



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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PM should sack Turnbull for incompetence

The Prime Minister should sack Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull and replace him with someone who has a grasp of the water issue and capacity to articulate solutions to them according to the Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor, who chaired the joint Commonwealth /NSW Namoi Valley Groundwater Taskforce, cited a growing list of Mr Turnbull's incompetent utterances on water policy and his lack of ability to make any meaningful comments that water users west of the Great Dividing Range in the Murray Darling Basin could make sense of, to support his call.

"Yesterday Mr Turnbull spoke of the recent rain as being not enough to cause run off into the river systems because it was becoming part of the groundwater system.

Anyone with any basic knowledge would know that the meagre amount of rainfall that has fallen recently would obviously be falling on the ground but definitely would not be entering the groundwater aquifers.

Any farmer would know that an inch of rain equates to about 6 inches of soil moisture with most groundwater aquifers found between 50m and 150m below the surface and recharged by groundwater recharge areas not through an inch of rain falling on the land.

Mr Turnbull's confusion about the relationship between the connectivity of groundwater systems and surface water systems again shows his lack of understanding of the issue," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor believes that Mr Turnbull's role in the detail of the \$10B water plan demonstrates once again his incompetence and has created great concern in water users in the Murray Darling Basin.

"Merely presenting 'bribes' to irrigators to surrender their water licences to a government slush fund is an insult to those who have invested and developed inland Australia when there is still great uncertainty about the science.

Even Liberal Senator Bill Heffernan has indicated that he believes that science on water may be as much as 40% out," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor points to Mr Turnbull's inability to fix the simple taxation issue relating to the joint NSW/Commonwealth Achieving Sustainable Groundwater Entitlements (ASGE) Program as another demonstration of Mr Turnbull's incompetency.

"In June 2005, \$100m was made available to groundwater users jointly by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments as compensation for the loss of water entitlements only to see in the fine print of the program that the Commonwealth would be able to steal up to 47% back as income tax. .../2

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“It is now nearly 2 years on and there is still an impasse on this issue with groundwater users still unable to access the much needed funding to help them to provide for their families,” Mr Windsor said.

The failure to consult the Murray Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) before embarking on the so called \$10B ten point plan is another example of Mr Turnbull’s incompetency according to Mr Windsor.

“It is unforgivable for Mr Turnbull not to have consulted the MDBC on the \$10B Ten Point 10 year plan for what comes under their jurisdiction and even today, Doug Miell from the NSW Irrigators – a key group in this issue - is quoted as not knowing any details of the plan.

“It clearly demonstrates that it is politics rather than policy that is driving the Government on this vital issue,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor said those who knew the water issue could clearly see that Mr Turnbull isn’t up to the job of managing let alone leading the way to solutions of such a complex issue.

“Many irrigators are saying Mr Turnbull may be a competent Bondi merchant banker but when it comes to water, his understanding of and statements about inland Australia’s water, he is totally incompetent.

“Having a group of captive corporate farmers known as the Bondi Group advising him, clearly demonstrates where Mr Turnbull is coming from on water policy.

“His position is more about market forces delivering to a few rather than a real understanding of how water mechanisms should work for everyone.

“Mr Turnbull’s statements that the land needed rainfall to the extent that ‘the water table would have to rise to the surface before runoff would occur was quite incredible for water users to comprehend and his reference to groundwater systems as being a sponge that would soak up all the rainfall because the soil was so dry was laughable.

“His lack of basic understanding of soil science on infiltration rates of sand and clay loams and the ‘sealing’ off of soils under heavy rainfall again demonstrates his inability to manage this critical portfolio.

“The sand on Bondi Beach might let water go straight through it but inland soils do not.

“This Minister clearly hasn’t got the intellectual capacity to understand anything other than clichés and throwaway lines when it comes to water policy and he should be replaced.

“At least John Anderson had some involvement in water policy and had a basic understanding of the issues but unfortunately failed to do anything about them.

“So to speak in terms that Mr Turnbull will understand, I’m afraid Malcolm’s in a muddle in a puddle and works on the principle that even if you don’t know what you are talking about, say it confidently and most of the people will believe you.

“Those who do know however are seeing through Mr Turnbull’s mist and want real solutions to the issue and not more trinkets in the lead up to the next election.

If the Government is unable to rectify the mess that it’s creating with its \$10B plan, I predict that the Government could lose the new seat of Parkes to a strong Independent,” Mr Windsor said.