

Forecasters warn of top end flooding, possible cyclone

Forecasters have warned of the potential for widespread flooding in the Top End as rain continues to bucket down on the region. Falls of more than 50mm a day have fallen across much of the Northern Territory for nearly a week and are expected to continue over the coming days as a monsoon low sits almost stationary over the eastern Top End. Bureau of Meteorology Cyclone Warning Centre forecaster, Todd Smith, said falls of around 200mm could occur in some areas. He said rain had been heaviest in the central and eastern areas of the Top End. "A lot of that area is saturated, so now any rain that falls on top of that is going to be run off, so there could be significant stream rises and certainly if it hangs around for a couple of days more we could be looking at significant flooding," he said. He said the low was not expected to move much in the next few days, but could potentially develop into a cyclone if it moved into the Gulf of Carpentaria later in the week. "We're expecting it to remain pretty slow moving, so in the short term the cyclone risk is only low to moderate probably, but the big risk is that it's going to produce a hell of a lot of rain over that area and cause rivers to rise." The low in the Gulf is one of three lows currently surrounding all sides of northern Australia. Cloud over Western Australia is from Tropical Cyclone Melanie, which is bringing a few showers to the Pilbara but little elsewhere as it moves slowly offshore. And while cloud from Melanie is spreading inland, it is not bringing rain. Meanwhile, cloud over southeast Queensland near an offshore low is also causing showers and wild weather on the coast, but the low is not expected to cross-landfall. SOURCE: AAP and *FarmOnline's* up-to-the-minute forecasting from The Weather Company.

Heavy NSW rains satisfy thirsty bush

Recent heavy rains have revived once-dry NSW regional rivers, creeks and wetlands, Water Utilities Minister Nathan Rees says. Good inflows have resulted in more increases in water allocations and releases benefiting the environment, irrigators, graziers and town water supplies, Mr. Rees said yesterday. "The recent widespread rain has provided immediate benefits for landholders, businesses and communities still feeling the effects of the worst drought in recorded history," he said. Mr. Rees said irrigators on the Barwon-Darling River system, in NSW's northwest, can now access "up to 10pc of water in their accounts". "There will also be good flows passing the length of the Barwon-Darling to the Menindee Lakes," he said. "Releases into the Lower Darling River downstream of the Menindee Lakes will commence on the 7th January 2008. "This will also allow an allocation of 100 per cent of entitlement for high security users in the Lower Darling River for 2007-2008." In the State's west, the Murray Valley and the Stevens Weir pool on the Edward River will be refilled, and increased flows in the coming fortnight will raise river levels upstream of the weir, Mr. Rees said. "Releases for stock and domestic supply have commenced into some of the rivers and creeks west of Deniliquin," he said. In the NSW southwest, up to eight gigalitres of water have been diverted into selected wetlands in the lower reaches of the Murrumbidgee Valley. Mr. Rees said more positive announcements were expected for irrigators in the Murray and Murrumbidgee Valleys on January 15. "While this rain has brought some very welcome news, without good follow-up rain these improvements will be short-lived, so it is vital everyone remains conservative with their water use." SOURCE: AAP

Bali roadmap calls for land use flexibility in Tasmania

National tree plantations industry body, Tree Plantations Australia, is backing the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association in opposing a blanket ban of tree plantations on prime agricultural land. TPA chief executive officer, Allan Hansard, said following the Bali climate conference that Australia's economy has a significant task ahead of it to reduce greenhouse emissions. But he says Premier Paul Lennon's proposal to "ban plantation development on prime agricultural land reflects that he is out of step with current thinking on climate change". "The agricultural sector is the second largest emitter in our economy and will have to pull their weight if future emission targets are to be met," Mr. Hansard said. "We know the agricultural sector is up to the task, but farmers, like the forestry sector will need flexibility to adapt to climate change and imminent climate change policy. "Plantations grown by farmers and the forest industry will be an important part of the climate change equation." Mr. Hansard says plantations already contribute more than 20 million tonnes of CO2 offsets to the national carbon accounts each year. "This is equivalent to taking 4 million cars off the road, or offsetting the emissions from 7 million cows," he said. "A Protection of Agricultural Lands (PAL) policy which dictates to farmers and the forestry sector what they can and can't grow is restrictive, limits offset opportunities, and will make it that much harder for our economy to meet its future emissions obligations."

Couriermail.com.au - Dam levels fall 3% in 2007

Southeast Queensland isn't yet clear of its water crisis, with major dam levels falling another 3 per cent in 2007.

With the exception of a wet August, average rainfall in the region wasn't much better than 2006 – one of the driest years on record – weather bureau figures show. "The effect of La Nina is not being felt in southeast Queensland as it is being felt in other parts of Queensland and NSW," Sydney meteorologist Matt Pearce said. Wivenhoe, North Pine and Somerset dams ended the year at a combined 19.85 per cent of capacity. Dam levels would have finished closer to 15 per cent had residents not slashed water consumption from 170 litres a day to 130 litres. "We should be very proud of the fact we were the benchmark as a waterwise community for the rest of Australia," the Queensland Water Commission's Gerald Tooth said. While showers kept the region green, they did little to boost dam levels. The only major dam inflow was in August, when Somerset Dam gained 20 per cent of capacity. The other dams gained just 6 per cent. Brisbane recorded 91mm of rainfall in August, compared to an eight-year average of 35mm. However, the city had its driest December in the past eight years.

MDA - Water boss gives the states a spray

Asa Wahlquist | *December 31, 2007*

THE nation's top water bureaucrat has lashed out at state governments for their "indefensible" failure to manage water systems, accusing them of "shambolic" administration. "There has been a failure of the urban water authorities, a failure of state governments," National Water Commission head Ken Matthews said. He argues urban water authorities should have planned for the current drought. "What is happening now is shambolic," he said. "The public confusion about water restrictions in urban Australia is rife. "The economic losses, the social losses, the social inequities are indefensible. "Water restrictions are a very crude instrument to achieve social objectives." As 2007 began, just one desalination plant, at Kwinana in Perth, was under construction. By year's end, five more were on the drawing board and several major pipelines and recycling schemes were under way. The Water Services Association estimates \$10 billion will be spent on water infrastructure over the next 5-10 years. Mr Matthews told The Australian that investments should have been made earlier. "They should have been investing, as they are now, towards climate-independent sources of supply such as desalination, recycling, irrigation transfers and so on," he said. He blamed delays in government decision-making and borrowing constraints, along with policies that forced water utilities to pay large dividends to their state government stakeholders. Mr Matthews also criticised governments for failing to charge the full cost of water supply, and for implementing "policy bans" - positions taken for political reasons, such as the government stance on desalination plants, dams and other infrastructure. "It is really important that they should all be on the table, they should go through a process of analysis, logic and evidence," he said. "To have a policy ban at the outset is, in my view, indefensible." Mr Matthews wants an addendum to the National Water Initiative "that asks all governments in Australia to collaborate in significantly lifting our game in urban water reform management". He said that, when the NWI was signed in 2004, "urban water was a footnote. The big issues then were rural water and environmental water". Mr Matthews said 2008 would bring many water challenges. "The biggest one is that we are trying for better water management when there is less and less water to manage." Though not willing to label the current episode a climate-change drought, Mr Matthews does believe the drought "might not have been as intense, or as long-running as it has been, had climate change not been there". He hopes the new Government will develop an improved relationship with the states, which have the prime responsibility for managing water. A new body to manage the Murray Darling Basin should replace the current body, which had governance arrangements that were "manifestly unsuitable for the challenge we have got in front of us", he said. Mr Matthews also lists a far more efficient water trading system as a big challenge. "It is happening but it is too complicated and too time-consuming and too costly. Our agenda for next year is to tackle that simplification." Water trades along the Murray River this year have needed up to 68 documents, incurred state costs of hundreds of dollars, and taken weeks for approval.

