



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MEDIA RELEASE

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ASHFORD HEMP TRIAL COMMENDED

In a speech to the Australian Parliament this week the Member for New England, Tony Windsor, has cited the Ashford hemp plantation trial as an example of thinking locally on the global issue of viable renewable Agri energy industries.

Mr Windsor speaking on the *Renewable Energy (Electricity) Amendment Bill 2010, the Renewable Energy (Electricity) (Charge) Amendment Bill 2010 and the Renewable Energy (Electricity) (Small-scale Technology Shortfall Charge) Bill 2010*, said that over the years various governments had made commitments to alternate energy projects but appeared to be sending mixed messages to the community and business wishing to become more active in bio fuels and alternate agricultural production.

'...It has sent so many mixed messages to consumers that consumers really do not know what the policy is. They get the buzzwords and hear about the percentages of renewable energy. They feel good about that. They look at the fine print of the policy and they become confused. They see changes in the policy, as we have recently seen in the insulation arrangements. They see variations between policy direction at the state level and the federal level. They see competition going on between some of the various energy providers, not necessarily on price but to make it look as though various business entities are more in line with a sustainable and renewable future. They see the changes in relation to Green Loans, for instance. They see a myriad of changes. The most recent change is that the government has removed itself from the building in terms of its emissions trading scheme. People quite understandably are confused. A lot of people are quite happy that the government has changed its policies, but a lot of other people are very confused as to what these messages are.' (Hansard)

Mr Windsor commended Leon and Connie Minos for conducting the hemp trial on their property and the Ashford Business Council steering committee for recognising the importance of hemp as a value added agricultural commodity that in full production would support agricultural and regional employment within the New England.

'Some years ago Ashford relied very heavily on tobacco and, later, on a coalmine and a relatively small power plant which closed down. The town has been searching for activities that it can lend itself to. In recent years they have been trialling industrial hemp. The member for Lyne might remember from a previous lifetime that, in the New South Wales parliament, I was instrumental in introducing what was essentially legalisation—the licensing of industrial hemp, excluding high-THC, dope-smoking hemp, to be grown as a product. That industry has not gone far. There are a number of people that are actually looking at it in Ashford as we speak. Only the other day the Inverell Shire Council passed a motion to look at promoting what the small community group in Ashford is trying to achieve. That group had trials last year. They have established a small market. They need assistance to try and grow the business and find out where the pitfalls are. They have the ingredients: the water, the land and the expertise and capacity to farm that land...'

'...Industrial hemp, for instance, is a sustainable product. Cars used to be built out of industrial hemp rather than out of the materials they are constructed from now. Industrial hemp has been used for a whole range of things, not just for ropes, tarpaulins and various clothing products. You can make furniture out of industrial hemp. It is a renewable product. We should be looking at and encouraging these sorts of people. I do not think the bills we are looking at today actually encourage the little people to motivate themselves too much. In fact, if you relate these bills to what is happening at the state level, they may in fact be counterproductive for the little people trying to make their contribution to a sustainable future.' (Hansard)

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Mr Windsor said the industrial hemp trial is being undertaken on a six (6) hectare site at Ashford and the yield is approximately ten (10) ton per hectare. He said the Ashford Business Council have applied for funding for a temporary Project Development Officer with the NSW Department of Industry and Investment. Mr Windsor commended Inverell Shire Council's support in principle for the PDO.

Mr Windsor said governments are now lagging way behind the public sentiment for sustainable energy resources and that now was the time to actually legislate to create an all inclusive energy industry.

'...The words from John Howard a decade ago, in 2001, when he put in place renewable energy targets, were appropriate at the time. The people in voter land listened and received the message that the government was serious about renewable energy and had put in place targets. But the putting in place of a target does not necessarily deliver anything. Many, particularly those in the coalition, would or should remember that the renewable energy target for biofuels back in 2001 was 360,000 megalitres. There is less biofuel in Australia now than before the Howard government put the target in. There is nowhere near 360,000 megalitres. So we had this feel good announcement and a number of initiatives and grants—some of which were rorted and some of which were politically motivated in terms of where they went in the various electorates—rolled out through those coalition years. Nothing happened. Absolutely nothing happened in terms of promoting renewable energy, in that case biofuels, either biofuels as a value-add to an existing process or first or second generation biofuels that could have assisted agriculture. (Hansard)

Mr Windsor said he would continue to support innovative projects, particularly within the Agricultural sector to ensure an economic future for regional Australia.

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