



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Telstra National's Waterloo

Country Third Force waiting in the wings

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor has described the current Telstra sale debate as being the National's Waterloo and warned of a country third force waiting in the wings.

"The Nationals are facing their Waterloo over their position on Telstra and if they make the wrong decision they will face a new third force established to truly represent country people without being tied to one side of politics or the other.

The Telstra sale issue and the future of telecommunications in the country is of such magnitude for country people that if the Nationals want to survive, they must recognise that unless they remain opposed to the full sale of Telstra they will face a bigger challenge to their existence than One Nation ever posed.

This is not an idle threat – this is a promise.

I have had recent meetings in Queensland and New South Wales and the mood of disenchantment with the Nationals representation is still there," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor has no doubt that the Nationals are in a quandary over Telstra.

"The parliamentary Nationals have continually flip-flopped and dropped their requirement for their support of the sale of the rest of Telstra.

They have floated so many no-compromise positions that the community has lost count and the 'scratch' mark has sunk even before it was defined.

The Page Research Report sought \$7 Billion for the rollout of fibre-optic cable, Barnaby Joyce has been calling for \$5 Billion in an infrastructure fund and other commitments for future proofing services and now we have the new Leader of the Nationals Mark Vaile being sent to the Queensland Nationals Conference today to do the Liberal Party's bidding with \$2 Billion to be put into a trust fund that will return \$100 million per year from the interest earned.

That's less than the \$1 billion the Government boasts it has spent between 1997 and 2005 on regional telecommunication.

Barnaby Joyce has been the only Nationals politician reflecting how country people are feeling on this issue but the rest of the Nationals are in a real quandary.

The Nationals are faced with a choice – truly represent their constituents and stand up for them or be exiled at the next election," Mr Windsor said.

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