2nd

The Australian - Corals may move from warming seas

If their watery world continues to warm as climate change scientists predict, Western Australia's corals may head south to cooler climes. That's the message from US and Australian researchers who compared the behaviour of the state's corals then and now. Since "then" was 125,000 years ago, University of Queensland paleoecologist John Pandolfi and geologist Benjamin Greenstein of Cornell College in Iowa are confident their findings are not a short-term blip. The implication is that conservation managers should help ensure corals have an "escape route" beyond existing parks and protected areas, Professor Pandolfi said. "Paving the way to southern refugia is a step in the right direction for coral conservation," he argued. "These refugia could be very important for re-seeding northern reefs if the environmental conditions return to a more favourable state." According to their research - reported in the journal *Global Change Biology* - fast-growing branching corals, *Acropora*, will probably be the first to move, possibly as far south as Margaret River or even around the corner to Albany.

"We've already seen some movement of the Acropora," said Professor Pandolfi, who is with the university's Centre for Marine Studies.

3

"Rottnest Island (off Perth) has Acropora coral, and it didn't have any 20 years ago." Professor Pandolfi and Professor Greenstein took advantage of Western Australia's "natural laboratory", a 1500km-long stretch of living and fossil coral reefs. They paired five ancient and modern reefs: two at Ningaloo and Shark Bay in the north, two more in the Houtman-Abrolhos Islands and Geraldton-Leander Point, and the most southerly site at Rottnest Island. They assessed the diversity and distribution of coral species living in the ancient and modern communities and then compared the data. The results suggested that coral diversity expands and contracts according to the water temperature.

Lungfish risk clouds \$2bn dam plan

The \$2 billion Traveston Dam proposal, which is a cornerstone of the Queensland Government's strategy to drought-proof the southeast of the state, is under a cloud after a commonwealth study raised doubts about a "fishway" built to save the endangered Australian lungfish. An audit by the federal Department of Environment has questioned whether a fishway that allows the fish to travel up and downstream over the Paradise Dam, on the Burnett River near Bundaberg, is operating effectively. The lungfish occurs naturally only in the Burnett River and further south in the Mary River, where the Traveston Dam is planned near Gympie. The world's oldest vertebrate animal, the Australian lungfish has existed for 150 million years. Approval for the dam will be among new Environment Minister Peter Garrett's first major decisions. Commonwealth approval is required for all projects that have the potential to threaten lungfish. The fishway was crucial to a 2002 decision by the Howard government to approve the 300,000-megalitre Paradise Dam. And a similar fishway is planned for the Traveston Dam. Mr Garrett will soon consider an environmental impact statement commissioned by the Bligh Government in Queensland before determining if the dam can be built. Fishways work by trapping fish moving upstream or downstream to breed in compartments, which are lifted over dam walls. The dams would otherwise block the movement of fish. The draft audit of the Paradise Dam fishway indicates that dry conditions have impeded its ability to move lungfish over the 37m dam wall since the device began operating in 2006. Although the dam was completed in 2005, it is just 16 per cent full because of the drought. Problems with the fishway were admitted in a statement by the dam's state government-owned operator, SunWater, to The Australian. The device was "not currently operating at full capacity due to minimal rainfall in the region, which has left Paradise Dam at very low levels", SunWater said. The statement added that when dam levels allowed, the fishway would be fully operational. Mr Garrett said his department was negotiating with SunWater about the fishway and other matters raised by the audit before a report is released later this month. The Queensland Department of Primary Industries principal scientist Peter Kind said that during seven days of monitoring the Paradise Dam, four lungfish were among an estimated 150,000 fish that passed through the fishway. "It needs water to operate and conditions are dry, but we are encouraged with what we are seeing so far," Dr Kind said. "Historically, the Burnett has been reduced to chains of pools at times and the lungfish has survived." Lungfish expert and Macquarie University researcher Jean Joss said that although lungfish had evolved to survive drought, dams would permanently impair their ability to move up and down rivers to find breeding sites.

3rd

FarmOnLine

SA irrigators demand Wong kick-start national water plan

South Australian Murray Irrigators have urged the newly appointed Federal Water Minister, Senator Penny Wong, to roll out the National Water Plan for the Murray Darling Basin as soon as possible. Senator Wong last month had a round table discussion with representatives from SAMI, Renmark Irrigation Trust, Central Irrigation Trust and Sunlands Irrigation Trust at the Renmark Club before visiting three local properties showcasing the latest irrigation technology. SAMI director Tim Whetstone said the meeting had established a solid platform for further discussions in the New Year. "To be honest, we were all encouraged with her knowledge - she had clearly done her homework - her enthusiasm to implement change and her willingness to listen," Mr. Whetstone said. "The day was all about dispelling any pre-conceived images of irrigators that the Senator may have had. "We understand that to survive we need a healthy river system and that the environmental considerations that will involve in the years ahead. "What we were able to do was show the Senator that this goal is not mutually exclusive to an efficient, sustainable irrigation industry."

Mr. Whetstone said topics covered during the meeting included:

- * the value of long term, low interest loans to irrigators entering a third year of restricted allocations;
- * the pricing problems associated with speculators leasing water for profit instead of use;
- * inefficient infrastructure that was prone to enormous water wastage;
- * over allocated water resources across the Murray Darling Basin; and
- * the need for water reform within the Basin.

SOURCE: Extract from full report to appear in *Stock Journal*, SA, January 3 issue.

4

Drought-relief shake-up on the cards from Rudd

The Federal Government will revamp farmers' drought relief payments in a move to reduce the plan's long-term costs. The Government will pay incentives to farmers to modify their practices in the face of climate change and the increasing drain on the public purse from subsidising marginal properties, according to reports in today's metropolitan media. Research grants and funding worth \$75 million will be offered to help farm organisations, including more support for genetically modified crops able to withstand drought. Federal Agriculture Minister, Tony Burke, who is currently touring rural areas of NSW, is reported as having said that the exceptional circumstances arrangements would remain in place for now but would be reviewed. "One of the things we need to make sure of is that the system is appropriate in an era of climate change," Mr. Burke said. Mr. Burke would not comment on the future of the exit grants used to encourage unviable farmers off the land, but separate sources said the Government was considering changes to the system. Mr. Burke said the Government's review would look at whether some farmers in receipt of long-term drought assistance were working unviable land. "I genuinely am open about the outcome. The thing I'm specific about is wanting producers to be better geared for climate change," he said. SOURCE: AAP

