

Weir rally irks SA's Murray irrigators

South Australia's Lower Murray irrigators are angry with fellow Murray Darling Basin producers who lobbied at Parliament House for the establishment of a weir at Wellington, SA. SA irrigators, who have vehemently opposed the weir near the mouth of the Murray River since it was proposed 12 months ago, were not informed about the farmers' rally in Canberra. That's despite their reliance on the river and attached lakes system. River, Lakes and Coorong Action Group spokesperson, Henry Jones, said that, while he understood the hardships faced by all irrigators, he was disgusted by "the selfish group who took their concerns to Canberra". "We are totally opposed to the weir – and couldn't believe how selfish they were," he said. Mr. Jones, who is a sixth generation commercial fisherman, said he was worried for those awaiting a decision on the weir, who have been under constant social pressures regarding their future. "People have been worried for a while now, with a lot of dairy farmers putting their land up for sale, and vignerons, established since the 1850s, can't even put in vines," he said. Hammond MP Adrian Pederick said the rally showed a typical eastern states attitude towards the River Murray. "There is a misguided belief that the weir will save everything from the Riverland up," he said. "My firm belief is, if they put anything in the river, it will kill it off." Mr. Pederick said it reinforced the need for Federal Government control of the system, under the \$10 billion plan. SOURCE: Extract from report in the *Stock Journal*, SA, November 8.

One of the biggest problems in the Murray-Basin is that producers within the Basin or even within the Murray Darling Association cannot be united because of selfishness. Without unity and a National approach to the management of the food bowl of Australia we are doomed. We all have to suffer as close as possible to the same amount of pain and it must be shared by not only those within the Murray-Darling Basin but where water is sourced from the Murray-Darling Basin and others who rely on produce from within the Murray-Darling Basin. It seems we can all breath the same air but cannot share the same water with equality.

Interest rise compounds tough conditions for farmers

Today's 0.25pc interest rate increase by the Reserve Bank of Australia will only compound the cost squeeze being felt by farmers from the drought, the high exchange rate and high petrol and fertiliser costs. National Farmers Federation vice president, Charles Burke, said farmers were acutely aware of the economic environment in which a rate rise was predicated, but were not enjoying the "economic purple patch" which had given way to the rise. "The booming economy behind the high exchange rate and interest rate rises are not flowing to farmers," Mr. Burke said. Mr. Burke said while a number of farmers would have locked in a certain amount of their borrowings to alleviate some of the variability in their business, the rate rise still increases farmers "exposure". He said farmers' debt levels had increased by 40pc between 2002-3 and 2005-6 according to ABARE. Farmers at a drought summit in Parkes, NSW, in September said the average farm debt was now \$1 million. But Mr. Burke said farmers don't blame the government for the rise. "Farmers are aware there are a range of factors behind the interest rate rise," he said. "It's something driven by strong economic factors, and apart from building capacity, there's not a lot the government can do to fix it. "We see this as an unfortunate side effect of a strong economy, with world demand taking advantage of the goods we produce and mine." SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

Timber notches up environmental milestone

Hardwood flooring manufacturer Australian Solar Timbers, Kempsey, NSW, is blazing a timber industry environmental trail. On the North Coast of NSW, it has become the first to achieve accreditation under the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS) chain of custody certification scheme. The AFS brand gives consumers the power to opt for products that come with the assurance they have been made with wood from sustain ably managed Australian forests. It's a sign of the times, as the forestry industry adapts to and improves on its environmentally sound methods of operation. SOURCE: *The Land*, NSW.

NEWS.com

Turnbull, Garrett to slug it out

THE federal election turns green today as duelling millionaires who have contributed a series of stumbles and gaffes to the campaign duke it out over the environment. As the Coalition tries to limit the damage and Kevin Rudd tries to keep the heat on John Howard after yesterday's historic interest rates rise, Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull and his opposite number Peter Garrett will face off against each other over climate change, renewable energy and their impact on jobs. The election debate in Canberra will be a crucial tipping point in the campaign in a week otherwise dominated by the economy.

Environmental policy is one of the few areas where there are clear differences between the major parties, making it one of the most important battlegrounds of the campaign. And with the effects of climate change and government action – or inaction – becoming increasingly apparent, the long-term consequences of the policies debated today will have a direct impact on voters.

Gaffes

Both men have also suffered embarrassing setbacks on the campaign trail while being forced to toe their respective party's lines. Another gaffe during this afternoon's head-to-head could see them disappear from the campaign altogether and could send voters fleeing to the other side. For Mr Turnbull, it could also be a mortal blow to his re-election bid in Wentworth, where he is being challenged over his approval of the controversial pulp mill in Tasmania. The Environment Minister went missing from the campaign trail for several days after it was reported that he had lobbied federal Cabinet to sign on to the Kyoto protocol just weeks before the campaign began. It was reported that Mr Turnbull's argument - that Australia would meet its Kyoto targets anyway and had nothing to lose by signing on - was rebuffed by the Prime Minister. Mr Turnbull was accused of leaking the story himself to curry favour with environmentally-conscious voters in his electorate as critics accused the Cabinet of cracking under the pressure of trailing in the polls. Mr Turnbull has denied leaking the story. The Minister was nowhere to be seen for the next few days -although some younger Australians might have been thankful for that. Mr Turnbull's most high-profile appearance in the campaign before the Kyoto leak had been when his exuberant spinning of a toy chair saw it topple over with two startled children inside. Mr Turnbull's absence left it to the Prime Minister to seize upon Mr Garrett's series of campaign gaffes which blunted Labor's attempt to take a stranglehold on green policy. After originally suggesting Labor would sign on to a post-Kyoto accord without developing countries following suit, Mr Garrett was forced to back down and say China and India's participation was a deal-breaker. Mr Garrett found himself in trouble again a week later when he told radio host Steve Price that Labor would renege on their promises if they won the election. After Price went public with the comment, Mr Garrett faced the media to explain that he was only joking. The Coalition pounced on the blunder, claiming it showed that Mr Garrett was a green radical who had sold out his beliefs to join Labor, which in turn could not be trusted to make good on its promises. Commentators said Mr Garrett's brain explosions would see him benched from the campaign. A poor performance this afternoon could see his post-election career crash to the ground faster than a toy chair within reach of Mr Turnbull.

The Australian

I was wrong: Kruszelnicki

Celebrity scientist and senate candidate Karl Kruszelnicki has recanted from his description of clean-coal technology as a complete furphy, now admitting it is worthwhile pursuing the technology as a short-term solution to climate change. Dr Kruszelnicki's candid correction yesterday followed his comments last week likening the promotion of clean coal technology to Nazi propaganda. His recant came on the same day as an initial review of two basins in NSW identified them as possible sites to store greenhouse gases underground. NSW Energy Minister Ian Macdonald yesterday released results of preliminary research based on old petroleum exploration data that found 16 potential storage sites in deep saline aquifers in the Darling Basin in the far west of the state. The Sydney Basin was found to be less promising, with deeper and less porous geology, but some sites near the Great Dividing Range were tagged for further exploration. The results will trigger further detailed analysis of these sites by the NSW Department of Primary Industries, along with the Gunnedah, Clarence and Murray basins. Santos is also keen to have its depleted gas reserves in the Moomba Basin considered as a potential storage site. Dr Kruszelnicki, a NSW senate candidate for the Climate Change Coalition, held a media event last week in Sydney to show there was not enough space underground to store the emissions from coal-fired power stations. In what appears to be a first in the current election campaign, he has posted a correction on his party's website as quickly and publicly as possible admitting his original calculations and position were flawed. "I was wrong," Dr Kruszelnicki admitted to The Australian yesterday. "We're very happy to admit our mistake on that." Dr Kruszelnicki said he based his original, erroneous calculations on incorrect data found in the first edition of Tim Flannery's best-selling climate change book *The Weather Makers*, which has subsequently been corrected. He admitted he changed his position on underground storage of emissions from coal- and gas-fired power stations, saying it could work as an interim solution until cleaner energy sources could be developed. "We're stuck with the fact that we have still got to make electricity in the short term from carbon of some sort," he said. "Something is better than nothing, so sequestering carbon dioxide is better than just letting it go out. "I see it as a stop-gap short-term thing rather than a long-term solution because the more you store it away, the more the chance that it will escape. "It's an interim technology we should explore to buy us as much time as we can get."

