P E T E R D R A P E R

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH

M E D I A R E L E A S E

COMPETITION POLICY BILL OPPOSED BY DRAPER

1st April 2004

In Parliament last night, Member for Tamworth Peter Draper spoke against the NSW Governments National Competition Policy Amendments (Commonwealth Financial Penalties) Bill. When the original agreement between the Commonwealth and the States was signed in April 1995, it was with the intention of overseeing State performance in electricity, gas, water, roads, rail and ports.

“”I am unable to find any indication that the original intention was to deregulate the liquor, pharmacy, dental, and poultry industries, or to amend the Farm Debt Mediation Bill,” Mr Draper told the Parliament. “If such a suggestion had been made when the agreement was being formulated, I am quite sure that the Prime Minister would not have enjoyed the unanimous support for the agreement from the states.”

Mr Draper expressed his opposition to any lessening of restrictions for the sale of alcohol, but pointed out that one of the main community concerns had been addressed, as petrol stations would be banned from selling alcohol.

“The mix of alcohol and motor vehicles is well documented as a major contributor to the road toll, and any encouragement of drivers to purchase alcohol with fuel was seen as extremely dangerous,” Mr Draper informed the Parliament.

Mr Draper also pointed out that he had received many expressions of concern from local poultry grower representatives, concerned that the Governments policy seemed to encourage them to consider relocation from Tamworth back into the Sydney basin.

“The Federal Government is penalising NSW $12.86 million per year to effect a 1% reduction in the retail price, without considering that this 1% decrease will lead to a 24% reduction in grower incomes, and a $60 million overall impact on growers and their surrounding communities,” Mr Draper continued.

“I am pleased however that the Government appears to be listening to industry concerns, and there may still be an opportunity to have those concerns addressed.”

Mr Draper spoke strongly against deregulation of community pharmacies, highlighting the vital role they perform in most rural and regional communities.

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"Deregulation of the pharmacy sector could prove to be a grave error of judgement because the health needs of our communities will be directly affected as a result."

The proposal to remove the Farm debt Mediation Bill also attracted criticism from Mr Draper.

"My electorate has just gone through the worst drought in 100 years and now locusts are decimating farms in the Gunnedah district. Farmers have contacted me to say they have lost their winter grazing oats, their lucerne has been reduced to stalks, and other crops are disappearing before their eyes. Yet it is in this climate that the Federal Government is forcing the removal of the Farm Debt Mediation Bill which requires that a meeting take place before a creditor can take possession of a property, and before any other enforcement action is taken under a farm mortgage."

"Because of the lack of balance within the diverse and separate areas of the Bill I cannot offer my support for it. Indeed, I strongly oppose it," Mr Draper concluded.

End Release.

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