The Australian - Farmer drought relief to be tightened

Drought-relief payments to farmers will be revamped by the Rudd Government amid concerns taxpayers are supporting farms that will never be viable because of climate change. The Government plans to pay incentives to farmers on unviable land if they are prepared to modify their farming practices to regain long-term viability in a move that would reduce the drain on the public purse involved in subsidising marginal properties. And it will back the planned \$75 million in research grants and funding to help farm organisations develop adaptation programs, including more support for genetically modified crops able to withstand drought. Primary Industries Minister Tony Burke confirmed the plans yesterday as the latest manifestation of the Rudd Government's move to take greater action on climate change than the previous Coalition government. Separate sources said the Government was also considering changes to exit grants used to encourage unviable farmers off the land. The sources said there was concern that quarantining the payments of up to \$170,000 from bankruptcy claims meant farmers had no incentive to avoid bankruptcy and were leaving huge debts to suppliers. The developments follow generous rains across much of Australia in recent months, which have provided some relief from the worst drought in a century. While the rains have not broken the drought, they have created a situation where some NSW farmers have simultaneously qualified for assistance for the effects of drought and flood. Since 2001, the Howard government committed \$3.5 billion to drought relief. Mr Burke told *The Australian* yesterday that "exceptional circumstances" arrangements, not due for review until September, would remain in place. But Mr Burke, who is touring rural areas of NSW, said he would review the EC system. "One of the things we need to make sure of is that the system is appropriate in an era of climate change," he said from Griffith. "I want to make sure that every time people working the land interact with government, they go away better prepared for climate change." Labor's election policy, published ahead of last year's poll, says the Hawke Labor government created the EC program and commits the party to support viable farmers during rare and prolonged events that fall outside "normal risk management". But it adds: "Labor believes that EC arrangements should not be used to artificially support producers who are not viable over the longer term and that EC policy should not reduce the need for responsible risk management by agriculture producers. "Labor believes it is important for governments to increase the number of drought-ready farming businesses so that farms are more prepared for years with reduced rainfall in the context of climate change." Asked whether he believed some farmers in receipt of long-term drought assistance were working unviable land, Mr Burke said: "That's something we'd look at in the review. "I genuinely am open about the outcome. The thing I'm specific about is wanting producers to be better geared for climate change." He said this was why Labor planned to boost funding for research to improve farming methods. Labor's election policy promised \$55 million in training and re-establishment grants for primary producers, as well as \$15million for research into climate change programs in each agricultural sector. It also promised \$60 million for work with national, state and community farming organisations to improve climate modelling, train producers on adaptation and develop more efficient farm management plans. Mr Burke said climate change was a challenge but could also provide opportunities. "There'll be some areas that have been very challenged by climate change where there'll be hope given to them through new developments in GM (genetic modification)," he said. "Some of the different techniques are moving away from ploughing, and what that has done both for retention of water and for reducing carbon emissions from the soil can create some really significant opportunities. The fact that a particular style of farming might be less viable certainly doesn't mean that it's doomed." A spokesman for the National Farmers Federation said last night the agricultural sector would

be glad to work with the Government. "Our argument is that it's not up to governments to decide what land is marginal and what is not or what should be farmed or not farmed," he said.

5

"Quite often the viability of a piece of land depends on the practices of the farmer, so we would have an issue with a blanket ruling." The spokesman said Labor had sent farmers the right signal by stressing it wanted to work with the sector to mitigate the effects of climate change and to help farmers adapt. The NFF was particularly keen to see more research on a region-by-region basis to find ways to make more producers more resistant to drought. Mr Burke declined to comment on the future of exit payments. But sources said the Government was expected to examine the system to give farmers an incentive to accept exit payments well before they went bankrupt.

Pioneering climate scientist dies

Bert Bolin, a pioneering Swedish climate scientist and co-founder of the UN's Nobel Prize award-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, has died, a colleague said today. He was 82. As early as the 1950s, Bolin produced research about the circulation of carbon in nature that remains relevant to the continuing debate on climate change. Most importantly, he played a key role in communicating the dangers of climate change to decision-makers and served as the first chairman of the IPCC from 1988 to 1998. He died in a Stockholm hospital from stomach cancer, but was active until three days before he died, said Henning Rodhe, a professor in chemical meteorology at Stockholm University. "He was an eminent organiser and leader and played an important role internationally in establishing links between scientists and decision-makers," Rodhe said. "He was very happy that the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to the IPCC and (former US vice-president) Al Gore. He was especially pleased about the fact that the prize was split in two, to award both the pure scientific work and the work to communicate these issues to the general public," he added. Bolin completed his PhD at Stockholm University in 1956, and was Professor of Meteorology there between 1961 and 1990. He has also been the scientific director of the European Space Agency, or ESA. He received many awards for his research about the climate, including the Carl-Gustaf Rossby Research Medal in 1984, the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement in 1988 and the Blue Planet Prize in 1995. His last book, *A History of the Science and Politics of Climate Change: The Role of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, was published last November.

AP

Our sixth-warmest year on record

Australia's warmer and wilder weather in 2007 was in line with international projections for man-made climate change, the Climate Institute said. The Bureau of Meteorology released its annual Australian Climate Statement today revealing Australia had experienced its sixth-warmest year on record - more than half a degree above the annual average temperature. Some areas, including NSW and the Murray-Darling Basin, recorded their warmest-ever year since records have been kept. The bureau also said Australia had now recorded a warmer-than-average year for 16 of the past 18 years and this pattern was not surprising given that Australia's climate was warming in line with the rest of the globe. "Unfortunately, the reality is stacking up with all the projections," Climate Institute chief executive John Connor told AAP. "Certainly across southern and eastern Australia we had one of the warmest years on record. "It also shows that global weather is not just about warmer weather, it's about wilder weather. "The projections are for intense storms, flooding, droughts and bushfires and we had all of those in 2007." The annual mean maximum temperature for 2007 of 28.6C was 0.73C above normal. The average annual mean temperature was 21.8C, with the annual mean minimum temperature 0.61C above normal. Despite widespread drought in the far southwest and southeast, annual mean rainfall was slightly more than average at 497mm (25mm above normal). The report said La Nina conditions, which typically bring better rains, failed to deliver in 2007. Mr. Connor said the figures reinforced the case that debate on climate change was no longer about the science. "Climate change is a growing reality in our lives," he said. "It's heightened the urgency for action in 2008 - it promises to be, and it needs to be, a significant year of action on climate policy." He said the institute wanted to see promises by politicians translated to action this year. AAP

States swelter in year of extremes

Last year will go down as the warmest on record for South Australia, Victoria, NSW and possibly Tasmania - but the year was also one of extremes. According to the World Meteorological Organisation, the February temperatures in Western Australia were more than 5C hotter than average. But Australia had its coldest June on record, with temperatures 1.5C below the average. As the Bureau of Meteorology prepared to release its annual weather review today, Don White from Weatherwatch Australia said worldwide figures indicated 2007 was in the top 10 of the past 150 years for warmth, "so global warming is definitely with us". He said the drought had eased considerably in NSW towards the end of the year. "Although 2007 wasn't as dry as 2006, there is still moisture deficiencies over a large part of western NSW, Victoria, South Australia and parts of the southwest," Mr White said. "The Murray-Darling Basin was way below average again." Australia's two largest cities had

contrasting fortunes when it came to rainfall. "Sydney had its wettest year since 1999 - 1499mm - which meant that during the year its dams increased from about 36 to just over 60 per cent," Mr White said.

