



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## Media Release

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# Senators walk a different walk in the country than in the Senate

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor has suggested that whilst the four Senators, who attended the Food Security Hearings in Gunnedah yesterday, have expressed great concern about the potential impact of mining activities on the food bowl of the Liverpool Plains, all voted against an Amendment in the Senate to fix the problem only months ago.

The Senate Inquiry into Australia Food Security heard evidence from concerned citizens about the capacity to produce food being put at risk by exploration and mining activities on alluvial floodplains.

“Whilst I welcome the Senate Inquiry’s visit to the region, the Senators, particularly Committee Chair Bill Heffernan, will have to walk the walk in Canberra, not just in country towns.

“These people had every opportunity to preserve these fertile floodplains if they had supported the Amendment put by myself in the House of Representatives and Senator Bob Brown in the Senate.

“In fact, they did support it on two occasions, once in the House of Representatives and once in the Senate, only to reverse their support when the Australian Minerals Council exerted pressure to renege on their commitment.

Mr Windsor said the test will come for both Government and non Government members when the Murray Darling Basin Authority starts work on the Murray Darling Basin Plan when the need for appropriate bio-regional assessment of the various valleys within the Murray Darling system will become obvious.

“The Authority’s role is to monitor and measure water resources in the Basin with a view to establishing an accounting process across each sub catchment.” Mr Windsor said.

“How can the Authority establish a plan when it has no idea of the science regarding groundwater and surface water in the Namoi Valley for instance?

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“The Authority will have the power under Section 22 of the Act, with regard to the mandatory content for the basin plan in relation to managing interception activities, which would have a significant impact on the basin’s water resources, including provisions in relation to harnessing scientific knowledge.

“Pressure may need to be applied to the Minister and/or the Authority to initiate appropriate scientific studies as nominated by Liverpool Plains landholders and other food producing alluvial systems.

“Let us see whether these Senators will stand up in Canberra, not just in the paddock.

“After all, it was their current leader, Malcolm Turnbull, who as Environment Minister in the Howard Government agreed publicly to a scientific study and then failed to direct his Department to do anything about initiating the study” Mr Windsor concluded.

A copy of an extract from the Water Bill 2007 is below:

## **Water Bill 2007**

### **No. , 2007**

#### **22 Content of Basin Plan**

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| 3 | An identification of the risks to the condition, or continued availability, of the Basin water resources. | The risks dealt with must include the risks to the availability of Basin water resources that arise from the following:<br>(a) the taking and use of water (including through interception activities);<br>(b) the effects of climate change;<br>(c) changes to land use;<br>(d) the limitations on the state of knowledge on the basis of which estimates about matters relating to Basin water resources are made. |
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22(3)(d) the regulation, for the purposes of managing Basin water resources, of interception activities with a significant impact (whether on an activity-by-activity basis or cumulatively) on those water resources; and

22(3) (k) the scientific information or models on which the water resource plan is to be based.

22 (7) The requirements referred to in paragraph (3)(d):

- (a) may require that interception activities with, or with the potential to have, significant impacts on the water resources of the water resource plan area are assessed to determine whether they are consistent with the water resource plan before they are approved under:
  - (i) any other laws of a Basin State; or
  - (ii) a particular law of a Basin State; and