



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Media Release

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Windsor urges Brigalow timber millers to stand firm Issue to be raised in Federal Parliament next week

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor has urged timber millers in the Brigalow Bioregion to hold the line in terms of future use of timber from the Bioregion.

Mr Windsor has been investigating the possibility of responsibility for the Brigalow being removed from the New South Wales State Government by the Federal Government with a view to maintaining "existing use rights" for those businesses gaining a livelihood from the forest.

"I believe that the Federal Government has a number of powers that could be initiated to wrest control of the Brigalow Bioregion from the New South Wales State Government.

I am seeking legal advice on the constitutionality of a Federal Government takeover of responsibility of the region," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor is also currently investigating the compensation package that has been offered to the timber industry and is seeking clarification as to the impact of any guarantees on the 'existing use rights' of timber millers as the criteria within the package could effect the structure of any Federal initiative.

"If it can be shown that the guarantees of timber quantity and quality are fully compensable within the 20 year timber agreements, the 'existing use right' may well be covered and there may be no need to proceed with the Federal initiative.

If this is in fact the case, there should be no reason for any timber mill to shut down as in a financial sense their incomes would be guaranteed over a 20 year period with compensation to the companies and their employees if the Government guarantees are in a legally binding agreement.

If this is not the case, then I will proceed with a parliament strategy to remove control from the New South Wales Government," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor posed a number of questions that need public clarification and is calling on the New South Wales State Government Ministers, the Hon Bob Debus and the Hon Ian MacDonald to answer these questions.

- 1 Do the so-called 20 year timber agreements include a compensation arrangement if the quantity and quality as described in that agreement are not met?

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- 2 Does the compensation for non performance of the 20 year contract involve the capacity for payment in any year that the quantity/quality issues aren't addressed by NSW Forestry?
- 3 Is the compensation component of the agreement transferable on the sale of the timber milling business within the 20 year agreement period?
- 4 If the compensation component of the agreement is legally binding in that guarantees are binding on the State Government, why would a timber mill accept an 'exit package'?
- 5 Does the compensation package extend to the employees of a timber mill at any time during the 20 year agreement?

I urge the timber millers to stand firm until these questions are answered.

Only then will we know the facts and can put together a strategy that could help save the timber industry in the region and the livelihoods of many people in our local communities.

I will be writing to the timber mill owners and will also be raising the issue in the Federal Parliament next week.

If the Federal Government can intervene in the grazing of the Alpine areas and takeover industrial relations jurisdiction from the States, then the timber getting from the Brigalow Bioregion could also be taken over by the Federal Government," Mr Windsor said.