6

On May 15 last year, Melbourne recorded its driest 365 days on record, with just 316.2mm of rain, less than half its average of 652mm. Matt Pearce from Weatherzone said Melbourne had had below-average rain every year since 1997. He said Brisbane had significantly below-average rainfall last year and had been in a long dry spell since 1999. After nearly a week of showers over southeast Queensland, levels in the region's three dams rose from 20 per cent to more than 24 per cent capacity in the figures released yesterday, adding a fortnight's supply. The rain also means the ground is now saturated, so more of the rain forecast for today and tomorrow is expected to run off into dams. The low that has been producing the rain is also continuing to bring strong winds and seas, and these are expected to continue today and tomorrow before abating on the weekend. Most beaches on the Gold and Sunshine coasts remained closed yesterday as big seas continued to pound the coast. Mr Pearce said northern parts of the country were under the influence of a monsoon, so heavy showers and storms would continue across the top end, the Kimberley and Cape York. A low over Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory could become a cyclone on the weekend and move towards Cape York early next week. Southeast Queensland would continue to get strong gusty onshore winds, showers and large seas. Southern Australia is also going to warm up, with another hot spell forecast for tomorrow and on Saturday. Wild seas and the possibility of breaking waves at the entrance to Coffs Harbour, on the NSW north coast, yesterday forced the annual Pittwater-to-Coffs Harbour race to be abandoned for the first time in the event's 27-year history. A fleet of 60 ocean racing yachts set off from Pittwater at midday yesterday and headed north to round Boondelbah Island off Port Stephens before turning south to Botany Bay and then north back to Pittwater - a trip almost equal to the Pittwater-Coffs race distance. *Additional reporting: Andrew Fraser and D.D. McNicoll*

Labor's drought relief 'anti-farmer'

The Coalition has accused the Rudd Government of having an "anti-farmer, anti-country vendetta" because it plans to review drought-relief payments. The Australian revealed today that payments to farmers will be revamped amid concerns taxpayers are supporting farms that will never be viable because of climate change. The Government plans to pay incentives to farmers on unviable land if they are prepared to modify their farming practices to regain long-term viability in a move that would reduce the drain on the public purse involved in subsidising marginal properties. And it will back the planned \$75 million in research grants and funding to help farm organisations develop adaptation programs, including more support for genetically modified crops able to withstand drought. Agriculture Minister Tony Burke confirmed the plans yesterday as the latest manifestation of the Rudd Government's move to take greater action on climate change than the previous Coalition government. But Nationals leader Warren Truss said farmers had serious concerns about the Labor Government. "The new Rudd Government has confirmed the fears of regional and rural communities around Australia that it will embark on a new bout of slash and burn," Mr Truss said. He said Mr Burke, in announcing the review, had confirmed Labor was consumed by its "anti-farmer, anti-country vendetta". "In case Labor hasn't realised, much of Australia has been caught in a cruel drought that in many places stretches back seven years. It is simplistic to claim that all the problems confronting the rural sector can be solved by more research into climate change." Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson said farmers should be nervous as Labor has promised multi-billion dollar savings in the May budget. But the Greens were glad a review is on the way and said it was long overdue. Separate sources told The Australian yesterday the Government was also considering changes to exit grants used to encourage unviable farmers off the land. The sources said there was concern that quarantining the payments of up to \$170,000 from bankruptcy claims meant farmers had no incentive to avoid bankruptcy and were leaving huge debts to suppliers. The developments follow generous rains across much of Australia in recent months, which have provided some relief from the worst drought in a century. While the rains have not broken the drought, they have created a situation where some NSW farmers have simultaneously qualified for assistance for the effects of drought and flood. Since 2001, the Howard government committed \$3.5 billion to drought relief. Mr Burke told The Australian yesterday that "exceptional circumstances" arrangements, not due for review until September, would remain in place. But Mr Burke, who is touring rural areas of NSW, said he would review the EC system. "One of the things we need to make sure of is that the system is appropriate in an era of climate change," he said from Griffith. "I want to make sure that every time people working the land interact with government, they go away better prepared for climate change." Labor's election policy, published ahead of last year's poll, says the Hawke Labor government created the EC program and commits the party to support viable farmers during rare and prolonged events that fall outside "normal risk management". But it adds: "Labor believes that EC arrangements should not be used to artificially support producers who are not viable over the longer term and that EC policy should not reduce the need for responsible risk management by agriculture

producers. "Labor believes it is important for governments to increase the number of drought-ready farming businesses so that farms are more prepared for years with reduced rainfall in the context of climate change." Asked whether he believed some farmers in receipt of long-term drought assistance were working unviable land, Mr Burke said: "That's something we'd look at in the review."

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"I genuinely am open about the outcome. The thing I'm specific about is wanting producers to be better geared for climate change." He said this was why Labor planned to boost funding for research to improve farming methods. Labor's election policy promised \$55 million in training and re-establishment grants for primary producers, as well as \$15million for research into climate change programs in each agricultural sector. It also promised \$60 million for work with national, state and community farming organisations to improve climate modelling, train producers on adaptation and develop more efficient farm management plans. Mr Burke said climate change was a challenge but could also provide opportunities. "There'll be some areas that have been very challenged by climate change where there'll be hope given to them through new developments in GM (genetic modification)," he said. "Some of the different techniques are moving away from ploughing, and what that has done both for retention of water and for reducing carbon emissions from the soil can create some really significant opportunities. The fact that a particular style of farming might be less viable certainly doesn't mean that it's doomed." A spokesman for the National Farmers Federation said last night the agricultural sector would be glad to work with the Government. "Our argument is that it's not up to governments to decide what land is marginal and what is not or what should be farmed or not farmed," he said. "Quite often the viability of a piece of land depends on the practices of the farmer, so we would have an issue with a blanket ruling." The spokesman said Labor had sent farmers the right signal by stressing it wanted to work with the sector to mitigate the effects of climate change and to help farmers adapt. The NFF was particularly keen to see more research on a region-by-region basis to find ways to make more producers more resistant to drought. Mr Burke declined to comment on the future of exit payments. But sources said the Government was expected to examine the system to give farmers an incentive to accept exit payments well before they went bankrupt.

4th

The Australian - Water restrictions failing

Australians have made herculean efforts to save water since restrictions were ramped up in 2001 but they might not be keeping up with climate change as many dam levels continue to fall. A national survey by The Australian has found the billion-plus litres of water saved since restrictions started to be introduced nationwide in 2001 has in some cases not kept pace with reduced rainfall. Had the restrictions not been imposed, the dams serving some capital cities would have dried up. The Sydney Catchment Authority reported inflow to its dams between 1990 and 2006 averaged just 614 billion litres, less than its pre-restriction annual usage. The inflow to Melbourne's dams between 1997 and 2006 averaged 387GL, less than its annual use. Inflows to Perth's dams have fallen to a quarter of their pre-1974 level, with an average of just 82GL a year from 2001 to 2006. Since the introduction of water restrictions, households in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane have saved 1.1 trillion litres of water -- as much as Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane together used in 2006-07. In 2006-07, the biggest reduction, in percentage terms, was in southeast Queensland, where residents were limited to 140 litres each a day starting in April last year. This week, the Queensland Water Commission said water use in the state's southeast had been less than that target for more than seven months. As restrictions continue nationwide and dam levels fall, the water industry, convinced it is facing climate change and unwilling to squeeze residents further, scrambled to invest \$19 billion last year in new water sources. But Australia may be no closer to security of water. Water Services Association deputy director Claude Piccinin said: "People are really pulling their weight, there's no doubt. "I don't think anyone is too happy that they (restrictions) have gone on so long. Had we known the drought was going to be so extensive and intensive, people would have started to augment earlier than this."

But the drought did not break, and dam levels kept falling. Perth has relied on groundwater and last year brought a desalination plant on line. Other cities have been overwhelmingly relying on restrictions. But Mr Piccinin warned restrictions were "a blunt instrument" and came with costs. He questioned how much further restrictions could be tightened. This week, National Water Commission head Ken Matthews told The Australian that state governments' management of urban water was "shambolic". He criticised water restrictions, saying they were "a very crude instrument to achieve social objectives". He said the economic and social losses and social inequities were indefensible. Last year, state governments committed \$18 billion to build more water infrastructure. That included desalination plants in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and the Gold Coast, a north-south pipeline and irrigation water savings in Victoria, and a recycling scheme and water grid in southeast Queensland.

The Advertiser - 2007 was South Australia's hottest year, says ...

