

Policy Statement 2007 – Peter Draper MP Member for Tamworth

Key issues:

Water –

- Chaffey Dam upgrade – Lobbying for augmentation of Chaffey Dam from 62 to 100 gegalitres to commence simultaneously with safety upgrade. Augmentation expected to cost \$14.5 million on top of \$14.5 million safety upgrade. It is imperative that the State Government fund the upgrade and not use a cost recovery policy if augmentation commences. Would further drought proof region, protecting Tamworth's water supply and increasing water resource for Peel Valley irrigators. Also pushing to reduce recently increased water pricing structure in the Peel Valley
- Country dams – Push for a cap of 10% minimum retention on regional dams to preserve the ecology and tourist potential of impoundments; further review the Water Sharing Plan to ensure adequate water supplies are maintained in light of exceptional circumstances; receive assurances that no bulk transfers of water be allowed until the water levels exceed 10%, and then only to a minimum of 10% retained water.
- Barraba water supply – Secure funding for pipeline to be constructed between Barraba and Split Rock Dam to secure town water supply. Initial estimates place cost for pipeline at \$10 million. Once constructed, would have the option of expanding pipeline to Manilla and Tamworth, using Split Rock as an emergency back up supply in times of severe drought. Cost would be a fraction of \$250 million Barnard Dam proposal.
- Ensure rural and regional residents have access to drinkable water and basic sewerage facilities by investing in the Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage program.
- Support dollar for dollar Commonwealth and Local Government funding or programs to prevent water loss by non-metropolitan water authorities.
- Assist water conservation and demand management in rural and regional areas by providing regional councils with information on education and awareness strategies.
- **Balance of Power will guarantee country water supplies**
- Committed to securing adequate compensation for irrigators who lose groundwater entitlements – introduced legislation to ensure water is recognised as a property right.
- Provide financial assistance for the sustainable supply and maintenance of water and sewerage schemes to all Aboriginal communities facing severe socio-economic disadvantages.
- Assist water conservation and demand management in rural and regional areas by providing regional councils with information on education and awareness strategies.
- Support development of a water infrastructure fund to support water efficiency and water conservation initiatives on a dollar-for-dollar basis accessible to all councils.
- Water recycling to become mandatory for new houses plus Govt to offer support to help retrofit older houses to utilise grey water

Health – See Independents' Rural Health Strategy

- Committed to increasing number of GPs and specialists in rural areas. Provided strong support for the establishment of a Rural Medical School at Tamworth and Armidale Hospitals, and secured planning funds for a new hospital in Tamworth. Looking to hasten process. By 2012 the NSW Rural Doctors Network estimates the GPs shortage in rural NSW (RRMA 3-7) will have increased to between 275 and 410.

- Encourage older people with disabilities to maintain independence and contribute to the community by enhancing HACC program.
- Improved mental health resources and push for improved mental health facilities in Gunnedah
- Recognition of the contribution Carers make by looking after loved ones through improved support and increased respite facilities; continue lobbying for people caring for another at home to receive improved financial support
- Improved dental health access and support of initiatives put forward by the Australian Dental Association to increase the number of dentists especially in country areas
- NSW spends only \$17.60 per capita on dental services in comparison to states like Queensland at \$33, while South Australia and Tasmania both spend \$31.
- Support the Upper House inquiry recommendations the Government increase its spending from \$16.23 per person to levels near the national average of \$23.54, plus increase dentists' remuneration to retain current workers and help attract new ones.
- Support a reduction in HECS fees for those dental graduates who are prepared to work in the public system to address a critical shortage of practitioners

Law and Order –

- Committed to increasing Police numbers across the Oxley Local Area Command. All Independents have agreed that police numbers will be a priority at next sitting of Parliament.
- I have already put forward a number of options to address staffing shortfalls as a result of long term stress and sick leave, with officers who spend more than six months undergoing rehabilitation to be placed into a corporate relief position “Non Operational”, thus allowing the command to recruit against the vacant position and retain the number of operational Police needed.
- Propose that Officers who are on long-term sick leave exceeding 12 months should be transferred to the Human Resources Command, awaiting medical discharge. Again this would allow the command to maintain permanent operational levels, and continue to develop special skills areas.
- The process of medical discharge must be fast tracked to allow quicker movement of officers out of the service so replacements can be recruited.
- Offering a package for discharge after 30 years service regardless of age would encourage many older officers to retire.
- Support the NSW Police Association's initiative for a staged annual increase in officer numbers in this State and the assignment of police specialising in domestic violence, licensing and youth related crime to all local area commands.
- Committed to establishing 24-hour policing for Gunnedah

Education –

- Press for increased funding and improved job security for teachers.
- More than 70 per cent are employed on a casual basis or in non-permanent positions. Government must allow long-term teachers to seek conversion to permanency after two years plus guarantee the replacement of fulltime teaching vacancies.
- Supporting the Teachers Federation call for a substantial funding increase to redress prior cuts and allow for the future growth of the sector.
- Government must recognise TAFE as a key partner in the State's economic development, as the Government's own State Plan recognises the importance of TAFE to meet growing industry demands.

