



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Windsor raises groundwater study again in Parliament

Given recent statements by the Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong about the lack of knowledge of groundwater systems, interconnectivity with surface water and ecology issues, the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor believes there is quite clearly a strong case for proper scientific assessment of the underlying groundwater system of the highly productive Liverpool Plains and any offsite impacts on the Murray Darling system that mining in the area may have.

Mr Windsor again raised the issue in the Parliament this week when speaking during a “Matter of Public Importance” debate on Regional Australia.

Mr Windsor told the Parliament, *“The electorate of New England and its position in the Murray-Darling system are very important. I have raised in the House before a number of the issues in relation to mining and groundwater and the relationship between groundwater systems and surface water in the Murray-Darling system, and recently we had before the parliament that critical piece of legislation embracing four states.*

If the climate scientists are right, and we do nothing, as some suggest, the Murray-Darling system could suffer a loss of up to 30 per cent of its run-off. If we add to that some of the more carbon conscious and productive forms of farming and grazing, such as no-till farming systems, groundcover pasture strategies et cetera, and then overlay it with some encouragement to revegetate because of salinity issues or to create carbon sinks or just because people like to grow trees, all those things will reduce the run-off into the system.

So additional changes in land use could compound even that worst possible option of a reduction in run-off of 30 per cent on 1990 levels, when our farming systems were quite different. What is that going to mean for the communities who rely on irrigation water? What is it going to mean for the communities who rely on that run-off for drinking water? What is it going to mean for the Murray-Darling system itself, the major provider of food in this nation, if we do nothing?”

Mr Windsor is confident that the proposed Namoi water study would have scientific integrity and be jointly funded by the NSW State Government and industry as well as the already announced Federal funding of \$1.5m.

“Comments made by the NSW State Minister Ian MacDonald in the Parliament and his support of the Namoi Catchment Water Study Working Group chaired by the Hon Pam Allan to bring the various interests together, indicate that the New South Wales State Government is going to be prepared to be party to a process that examines the scientific data relating to the groundwater issue and I look forward to the study proceeding.

I also congratulate all the groups involved in the process in their efforts to find common ground on such a complex issue,” Mr Windsor said.

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