South Australia experienced its hottest year on record in 2007 but across the nation, Australia recorded only its sixth-warmest year. The Bureau of Meteorology today released its annual climate statement on weather conditions experienced across Australia last year. The mean temperature for Australia was 0.67C above average in 2007. The Murray Darling Basin, South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria all recorded the warmest years on record. The SA mean temperature of 20.6C was 1.1C above the 1961-1990 mean average of 19.5C.

8

Patchy rainfall across southern Australia meant long-term droughts persisted in the far southwest and in the southeast, including the Murray Darling Basin, all of Victoria and northern Tasmania. The report stated southeastern Australia has now missed out on the equivalent of an average year's rainfall over the duration of this continuing 11-year drought.

Hot, and here to stay

Adelaide has sweltered through its hottest year since records began 120 years ago, in a sign that meteorologists say shows climate change is already here. The Bureau of Meteorology yesterday released its annual climate statement for 2007, showing South Australia also had its hottest year on record and Australia had its sixth-warmest year. Adelaide's annual mean temperature was 0.3C above its previous maximum of 18.1C, set in 1914, and the hottest since records were first kept, in 1887. The extreme heat will return today, with total fire bans in some districts. A top of 39C is forecast for Adelaide, ahead of 38C tomorrow. Weather extremes of all kinds were felt across Australia in 2007 – including flooding in the eastern states. Climate Institute chief executive John Connor said the reality of the weather was stacking up with all projections. "It also shows that global weather is not just about warmer weather, it's about wilder weather," he said. "The projections are for intense storms, flooding, droughts and bushfires and we had all of those in 2007." Federal Climate Change Minister Penny Wong said that the statement reinforced the need to tackle climate change. Among the most recent examples of wild weather wreaking havoc in and around South Australia was a "mini tornado" which struck the Mallee town of Pinnaroo on December 19 and a giant dust storm at the border with New South Wales two days later. The wall of dust just east of the South Australian border near Broken Hill was photographed by NSW pastoralist Mel Scott, 25, on December 21. She said it was "raining mud" inside the 50km-wide wall of dust as she drove through it near Wilcannia. "It was not very windy, it was pretty calm and eerie, we didn't know what to expect," she said. Bureau of Meteorology senior meteorologist Darren Ray said the rare dust storm was created when the cold front which brought rain to South Australia that day, met northerly winds and dust was blown from the land in opposing directions. Mr Ray said that the December 21 downpour in SA, NSW and Victoria was related to La Nina. "We had good rains in November/December because of the La Nina influence, otherwise it's very poor. It was the 15th consecutive year of above-average temperatures for South Australia and that shows the global warming trends biting," he said. The Murray-Darling Basin also recorded its warmest year since records began. Mr Ray said SA had its first fire ban issued in winter, which was also consistent with global warming trends.

Market drives the green dollar

Australian consumers are driving the country's market towards more environmentally friendly ventures. One of capitalism's undoubted virtues is that the market will always move to meet demand. That demand now is for energy-efficient appliances, greener electricity, fuel-efficient vehicles and a style of living that puts less strain on our planet. But the public and private industry shouldn't be expected to shoulder the whole burden of turning little individual savings into a larger collective effort. The rush to take up rebates for water-saving products shows that as long as governments provide some incentive, people will pay to play their part. Consumer demand is now also set to drive a move towards greener housing. For a long time, housing, particularly that aimed at first-home and lower-income buyers, has been built as economically as possible. No eaves, low ceilings, minimal insulation and small blocks all add up to homes that are cheaper to buy but much less cost-efficient to run. In the long term, these houses are also environmentally expensive. When home repayment levels are at record highs, then pragmatism dictates trying to keep the mortgage low. But the public has already shown it will make concessions for environmentally friendly housing. As climate change continues to grow as a political issue, the market should respond and offer even more affordable incentives for householders to be environmentally friendly.

FarmOnLine

2007 the sixth hottest year on record: BOM

2007 was the sixth hottest year on record in Australia, according to the Bureau of Meteorology's Annual Australian Climate Statement released today. The statement also revealed 2007 was the hottest year on record in the Murray Darling Basin, New South Wales, Victoria, and South Australia; and that south-east Australia has now missed out on the equivalent of an average year's rainfall over the past 11 years, and under the current drought, water storages have had record low inflows. Federal Water Minister Penny Wong says the report reinforces the need to tackle climate change. "The first act of the Rudd Government was to ratify the Kyoto

Protocol," Senator Wong said. "This new leadership continued at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali, where Australia played a constructive role in negotiations on the 'Bali Roadmap'. "This year the Government will be working on a National Emissions Trading Scheme and increasing the uptake of renewable energy. "All these efforts demonstrate the Rudd Government's determination to do its bit in the global challenge to tackle climate change."

The Bureau's statement also reveals that 16 of the last 18 years have been warmer than the long-term average in Australia. SOURCE: National rural news updated daily on *FarmOnline*.

Week ending 2nd January 2008

Water in Storage

MDBC Storages	Full Supply Level (m AHD)	Full Supply Volume (GL)	Current Storage Level (m AHD)	Current Storage		Dead Storage (GL)	MDBC Active Storage (GL)	Change in Storage for the week (GL)
				(GL)	%			
Dartmouth Reservoir	486.00	3 906	410.64	674	17%	80	594	+3
Hume Reservoir	192.00	3 038	175.55	694	23%	30	664	-24
Lake Victoria	27.00	677	24.10	354	52%	100	254	-14
Menindee Lakes		1 731 *		38	2%	(- -) #	0	+9
Total		9 352		1 760	19%	--	1 512	-27

* Menindee surcharge capacity 2050 GL % of Total Active MDBC Storage = 18%

NSW takes control of Menindee Lakes when storage falls below 480 GL, and control reverts to MDBC when storage next reaches 640 GL

Drought policy review will "bash farmers": Truss

Nationals Leader Warren Truss has accused the Federal Government of embarking on a "slash and burn" approach to rural Australia, following its announcement this morning that drought assistance policy is under review. Mr. Truss said the comments from Agriculture Minister, Tony Burke, were critical of exceptional circumstances drought assistance and claimed this was a "clear warning" that Labor is "consumed by an anti-farmer, anti-country vendetta". In support of his claim, Mr. Truss pointed to Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's time as chief of staff of former Queensland Premier Wayne Goss, during which time he says 13 country rail lines were closed, more than 2000 hospital beds were removed, 600 Department of Primary Industries staff sacked, and 400 teaching jobs from regional schools were slashed. "In case Labor hasn't realised, much of Australia has been caught in a cruel drought that in many places stretches back seven years," Mr. Truss said. "It is simplistic to claim that all the problems confronting the rural sector can be solved by more research into climate change. "For Mr. Burke to suggest that drought is just about farmers failing to come to grips with climate change shows just how little Labor's Cabinet room knows about the country outside of the inner suburbs of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane." Mr. Truss said that during the last six of Coalition rule, the Federal Government provided more than \$3.5 billion in drought assistance, "at a time when State Labor Governments walked away from their obligations to provide disaster aid". "With wall to wall Labor across the nation, who will be there to help families when another drought comes?" SOURCE: National rural news updated daily on *FarmOnline*.

