



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Media Release

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Vaile's failure to honour poll commitment breaches trust of wheat growers

The failure of the Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile to commit to a poll of wheat growers on the future of Australia's wheat marketing process has been described as "breaching the trust of wheat growers" by Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Questioning Mr Vaile in question time today in the Parliament after the Government took back the veto rights from AWB giving the decision to the Minister for Agriculture, Mr Windsor sought Mr Vaile's commitment to a proper poll of all registered wheat growers on any changes to the present export marketing system.

"Mark Vaile told wheat growers in Warracknabeal Victoria in March this year that any changes to export wheat marketing would include a poll of all wheat growers.

"Since then, Mr Vaile has ducked and weaved on the issue but he has never denied giving it.

"Mr Vaile knows it's the right thing to do and he should keep to his word.

"He has breached the trust of Australian wheat growers.

"Wheat growers of Australia need to beware that there is absolutely no commitment from the Government to ask them directly about any changes that may be introduced as a result of the Cole Inquiry scandal.

"The words mouthed by the Deputy Prime Minister may seem to indicate that the Government will 'consult' with growers but he reverts to the rhetoric of getting input from 'industry groups' who he knows will reflect what the Government wants to happen even when it is to the detriment of their members.

"The National Party is big in the country but they bow to their Liberal masters when they get to Canberra," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor believes that it is time for these industry groups to become more focussed on their members' needs and less on falling out with the Government to achieve better outcomes for their members and maybe even attract new members and strengthen their organisations as a result.

Mr Windsor said that today the NSW Farmers Association in an open letter to All Federal MPs 'welcomed recent comments by Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile that the grain industry will be consulted and we encourage the Federal Government to include the grain producing public in its definition of the grain industry throughout this decision making process.'

"The NSW Farmers' need to be more forceful in their approach than just 'encouraging' the Federal Government to include the grain producing public in its definition of the grain industry throughout this decision making process.

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“They should be demanding a poll of ALL registered wheat growers instead of pussyfooting around the issue.

“The so-called industry groups need to show some spine on this issue as does the Deputy Prime Minister and his National Party colleagues.

“This whole mess started when AWB breached the trust of wheat growers and if Mr Vaile doesn’t conduct a poll of registered wheat growers on any mooted changes, he will be perpetuating the lost trust in the system aided and abetted by ‘industry groups’.

“The NFF sold out on Telstra, the Grains Council of Australia sold out on biofuels opportunities and the NSW Farmers are in danger of accepting the consultation of the ‘grain producing public’ instead of a poll of all registered wheat growers.

Wheat growers should demand more of their ‘industry bodies’ and the ‘industry bodies’ should respond accordingly,” Mr Windsor said.

Question to Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile from Tony Windsor MP Member for New England

Tuesday 5th December 2006

Mr WINDSOR (2.44 pm)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and relates to the future of the Australian wheat industry.

Deputy Prime Minister, further to your commitment to a Victorian wheat rally earlier this year of a poll of all growers if changes were proposed to wheat export arrangements, and given your statement earlier today that ‘Wheat growers are the people that matter,’ and ‘A full consultative process with industry will take place, importantly with growers,’ will you guarantee that a properly constituted poll of all registered wheat growers be undertaken on the various options being considered in relation to the single desk before any cabinet decisions are taken?

Mr VAILE—I thank the member for his question. As the government has clearly indicated from the outset on this very important issues, as far as wheat growers are concerned, we are going to consult widely with the industry. We have the tried-and-true mechanisms in terms of seeking the views of growers both directly and indirectly through their peak body organisations, many of whom have been working with the government over a period of time during the course of this year.

What I can assure the member and all members of the House, and particularly the wheat growers of Australia, is that the government is not going to take any decisions in terms of locking in future arrangements until we have drawn in the views of all players in the industry. I did say at the press conference that the views of growers are the most important thing, because it is the wheat growers of Australia whose product we are talking about and not the entities that manage it or market it; it is the growers and their families who are important here.

They are currently facing in many parts of Australia extreme circumstances with the drought, and the government is certainly going to look after their interests in what we do as we move forward in this very challenging circumstance. So, of course, we will use all the mechanisms available to us to seek the views of growers, industry organisations and industry representatives.