However Dr Kruszelnicki has not yet decided to sell his V8 Monaro, saying he couldn't afford to after spending all his money switching his other car for a Toyota Prius and installing solar panels on the roof of his home. Dr Kruszelnicki's comments were welcomed last night by the head of the clean-coal research program in Australia. Co-operative Research Centre for carbon dioxide chief executive Peter Cook said he welcomed Dr Kruszelnicki's open-minded approach and offered to provide him with more information about clean-coal research. "Occasionally people can change their minds," Dr Cook said.

Blix backs N-power to combat warming

Former UN weapons inspector Hans Blix has given his support for nuclear power, urging Australia to continue exporting uranium to help combat global warming. Dr Blix, in Australia to receive the Sydney Peace Prize, told the SBS Dateline program yesterday nuclear was the best energy source for the environment. "It's not an opinion shared by everybody, but I think the world needs much more nuclear power than we have now," he said. "I'm not nuclear for being nuclear, I'm nuclear for environmental reasons. "It generates an enormous amount of electricity without adding to the greenhouse effect. In fact, environmentally it's the best of the energy sources that you have." Dr Blix's comments, ahead of the presentation of the peace prize by former prime minister Paul Keating tonight, coincided with the announcement of what was hailed as the nation's biggest carbon offset program. Carbon offset company CO2 Group has signed an agreement with Woodside to plant 20 million mallee trees in NSW and Western Australia in the 2008 and 2009 growing sessions to offset the CO2 produced by the giant gas company's \$12billion Pluto LNG project. The plantations will have an estimated carbon offset value of \$25million over 50 years, with most value being generated in the first two years. Woodside has the option of funding additional plantings between 2010 and 2012, which would lift the value of the offset program by a further \$75million. Woodside chief executive Don Voelte said that as part of the resource company's environmental investigation for the Pluto project on Western Australia's Burrup Peninsula, several options had been examined to handle the 1.7per cent CO2 contained in the gas. Mr Voelte said Pluto's CO2 emissions could be offset most efficiently by planting the trees.

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MEDIA RELEASE: Murrumbidgee Irrigation

No Secret Water Deals

In response to news stories run over last weekend particularly in Melbourne media. Murrumbidgee Irrigation refutes the claims that secret water deals were done between NSW rice growers and Sydney Hydro Limited in the 2005/06 season. "The media claim that there were secret water sales done between Snowy Hydro and NSW irrigators, particularly in the Murrumbidgee region are simply rubbish!" responded Chairman, Dick Thompson. "The initiative between Snowy Hydro and Murraybidgee irrigators was based on changes to the timing of the release of water. There was no water either sold or purchased and the contract to secure additional timely releases for both large and small irrigators in our region was made via a media release on the 12th September 2005. A cursory glance at the publicity available information on our website would reveal the media release entitled 'More advance water for irrigators. The September 2005 media release provides the background to the water advance initiative which played a major role in maintaining some production and underpinning value-adding of irrigated produce during the fourth successive season of substantially lower than average crop yield. The initiative provided additional water for a range of crops including rice and other produce so that local jobs could be maintained for the 2005/06 season with the hope of surviving for improved seasons ahead. "Comments from John Kelly and Max Talbot are both inaccurate and inflammatory said Mr. Thompson. "To say there is 'virtually zero' water left in Lake Eucumbene and Jindabyne Dam rather than 800 gegalitres had these initiatives not been put in place is completely wrong. In fact there is around 700 gegalitres in Snowy storages at the moment. Messer's Talbot and Kelly seem to think there is something wrong with people making commercial arrangements and that water should be stored with a 'never to be released' label. What they don't mention is the contribution of irrigation to our economy, communities and environment," continued Mr. Thompson. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics latest figure, the area of crops and pastures irrigated in 2004/05 was less than 1% of total agricultural land holdings yet irrigated agriculture represented around 28% of the gross value of agricultural production. This creates employment on farm and through associated manufacturing and processing industries and substantially contributes to the food put on every Australian's plate, every day. Mr. Thompson future said, "They also haven't talked about the contribution of irrigation to the employment. In the case of Murrayumbidgee Irrigation (MI), the recent redevelopment of our region's natural drainage site, Barren Box Storage and Wetland, has resulted in the annual return of 20,000 ML to the Snowy River and the return of 1,650 ha in the MI to its natural ephemeral wetland state. The project has been recognised as one of our countries most leading-edge and innovative water-savings initiatives, benefiting both the

environment and communities in the Snowy River and MIA regions.” It’s disappointing that Messer’s Talbot and Kelly did not see fit to mention these relevant issues regarding irrigation.

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They have obviously missed the last 10 years of water reform and apparently don’t understand today’s Snowy Hydro business of irrigation. In future they should get their facts right before taking their story to the media,” concluded Mr. Thompson.

9th

FarmOnLine

Easy being green; profiting from the carbon market

Farmers are becoming more resource managers and less primary producers. With markets for carbon, energy and even environmental stewardship opening up, significant benefits are being seen for farmers across the country. Director of The Climate Institute and western Victorian farmer, Mark Wootton, said farming had a very good story to tell in the carbon cycle. "Working with farming organisations and the Conservation Foundation we have calculated there is \$2.93 billion presently out there under various energy, carbon and environmental schemes and there are great opportunities out there for farmers to take advantage of the present global warming issue and be a part of the solution," Mr. Wootton said. Part of the figure is a \$300 million per year wind farm revenue, but Mr. Wootton said in the future it should also be farmers generating the energy themselves, not just taking lease payments from wind companies. Meanwhile, CarbonSMART is a Landcare initiative that acts as a carbon broker, linking businesses that want to minimise their emissions with farmers who wish to sequester or set aside carbon through vegetation. CarbonSmart project officer, Rob Youl, has calculated that in some circumstances farmers can be paid almost as much for managing the land per hectare as for producing a commodity. "Let's look at a high rainfall beef producer in a 1000-1200mm rainfall zone, making \$300 per hectare per year," he said. "With the right bush tender or stewardship program and being paid \$18 per tonne of carbon in vegetation every year, I reckon that farmer can earn up to \$240 per hectare per year from environmental projects." While the concept of receiving payments as a land manager as opposed to a farmer may not sit well with most farmers, finally being financially rewarded for good management of the land is something that probably will. In future, practices such as no-till or low-till and rotational grazing are likely to be recognised through carbon trading or environmental programs, however more direct or practical market based incentives already exist. Under CarbonSMART, Landcare accredited businesses that are already trying to minimise their carbon emissions buy carbon credits from Landcare, who pass the payments onto accredited farmers, thus acting as a carbon broker. SOURCE: Extract from full report in *Stock & Land*, Victoria, November 8 issue.

Election '07: Feds were involved with clearing bans

Prime Minister, John Howard, has admitted the Federal Government did play a role in banning land clearing, but won't comment on whether farmers should be compensated for this or be recognised for their contribution to Australia meeting its Kyoto targets. In a special interview with Rural Press last week, Mr. Howard exploded the long-held belief that State Governments were solely responsible for bans on land clearing by saying the bans came about by a "combination" of State and Federal action. Earlier this year, Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, implied on the 7.30 report that the only reason Australia was meeting its Kyoto targets was because of a ban put on land clearing by the Federal Government – a statement he later "clarified", insisting the States went it alone and banned land clearing. In the June interview on the ABC, Mr. Costello said "stopping land clearing was a good thing" and went further to say "this was all designed to stop land clearing, and we stopped land clearing, and it's helped us meet our Kyoto targets". While not wanting to comment on Mr. Costello's previous comments on the issue, Mr. Howard said "there were actions by both the Federal and State Governments" to stop land clearing. "There is Federal legislation and there were a lot of negotiations between the Federal Government and the Queensland Government," Mr. Howard said. "Most of the land clearing occurred in Queensland, and that did make a big contribution (to reducing emissions), but there was a combination of action by both Governments. "...there were financial payments made in relation to some of those things by the Federal Government but there was also legislative action taken by the Queensland Government." Mr. Howard said it was clear land clearing had made a contribution to Australia reducing its greenhouse emissions, and meeting Kyoto targets, but "it's not the only thing that's made a contribution", he added. "Our greenhouse challenge program, we've enlisted a lot of companies, and the greenhouse gas abatement measures introduced by the Government itself... there's quite a lot of things that we have done to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that may have made a contribution," Mr. Howard said. "As for recognition for farmers, we are proposing in the lead up to the introduction to the emissions trading system we'll be consulting the farm sector about its relationship. "Bearing in mind that we're not proposing to include emissions from the rural sector in that trading system initially which is seen by the rural sector as a sensible and beneficial thing to have done. "We'll be having discussions about the relationship of the farm sector to the emissions trading

system, but it's too early for me to say yes or no to that (compensation)." SOURCE: Extract from special report in this week's Rural Press agricultural publications.