Get used to the drought, it may never break

It may be time to stop describing south-eastern Australia as gripped by drought and instead accept the extreme dry as permanent, one of the nation's most senior weather experts warned yesterday. "Perhaps we should call it our new climate," said the Bureau of Meteorology's head of climate analysis, David Jones. He was speaking after the release of statistics showing that last year was the hottest on record in NSW, Victoria, South Australia and the ACT. NSW's mean temperature was 1.13 degrees above average. "That is a very substantial anomaly," Dr Jones said. "It's equivalent to moving NSW 150 kilometres closer to the equator." It was the 11th year in a row NSW and the Murray-Darling Basin had experienced above normal temperatures. Sydney's nights were its warmest since records were first kept 149 years ago. "There is absolutely no debate that Australia is warming," said Dr Jones. "It is very easy to see ... it is happening before our eyes." The only uncertainty now was whether the changing pattern was "85pc, 95pc or 100pc the result of the enhanced greenhouse effect". "There is a debate in the climate community, after ... close to 12 years of drought, whether this is something permanent," he said. "Certainly, in terms of temperature, that seems to be our reality, and that there is no turning back. "Last year climate change became very evident in south-eastern Australia, with South Australia, NSW, Victoria, the ACT and the Murray-Darling Basin all setting temperature records by a very large margin," he said. Some areas were "getting closer to 1.5 to 2 degrees above what we were seeing during early parts of the 20th century." Australia as a whole had a mean temperature 0.67 degrees above average last year, making it the nation's sixth-warmest year. NSW and the Murray-Darling Basin experienced their seventh consecutive year of below-average rain. Dr Jones said the State-wide rain statistics would have looked even worse had it not been for heavy falls along the coast. Sydney had its wettest year since 1998, receiving 1499 millimetres, well above the long-term

average of 1215. While much of it was coastal, rain that did fall across the State fell at the wrong time for farmers, soaked into drought-parched soils or evaporated during scorching days. Widespread falls across NSW in June were followed by very dry spells in August, September and October. "Very good rainfall in December across south-eastern Australia has been followed, since about Boxing Day, by quite extreme heat in Victoria, southern NSW and most of southern Western Australia," Dr Jones said. SOURCE: *Sydney Morning Herald*.

10

Grass could help save the world from climate change

With new research showing that the world's forests are absorbing less man-made carbon dioxide each year, two Australian scientists said some plants could store CO₂ for thousands of years. Grasses such as wheat and sorghum can store large amounts of carbon in microscopic balls of silica, called phytoliths, that form around a plant's cells as they draw the mineral from the soil, a report in the latest issue of *New Scientist* says. When a plant dies, the phytoliths, or plantstones, enter the soil and lock in the carbon for potentially thousands of years, said the Southern Cross University agricultural scientists, Leigh Sullivan and Jeff Parr. The next step would be to see if plants that best store carbon in plantstones have higher or lower crop yields and quality. "So far our studies of wheat and sorghum suggest that there is no trade-off between yield and carbon sequestration," Professor Sullivan said. Strains could be bred to better produce plantstones and farmers could potentially claim carbon credits under the Kyoto Protocol, the report said. The forestry industry is already heavily involved in carbon storage but storing carbon in plantstones could become more widespread because farmers could also still earn income by selling the crops for food, the report said. SOURCE: *Sydney Morning Herald*, a Fairfax Media publication.

Drought-relief shake-up on the cards from Burke

The Federal Government is promising to make improvements to the exceptional circumstances drought-relief scheme. But it will not tell farmers what they can and cannot grow on their land, says Federal Agriculture Minister Tony Burke, who is currently touring the country to meet with farmers in every State and Territory. Mr. Burke, speaking from Hay in south-western NSW, said the Labor Government supported existing exceptional circumstances arrangements but wanted to make sure the scheme is improved. "So that whenever somebody goes through a period of drought and goes through a period of needing government assistance, by the time that period of assistance is over they've actually got themselves better prepared and better engaged to deal with climate change in the future," Mr. Burke said. There would be a range of different methods used to help drought-affected farmers adapt. "We certainly won't be in the business of telling people what they can and cannot grow on their properties," Mr. Burke said. "The answers of dealing with climate change will vary not just (from) one sector of farming to another but they'll differ from property to property." Some of the methods would include using genetically-modified crops appropriately, changing ploughing methods and specific water strategies, he said. "We want to make sure that we don't just have a sustainable sector, that we've got a sector that's going to be able to thrive in what's going to be some challenging times ahead." Mr. Burke said he wanted drought assistance to extend beyond financial support. "When people interact with (the exceptional circumstances system) I want them to always go away better prepared for climate change and better prepared for the future than when they arrived," Mr. Burke said. "What I don't want to see is situations where some people can go onto the system of relief and have no incentive during that time to actually improve the property to better deal with the climate change and future drought that they will be facing in the years to come." Mr. Burke said the Government also wanted to ensure the system worked for small business owners and others dependent on rural economies. "The exit payments are a valuable concept to help people when they make the decision that the future's looking pretty gloomy, to help in the process of getting off the land, paying off their debts and moving forward," he said. "At the same time you want to make sure that you don't get a whole lot of local small business people who end up with bad debts that will never be paid while someone else walks off with a handsome exit payment. "I want to make sure that we don't, at the expense of looking after a farmer, leave behind a whole lot of truck drivers, small business owners who then have their own business go under through somebody who owes them money becoming bankrupt but walking away with a handful of cash anyway." Mr. Burke played down suggestions the changes would provoke a backlash from farmers. "In the city people will talk about climate change in a theoretical sense, there on the land it's amazing, people actually live the climate," he said. "The strength and support from people working the land to make sure we are well set up for the future is something that has taken me by surprise and gives me a lot of optimism for how this is going to go ahead." SOURCE: AAP

5th

The Advertiser - Murray levy fails to revive ailing river

Only 14 gigalitres of water – 37 days of supply for Adelaide – has been bought and returned to the River Murray through the publicly funded Save the River Murray Levy. The fund has raised more than \$50 million by charging SA Water customers since it was introduced in 2003. Householders pay a \$32.80 annual charge, or \$8.20 a quarter. Environmentalists want far more water returned to the dying river, saying too much money has

been spent on research and bureaucracy. But River Murray Minister Karlene Maywald argues the levy also is funding vitally important work and research into improving salinity, water quality and irrigation efficiency. Of the \$50 million raised by the levy, \$45 million has been spent – mostly on the construction of salinity schemes and assessments into environmental works. More than \$9 million has been given to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission for work such as dredging the Murray Mouth.

11

But University of Adelaide Associate Professor David Paton accused the Government of addressing the needs of irrigators and other businesses dependent on the river ahead of the needs of the environment. He said more levy funds should have been spent on returning water to the river, which was in dire need of more flows. "If this country can't make decisions and respond immediately for urgent requirements for environmental restoration, there's little hope of securing good environmental outcomes," he said. "We still look at the economic welfare of individuals in the short term rather than economic and environmental sustainability of the (River Murray) system in the long term." The Save the River Murray Levy was introduced in October, 2003 to raise funds for projects to address the declining health of the River Murray. It also aims to secure water of acceptable quality for irrigation and urban water supplies. The 14 gegalitres of water so far returned to the river was all provided in the 2006/07 financial year. One gegalitre of that water – equal to 2 1/2 days supply for Adelaide – was bought from existing River Murray water licence holders, such as irrigators, using \$1.4 million in funds raised through the levy. The other 13 gegalitres was provided from State Government water licences. Wilderness Society campaign manager Peter Owen said the river needed the water "yesterday". "Buying water, removing water entitlements and giving it back to the river has to be done with a matter of urgency," he said. "The time of talking about what we have to do has been and gone." Mrs Maywald defended the use of funds to improve the overall environmental health of the River Murray and not just to return water. "The fund is an important initiative in strategic planning for the future of the Murray and once the river begins to recover from the widespread drought in the Murray-Darling Basin, we will see more and more benefits of this prudent planning and management," she said. "The South Australian Government believes returning water to the river is extremely important. "In fact, South Australia was the first state to contribute water to the Living Murray initiative." The Living Murray initiative aims to restore an extra 500 gegalitres of water to the river by 2009, of which the State Government will provide 35 gegalitres. Meanwhile, the Health Department yesterday issued a warning for the public to avoid contact with water in Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert because of blue green algal outbreaks. Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith said the Government was hypocritical for calling on the former Federal Government to spend money on flows but doing little itself. "What on earth has the Premier done with the \$50 million he's raked in?" he said. "The River Murray Levy has become another cash cow for the Rann Government." The State Government will buy a further four gegalitres of water from licence holders by 2009, most is expected to be bought in the 2008-09 financial year. The remaining 17 gegalitres of its target will be provided through infrastructure and water trading. Mrs Maywald said research and new technology played an important role in maximising use of the water available for all users, including the environment. The drought has exacerbated the environmental problems that over-allocation has caused to the River Murray. Tea Tree Gully holidaymakers Heath Lavis, 27, and Carmen Nemet, 25, said they had never seen the water levels at Goolwa so low. "It's quite amazing how barren it has got," Mr Lavis said. "I knew it was a little bit shallow but not this shallow."

