

6 September 2006

M  
e  
d  
i  
a  
  
R  
e  
l  
e  
a  
s  
e

## Growers left hanging by govt because of QLD election

The Federal government will break its promise of a mandatory horticulture code of conduct but will not announce its preferred voluntary code until after the Queensland election this Saturday to avoid damaging the Nationals' chances, according to the three federal independent MPs Bob Katter, Peter Andren and Tony Windsor.

"The Liberal Party have put their foot down on the horticulture code of conduct ensuring it will be a voluntary and not a mandatory code as promised by the ex-Deputy PM and leader of the Nationals John Anderson before the 2004 election," the Independents said.

"The Nationals have begged the PM to hold off the official announcement until Monday next week to avoid further damage to their chances in the Queensland election this Saturday".

Mr Katter said: "The Agriculture Minister, Nationals MP Peter McGauran, has been ducking and weaving a barrage of questions from the independents on this issue to avoid facing the fact the government is going to break its promise to the state's fruit and veg growers.

"Again the Nationals are more than happy to betray their constituents and side with the enemy – the large supermarket chains – falling into line with the policies of the Liberals and their masters at the top end of town," he added.

"First Minister McGauran tried to deny the government ever promised to include the supermarket chains in the mandatory horticulture code, and now it is reported the cabinet will only allow a voluntary code of conduct – which won't be worth the paper it's printed on," Mr Andren said.

"Fruit growers throughout Australia have long fought for a fair go in the supply chain from the orchard to the supermarket shelves – all they want is a fair price for their produce, and an accountable process to make sure they get it," Mr Windsor added.

"The government is playing politics with their livelihoods and the Nationals are complicit in the ongoing deception surrounding the horticulture code of conduct. Voters in Queensland should examine who is representing them on this issue – the independents have been consistently fighting for growers' interests for the best part of the last decade from fireblight to this code of conduct," the federal Independents said.

"The government promised the mandatory horticulture code would be implemented within 100 days following the 2004 election. It has been 100 weeks, and there is still no code and conveniently no announcement until after Saturday.

"Queensland grower Scott Dixon said it all in a letter to Nationals' MPs: *'If only you had the fortitude to pull on your Liberal Coalition partners and use this balance of power to vote in line with the wishes of your constituents you would see your support increase 10 fold. Unfortunately we can only assume this subservient attitude is portrayed in an effort to retain your positions'*.

"The Minister says the negotiations are continuing but we know he took his proposal to cabinet months ago and it was rejected. The government must deliver the mandatory code immediately," the Independents concluded.

**For more information: Bob Katter – 02-6277-4978/Peter Andren – 0419-612-891/Tony Windsor – 0427-668-868**