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Turnbull and Garrett go head to head

The challenges for farming communities from climate change will be intense, said Environment Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, in his debate today with Labor's Peter Garrett. But Mr. Garrett said the Coalition's persistent skepticism about climate change was the biggest impediment facing Australians. While commentators agreed there was no clear winner in today's debate, the exchange between the two men slogging it out on one of this year's top two election issues clearly proved there is a difference between the two parties - on this topic, at least. What role Australia plays and exactly how it fits into a global effort to reduce emissions was centre stage at the debate. Mr. Turnbull said climate change was the biggest environmental and economic challenge the world faces, but argued a new global climate agreement on emissions was needed. He said Kyoto was "part of climate change history". Mr. Garrett said "a government of climate change skeptics can't deliver climate change solutions". Mr. Garrett dodged a question about the farm audit he had previously agreed would be conducted under Labor. "There's no doubt that the challenges for our farming communities are intense, particularly when you look at the likely predictions for drier and hotter periods, particularly in the south of the country, under the IPCC scenarios," Mr. Garrett said. "And I think there's a much greater awareness of the impacts of climate change on agricultural communities, and the likely impacts in the future, than there's ever been." But Mr. Turnbull said farmers need a plan like the \$10b Murray Darling one to help them adapt to climate change. "They don't need the Peter Garrett line drawn down the middle of the country, or the middle of NSW, and said, right, everybody to the west, clear out to the coast," Mr. Turnbull said. "What they need is support. They need support. They need technology. They need leadership." Mr. Turnbull said he heard nothing from Mr. Garrett on water or the Murray Darling Basin for the entire debate. SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

Water prices ease

Recent rainfall in key areas of the Murray system has eased the price of temporary water. According to a newsletter from water brokers, Waterfind, late last week temporary water was still trading at up to \$1200 a megalitre - a record high. Most recently this same water has been trading at \$1070 per ML, a 10 per cent decrease and the first price drop of temporary water since the irrigation season began in July. The recent rains are the highest seen for the Murray system since May 2007. Some areas such as Albury received 63mm and Mildura as little as 4.8mm. Waterfind said the rain - while welcome - still provides little respite for irrigators, especially for those with permanent plantings who are largely based in Western Victoria and South Australia's Riverland. For these growers buying water from the temporary market at record high prices has been their only option to ensure their vineyards and orchards survive. SOURCE: Waterfind.com.au and FarmOnline.

The Australian

No gaffes in climate debate

Troubled election performers Malcolm Turnbull and Peter Garrett survived their debate today without either making an obvious gaffe. Mr. Turnbull, the Environment Minister, faced off against Mr. Garrett, his Labor counterpart, at the National Press Club today. Mr. Turnbull emphasised the need to address climate change without harming the economy, while Mr. Garrett touted an urgency to act, in what was a spirited debate. Mr. Turnbull, speaking at the opening of a debate, said the coalition had a vision for a sustainable future for Australia. "(It would) be one in which the future of our children is assured, it is a future which will see us defeat the challenge of climate change," he said. "It is a future which would see us drought-proof Australia ... and we will achieve an effective global response to the global problem of climate change." While acknowledging the vision would be hard to achieve, Mr. Turnbull said it would be achievable under the coalition. Both Mr. Turnbull and Mr. Garrett had been under recent intense political pressure -- Mr. Turnbull over his approval of Gunn's pulp mill in Tasmania, and Mr. Garrett over an apparent backflip over the inclusion of India and China in the second Kyoto agreement. But there was no obvious gaffes by either -- and a panel of commentators after the debate thought both would serve Australia well as environment ministers. Mr. Garrett promised again that if elected, Labor would immediately sign the first Kyoto agreement and would take its place as a full signatory in climate change negotiations in Bali due late this year. Mr. Turnbull warned that Labor's plans on climate change had the potential to be a big economic risk to Australia. Mr. Turnbull said Australia could be left out if it signed up to a pact without ensuring developing nations like China and India did the same, and by committing to major cuts in emissions without taking account of what other nations were doing. He said Labor was committing to a 60 per cent cut in emissions by 2050 regardless of what the rest of the world does. Mr. Garrett said the way Australia deals with climate change will determine the country's way of life for many years to come. "This is not just an environmental issue, it's about health, it's about

the economy, it's about harnessing the business opportunities to drive climate change solutions," he said. Mr Garrett said the choice between the parties on the environment and climate change was stark.

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"We can be driven by the urgency of the science which demands that we act now to reduce emissions, or by the economics which says action is affordable, the longer we wait the more it will cost," he said. "Or we can be frustrated and hampered by the scepticism shown by the Howard government." Mr Garrett said the Howard government had been "missing in action" for 11 years when it comes to the environment. "I have to say with conviction Kevin Rudd and Labor will provide the climate change leadership Australians are crying out for," he said. Mr Garrett said he did not regret Labor's change of tack last week on the Kyoto Protocol, despite a poll today which showed 75 per cent of voters in marginal electorates want Australia to sign up to post-2012 agreement without waiting for developing countries to commit to carbon-emissions reduction targets. "The position has not changed. I don't regret anything at all," the Labor frontbencher said. Mr Turnbull said a Coalition government would take legal action against Japanese whaling if it thought it would be successful. But he said that failure would only provide further ammunition to the Japanese whalers to continue their so-called scientific whaling. His remark followed an accusation by Mr Garrett that the government had been sitting on its hands over the issue and that court action had to be contemplated.

'Desperate' MPs dumping power plan

Kevin Rudd yesterday brandished a newsletter by Victorian Liberal MP for La Trobe Jason Wood declaring he is opposed to nuclear energy as evidence that the Liberal Party was walking "both sides of the street" on the nuclear issue. In his newsletter Mr Wood says: "While many countries around the world use nuclear energy without incident, my greatest concern remains waste disposal. Until safer methods of waste disposal are developed, it will not have my support." The Opposition Leader said it showed that Liberal MPs were so desperate on this issue they were willing to break ranks with John Howard. "Here we have, on the eve of an election, the Liberal Party once again walking both sides of the street," he said. "Mr Howard is saying we are going to have nuclear reactors right around the country, and Liberal members of parliament (are) trying to pretend a couple of weeks before the election that we're not going to have nuclear reactors in Australia," he said. Mr Wood told The Australian he felt comforted by the Prime Minister's commitment to have local plebiscites on the issue. But Mr Rudd said Liberal MPs were becoming agitated on the nuclear issue because it was proving "radioactive" with voters.