DYING WETLANDS: Species driven to point of extinction

Journey to oblivion

Wetlands along the River Murray may suffer irreversible damage within months without water, SA's environmental manager for the Murray says. There are 27 regulated or managed wetlands disconnected from the river in SA, some for more than 12 months. A further six unmanaged wetlands were disconnected in recent months as part of the emergency response to the drought but there is evidence some of these wetlands may never fully recover. If they do not receive fresh water flows soon, the species they support may be lost forever. Judy Goode fears time is running out for the plants and animals of the Murray-Darling system, including river red gums hundreds of years old. She says the environment is "the biggest loser" in the drought because it always comes last. Critical urban water needs come first but we cannot expect the environment to hang on indefinitely, she says. Unfortunately the problem is far worse than it would otherwise be because the environment was missing out on water long before the drought took hold. The trees on the floodplain have not had a good drink for more than 10 years. The Coorong has been starved of fresh water flows for more than six years. "While we are seeing extreme impacts as a result of the drought, the environment has really been taking a very big hit for a long time now," Ms Goode says. "Ultimately we have to address the situation, for the sake of a whole range of species but also for our own species, because a healthy river is essential for healthy communities." Localised watering projects at places like Chowilla have been successful, and have shown the environment can respond to small volumes of targeted water. "Sooner or later we will start to see a fundamental change in the ecological

character of the river, its floodplains and the lakes and Coorong, with the loss of iconic species that define this unique part of South Australia," Ms Goode says. "We can't continue on the premise the environment can go without water indefinitely . . . and once you have lost it you can't just recreate it." Dead and dying trees, salty earth and groundwater, disappearing wildlife and devastated landscapes also represent a waste of taxpayers' money.

12

The Government and the community have invested thousands of volunteer hours and dollars in managed wetlands to re-introduce wetting and drying cycles that mimic the natural water regime. "Thousands of volunteer hours amount to an enormous community effort to invest in the long-term health of these sites. We want to protect that investment and . . . to do that we really need water soon." Ms Goode says water quality is influenced by the connection between the river and its floodplains. Regular flushing of a floodplain reduces the amount of salt stored on it and provides for an exchange of carbon, which is the basis of all life within the river. Riverland irrigators have received an increase in their water allocation to help permanent plantings last through summer, but again the environment appears to have been overlooked.

The Australian - Algae risk to lake visitors

Glorious summer holiday conditions in Victoria's Gippsland Lakes region have been marred by an outbreak of blue-green algae that can be harmful to swimmers. Calm conditions and high temperatures in recent days have proved ideal for the algae, detected at levels that may cause skin irritation and mild respiratory and hayfever-like symptoms. Victoria's Department of Human Services yesterday warned holiday-makers to avoid swimming where the algae can be seen or where the water is discoloured. "If contact is made, users should remove any affected clothing and wash themselves thoroughly with clean water after coming ashore," the DHS advice said. Daily testing will be conducted to monitor the bloom that disappears as quickly as it arrives, once the weather cools and the wind whips across the water. Holiday-makers were not panicking, according to Jenny Easton, a partner in Gippsland Lakes Great Escapes in Paynesville. "We don't expect anybody to overreact by cancelling bookings," she said.

Cool housewarming for South Pole base

Dozens of US dignitaries will fly to the South Pole next Saturday for what will undoubtedly be the coolest housewarming of the year. During their four-hour visit, they will salute the US flag at the dedication of the new Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station, the most hi-tech scientific base in Antarctica and the only one sited at the geographic South Pole. However, an early arrival at the station said the toast at the unveiling of the 6000sq m structure -- funded and operated by the US National Science Foundation -- would be non-alcoholic. Considering all of these people will be coming from sea level to altitude (2800m) in three hours, that makes for a nasty hangover at the very least, if not outright altitude sickness," he said. Despite the Americans having spent \$US153 million (\$173.5 million) to construct the base, they have not issued an Antarctica-wide invitation to the opening. "No, we weren't invited. We wouldn't expect to be," an Australian Antarctic Division spokeswoman said of the celebrations. Instead, she said AAD staff were planning their own celebrations to honour the 1911-14 Australasian Antarctic Expedition, led by geologist Douglas Mawson. The US Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station building replaces facilities that have deteriorated in the harsh environment of the polar plateau, where temperatures drop to -73C and winds blow snow almost continuously. The building will support a range of research projects, from astronomy to seismology. It will house 150 scientists and technicians during the three-month field season, generally from November to January. It is a far cry from the first US South Pole station built by 18 Americans between November 1956 and February 1957. "It was an extraordinary sight," Sydney journalist Geoffrey Lee Martin said yesterday. He flew over the base with Edmund Hillary on February 17, 1957. "They'd built a tiny village of half-a-dozen little huts and a large radar dome, clearly visible from the air," he said. "It was especially remarkable as everything had to be dropped by plane, including a small pool table." Saturday's ceremony will also mark the 50th anniversary of a major international scientific collaboration called the International Geophysical Year, when US researchers first took up residence at the Amundsen-Scott base. The event also highlights the beginning of another global scientific campaign, the International Polar Year, which includes researchers with the AAD.

6th

Adeliadenow.com - Mobile desalination to be on river barges

The Queensland government will put mobile desalination plants on the Brisbane River to ensure water supplies if the record drought continues. Acting Premier Paul Lucas said two mobile desalination plants were planned on barges on the Brisbane River at a cost of \$550 million. Preliminary works would cost an additional \$125 million and included site selection, surveying, water modelling, environmental studies and geotechnical works. The contingency moves, which would be assessed and approved at the end of the wet season in March or April, could pump an extra 144 megalitres of water a day into the region by the end of next year, even if the worst drought on

record worsened. "That's enough extra water for more than a million people a day," Mr Lucas said. "Even if our dams receive the same average inflows we've had since 1990 - which itself is a third of historic average inflows - the Queensland Water Commission advises combined storage levels would be around 28 per cent after the wet season." At that level it's unlikely we would need to proceed with these emergency desalination measures.

13

"But it's like having fire insurance - most people never need to use it but it's important to have there, just in case." Mr Lucas said the 2006-07 financial year was the worst for rainfall in southeast Queensland in more than a century of records, with just 4.4 per cent of the historical long-term average, he said. The Queensland Water Commission estimated the region's dam storage levels could drop to 7 per cent by 2010, based on 2006-07 inflows, daily usage, evaporation, power needs and additions to the \$9 billion water grid as they come online. "If, and I stress if, the current 'worst drought on record' rainfalls continue, there will be a gap between predicted supply and demand before the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam starts delivering meaningful flows in 2013," he said. "The contingency measures, if required, will address that gap." Recent heavy rain from a low pressure system has boosted southeast Queensland's parched dam levels by up to 5 per cent. The average level of the three major dams - Wivenhoe, Somerset and North Pine - was boosted to 22.45 per cent yesterday, with further flows expected in coming days.

