



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

15 May 2009

Resources Minister agrees to meet Windsor on mining Liverpool Plains

The issue of the impact on groundwater under the Liverpool Plains if mining is allowed to take place in sensitive areas will be on the agenda of a meeting to be held between the Minister for Resources and Energy, the Hon Martin Ferguson and the Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor during the next sitting of Parliament.

The meeting was offered to Mr Windsor in the Minister's response to a question from Mr Windsor seeking the Minister's support for the development of a strategic bioregional plan for the Namoi Valley before any mining takes place there.

Mr Windsor is very keen to take Minister Ferguson up on his offer.

"I thank the Minister for his offer to meet and discuss the development of a strategic bioregional plan for the Namoi Valley and in particular the Liverpool Plains.

With the suggestion by the Minerals Council of Australia given at a Senate Inquiry of the need for such planning to be undertaken, I believe that a meeting with Minister Ferguson could prove to be very productive in the short and long term not only for the Liverpool Plains but for all other valleys where mining and agriculture have to co-exist.

The meeting will be a great opportunity to move forward on this issue in the best interests of all concerned," Mr Windsor said.

The following is the Hansard of question from Mr Windsor and the answer from Minister Martin Ferguson.

Mr Windsor's Question

Mr WINDSOR (New England) (3:22 PM) —My question is to the Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism and relates to calls for an independent scientific study into potential impacts of mining on the massive groundwater resources of the Namoi Valley at the headwaters of the Murray-Darling system. Minister, given that the Commonwealth has taken a lead role in the Murray-Darling water debate, does the minister believe that the Commonwealth should play a greater role in the mining development debate where water resources could be threatened? Would the minister agree with evidence given to a Senate inquiry into the operation of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, where on 9 December 2008 Ms Melanie Stutsel, Director of Environmental and Social Policy for the Minerals Council of Australia, said:

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We— the Minerals Council of Australia— therefore consider that a more appropriate role for the Commonwealth would be in strategic bioregional planning, pre-emptive of development pressure and across larger time frames. Individual projects would then be approved by states and territories, which would have responsibility to ensure that the project fits within the remit of the bioregional plan.

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Minister, given that the people of the Namoi Valley and in particular the Liverpool Plains, where this water issue is of great concern, would agree with the Minerals Council on that particular issue, don't you think it is time that we moved to have a process where these sorts of problems can be rectified in a better way than the state based process that we have now?

Minister Ferguson's Answer

[Mr MARTIN FERGUSON](#) (Batman) (Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism) —I thank the member for New England for that long and detailed question. In doing so, I understand that he appreciates the significance of the mining and resource sector in Australia. I know how hard we as a government have worked in recent times not only on our government economic stimulus packages but also on bringing in key private sector projects in Australia such as the Gorgon and Browse LNG projects, because those projects create key opportunities for private sector investment in Australia of major significance to all of Australia.

In that context, I am more than willing to sit down with the member to consider the serious issues that he has raised this afternoon. In doing so, I will also appropriately consult with the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts because some of the issues potentially go to the operation of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. I simply say, from the Australian government's point of view, that we are absolutely committed to the development of the resources and energy sector in Australia but in a sense that guarantees appropriate attention to serious environmental considerations. I thank the member for raising this very serious issue in the parliament for our consideration.