Turnbull attacks 'soft touch'

A Rudd Labor government will be seen as "a soft touch" on climate change by other countries, which will try to take advantage of it by luring away Australian industries. In his concluding remarks at yesterday's National Press Club debate with Opposition environment spokesman Peter Garrett, Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull warned the next round of climate change negotiations was "not for the faint-hearted". While Mr. Garrett attacked the Government's lack of conviction on climate change as its weakness at future negotiations, Mr. Turnbull questioned his rival's ability to demonstrate the toughness needed to forge a new global deal after the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. Last week, Mr. Garrett backtracked on a commitment to sign a new global agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions even without securing commitments from key developing nations such as China and India. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change meets next month in Bali to try to establish a roadmap for future negotiations to deliver a new international climate change agreement, to be completed by 2009 at the earliest. "Every country that attends, every big economy that attends, goes there with the intention of winning an advantage for itself, wanting to secure an edge on others," Mr. Turnbull said. "And there will be countries that will be looking to take industries from Australia." Mr. Turnbull said if Australia was represented by Mr. Garrett, then other countries would know he did not believe that rival economies such as China and India should be obliged to cut their emissions. "They will see a Labor government as a soft touch, somebody to take advantage of, to our great disadvantage," he said. "This negotiation is not for the soft; it's not for the faint-hearted. It has to be conducted realistically. "It has to be conducted in a tough fashion, defending Australia, ensuring we get the result we need for the world, and protecting the industries and the economy upon which we depend." Earlier, Mr. Garrett acknowledged the negotiations would be complex and tortuous, but said Australia would be negotiating from a position of disadvantage if it refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. "How can you maintain a position of wanting to drive a climate change negotiation if you're not willing to sit in the actual negotiating room and drive the agreement forward?" he asked. "Persistent skepticism is the biggest obstacle to any genuine action in any field of endeavour. And a government of climate change skeptics can't deliver climate change solutions." Mr. Garrett, who greeted his opposite number with a bone-crushing handshake, defended his move from conservationist and rock star to politician, saying he had not betrayed his beliefs. And the Labor frontbencher found an ally in Mr. Turnbull, who said compromise "was part of the business of getting things done".

Water outlook worsening despite rains

Good rainfall across eastern Australia over the past week has had little effect on dam levels in capital cities.

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Melbourne's dams rose from 39.8 per cent full last week to 40.4 per cent yesterday, but the shortage of water is still worse than at any time since the beginning of 1997. Sydney's water storages rose 0.4 percentage points to 57.4 per cent, while southeast Queensland's water storages are still very low, on 20.4 per cent. National Climate Centre senior climatologist Neil Plummer said: "What we are seeing is what looks like a trend towards a weakish La Nina event, and we would expect to see more rainfall in the areas that it has fallen." Much of eastern and central northern Australia has been doused with 50mm of rain over the past week. "There have been some reasonable falls in the Murray-Darling Basin, but as we saw in winter, most of the falls are coming either south or east of the Murray-Darling Basin," Mr Plummer said. Murray-Darling Basin Commission chief executive Wendy Craik said the outlook for the Murray River was worse than it was at this time last year. She said rainfall over what are traditionally the wettest months - July to October - was very low, and storage levels were at record lows. Dr Craik said there was a greater than 75 per cent chance that the amount of water available in July at the beginning of the next water season would be less than it was this year. "It is frightening," she said, describing inflows this year as "incredibly low". "We haven't broken out of very low inflows, and that is compounded now by our record low storage - it is about 21 per cent of capacity." This time last year, MBDC storages were at 30 per cent, holding 2820GL (gigalitres or billion litres). Last week they held 2055GL. Water hydrology professor at Charles Sturt University Shahbaz Khan said the soil through the Murray-Darling Basin was "phenomenally dry". He estimated that it would take about 1000mm of rain to replenish the soil moisture deficit, before there was runoff. In the Murrumbidgee, Professor Khan estimated, the deficit was almost 1400mm. "We need a lot more, and more persistent, rainfall before we will see a real change in inflows to dams," he said. Dr Craik said the prognosis for the Murray-Darling Basin was for higher-than-average temperatures, which would result in higher evaporation and less inflow. Wenju Cai from the CSIRO has estimated that every rise in temperature of 1C results in 3400GL being evaporated from the basin. According to the Bureau of Meteorology, temperatures in the basin since November 2001 have surpassed previous records by considerable margins. Dr Craik said contingency planning was under way for next season, to ensure Adelaide and river towns had water. "That is the focus at the moment. If you did have a worst-case scenario, what would you do, and what are the alternatives?"

10th

South Australia's Storages as at 10th November 2007

MDBC Storages	Full Supply Levels (m AHD)	Full Supply Volume (Gegs)	Current Storage (m AHD)	Current Storage (Gegs)	Current Storage (%)	Dead Storage (Gegs)	MDBC Active (Gegs)	Change in Storage for the week (Gegs)
Dartmouth Reservoir	486.00	3906	412.27	711	18%	80	631	+12
Hume Reservoir	192.00	3038	176.89	821	27%	30	791	-13
Lake Victoria	27.00	677	24.92	440	65%	100	340	-17
Menindee Lakes	-----	1731*	----	40	2%	(--)#	0	+0
TOTAL		9352		2021	22%	--	1762	-18

* Menindee surcharge capacity 2050GL

% of Total Active MDBC Storage = 21%

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

Adelaide Advertiser

CLIMATE CHANGE: Doctors urge action

A doctor's group is calling on voters to consider climate change on election day because of the health threat it poses.

Australia told to brace for cyclone season

Australia should brace itself for the worst tropical cyclone season since 1998/1999, a leading catastrophe forecaster warned today. Either five or six tropical storms will hit Australia this season, which lasts from November 1 to April 30, according to a prediction by UK-based Tropical Storm Risk (TSR). The Australia region, which includes nearby islands in the southwest Pacific, is likely to see 13 tropical storms, seven of which will develop into severe tropical cyclones, TSR predicted. TSR is a consortium of weather experts at University College London and the UK's Meteorological Office, backed by insurer Royal & Sun Alliance, reinsurance broker Benfield Group and claims adjuster Crawford & Company. The reason for the higher cyclone activity is La Nina conditions in the tropical Pacific Ocean, pushing sea surface temperatures there to their coldest since 1999, which helps create above-normal tropical storm activity, TSR said. This season will not be as bad as 1998/1999, said TSR, when the region saw 16 tropical storms, 10 of which developed into severe tropical cyclones. Tropical storms can wreak havoc. Tropical

Cyclone Larry, which battered northern Queensland in March 2006, left 7000 homeless and 50,000 homes without power. TSR said it has correctly predicted severe tropical cyclone activity for the past seasons.

NEWS.com.au

UN chief calls for Antarctic action

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With prehistoric Antarctic ice sheets melting beneath his feet, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon called for urgent political action to tackle global warming. Antarctica has warmed faster than anywhere else on Earth in the last 50 years, making it a fitting destination for Ban, who has made climate change a priority since he took office earlier this year. "I need a political answer. This is an emergency and for emergency situations we need emergency action," he said during yesterday's visit to three scientific bases on the barren continent, where temperatures are their highest in about 1800 years. Antarctica's ice sheets are nearly 2.5km thick on average - five times the height of the Taipei 101 tower, the world's tallest building. But scientists say they are already showing signs of climate change. Satellite images show the West Antarctic ice sheet is thinning and may even collapse in the future, causing sea levels to rise. Amid occasional flurries of snow, Ban flew over melting ice fields in a light plane, where vast chunks of ice the size of six-storey buildings could be seen floating off the coast after breaking away from ice shelves. "All we've seen has been very impressive and beautiful, extraordinarily beautiful," he told reporters. "But at the same time it's disturbing. We've seen ... the melting of glaciers." It was the first visit by a UN chief to Antarctica. Ban is preparing for a UN climate change conference in Bali, Indonesia, in December, which is expected to kick off talks on a new accord to curb carbon emissions after the Kyoto Protocol expires in 2012. Ban has focused strongly on the environment and held a climate change summit at the United Nations on the eve of the annual General Assembly gathering of world leaders. He is expected to continue his South American tour at Chilean national park Torres del Paine, where Andean glaciers are also being affected by global warming. He will then visit Brazil, a leading force in developing biofuels from crops as an alternative to fossil fuels. Fears about climate change have fuelled a boom in biofuels. Despite the controversy of diverting food crops into fuel production, Ban has said alternative energy sources are vital to addressing climate change. Antarctica - a continent with only about 80,000 temporary residents - is 25 per cent bigger than Europe and its ice sheets hold some 90 per cent of the fresh water on the Earth's surface.

