

# PETER DRAPER

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH

## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Gunnedah Research Centre too valuable to sell**

*July 7 2004*

Agricultural productivity, environmental benefits, jobs, Aboriginal culture and years of native plant research will be lost to Gunnedah and the region should the State Government decide to sell off the Gunnedah Research Centre, Member for Tamworth Peter Draper said today.

Mr Draper has called on the Government to recognise the value of the centre's research to animal and plant health, to agriculture, its significance to local Aboriginal people and its role in ongoing environmental studies prior to considering any plans to sell the centre.

Mr Draper recently toured the research centre with Gunnedah mayor Gae Swain, NSW Natural Resources Commission Assistant Commissioner Di Bentley and representatives from the Namoi Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and Red Chief Land Council.

The centre not only carries out world class environmental research providing a valuable reference site for the community, landholders, CMA's, universities and schools, but the property upon which it is situated features a series of caves of great historical significance to local Aboriginal people.

"It is a widely held belief among Indigenous people that the caves contain burial chambers and this is now subject to an archaeological evaluation," Mr Draper said.

Mr Draper said prior to the Department's restructure, there were 21 staff members at the Gunnedah Research Centre, however, from the beginning of July that was reduced to 10 Centre for Natural Resources staff and six Barwon region staff with at least five of those positions "under review".

"It's my understanding that unless some positions from Sydney are relocated to Gunnedah, the centre could easily close due to attrition, transfers and disheartened staff seeking employment elsewhere," Mr Draper said.

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Mr Draper said he was impressed at the level of research undertaken at the centre, which has about 20ha of environmental plantings established over the past 13 years.

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“There is a strong possibility that this land would be sold off resulting in a dreadful waste of potential future research opportunities,” he said.

“Significant research has been conducted at this unique centre with some of the positive outcomes evident in benefits to biodiversity, salinity mitigation, farm forestry and incorporation of stock shelter and fodder reserves.”

“With the recent publicity about the very real effects of global warming and predicted severe climatic changes, I would think the Government would be very carefully considering the role centres such as this play in addressing this global issue.”

Mr Draper said the centre has also conducted a biodiversity audit gathering valuable data on threatened and endangered species and showing local extinctions of some small native mammals is real possibility particularly in the CMA’s sheep and wheat belt.

“The value of this centre in terms of the environment and land management clearly has relevance now and into the future, it would be extremely regrettable to see this property lost, sold or cleared.”

Mr Draper supports alternative suggestions which have been put forward by stakeholders including that the Government explore the possibility of using the centre as a field study site by the University of New England or lease the grazing land in the short term while retaining trial sites and building areas.

“There is a strong case for a cost benefit analysis of the centre to be carried out before any decision on a sale is made,” he said.

Mr Draper has invited NSW Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources Minister Craig Knowles and NSW Primary Industries Minister Macdonald to personally inspect the site in order to gain an appreciation of what the Government and community would stand to lose.

*End Release*

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