



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## MEDIA RELEASE

28 November 2008

### **Nationals back down on water amendment recreates the problem Australian Minerals Council and NSW Minerals Council at odds**

The Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor, MP, said today the sheer act of stupidity carried out by the National Party in the Senate this week has created the very problem the Amendment to the Water Amendment Bill 2008 was designed to solve.

Mr Windsor originally moved an Amendment which would require a scientific study of groundwater issues to be done prior to the granting of exploration licences for mining activity.

The Coalition supported Mr Windsor in the House of Representatives on 15 October 2008.

A similar Amendment was moved by Senator Bob Brown on Wednesday 26 November and was supported again by the Coalition with many of the Nationals lauding themselves over giving the Senate the numbers to deliver the Amendment.

The next day, Thursday 27 November, while the Water Bill was still in the committee stages of the Senate, the Nationals moved to reverse their position on the Amendment and voted it down in conjunction with the Labor Party.

“Obviously the Minerals Council’s puppeteer, Mitch Hooke, reined in the Nationals overnight and ordered them to reverse their position.

“By gutting the original amendment by removing the word “exploration” and replacing it with “mining”, the Nationals have recreated the very problem that led to the need for the original amendment.

“And they have the hide to say they’ve done something positive,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor says the problem is that under a state based planning process there is only a need for a localised Environmental Impact Statement to be carried out by the mining company **after** exploration.

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“Under the state based planning process there is no need to identify offsite impacts further downstream in groundwater or surface water.

“And if you don’t have the scientific knowledge of these systems, how does one prove who caused the problem?”

“The Nationals have delivered to the Mining Companies the exact environmental process they have to contend with now.

“Mitch Hooke, CEO, Australian Minerals Councils has said “*there is no need for an extra piece of environmental oversight*”, hence no need for a scientific study.

“Mr Hooke would be delighted with what the Nationals have done,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor points out however that recently, Dr Nikki Williams, CEO of the NSW Minerals Council, who previously supported the Hooke view of the world, said on the Sky News Agenda Program that the NSW Minerals Council supported a scientific study.

“Dr Nikki Williams is in fact, part of a facilitation committee headed by former NSW Environment Minister, Pam Allan, formulating a proposal for exactly what the Amendment proposed by Senator Brown and myself stood for – that being a scientific assessment of water and an assessment of risk of mining activity on the Basin’s water resources.

“Mr Hooke’s involvement has the potential to undermine this process.

“The National’s involvement eradicates any credibility they may have had on this issue.

“If a scientific study was completed, it would have the effect of saving the mining companies money as they would not be paying for exploration licences on land that would be impossible to mine.

“It would also remove the blight on farming families of having exploration occur in areas that would long term not be able to be mined due to massive water reserves”, Mr Windsor said.