It's easy being green

These days it's easy being green. Consumers who want to do something to help the environment have many options, such as solar power or water, environmentally-friendly light bulbs, rainwater tanks, or even purchasing some of their home electricity from renewable energy sources. Investors and superannuation fund members also have a fast-growing list of options to ensure their money helps make the world a better place, or at least does not damage its fragile environment even further. Ethical investments, also known as socially responsible investments, are booming in popularity. The good news for investors is that returns have been as good or better than those provided by traditional investments. Research by the Responsible Investment Association Australasia shows total funds under management in the responsible investment sector grew 43 per cent last financial year, from \$12 billion to \$17.1 billion. The Responsible Investment 2007 report said mainstream fund managers were also integrating environmental, social and governance issues into their financial analysis and stock selection. So what is responsible investment and how does it work? "Responsible investment is an umbrella term to describe an investment process that takes environmental, social, ethical or governance considerations into account," the RIAA said. Some funds have negative screening processes, meaning they avoid putting money in companies involved in areas such as tobacco, armaments, alcohol, uranium, gambling or animal testing. Other funds have a greater focus on industries that have a positive effect on society or the environment, such as water and waste management, renewable energy, mass transport, health care, sustainable agriculture or education. Not all funds are created equal. South Australia's biggest superannuation fund Statewide said definitions could differ between funds and investment managers. "As a guide, investors should look for investment managers or super funds that have signed the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment," Statewide chief executive Frances Magill said. "By becoming a signatory, organisations agree to consider social, ethical and sustainable practices when making their investment decisions." An example of different views is whether uranium mining is included or excluded from an SRI fund. Historically seen as bad because of its use in nuclear weapons, uranium is also viewed by many as a cleaner energy source than raw materials such as coal. It has been estimated that half the ethical funds in Australia hold investments with uranium interests. These funds are potentially delivering higher returns through their exposure to mining giant BHP Billiton, which owns South Australia's Olympic Dam copper and uranium mine and has had share price gains of about 100 per cent since January. JP Morgan vice-president David Jones-Prichard said "the jury's still out" on whether uranium miners should be included in ethical funds. However, other forms of alternative energy are a

walk-up start, he said. "Looking globally, alternative energy has done well relative to benchmarks. Alternative energy has been the flavour of the year. A lot of people have woken up to what's going on in the world." He said the outlook for the sector was positive. "Ethical investment has been around for a long, long time but it's really taken off in the last two or three years, and I think we are going to see more money flowing into ethical funds," Mr Jones-Prichard said.

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"If you ask yourself, 'Am I going to give up performance by investing ethically?', I think the answer could be 'No' and that's the key question." Statewide's Frances Magill also sees a bright outlook for socially responsible investing. "Already we're seeing banks and mining companies promoting their strong focus on sustainable investment practices as they recognise that sustainability holds the key to doing business in the future," she said. "Studies have shown that companies engaging in sustainable practices are more likely to perform better over the long-term, and this will create benefits for shareholders." Finding an ethical investment fund is easy. Investment companies offering socially responsible investment (SRI) funds include AMP, BT Financial Group, Hunter Hall and Perpetual. By searching under "ethical" or "SRI" on the Morningstar.com.au website, people can compare ethical funds' performance and fees. It can be tricky in superannuation. While Australian Super, the nation's biggest industry super fund, has SRI options, not all super funds do.

11th

ADELAIDE.now.com

Xenophon running dry on Murray

Nick Xenophon has been accused of jumping on a "save the Murray bandwagon" for the federal election. Mr Xenophon has nominated the River Murray water flow as one of the key issues he hopes will propel him into the Senate. But Hansard records show he made only three speeches about the Murray in the 10 years he served in the SA Parliament – usually only a few paragraphs long. Mr Xenophon – who was elected 18 months ago for an eight-year term in the Upper House – is running as an independent candidate for a Senate seat. SA Water Minister Karlene Maywald said Mr Xenophon had never approached her to discuss the crisis or any other water issues while a member of the Legislative Council. "We welcome anyone who raises this issue at a national level, but I had no conversations with Nick Xenophon about water while he was a State MP," Ms Maywald said. Mr Xenophon said water was a "big issue that was critical to South Australia's future". "I have always been concerned about the River Murray but I had other things on my plate," he said. "And it is a national issue which I will be better placed to pursue in the Federal Parliament." The Greens welcomed Mr Xenophon's interest in water issues, but said his environmental track record paled in comparison to their own. "Nick Xenophon is not known for paying attention to the River Murray issue – he's known as the anti-pokies MP," SA Greens Senate candidate Sarah Hanson-Young said. "But if he wants to jump on board and support our policy for the river, that's fine. But he would be a lone voice in Parliament while the Greens may well hold the balance of power in the Senate and get things done." One Nation SA candidate Mark Aldridge said Mr Xenophon put showmanship before substance. "The water issue is an easy one to jump on given the drought but Nick Xenophon has no credibility given his record," he said. "My opinion of Nick Xenophon is he will say whatever to get the headlines but he doesn't follow through." Mr Xenophon defended his credibility. "This criticism is silly given the River Murray crisis requires a united approach and to suggest I jumped on the bandwagon is unfair," he said. "After I announced I was running for Federal Parliament, people from the Riverland approached me for help and I won't turn my back on them. People will have to judge whether I will work my guts out to do the right thing on this issue given my record on pokies, victims of crime and asbestos."

Thousands march for climate

Thousands of people have marched through Australia's streets for the second annual Walk Against Warming, calling for greater action on climate change and renewable energy targets. In Sydney, organisers said crowd marshals counted more than 28,000 people in the city's Domain and on a round-trip walk through the city. Nature Conservation Council's Cate Faehrmann said early estimates suggested as many as 150,000 people had marched in similar protests across the country.

Protests 'sends clear message'

"It's clear that there is a lot of support out there. Much more needs to be done and that's what the community said today on climate change," she said. "It's a big message that's being sent to the next government to get more serious on climate change and give us more than what we've seen today." Ms Faehrmann called on the next elected government for a short-term target to reduce greenhouse pollution by at least 30 per cent by 2020.

'Diplomacy the solution'

Asked whether, in light of today's rallies, the Government would further reduce green house gas emissions, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer today said diplomacy was the solution to an international issue. "The key to success in

terms of climate change is diplomacy," he said in the Adelaide Hills town of Stirling. Mr Downer said it was important the international community negotiate "a serious convention which will stabilise and reduce global green house gas emissions" over the next couple of years, starting at the meeting of the United Nations' framework convention on climate change in Bali next month.

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"We should negotiate a proper and a serious convention which will stabilise and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and it's not going to work and not going to be meaningful if developing countries and the US aren't prepared to participate," he said.

Garrett booted at march

Earlier during the protest in Sydney, federal Labor environment spokesman Peter Garrett was met with boos but Ms Faehrmann said the crowd was merely frustrated by the lack of progress on climate change. "It's action in the next few years that counts. That's why people are getting frustrated, they have seen delays, they have seen decisions which will increase our greenhouse emissions," she said. The boisterous crowd included many young children and the odd dog. Some marchers were dressed for the occasion as pollution emitting stacks and others in dog costumes. Ms Faehrmann said she was disappointed that federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull had not turned up despite being invited.

In Adelaide, thousands also took to the streets.

Among those marching down the city's King William Street from Victoria Square to Elder Park were Greens Senate candidate for SA Sarah Hanson-Young. "The huge momentum of today's Walk Against Warming rallies across the country is an indication of the concern in the community for the future of our planet and future generations," she said in a statement. Organisers had predicted some 25,000 people would participate in the Adelaide event and the number came close to that, said Greens spokeswoman Gemma Clark. - *With AAP*

Storm weather warning issued for Queensland

Central Western Queensland communities have been warned of the possibility of flash flooding as thunderstorms sweep across the area. The Bureau of Meteorology this afternoon issued a severe storm warning for the areas of Stonehenge, Hughenden, Torrens Creek, Aramac and Muttaborra. It said severe thunderstorms were likely to produce damaging winds, very heavy rainfall and flash flooding. It said Charleville, further south, had reported 39mm in 30 minutes and 55mm in 45 minutes earlier today. Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ) were warning people in those communities to secure outdoors items, seek shelter and avoid any floodwaters. An EMQ spokesman said the SES had been called to help sandbag a shop threatened by flooding in Charleville.

