



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Turnbull answer on Chaffey Dam indicates conspiracy continues

A number of Government Ministers are either incompetent in the conduct of their portfolios or are in cahoots in a political conspiracy to deprive Tamworth water users of future water security according to the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor was referring to the ongoing debate over the enlargement of Chaffey Dam from 62 gegalitres to 100 gegalitres.

Mr Windsor raised the issue during Question Time in Parliament again on Wednesday by asking the Minister for Environment and Water Resources Malcolm Turnbull if he would, as Minister responsible at a Federal level, have any objections in a policy sense, to the enlargement of Chaffey Dam proceeding.

"I was amazed at Malcolm Turnbull's answer where he indicated a number of interesting responses and gave an insight into what is actually going on.

"The Minister said that the State Government has responsibility but went on to say *'the proposed expansion of the Chaffey Dam may well bring to bear relevant elements of federal environmental policy, not least of course being the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*

"The Minister also said that he could not answer the question about possible objections to the dam proceeding as he was not aware of the proposal.

"Mr Turnbull is either incompetent or deliberately misled the Parliament by saying he knew nothing of the issue," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Turnbull told the Parliament *'I cannot tell the honourable member whether I object to something in respect of which I know no more than that which he has offered to the House just a few moments ago.'*

Mr Windsor knows for a fact that Mr Turnbull has documents relating to this issue.

"I have seen letters and documents regarding correspondence between the Chaffey Dam Reference Panel then Chairman Phil Betts and various Ministers in the Government on the upgrade and have had various conversations with Mr Betts about this issue.

"Mr Betts, in his then capacity as Chair of the Community Reference Panel, wrote to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services Mark Vaile on March 21 this year clearly stating that *'the discussion paper on cost sharing arrangements is intended to enable formal consideration of funding arrangements.'*

"Mr Vaile's Chief of Staff Brad Williams wrote back to Mr Betts on May 1 wherein he said, *'As the matter you have raised falls within the portfolio responsibilities of the Hon Malcolm Turnbull,*

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Minister for Environment and Water Resources, I have forwarded your correspondence to his office for consideration and direct reply.'

Mr Windsor said that further proof that Mr Turnbull has full knowledge of the proposal is reinforced by a senior member of his office replying to Mr Betts on June 26 saying, *'I refer to your letter of 21 March 2007 to the Hon Mark Vaile MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, concerning the potential for Commonwealth Government investment in the upgrade of the Chaffey Dam. Mr Vaile has passed your letter to the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources the Hon Malcolm Turnbull. Mr Turnbull has asked me to thank you for your letter and to reply on his behalf. I apologise for the delay in responding.'*

"It is common knowledge that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Tamworth Regional Council have met with various Ministers and senior advisers including Mark Vaile and Malcolm Turnbull.

"It is also known that Assistant Minister for Water John Cobb has been briefed and has been presented with a copy of the proposal.

"I have raised the issue in the Parliament on a number of occasions.

"For Mr Turnbull to now say this is the first he has heard of it smacks of incompetency with the Water Portfolio or is part of some political plot to deny water security for Tamworth and the Peel Valley," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor said that he had another copy of the Chaffey Dam upgrade proposal delivered to Mr Turnbull's office yesterday as he seems to have not read either the first he received from Mark Vaile or the copy given to John Cobb.

Mr Windsor also enclosed a note with the document requesting a speedy answer as to whether the Commonwealth has any objections to upgrade of Chaffey Dam.

All Mr Windsor wants is for all of those involved to be honest with the electorate about the Chaffey Dam upgrade so the electorate isn't left dangling believing the Commonwealth will not hold up securing the community's long term water supply.

Mr Windsor points to an answer given by the Deputy Prime Minister on February 8 this year as further proof of knowledge.

"Six months ago, Mr Vaile in answer to a question I put to him in the Parliament, indicated the issue was raised with him by the Mayor of Tamworth and further indicated that they (the Council) should put forward these proposals to us (The Government) so that we can have a look at them ... as we move forward in this process.

"It is time for all the players to come clean with what they have been doing in relation to the Chaffey Dam upgrade which doesn't appear to be much if Mr Turnbull's answer in Parliament yesterday is correct.

"It's time for Mr Betts, Mr Treloar, Mr Vaile, Mr Cobb and Mr Turnbull to tell the public what game is being played and get on with providing greater long term water security for Tamworth and its environs rather than plotting another political strategy that the people will see through as just that.

"Six months is a long time to be treading water on such an important issue," Mr Windsor said.

Hansard attached

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE 8 August 2007

Chaffey Dam

Question

[Mr WINDSOR](#) (3.09 p.m.)—My question is to the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources. The minister is aware of a proposal from the Chaffey Dam upgrade reference panel to enlarge Chaffey Dam near Tamworth. Minister, given that the New South Wales government, the local council and Peel River irrigators have approved the process, could you inform the House of any policy implications at the federal level that could impact on the enlargement of Chaffey Dam from 62 to 100 gigalitres? Does the minister have any objections to this critical piece of infrastructure for the Tamworth district proceeding?

Answer

[Mr TURNBULL](#)—I thank the honourable member for his question. The provision of water for Tamworth is squarely within the responsibility of the state government. Nonetheless, as the honourable member knows, the proposed expansion of the Chaffey Dam may well bring to bear relevant elements of federal environmental policy, not least of course being the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. When I have a proposal for the expansion of the Chaffey Dam, I will be able to give the honourable member and other members of this House an informed response. At this stage, I do not have a proposal before me.

Interjection

[Mr Windsor](#)—Do you have any objections?

Continue

[Mr TURNBULL](#)—I cannot tell the honourable member whether I object to something in respect of which I know no more than that which he offered to the House just a few moments ago.