



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## Media Release

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### **Windsor challenges Vaile to debate future of Country Australia**

The Independent Federal Member for New England, Tony Windsor, has challenged Mark Vaile, the Leader of the National Party and Deputy Prime Minister, to debate the future of country Australia.

Mr Windsor said that country Australia was at a crossroads in terms of its future and many of the major issues that impact on country people would be brushed over by the city centric Liberal and Labor Parties during this election campaign.

“I challenge Mark Vaile to debate me on the future of Country Australia.

“Country Australia needs to become ‘unattached’ from one side of politics to be able to negotiate better outcomes for country people rather than be beholden to the city based major parties.

“Mr Vaile can choose the venue and location and a time suitable to him as long as the location is west of the Great Dividing Range,” Mr Windsor said.

The following is a list of some of the areas where the National Party has accepted less than what country people should have received if they had had stronger representation.

- The National Party made big noises about their opposition to the full sale of Telstra but then sold out when it came to the crunch.
- The Nationals also accepted a second best broadband service despite having supposedly receiving guarantees of equity of access to broadband and phone services for country people.
- Mr Vaile’s commitment to wheat growers at a rally at Warracknabeal in Victoria to undertake a poll of them if changes were mooted to the export wheat marketing arrangements he reneged on!
- The Nationals also reneged on a mandatory horticulture code of conduct to include the major retailers within 100 days of the 2004 election.
- It took over two years and threats of mutiny to finally get an outcome sought by the industry on the taxation of groundwater compensation payments as capital and not income after saying that such payments have always been taxed this way but only in the shadows of the looming election it gets sorted out.
- Zonal taxation policy adopted at National Party conferences have been buried in Canberra.
- Ethanol and renewable fuels legislation was eventually supported by the National Party but included the introduction of an excise and they only agreed to the Bill after Democrats and Independents introduced amendments agreed to by the Labor Party which shone the spotlight on the National Party’s inaction on the issue.
- Statement by the National Party that there would No US Free Trade Deal without sugar – reneged on.

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- The Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) Bill which has seen regional universities disadvantaged despite being given a regional capital assistance fund but no recurrent funding to maintain and staff the new facilities.
- Add to these the failure of the National Water Initiative now being superseded by the Prime Minister's \$10B Water Plan hurriedly cobbled together earlier this year and ten years of inaction on Property Rights despite it being a central plank to the 1994 Council of Australian Government (COAG) National Competition Policy agreement for States to receive billions of dollars in National Competition Payments.
- A much needed inquiry into the Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) that was called for before the outbreak of equine influenza was not addressed.
- The removal of the Fuel Sales Grants Scheme took away over \$200m from country motorists.

Whilst these are previous failings of the National Party to stand up for country people, Mr Windsor is looking to the future not wanting the same subservience to city-centric interests to continue.

“Country people must elect representatives who will stand up for them on a better access to health services, education opportunities, equity of telecommunication services, a fair share of infrastructure development, as well as being recognised as having a large role to play in the development of water policy, renewable energy, environment, climate change and drought policy solutions.

“We need to establish positive regional development policies not just trinket programs that sound good at election time but long term policies that can turn around population drift and provide people with opportunities to live fulfilling lives in country areas,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor believes the loss of the NSW country seat of Gwydir should ring warning bells in the ears of country voters.

“The abolition of the seat of Gwydir for this election due to population loss in country NSW is a clear indication that the past directions of the National Party haven't been working effectively and don't auger well for the future.

“This should ring warning bells in the ears of country voters that unless they take their future into their own hands through ‘unattached’ parliamentary representatives able to stand firm on issues impacting on country people, then country areas will continue to suffer decline in services and opportunities.

“Those seats that have relied on the National Party need to be more proactive about the future or be left behind by a tired old party still purporting to represent them but in reality just doing what the Liberal Party tells them to do.

“This election is the ideal opportunity for country people to use their vote in a much more strategic sense by voting for Independents as the Government and Opposition are essentially two Liberal Parties directed by city administrators.

“Mr Vaile is keen to denigrate Independents – a full blown debate on the future of country Australia will give him an opportunity to explain his party's position.

It would also provide an opportunity to destroy Independents,” Mr Windsor said.