



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Population debate needs to look at distribution not just the number

With the Prime Minister's recent announcement of Tony Burke to take on the role of Minister for Population, the Independent Member for England, Tony Windsor, is keen to pursue the issue of population distribution in Australia and not just the number.

It has long been Mr Windsor's contention that Australia's planning for population growth has been misdirected, describing it as "feedlot mentality" where the current attitude is one of, "to deliver the greatest number of services to the highest number of people at the cheapest possible price, you put them in a high-rise feedlot and then use gravity to help remove the effluent".

Mr Windsor believes that there is a real need for planners to change their attitude and see the very real potential for the development of regional Australia and at the same time have a positive impact on metropolitan areas of Australia.

"Planners look at the population growth and how to deliver services to people in isolation of the myriad of other factors rather than taking a more holistic view that should include the more social aspects of a quality of life.

"Planners appear to see a problem and the easiest way of dealing with it is to centralise.

"I would argue however that centralisation only adds to the problem as it doesn't take into account the impact on the quality nor quantity of people's lives," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor is concerned that decision-makers look at statistics differently to justify their position.

"ABS statistics have shown trends of positive growth in many country centres but it appears that Planning Departments are saying that country centres will decline.

"The latter could be seen to be a self-fulfilling prophecy with a possible hint of wishful thinking on their part that if they create enough negativity around living in country areas, people will be convinced that a move to the country is a bad move.

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“I would argue, however, that if Planners were directed by decision makers to plan for growth in country areas and pro-active country growth policies were put in place then country Australia would grow and the nation as a whole would benefit as a result.

“It will, however, take a long term bi-partisan commitment to achieve this and I implore Minister Burke and Governments at all levels to take a proactive position on this,” Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor is heartened, however, by the words of the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, when announcing the Cancer Care Clinics in regional Australia.

“Minister Roxon appears to be recognising the need for better access to health services in regional Australia.

“The announcement of Cancer Care Centres in Tamworth, Ballarat, Albury and Bunbury and more to come, is indeed good news for regional Australians in need of accessing cancer treatment.

“These centres will mean that regionally based people won’t have to go to their capital city to get the care that they need and will have the support of family and friends a lot closer to them.

“This is good policy and good practice that needs to be replicated in other aspects of human services.

“Not only does it serve existing residents of country Australia but it also serves as an attraction to people considering a move to country Australia as it means that service is available close by if needed just as it is in the city.

“I look forward to working with Minister Burke in this new field and putting forward the many and varied opportunities that exist in country Australia,” Mr Windsor said.