12th

FarmOnLine

Drought forces downscaling at SunRice

SunRice will temporarily downscale its Australian paddy handling and rice milling operations, following the industry's fifth year of drought. The window for planting has effectively closed with the latest grower surveys predicting a 2008 rice crop of around 15,000 tonnes - just over 1pc of normal production and the lowest output since 1928. As a result SunRice is placing its Deniliquin and Coleambally mills on a care and maintenance program, with no processing from 21 December 2007. SunRice chief executive, Gary Helou, says the Paddy Operations will also be significantly reduced progressively through until April 2008. "Furthermore, we have decided to reduce shift arrangements at Leeton mill, from three to two shifts, effective 30 April 2008," Mr. Helou said. "Our priority now is to keep as many people as possible in the business and to ensure we do not lose any permanent industry infrastructure. "Both are critical to ensuring the company is in a strong position to respond quickly when the drought breaks." The downscaling will result in approximately 180 redundancies across SunRice operations. SunRice will continue to employ 670 people across Australia in its rice milling, rice foods processing and other businesses, including 400 people in the Riverina region of NSW. "The decision was difficult as it impacts SunRice people who have demonstrated great skill and commitment to the company," Mr. Helou said. "Regrettably, the downscaling was the only responsible way forward in the face of an unrelenting drought." Mr. Helou said all affected employees would receive their full entitlements and severance payments. SOURCE: National rural news from Rural Press and *FarmOnline*.

Farmers need emissions trading, says AgForce

Rural lobby group AgForce is demanding the major political parties clarify how agriculture will be dealt with under a national emissions trading framework rather than just "opportunistically blowing the climate change trumpet". There was a distinct lack of detail in yesterday's debate between Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Labor's Peter Garrett on how agriculture would be treated under their respective policies. But AgForce president Peter Kenny says this isn't good enough. He says that Australia is due to participate in meetings in Bali to

renegotiate the Kyoto Protocol just two weeks after the election, meaning the major parties must have a plan for dealing with offsets and whether agriculture will be hit with constraints or taxes. "It is nonsense for major parties to say that they will give us more details next year when Kyoto is actually being negotiated this year," Mr. Kenny said.

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Queensland landholders contributed more than \$2 billion in offsets to enable Australia to meet its emission reduction targets under Kyoto, but this contribution is yet to be properly recognised by the Federal Government or the Opposition and neither is engaging with industry in designing a solution, he said. "The Bali conference is likely to have a greater impact on Australian agriculture than any trade negotiations, yet both the ALP and the Coalition parties are silent about plans for agriculture and how they will recognise the impact of existing controls on Queensland producers," Mr. Kenny said. "Queensland landholders were forced to lock up land. "In helping Australia meet its targets, landholders were fleeced of their opportunity to develop that land and are still locked out of carbon trading opportunities despite sitting on a known \$2 billion carbon resource. "Both sides of politics must declare their stance on this issue so that Queensland producers can take that into consideration when they cast their vote. "We need to know what policy position Australia will take to the international negotiations and be reassured that we will not be done over again."

NAB says poor winter crop means no farm recovery

The outlook for farm production has deteriorated, as minimal rain over the critical September and October period has cut harvest prospects for the second consecutive season. According to the National Australia Bank's agribusiness outlook the total winter crop - including wheat, barley and canola - is expected to be just 4.5 million tonnes above last year's poor outcome. The crop is set to be 15mt below the five-year average. The NAB reports that livestock producers also continue to be impacted by the dry conditions, with limited pasture growth over the critical spring period forcing producers to off-load stock. And the outlook for irrigated production remains very poor, with inflows over the past few months receding towards the record low levels of 2006. With August through to October typically the best months for inflows, the prospect of a substantial improvement in allocations this season is becoming increasingly unlikely. The worsening drought conditions has led NAB to again revise its base case forecasts for farm production down by 5pc in 2007/08. This compares to early season estimates of a 15pc recovery in output. SOURCE: NAB and *FarmOnline*.

Adelaide.now.com

Wetlands worth billions

Wetlands along the River Murray are being disconnected from the river to reduce evaporation, but the move ignores their water purification value. University of Adelaide research shows every hectare of permanent natural wetland in the Murray-Darling Basin generates more than \$7000 worth of water purification services. Temporary wetlands, typically connected to the river for about five months a year, are worth \$3000 a hectare per year. Adelaide University's Dr Carmel Schmidt says wetlands are often referred to as "the kidneys of our river systems" because they purify water by trapping sediments and removing impurities. "When natural wetlands are destroyed, the water filtration service they provide is also destroyed," she said. "But the filtration service provided by the wetlands is worth more per hectare than many farming enterprises." Dr Schmidt said the main implication of her research was that wetlands must receive enough water to maintain their ability to filter water. "We need to ensure that they will survive the drought and, unless they get water, they won't," she said. SA has 69 nationally important wetlands listed in the Environment Australia directory, with a total area of 4.2 million hectares. At \$3000 to \$7000 a hectare, these wetlands would provide water purification services worth \$12-\$29 billion. "This service is under threat," Dr Schmidt said. Dr Paul Sinclair from the Australian Conservation Foundation said the research provided another compelling reason to provide water for the environment within the next term of government. If permanent wetlands are allowed to dry out they can become stinking, poisonous wasteland that would cost millions to resuscitate, he said. The State Government has already disconnected more than 30 wetlands from the River Murray for a period of 12 months, aiming to save about 36 gigalitres of water that would otherwise be lost through evaporation.

A truck, a road, 5m litres of water

Road-building that use big volumes of water have been criticised as a Port Lincoln resident accused developers of wasting mains water. North Shields resident Leon Murray estimated that five million litres of mains water had been used over eight weeks during construction of the 5km road. He said two 12,000-litre trucks operated up to six days a week and filled up with mains water five times a day. "If they can come up with figures that there's no other way to get water, then I think it could be taken that they have to have something, but I can't see that there's not some other alternative," he said. "I believe it's a waste." The Port Lincoln council used wastewater for its roadwork, Mr

Murray said. Point Boston Peninsula is a 1000-home estate 12km north of Port Lincoln. It aims to draw 90 per cent of its household water needs from rainwater, wastewater and stormwater facilities on site. Developer John Culshaw said SA Water had granted the estate an annual allocation of 30 megalitres, or 30 million litres, which was being used during construction. He said salt water was not suitable to make the road but recycled wastewater use had not been investigated.

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He was unsure exactly how much water had been used to make the road but said it was not significant. "The small amount of water used is nowhere near the 30-megalitre allocation, it is a very minor amount," he said. "The small amount of water used on road construction to deliver best practice is well and truly offset by the incredible water savings in this project. "We believe we are breaking a lot of ground in relation to water reuse with this estate and we are trying to show how to recycle, harvest and use other water." Each house will have at least one 22,000-litre rainwater tank on site and a wastewater treatment facility would provide irrigation water. Stormwater would also be collected from streets and used throughout the development. An SA Water spokesman said it had approved use of water from the development's allocation to be used during construction. The road will be completed by next month.

