



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Groundwater decision imminent

Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor raised the issue of groundwater entitlements with the Prime Minister in Question time today.

Following concerns raised by northern irrigators and the Namoi Catchment Authority regarding the slowness of the decision relating to water entitlements and tax deductibility of the loss of a capital asset it was decided to raise the issue in Parliament.

The uncertainty has caused enormous anxiety amongst the farming community who have been subjected to poor treatment by both the NSW and Federal Governments.

Mr Howard in his answer said that he believed an agreement had been achieved at a Commonwealth and State Government level under the guidance of his Parliamentary Secretary Malcolm Turnbull and that a document to that effect was on the Prime Minister's desk and would be considered for sign off very soon.

"I appreciate the Prime Minister's answer and look forward to the announcement of a positive outcome for the groundwater users of New South Wales" Mr Windsor said.

Question to Prime Minister

"My question is to the Prime Minister and relates to the Parliamentary Secretary's role in the signing off on water entitlement allocations to the six NSW valleys involved in the Achieving Sustainable Groundwater Entitlements Program as recommended by the Groundwater Advisory Committee some two months ago.

Without wanting to overdramatise the urgency of this decision, the Prime Minister and the Parliamentary Secretary should be aware that irrigators are making critical planning decisions relating to their cropping activities on the basis of unknown water entitlements and need an urgent decision at government level.

Could the Prime Minister or the Parliamentary Secretary update the House on progress relating to this issue?"

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Answer from the Prime Minister

Mr HOWARD—I will do my best. I will consult the parliamentary secretary at the end of question time. I am aware of the importance and urgency of this issue. I am also aware that there are still a number of taxation aspects that need to be resolved. They are in hand. I had a meeting with some people concerned in relation to this issue. Of course, the actual determination of the entitlements has something to do with the roles and responsibilities of the New South Wales government, as I think the honourable member for New England would be aware.

Mr Windsor interjecting—

Mr HOWARD—I cannot quite pick that up. I will talk to you later. Let me simply assure the honourable gentleman that if there is anything further that needs to be done by the Commonwealth government to expedite the resolution of this matter I am quite sure that the member for Wentworth will do it.

Mr HOWARD (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (3.09 pm)—Mr Speaker, I seek the indulgence of the chair to add to an answer.

The SPEAKER—The minister may proceed.

Mr HOWARD—I would like to add to an answer that I gave to the member for New England. I have been informed since I answered that question that in fact agreement has been reached between the parliamentary secretary and the New South Wales minister. The parliamentary secretary has written to me and, subject to me being satisfied with the arrangement, it will be okayed and we will go ahead.