



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Media Release

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Windsor seeks PM's clarification of Chaffey Dam upgrade

Clarification of the approval process and funding for the upgrade to Chaffey Dam is the subject of a letter to the Prime Minister from the Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor believes there are still conflicting and contradictory messages being sent by various Federal Government Ministers and staffers and public servants.

“With so many statements at variance with each other it's time that the Prime Minister entered the debate and outlined exactly where the Commonwealth stands and what hurdles the Chaffey Dam upgrade project has to jump within the Federal bureaucracy,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor outlined a number of conflicting statements.

1. Mr Turnbull, the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources, confirmed in Parliament on 20 September, in response to my Question without Notice to him, that the funding would be contingent on assessment of the NSW Government's business plan by the National Water Commission and that the Plan would have to be consistent with the principles of the National Plan for water security and the National Water Initiative.
2. Mr Turnbull's staff member Brad Burke said by email on Thursday 20 September “While the National Water Commission is undertaking necessary work to progress this project the bottom line is that it will go ahead provided the State Government upholds its funding commitment”.

Mr Windsor said “There is no mention of the NWI or National Plan for Water Security or as reported in the Australian Financial Review on Wednesday 26 September, the National Water Commission's statement where *‘a spokeswoman for the NWC said the assessment to determine whether the funding went ahead had not yet occurred and would absolutely not be a rubber stamp. There are conditions that apply to our funding Those conditions determine whether the funding happens or not’.*”

3. This is further contradicted by the National Party candidate Phil Betts where he says there are *“no further environmental assessments necessary by the National Water Commission.”*
4. Another contradictory statement was made on ABC Radio by the CEO of the Namoi Catchment Authority and now Chairman of the Chaffey Dam Reference Panel, Mr Bruce Brown who said the environmental assessment could take up to six months.

Mr Betts' statements also fly in the face of statements made by Mr Turnbull and Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile according to Mr Windsor.

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Mr Vaile has stated, *“First, any grant funds by the Australian Government has to be justified by the presentation of business case documentation establishing that the expenditure is valid and the project will be viable in the long term. This is a long-standing requirement in relation to the disbursement of taxpayer’s funds.*

The requirement that water management arrangements and projects be shown to be consistent with the National Water Initiative has been in place since the NWI intergovernmental agreement was signed in 2004. Since the passage of the Water Act 2007, consistency with the NPWS is also mandatory, irrespective of whether Australian Government funds are involved, or not.

The need for any such project to meet Australian Government environmental standards has been an inevitable prerequisite since the passage of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.”

“With all these contradictory statements, I am asking the Prime Minister to confirm in writing what the Government’s position actually is so that no doubt is left in the minds of the people dependent on the Chaffey Dam water resource,” Mr Windsor said.