



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Media release

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Corish's drought comments demeaning to farming communities As a political representative he's a proven puppet

Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor has described former National Farmers' Federation President and political aspirant Peter Corish's recent comments on drought assistance as demeaning and insulting to the farming community.

Mr Windsor was referring to Mr Corish's statements in a study he chaired "Creating Our Future: Agriculture and Food Policy for the Next Generation" and further his comments in support of a CSIRO report "Managing Change: Australian Structural Adjustment Lessons for Water" which also considered Australia's drought assistance provisions.

"Mr Corish's recommendation for the removal of the interest rate subsidy support during the worst drought in living memory is an act of betrayal of the farming community that as a former NFF President, he supposedly 'represented'.

Mr Corish is quoted as saying, 'Many see it (the interest rate subsidy) as rewarding poor management, propping up farmers who fail to respond to changed conditions or take imprudent risks. It can delay change and reform by keeping otherwise unviable farms in business for longer than would otherwise be the case' with **HIS** report recommending interest rate assistance be phased out.

Drought policy is in need of review but Mr Corish's comments are insensitive to those farming families who have battled with drought for the past five years and don't have the benefit of drought proofing irrigation licences as Mr Corish does.

He fails to acknowledge that drought support is a conduit to the entire community – not about picking winners or losers," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor believes that Mr Corish has lost sight of equity issues in his comments.

"Before Mr Corish consigns farmers who couldn't survive the last five years without some degree of government assistance to the scrap heap, he may like to consider some equity issues.

Since the drought commenced in 2001 till 2005, the Commonwealth Government has assisted eligible farmers across Australia to the tune of \$240m for interest rate subsidy assistance – an average of \$60m per year.

Compare that to the assistance given to the building industry through the First Home Owners Scheme over the same period of time of approximately \$5.2 BILLION or \$1.3 Billion per year and Mr Corish's comments show just how demeaning he is being to his former 'constituents' in the farm sector.

The First Home Owners Scheme was set up only on the concern of the building industry that the introduction of GST would cause a drought in their industry unlike farmers who had to be experiencing their drought before getting assistance.

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Even today in The Age newspaper, it is reported that that leader of economic rationalist thinking, the Treasurer, Peter Costello has warned that Australia could be facing its worst drought this summer since records began, leaving hundreds of farmers dependent on government assistance also flagging new measures to make it easier for farmers to claim drought relief in a season when many are likely to have no income at all," Mr Windsor said.

As speculation mounts about the political aspirations of Peter Corish, Mr Windsor has no doubt about how Mr Corish would act as a Member of the House of Representatives should he be successful in being 'preselected'.

"Everything that Peter Corish has said and done points to an attitude of wanting to rule over rather than represent the people.

What is being played out by Mr Corish and the National Party is nothing more than the continuation of a charade that has been going on since well before Mr Corish stood down as the NFF President.

You only have to look back at events like the back flip of the NFF on the full sale of Telstra, the US Free Trade Agreement, the failure of the National Water Initiative, taxing of water compensation payments, a much needed inquiry into the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS), ten years of inaction on Property Rights, the removal of the Fuel Sales Grants Scheme from country motorists and when added to his suggested changes to Exceptional Circumstance assistance that would see interest rate subsidies phased out you really have to wonder whether he really wants to represent or rule," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor said that under Mr Corish's leadership, the NFF became a puppet of the Coalition Government.

"I went to the media conference on the steps of the Senate entrance when Mr Corish told Barnaby Joyce that it was OK to support the full sale of Telstra because the NFF had been given guarantees that parity of pricing for basic telephone and broadband for country people would be enshrined in the legislation.

History shows Senator Joyce was weakened by this call from Mr Corish to vote for the sale and history shows that there are no guarantees in the legislation enshrining these basic needs.

Even National Party Senator-elect, John 'Wacka' Williams saw through the façade when he raised the issue of legislative guarantees for telecommunication services at this year's National Party Conference in Ballina.

Why would a senior National move a motion at a State Conference to ensure service guarantees when supposedly Peter Corish had written guarantees that these services would be enshrined in legislation.

Mr Corish duped his constituents and can't be trusted not to do so in the future," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor says that whenever the Government needed a supporting voice of country people, they called on that 'apolitical independent organisation', the National Farmers Federation.

"Whenever the Government was having difficulty in getting their message across to the metropolitan based people that country people were being looked after, the call would go out to the NFF and Mr Corish would dutifully mouth the words that the NFF and therefore country people were behind the policy and all would be good.

The Australian-US Free Trade Agreement received the NFF blessing despite protestations of most in the farming community that indicated to the contrary.

Remember the statement that there would be no FTA without sugar!

It is common knowledge that Mr Corish's role in the US FTA process was as a lackey for Mark Vaile and John Anderson with the reward to be Anderson's successor.

Now we have the Corish view that there should be fewer farmers in the future.

No wonder Gwydir was lost!

Our farmers and the communities that rely on them deserve better than that," Mr Windsor said.