



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

18 September 2007

Independent Study of Carooona Coal Project must happen

An independent study of the proposed Carooona coal project and the possible effect on underground water bearing gravels must be next on the agenda for the Minister of the Environment and Water Resources Malcolm Turnbull according to the Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor said the Commonwealth involvement in the Murray – Darling system and the Minister's secondment of the Chief Scientist to review the Gunns proposed pulp mill in Tasmania, highlights the Federal role on national biodiversity issues.

Mr Windsor has extended an invitation to the Minister to inspect the site of the proposed 500 million tonne coal project at Carooona to get a better understanding of the situation.

The similarities between the Gunns Pulp Mill and Carooona Coal were raised by Mr Windsor last week in the Parliament when Mr Windsor told the House:

“The reason I mentioned Gunns is that I think the processes are very similar. The proponents of both the Gunns and the BHP proposals have to go through a state based process..... The Chief Scientist is reviewing that now for the minister. I congratulate the minister for the environment for pulling this thing up. But make sure you have a good look at it and do not put the Chief Scientist in an invidious position where he has to approve it for political reasons when there is a whole range of procedural matters. Exactly the same issue is arising in the Carooona coal proposal. It is a state based process.”

“We know that, Minister, but we also know that under the various biodiversity legislative arrangements the Commonwealth does have some say, and that is what the minister has triggered in Gunns situation, with the Chief Scientist coming in to play.”

Mr Windsor believes that the Commonwealth's move into the Murray-Darling Basin system has forced them to create a plan to gauge how interlinked mechanisms work and then come up with a water budget, in a sense, and determine some allocations.

“An independent study of the interconnectivity between the coal mine and groundwater would be ‘a stitch in time saves nine’ concept that would reduce the compensation headache now facing the government on water licence allocation.

“I have urged the Minister many times to put in place an independent study of the impact of long-wall coal mining on water bearing gravels and what it does in terms of hydrology and hydraulics of the system.

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“If you put a trench across an underground water system what does that do in terms of hydraulics of an interlinked system?”

“Interconnectivity and biodiversity issues need to have an independent transparent mechanism in place that tempers the States’ enthusiasm for large scale development without scientific analysis of the long term effects of such projects,” Mr Windsor said.