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Government and Opposition Duck War Vote

The Government and Opposition have combined to avoid an amendment from Independents Peter Andren and Tony Windsor designed to reflect the overwhelming will of Australians that there be no involvement in Iraq without UN Security Council approval.

“I sought to have the so-called debate on Iraq brought to finality with a resolution from the Parliament, instead of it being adjourned indefinitely,” Mr Andren said.

“The debate was shunted from the main parliamentary chamber to the upstairs main committee room where ‘uncontentious’ issues are discussed.

“There was never any intention to complete the debate this week and it would have been adjourned until the next sitting in 2 weeks, or perhaps indefinitely.

“The way this crisis is evolving, even two weeks is more than likely to be too late.

“Last night I exercised my right and successfully moved the debate back to the main House so my amendment could be voted on. The Government and Opposition will claim that I tried to gag the debate, but I’m prepared to wear that in the interests of trying to get MPs to reflect the concerns of their electorates before we join a pre-emptive strike on Iraq.

“The so-called debate on Iraq was always a convenient smokescreen for both the Government and Opposition to air the concerns of the electorate but never commit themselves to any vote of the Parliament.

“I tried to force that commitment today but the Government and Opposition combined to silence the will of the Australian people.

“That amendment stated that in the absence of an unambiguous and unanimous support of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Australian defence forces not be involved in any military action in Iraq.

“Only I, Tony Windsor and Member for Cunningham Michael Organ supported the amendment while the Government and Opposition joined forces to oppose it.

“To make matters worse, the names of the Government and Opposition members won’t be recorded in Hansard. Not even those Labor members unhappy with their party’s ambivalent position on UN approval were prepared to cross the floor.

“Despite the rhetoric of the parliamentary debate, and the speeches to rural Australians against the war who gathered outside parliament today, there was never any intention by Labor and of course the Government to have my amendment properly debated, let alone voted on,” Mr Andren concluded.

For more information: 0419 612 891 or 02 6277 2341/6332 6339.