Thousands fight climate change

Thousands of South Australians took to the streets of Adelaide today to participate in the national Walk Against Warming rallies. Among those marching down the city's King William Street from Victoria Square to Elder Park were Greens Senate candidate for SA Sarah Hanson-Young. "The huge momentum of today's Walk Against Warming rallies across the country is an indication of the concern in the community for the future of our planet and future generations," she said in a statement. Australians in more than 50 cities and towns across the country took to the streets for the Walk Against Warming. The aim of the rallies was to draw attention to the issues of climate change during the election campaign and to pressure political parties to take action over global warming. Organisers had predicted some 25,000 people would participate in the Adelaide event and the number came close to that, said Greens spokeswoman Gemma Clark. Asked by journalists whether, in light of today's rallies, the government would further reduce green house gas emissions, Foreign Minister Alexander Downer today said diplomacy was the solution to an international issue. "The key to success in terms of climate change is diplomacy," he said in the Adelaide Hills town of Stirling. Mr Downer said it was important the international community negotiate "a serious convention which will stabilise and reduce global green house gas emissions" over the next couple of years, starting at the meeting of the United Nations' framework convention on climate change in Bali next month. "We should negotiate a proper and a serious convention which will stabilise and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and it's not going to work and not going to be meaningful if developing countries and the US aren't prepared to participate," he said. AAP njl/jt/cdh

The Australian

Coalition's aquifer plan springs a leak

An uncosted Coalition pledge to support a plan to harvest stormwater from Adelaide airport was undermined yesterday when the airport's owner revealed there had been no discussions with the Howard Government about the proposal. Foreign Minister Alexander Downer described the plan to capture storm runoff and store it in aquifers underneath the airport as "visionary". He declared the Coalition believed the scheme to be "feasible, we think it can be done at a total cost of \$30 to \$40 million". He talked up the Coalition's commitment to the project, saying: "It is incumbent on all governments to work on imaginative and innovative ideas to improve water security in this state." But Adelaide Airport Ltd later described the water capture and storage plan as being in its early days. "Adelaide Airport Ltd hasn't had any contact at all with the federal Government and no discussions," a spokesman said. Mr Downer's office later said there had been consultations "with a range of people". Adelaide Airport Ltd commissioned studies into the plan's feasibility after a similar project was developed by Salisbury City Council at Parafield airport in Adelaide's north, according to Salisbury's director of city projects Colin Pitman. He believed the recycling project could capture up to a third of the annual runoff from the Adelaide metropolitan area. The plan would have more than 50 gigalitres of storm runoff stored in aquifers under the airport and provide up to 30GL back to the city. Its proponents say that could be done at a fraction of the cost of a \$1.4 billion desalination plant now under consideration. Mr Pitman said yesterday that 52GL of stormwater ran through or around Adelaide airport each year. "As a first step we could capture 15 to 20GL of that water eventually stepping up to 30GL stored in aquifers under the airport." Mr Pitman said the combined water supplies from both airport aquifers could replace almost all of the water Adelaide currently draws from the Murray River. "It will be a tremendous boost to water security in South Australia," Mr Downer said. "I think Adelaide faces a major water-security problem. We've got to make better use of water runoff into the sea from the Metropolitan area. "Premier Rann tells us climate change is a terrible problem. He's been in office for over five years and they've done zero on the issue of water security."

The Premier's office yesterday questioned what research Mr. Downer and the Coalition had done on the airport aquifer project. A spokeswoman for the Premier said South Australia was a leader in water recycling measures. "Approved recycling projects when completed will mean that nearly 45 per cent of our waste water will be recycled - charging well ahead of the national average of 9 per cent," she said. "We have legislated to better manage our storm water in partnership with local government."

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UN chief visits Antarctica

King George Island, Antarctica: UN chief Ban Ki-moon flew to Antarctica on Friday on a fact-finding mission for climate change, becoming the first UN leader to make an official visit to the frozen continent. The Secretary-General, who has made climate change a priority issue during his term in office, was briefed by scientists at Chile's President Eduardo Frei Air Force base before visiting the Collins Glaciers and the Sejong Research Centre. Mr Ban was taken to the base by a C-130 transport plane of the Chilean air force to get a first-hand look at how global warming is affecting glaciers on the frozen continent. "This trip, you may call it an eco-trip, but I'm not here as a tourist," he told reporters as he stood on the landing strip. "I'm here as a messenger of all the warnings on climate change. I'm here to observe the impact of the global warming phenomena, to see for myself and to learn all I can about what's happening in Antarctica and, actually, around the world." Mr Ban called the impact of climate change "an emergency" and said: "If the international community does something now, we will be able to prevent a further progress of the global warming." During the briefing, the scientists told Mr Ban of melting glaciers in Antarctica and at the southern end of the Andes that they attributed to climate change. The examples included the fate of an icecap known as the Larsen platform that melted away in just 20 days, despite its size of 400sqkm, and Hannah Point Glacier, which receded by 120m over several years. Yesterday, Mr Ban was due to fly into tropical Brazil to further push his campaign for world action on climate change. He will visit Ribeirao Preto, in southeastern Brazil, to examine the country's pioneering efforts to use alcohol from sugarcane in cars to limit greenhouse gases and reduce the reliance on fossil fuels. Mr Ban will also visit Brazil's northern Amazon jungle to see the effects of deforestation in an area often called "the lungs of the planet". Mr Ban, who has declared his efforts to focus global attention on fighting climate change "one of my main priorities as secretary general", is preparing to host a conference on the issue in Indonesia in December. That forum is aimed at starting negotiations on a successor to the Kyoto treaty, which expires in 2012. Last week, Mr Ban addressed the Ibero-American Summit in Santiago, the Chilean capital, where he told the audience that the UN's work was "intimately linked" with the need to promote social cohesion worldwide. AFP Garrett heckled over lack of action

Garrett heckled over lack of action

Labor environment spokesman Peter Garrett was heckled by conservationists yesterday as he took part in the Sydney leg of climate-change demonstrations that attracted about 100,000 people nationally. With federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull a no-show, Mr Garrett bore the brunt of ill-feeling about the major parties' climate-change policies when he spoke in Sydney. Elements of the Walk Against Warming crowd booed or turned their backs on Mr Garrett, whom many environmentalists accuse of betraying his principles by joining Labor's front bench. Mr Garrett brushed off the reception, saying he was glad to have taken part. Nature Conservation Council NSW executive director Cate Faehrmann said the crowd was merely frustrated by the lack of progress on climate change. "It's action in the next few years that counts," she said. "That's why people are getting frustrated. They have seen delays, they have seen decisions which will increase our greenhouse emissions." Ms Faehrmann said she was disappointed Mr Turnbull had not taken part, despite being invited. He cited Remembrance Day commitments. Australian Greens leader Bob Brown, who also addressed the Sydney crowd, said the turnout proved the environment was a top priority ahead of the election. "This is a vote-changing issue ... this is an issue which tops the economy," Senator Brown said. "I think there's a lot of people who want to change more than the climate. They're looking at changing the Government (because) ... it's failed to tackle this issue." The second annual Walk Against Warming was held in about 60 cities and towns, with an estimated 30,000 marching in Melbourne. In Brisbane, a crowd of more than 2500 walked from Queens Park in Brisbane's CBD to Musgrave Park at West End, blowing whistles and chanting slogans along the way. Queensland Conservation Council co-ordinator and organiser Toby Hutcheon said neither political party had pledged enough so far to tackle the enormous problem of climate change. "We've got very little, obviously, from the Howard Government and whilst there's been some good steps from the ALP signing Kyoto, it's really about what are we going to do in our generation," he said. Thousands marched in Adelaide, too, but Foreign Minister Alexander Downer was not among them. "The key to success in terms of climate change is diplomacy," Mr Downer said in the Adelaide Hills town of Stirling. "We should negotiate a proper and a serious convention which will stabilise and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and it's not going to work and not going to be meaningful if developing countries and the US aren't prepared to participate."

AAP

Simple carbon tax call

The next federal government has been called on to reconsider the option of imposing a simple revenue-neutral carbon tax, rather than creating a complex emissions trading scheme. Centre for Independent Studies researcher John Humphreys argues a carbon tax would allow tax reform and drive a faster transition to cutting greenhouse emissions with less impact on the economy than an emissions trading scheme.

