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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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‘Senate Inquiry Report vindicates my stand’ – Windsor Maguire to be referred to AEC for investigation

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor has welcomed the Report by the Senate Committee Inquiry into the Regional Partnerships Program that was tabled in the Senate this afternoon saying that it has vindicated his stand.

“The Senate Inquiry Report on the Regional Partnerships Program vindicates my stand and my resolve to have the process of accessing the program investigated and exposed as being too open to politicisation and abuse through a lack of proper checks and balances that would be deemed appropriate in the allocation of public monies.

The Committee made 26 recommendations as a result of their Inquiry – all of which relate to making the process of accessing funding through the Regional Partnerships Program more open and accountable.

There are many worthwhile projects in regional Australia and I have always been supportive of the projects in the New England electorate that received funding through this Program,” Mr Windsor said.

The Report also refers to the evidence of witness Mr Greg Maguire indicating that ‘the Committee is concerned that Mr Maguire may be in breach of the Electoral Act’ and that ‘the Committee therefore intends to refer this matter to the AEC (Australian Electoral Commission) for examination.”

The Report also states, “With regard to the meeting on 19 May 2004, it is clear from the evidence that Mr Maguire used words to the effect that Mr Windsor could be offered a government position if he chose not to stand for re-election, or if he chose to join a party of the coalition government.^[591] and in Mr Maguire’s own words to the Inquiry “I reckon you could probably get a Ministry, you could probably do whatever you wanted to – even an overseas posting” and then went on to say “Go and talk to John Anderson”.

The Report also has a separate section titled “Possible offence by a witness” This states the following

1.46 The Committee took evidence from Mr Greg Maguire, a central figure in the allegations of Mr Tony Windsor MP that he was offered an inducement not to stand for the seat of New England at the 2004 federal election. During his appearance before the Committee Mr Maguire claimed that his companies had made contributions to Mr Windsor’s state and federal election campaigns. When asked to provide details to the Committee, he refused to answer but instead undertook to provide the information on notice. The information was important for corroborating some of Mr Maguire’s evidence and was material to the Committee’s examination of the matter.

1.47 Contrary to his undertaking at the hearing, Mr Maguire subsequently failed to provide the information to the Committee. The Committee wrote to Mr Maguire on three occasions to remind him of his undertaking. On the final occasion the Committee drew his attention to Senate procedural resolutions which make it an offence for a witness to fail to answer questions and provide information when required to do so. Mr Maguire informed the secretariat that he would not be making a response.

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1.48 During this process the Committee received fresh evidence which raised serious doubts about the veracity of Mr Maguire's statements. The Committee provided this evidence to Mr Maguire and invited him to comment. Mr Maguire also refused to respond to this material.

1.49 The Committee is deeply concerned by Mr Maguire's evasiveness on this matter. His refusal to provide relevant information made it difficult to not only corroborate his evidence before the inquiry but also to verify whether Mr Maguire had disclosed these election contributions to the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC).

As a result of this, the Committee intends to write to the Australian Electoral Commissioner asking that the matter be investigated.

“I have maintained throughout the Inquiry that my version of what happened at the meeting with Mr Maguire on May 19 2004, that was the catalyst for the Senate Inquiry, was true and correct and two very reliable witnesses supported my evidence.

The Committee also noted that the Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson who was invited to make a submission to the Inquiry declined to give evidence,” Mr Windsor said.

The Inquiry also looked into the circumstances surrounding the National Maths & Science Centre at UNE and also the Grace Munro Centre in Bundarra.

With regard to the National Maths & Science Centre at the University of New England, the Committee found “The National Party obviously sought to obtain political advantage from the grant by way of advertisements that were carried in the local newspapers at the time of the centre's official opening. The university did not act appropriately in having its SiMERR advertisement appear with a party political advertisement, and the professors were probably unwise not to have objected to having their names linked to the party political advertisement.”

The Committee’s comments about the Grace Munro Centre opening in Bundarra were “The evidence shows that Senator Macdonald attempted to influence the Uralla Council to exclude Mr Windsor from the official party and from speaking at the official opening. The Committee believes the attempt to exclude a local elected representative from the opening was inappropriate.

“I make no apologies for my stand on these issues and in fact I am pleased that as a result of my actions the future processes of this program will be more open and accountable for ALL applicants,” Mr Windsor said.