- All preschool children should have access to preschool education in the year prior to school, and preschools must be affordable for all families
- An enriched literacy program for four-year-olds in preschool is \$20,500 cheaper per child to run than school-based reading recovery programs, research by Mission Australia and Griffith University shows.
- As well, it costs \$140 per child to run an intensive social skills program to improve behaviour of four-year-olds compared to \$20,000 to send a school-aged child with severe behaviour problems to a special school.
- US research has shown that for every dollar invested in intensive and targeted programs for preschool children there was an eventual return to society of more than \$17 in reduced expenditure on welfare, remedial education and criminal justice.
- For example, it costs \$382 per child to run the intensive literacy program in preschools. But it costs \$21,000 to put a school-aged child through a remedial link reading program.
- Participation in the pathways program would result in a 21 per cent cut in juvenile offending in the targeted community, the report says, and save \$415,000 over three years in the juvenile justice system.
- NSW has the lowest pre-school participation rate in the country - 59% compared to 96% nationally.
- DoCS funded pre-schools receive on average \$74,000 per annum and parents of pre-schoolers in those centres pay over \$30 per day, yet preschools run by the Department of Education receive \$240,000 per year.
- Improved funding for Adult and Community Education, and increased funding for local TAFEs,
- Improved school infrastructure in Tamworth, to result from the examination of future education needs and in particular Tamworth High School, Bullimbal, and Tamworth West Public
- Smaller class sizes and better support for country teachers

Roads/Transport –

- Funding to replace Timber Bridges, 67 in TRC area alone
- Manilla Road upgrade completion,
- Sealing of Grain Valley Way between Mullaley and Boggabri
- Lobby for increased Regional Road Block grants to ensure that State and regional roads transferred to Local Government under the road classification review are properly funded
- Guarantee country train services be properly maintained and services continued

Local and regional business –

- More government support for small business in rural areas such as payroll tax incentives to encourage small business growth, increased Govt support for ventures such as Gunnedah Ethanol Plant, Equine Centre, and local programs to address skill shortages
- Relax rate pegging review to enable councils to address infrastructure backlogs and maintain and enhance services.
- No cost shifting without funding to meet requirements
- Review Fire Services Levy on councils and fund metropolitan and rural fire services by investigating a broad based property tax.
- Continue lobbying for adoption of the Queensland model for the residential home building industry as advocated by the Master Builders Association.

Drought –

- Increased Govt support for drought affected farmers and local businesses reliant on agriculture, increased counselling services for farmers, financial advice

Environment –

- Waste levy funded waste reduction programs should be used for:
- Waste reduction education programs,
- Garden waste and household food waste collection and processing initiatives,
- Programs for the collection and processing of historic hazardous wastes such as asbestos,
- Seed funding for Extended Producer Responsibility, schemes which will be industry funded in the longer term.
- A significant increase in weeds funding.
- Introduce deposits on beverage containers if the national packaging covenant fails to deliver on its targets by its mid-term review in 2008.
- Cut red tape which currently requires land owners to get dual consent by CMA and councils for native vegetation clearing works. Review the native vegetation regulations to address present difficulties facing farmers plus Local Government.
- Urge greater use of ethanol as a fuel and increased support for ethanol producing business. Increase NSW's use of renewable energy to 20 per cent by 2010
- Ensure that State, agency and Local Government plans driving policy setting, budgeting and program delivery complement and/or reflect one another to ensure that State and Local Government priorities are integrated and that services are provided as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- I am committed to supporting Seniors and the retired so they can remain in their own community rather than being forced to relocate out of the district
- Lobby to address the inequity with city seniors receiving travel benefits that are not available to country residents
- Self funded retirees should be entitled to the same means tested concessions that are available for pensioners and NSW should move to come into line with other states such as the ACT and WA that do much more to assist people who planned their retirement so as not to cost Govt money
- Continue to press local Govt Departments to purchase locally and support local business
- Further access to improvement programs such as the Main Street/Small Towns and Townlife programs
- Continue my support for local emergency services to ensure the contribution of volunteers is recognised through strong financial support and an ongoing provision of equipment and new tankers to make their job as safe as possible
- Continued investment in local sports and facilities to maximise opportunities for tourism plus increased funding for NIAS
- Seek an increased return of funds raised through the recreational fishing license to the local area to continually improve opportunities for anglers