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MEDIA RELEASE

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Chaffey Dam still not secure

The Federal Minister responsible for signing off on the Chaffey Dam upgrade has contradicted the Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the National Party Mark Vaile's comments that Chaffey Dam was a done deal and 'not an election promise' according to the Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor said that a story in the Australian Financial Review today indicates that the Minister for Environment and Water, Malcolm Turnbull's office is now saying that *'there were hurdles to clear before the Commonwealth funding could proceed'* and it was *'now contingent on the NSW Government submitting an appropriate business plan....that is consistent with the principles of the National Water Initiative and the objectives of the National Plan for Water Security.'*

"I have been concerned for months about the implications of the Prime Minister's \$10B Water Plan on final approval and the delays the National Party imposed until after the Murray – Darling Legislation went through the Federal Parliament.

"Now we have a situation where Mark Vaile says 'it's all go' and the Minister responsible, Malcolm Turnbull says that he still hasn't seen the plan.

How many times does he need the plan? I personally know of six plans that Malcolm Turnbull has, including personally delivered plans to his office," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor also raised the issue of cost recovery.

"If, as Mr Turnbull is now suggesting, the 'Plan' needs to fit with the principles of the National Water Initiative (NWI) that would mean that any expansion of the dam would trigger the 'cost recovery principles' of the NWI which would mean the irrigators would have to pay substantially more for their water.

"The NWI spells out clearly as does the 2007 Water Bill that projects funded by the Australian Government Water Fund would incur cost recovery penalties.

"This was denied by senior Nationals when the funding was announced.

"They clearly don't understand the legislation and the objectives of the National Plan for Water Security and have deliberately delayed announcing the money until the Federal legislation could block the project.

"If the Nationals who attended the grant announcement knew of these complications they were clearly deceiving for political advantage.

If they didn't know then they are incompetent and being played for fools by their Liberal Party masters.

How can the government allocate funds to a project if they haven't done their homework on whether the project criteria fits with the broad policy objectives?

The NSW Government have accepted the proposal put forward by the Chaffey Dam Reference Panel with the NSW Minister for Climate Change having said the upgrade would occur when the Commonwealth provided its share.

There is now no wriggle room from either the State or Commonwealth so let's get on with it," Mr Windsor said.

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