 National Monitoring System to streamline EC application and assessment processes will not help those currently experiencing great hardship as they try to sustain their operations and families.

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Higher Education

The extra loading for regional universities announced in 2004 continues until 2009 however no extra funds have been allocated to assist regional universities.

Regional Airport Security

Regional Airport Security funding has not been increased since measures were announced in August last year. There is still no inclusion of passenger screening at regional airports like Tamworth and Armidale despite their direct access to Sydney Airport through regular scheduled flights.

Health & Aged Care

Respite boosted

Funding for residential, day and overnight respite has been increased which will allow more carers to take a break from their demanding role. How this is to be done in regional communities is still to be explained.

Mental Health has received a boost with an additional \$42.6 million over five years to expand the program which assists GPs in managing patients with mental health problems and rewards GPs for providing best practice, primary mental health care as well as providing a GP Psychiatric Support Service so that GPs can seek advice from a psychiatrist via phone, fax or email for patient care.