

PETER DRAPER

INDEPENDENT MEMBER FOR TAMWORTH

MEDIA RELEASE

“It’s a National(s) Disgrace” says Country Independents

8th December 2003

The NSW Country Independents have condemned the National Party as out of touch and irrelevant following almost half their party failing to bother turning up to vote on three bills of great importance for country communities last Friday. The Parliament passed the Native Resources Commission Bill, the Native Vegetation Bill and the Catchment Management Authority Bill with just over half the Nationals in attendance.

In what can only be viewed as a stinging rebuke to the leadership of Andrew Stoner, both former leaders George Souris and Ian Armstrong, as well as Deputy Leader Don Page, plus senior number counter Tomas George were amongst the Nationals missing in action.

Leader Andrew Stoner attempted to justify the absences by saying the missing members had flights booked and they had Christmas commitments and school functions in their electorates. He also pointed to the absence of some city Labor members.

“This failure to vote on what are probably the most important bills for country people highlights exactly why I left the National Party and became an Independent,” said Member for Port Macquarie Robert Oakeshott. “The Nationals are more intent on attending Christmas parties than looking after country communities.”

“What a disgraceful week for the Nationals,” said Member for Tamworth Peter Draper. “They voluntarily nominated their state seat of Lachlan for abolishment under the next electoral distribution, obviously contributing to Member for Lachlan and former leader Ian Armstrong’s decision not to turn up.”

“With conduct like this from the Nationals, it is no surprise that the Labor Government can continually get away with disadvantaging country people. It also explains why Independents and Liberals are winning seats that were once Nationals heartland,” Mr Draper said.

“Could the failure of so many Nationals members to vote on country legislation be seen as an attempt to broaden their appeal in city and coastal seats to the detriment of rural and regional areas?” asked Member for Northern Tablelands Richard Torbay.

“They took Country out of their name, then removed Party,” said Member for Dubbo Tony McGrane. “They have completely lost sight of who they are supposed to be representing.”

End release.

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