7th

FarmOnLine

Disaster not over as floods still rising in NSW and Qld

More rain is expected in flood-ravaged northern NSW today, while in parts of southern Queensland the deluge has been described as the worst in 20 years. Heavy rain is expected to continue falling in flooded areas of northern NSW, with some parts already declared natural disaster zones. Showers will hit towns in the Northern Rivers area for the next few days and may cause localised flooding, but the brunt of the weather front is starting to weaken as it moves south. NSW Emergency Services Minister, Nathan Rees, declared the Tweed and Kyogle local government areas natural disaster zones on a visit to the region on Saturday, and is considering natural disaster declarations for the Richmond valley and Lismore if more rain falls in those areas. The Bureau of Meteorology has issued flood warnings for the Tweed, Richmond, Wilsons, Bellinger, Orara, Bogan, Warrego and Paroo rivers. Kyogle was hit the hardest when the Richmond River peaked at a major flood level of 18.1m - the second highest ever recorded for the area. Widespread flooding forced the evacuation of hundreds of people to higher ground on Friday night, but river levels are now on the decline. A peak of 6.8m Sunday afternoon will cause major flooding at Coraki and at Bungawalbyn Junction. Further south, heavy rains caused minor flooding at Glenreagh Saturday, with similar conditions expected to hit Grafton by Sunday afternoon. West of Coffs Harbour, the Bellinger River rose to minor flood levels of 4.3m at Thora, with further rainfall threatening to cause more damage. The wet weather has cut CountryLink train services between Brisbane and Sydney, requiring northbound passengers to board buses at Grafton and southbound passengers taking buses to the mid-north coast. The State Emergency Service is keeping watch on floodwaters and will be ready if flash flooding occurs. The storms will move south but bring little rain to the Central Coast and Sydney this week. North of the border emergency services are urging southeast Queensland residents to take precautions ahead of rising floodwaters described as the worst in some areas for 20 years. While much of the rain brought on by the massive low-pressure system has abated, rivers and waterways across the region are continuing to rise, with most expected to peak either Sunday or Monday. The Bureau of Meteorology has issued major flood warnings for the Logan and Albert rivers, south of Brisbane, and the Condamine River system near Warwick in southern Queensland. The Bureau says the Logan River has risen 12 metres at Yarrahappini, while it's risen 10 metres at Maclean Bridge and is expected to rise another five metres by Sunday night. More than 240 mm of rain has fallen in some areas on the Gold Coast hinterland, which feeds the Albert and Logan river systems. The Condamine River is expected to rise to 6.5 metres at Warwick late Sunday afternoon, with a second peak expected later at night. SOURCE: AAP

Heraldsun.com.au - Melbourne residents slash water use by 16 per cent

The harsh water restrictions placed on Melbourne have worked: the city saved 69 billion litres of water last year. Figures to be released today by Water Minister Tim Holding show Melburnians used 369 billion litres of water in 2007, compared with 438 billion litres in '06. That's a 16 per cent reduction. The savings came after the city spent the entire year on either stage 3 or 3a water restrictions. Melbourne was on stage 3 restrictions between January and April last year, and then the newly created stage 3a restrictions for the rest of the year, which severely reduced watering of lawns, gardens and parks. In 2006, the city spent most of the year restriction-free, easing on to stage 1 in September that year, then going to stage 2 just one month later. The clampdown on water use has left 3 billion litres more water in the city's dams compared with this time last year. However, supplies are still low: the reservoirs were at 38.7 per cent capacity yesterday, compared with 38.5 per cent capacity on this

day last year. The city's largest dam, the Thomson, was at just 27.2 per cent of capacity yesterday. Water levels fell .2 per cent in 24 hours after Saturday's scorching temperatures. There are no plans by the Government to lift restrictions. Stage 3a is here to stay until the end of June, at least. Water officials have said the city is likely to remain on stage 1 or 2 restriction levels as a minimum until the Government's major water projects -- a north-south pipeline and a desalination plant -- come on line in 2010 and 2011. Mr Holding said the water savings

14

were achieved through a number of measures, including restrictions. "These savings are a 16 per cent reduction in water consumption and are equivalent to adding three Maroondah Reservoirs, filled to capacity, to the water supply systems," he said. Mr Holding said businesses and households had helped bring Melbourne's water consumption down. "Households use around 60 per cent of Melbourne's water, so water saving at home can have a significant impact on our water supplies," he said. "Stage 3a restrictions enable some watering to be maintained for gardens, while ensuring the continuation of sport through the summer, with one in four sports grounds able to water."

Adelaidenow.com - Robert F. Kennedy says green up or get out

Forget changing light bulbs or driving a fuel-efficient car, the only way to save the planet from catastrophe is by ousting bad politicians, leading U.S. environmental campaigner Robert F. Kennedy Jr says. Mr. Kennedy said lists suggesting 10 things individuals could do to make the planet greener were "just a bunch of baloney" and a "distraction". Instead, he said people needed to vote out governments not environmentally friendly and propped up by polluters. The environmental activist, lawyer and author will deliver his strong message in Adelaide in February at the Solar Cities Congress. Mr Kennedy said it was imperative governments stopped bankrolling big industrial polluters by providing millions in subsidies. If the market place was level and subsidies to oil and coal companies were scrapped then vital renewable energy sources, such as solar power, could compete and prosper, he said. "Free market capitalism is the solution to our problems. In order to do that, we have to change the market place rules so that it rewards conservation," he said. "A true free market would promote efficiency and efficiency means the elimination of waste. A true free market would encourage us to properly value our natural resources." Mr Kennedy said the under-valuation of resources saw them used wastefully by a handful of rich people treating the planet as if it was a business in liquidation. He said it was wrong to "convert your natural resources to cash as quickly as possible and have a few years of pollution-based prosperity" because this "makes a few rich and impoverishes the rest of us". U.S. President George W. Bush was the paradigm for that model, Mr Kennedy said, adding it was "a very selfish, immoral and short-sighted model. In the long-term, it's a recipe for economic catastrophe", he said. Named one of Time magazine's "Heroes for the Planet" for his work in restoring New York's Hudson River, Mr Kennedy has been urging conservation for decades. He said "good environmental policy is identical to good economic policy 100 per cent of the time". The son of the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy is passionate about saving the planet and said he was heartened by the "big seachange" on environmental awareness. He said, however, those who supported conservation were "up against the apocalyptic forces of ignorance and greed". Asked what individuals could do to green, he said: "You have to get rid of the politicians who are indentured servants for the carbon cronies. It's only one thing. "Forget about changing your fluorescent light bulbs or buying a fuel-efficient car. The key thing to do is to get rid of the bad politicians. It's great to buy a Prius (fuel-efficient car) and integrate an environmental ethic into life but it's not going to change the world. It's not going to save the world." Mr Kennedy said smart politicians were needed to change the rules to stop polluters and ban such things as non-environmentally-friendly cars. "What industry loves is all of these lists - here are 10 things you can do - because it shifts the burden to the consumer," he said. Mr Kennedy calls such lists "just a bunch of baloney". "It's a distraction when newspapers say that's the answer instead of saying the answer is to get rid of these disastrous politicians just in it for industry, the polluters," he said.

1st for 2008 may I take this opportunity to wish you all the best for 2008, this must be the year we reverse not only our dependence on the River Murray and water within the Murray-Darling Basin but work towards negate the effects of 'climate change.'

