



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**TONY WINDSOR MP**  
**INDEPENDENT**  
FEDERAL MEMBER FOR NEW ENGLAND

Shop 5  
259 Peel Street  
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

**All Mail:** PO Box 963  
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

**Ph:** (02) 6761 3080

**Toll Free:** 1300 301 839

**Fax:** (02) 6761 3380

**e-mail:** [Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au)

**Web Page:** [www.tonywindsor.com.au](http://www.tonywindsor.com.au)

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### Federal Minister passes buck to State over mining impact on Liverpool Plains groundwater

The buck passing between Federal and State Governments continued today in the Federal Parliament when the Federal Minister for the Environment, Peter Garrett deflected a question from the Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor about the impact of mining on the groundwater system of the Liverpool Plains and the broader Namoi Valley back to the NSW State Government.

Mr Windsor believes that the Minister's failure to address his question reinforces the need for an Independent study of the impacts of longwall mining not only on the immediate area of the Liverpool Plains currently being explored by BHP but also further down the Namoi Valley where it links up with the Murray-Darling.

"It is the height of hypocrisy that the Federal Minister for the Environment won't simply admit that the science about the impact of longwall mining on underground aquifers like those passing through the Liverpool Plains is inadequate and in need of much research.

To purely say that "the responsibility for assessing those coal mine proposals lies with State Governments ... and it is the responsibility of the **relevant** regulatory authorities to ensure that there aren't any impacts on the environment including the things like groundwater that are unacceptable" is a cop out by the Minister.

We now have the ridiculous situation where the Government wants to take responsibility for water away from the States but the Minister for the Environment is quite happy to allow New South Wales to dictate the terms in an area where massive water resources could be destroyed," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor is concerned that the NSW State Planning approval process is too easily conflicted when the State Government's short term need for revenue is pitted against the long term needs of the environment.

"The Minister for the Environment would have to recognise the conflict of interest that exists in the State Government when the same organisation is in charge of regulation and revenue.

When the NSW Government Treasury can see a huge exploration licence cheque and royalty cheques sitting under the Liverpool Plains, it doesn't care about the cost to others or the environment.

It's like putting Dracula in charge of the Blood Bank," Mr Windsor said.

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**For further information contact Tony Windsor, Ph (02) 6761 3080 or 0427 66 8868**

According to Mr Windsor, the long term needs of the area are being overlooked. He believes the Federal Government can and should play a significant role in securing the future of the area.

“It is obvious that the science of the impact of longwall mining under the Liverpool Plains is not adequate and the Federal Government has the ability to remedy this.

This is what the community is trying to achieve and I, as their representative, will continue to push the Federal Government to fund an independent study into it.

The area is part of the Murray Darling system. It is part of the Federal Government’s area of responsibility and the Minister for the Environment can’t pick and choose what he will wade into.

If it’s good enough for the Coorong and Lower Lakes in South Australia to have the Federal Government intervene then it’s good enough to have the Federal Government intervene in the Liverpool Plains and Namoi Valley,” Mr Windsor said.

### **Mr Windsor’s Question**

My question is to the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts and relates to coalmining exploration licences that have been granted on the Liverpool Plains region of northern New South Wales. Given that this region is underlaid with 20 interconnected groundwater systems covering 350 kilometres of the Namoi Valley, could the minister explain his understanding of the potential impacts of mining in such an environment? Does the minister believe that a localised state based planning process is an adequate approval process when there is no knowledge of the impacts of slashing these hydraulic systems and when the impact may occur many hundreds of kilometres away from the site of the mining project?

### **Minister Garrett’s Answer**

I thank the honourable member for his question. The member would know that the responsibility for assessing those coalmining proposals lies with state governments. It is the responsibility—

*Opposition members—Blame game!*

That is a fact. It is a responsibility of the relevant regulatory authorities to ensure that there are not any impacts on the environment, including impacts on things like groundwater, that are unacceptable.