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Mr Humphreys said a key condition of a carbon tax was that it be revenue neutral, with the revenue used to cut other taxes so that households could be fully compensated for increased energy bills. He said a \$30 per tonne carbon tax would generate enough revenue to increase the income-tax free threshold to \$10,000 and cut the top marginal tax rate to 30 per cent. This would create the incentive needed for generators to develop and install cleaner technologies without changing demand for energy and transport. "I'm a technology optimist, I think we will shift to renewable energy no matter what policy we adopt, but putting a tax on coal just increases the incentive and gets us there quicker," Mr Humphreys told The Australian yesterday. Both the Coalition and Labor have committed to introducing a national emissions trading scheme from about 2011, which sets a gradually increasing limit on greenhouse gases and requires generators and other energy consumers to buy permits to emit. Although emissions trading also puts a price on carbon, it guarantees specific cuts in greenhouse emissions with a variable price, while a tax guarantees a price with a variable level of emissions.

13th

FarmOnLine

'Generation shift' in drought policies needed: NFF

The major parties need to outline a vision for agriculture after largely ignoring the sector so far in the federal election campaign, the National Farmers' Federation (NFF) says. The NFF called for the coalition and Labor to unveil comprehensive policies which recognise that farming is vital to the nation's economic, environmental and social future. "To date, rural Australians have heard little mention of agriculture in this federal election campaign," NFF president David Crombie said. "We are talking about a sector of the Australian economy that generates \$103 billion annually in GDP (gross domestic product) taking into account the supply-chain value, supports around 1.6 million Australian jobs and provides over half the food Australians consume every day." Mr. Crombie identified climate change as potentially the biggest risk facing farmers and called for a generational shift in thinking about how the nation deals with drought. "We seek a commitment from an incoming government to work with farmers on developing a new cooperative partnership, investing and working together to better drought-proof Australia today, to secure all our futures tomorrow." The NFF called on all parties to progress the national water plan by engaging closely with farmers to maintain the nation's pest- and disease-free status. "A vacant landscape is not the answer. We need a clear direction and commitment from our leaders on the key issues for the farm sector," Mr. Crombie said. SOURCE: AAP

AWA

*The current Federal Election period represents a critical time for all sectors of the economy and society; Sound Water Management should be a priority policy issue. AWA takes an active role in raising the level of understanding and discussion on water issues. The latest edition of Water Journal outlines some of the critical areas for attention by political leaders.

*The Water Education Resource Hub is a new online resource that brings together a huge range of tools anyone can use to educate the community, schools or work colleagues on water. The HUB is the latest initiative of the Water for Life Education Program.

*Melbourne's largest industrial recycled water project has signed up the plastics manufacturer Qenos, Australia's sole manufacturer and leading marketer of polyethylene resins. Qenos will receive 2 billion litres/year of Class A Recycled Water from City West Water's Altona Treatment Plant. This will reduce drinking water use by 90 % at its Olefins site.

*The Green Business Program under the NSW Climate Change Fund is now open. Applications are invited for projects which will save water, energy and greenhouse gas emissions in business operations in NSW. There are two funding streams - market transformation and direct measures.

*The Wyaralong Dam could deliver water to SE Queensland homes a year ahead of schedule, subject to approval of the 1000 page EIS for the dam on Teviot Brook, just released for public comment by the Coordinator-General. It shows the dam could be built by end 2010.

*The Federal Government says if re-elected it provide \$30-40 million to support a scheme promoted by the Adelaide Airport to re-use Storm water from Brownhill Creek and Sturt Creek and put it into an aquifer at the Adelaide Airport thereby providing up to 55GL water/year.

*Sydney Water's board of directors has approved the indicative terms and conditions setting the framework for third parties to negotiate with Sydney Water for access to its wastewater system. The agreement has been developed under the new Water Industry Competition Act that will come into effect later this year.

*A scenario analysis by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) indicates that biofuels aggravate already stressed water resources as biofuel production increases demand for land at the expense of nature and requires large quantities of water, already a major drain on world agriculture.

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*Department of Housing tenants from the Sunshine Coast who use water-efficient techniques to keep their gardens thriving throughout the challenging dry conditions were recognised today as part of Queensland's 2007 Water-Wise Garden Awards.

*Biolytix is a Finalist in the "Asian Innovation Awards 2007" sponsored by The Wall Street Journal (Asia). It includes all technologies in the Asia-Pacific region and there were 260 entries.

*SA Water's rebate for rainwater tanks has been popular with over 1000 applicants within the first 15 months of the scheme (PDF). Tank rebates in other states have also proved popular.

*The increasing drought in southern states of US has led Georgia to declare a state of emergency and demand that the US Corps of Engineers significantly reduces discharges from Atlanta's main water source, Lake Lanier as water restrictions are introduced, the state prepares emergency response plans in case of supply interruptions, and many residents are having private wells drilled.

*An international seminar on water resources told participants that water investments in the Middle East are increasing. The event also outlined likely disputes and strategies to resolve the issues. \$250 billion in investment is needed within the next decade, with half needed for desalination projects plus water treatment plants and network renewals.

*Now that the fires in western US appear under control, it appears that some two dozen small water systems in the fire-scorched areas of San Diego County might be issuing boil notices as people return home, though whether this is required is debatable.

*Printed version of Recycled Water Guidelines (phase 1) now available. Phase 1 concentrate on non-potable reuses of recycled water. Also includes the basic principles for quantitative health risk assessment used in all Commonwealth recycled water guidelines and ADWG via use of DALYs, tolerable risk, log reductions plus information on ways to minimise risk of accidental or inadvertent misuse.

*Award winning Southern Cross station in Melbourne has some innovative approaches to water including rainwater harvesting.

*A "visionary" Coalition plan to capture storm water runoff from Adelaide airport and store it in aquifers beneath comes as news to the airport's owners.

*The world's biggest water companies have quietly secured long-term contracts worth hundreds of millions of dollars in Victoria's main regional centres such as Bendigo.

*Having a beer after exercise can help regain liquid better than water, the bubbles quench thirst and the carbohydrate in beer help replace lost calories.

News.com.au

10 billion litres to quench city

The Brumby Government is raiding 10 billion litres of water from the Yarra to prop up Melbourne's diminishing water supply. Environment Minister Gavin Jennings confirmed yesterday the Government would immediately start taking 45 million litres a day from flows that were supposed to ensure the environmental health of the river. The move will increase the likelihood of dangerous blue-green algal blooms and fish kills, but most people would not see any changes to the Yarra because its lower reaches are tidal. Mr Jennings said the Government would reduce Yarra flows to 200 million litres a day, taking out 10 billion litres between now and July 1. With the river flowing about 245 million litres a day, the Government can divert 45 million litres at Yering Gorge, in the Yarra Valley, every day and pump it through a pipeline to Sugarloaf Reservoir. It will boost city water supplies, which yesterday stood at 40.4 per cent capacity. The Government has considered the Yarra raid -- and taking a further 10 billion litres from the Thomson River -- for some time. It decided yesterday to go ahead immediately. Mr Jennings said the Government would monitor the Yarra to minimise the environmental impact of the diversion. "This extra contingency measure allows us to take more water from the Yarra now before the spring flows end, and . . . keep water in the bank for the summer ahead," he said. Mr Jennings said regular tests would be conducted at six sites along the Yarra, checking temperature and keeping watch for blue-green algae outbreaks. "With this increased monitoring we will be able to act quickly to deal with any emerging environmental issues through measures such as providing flushing flows down the river," he said. The Government last raided the Yarra in 2003 after a drought but before last year's election, it promised extra environmental flows for the river. Yesterday's decision not only dumps

the election policy, it eats into the existing Yarra flows. Community river watchdog Ian Penrose, of the Yarra Riverkeepers Association, said the Government's decision was totally irresponsible. "The situation is terrible," Mr Penrose said. The risk of fish kills and algal blooms would increase with reduced flows and warmer temperatures, as the water became more nutrient-rich, he added. Platypus breeding would also be likely to diminish. Mr Penrose said the Government conducted a study in 2005 that recommended more water for the Yarra -- which the Government had promised before the election last year.

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"They are ignoring their own work and their own advice," he said. "It will be bad for all flora and fauna along the river. "It's a total turnaround from the Government. "The Government is ignoring its responsibilities to the river's health, a river that is really important to Melbourne."

Adelaide.now.com

Setback for carbon plan

A Santos proposal to build the world's largest carbon storage project in Outback South Australia is likely to be shelved unless it gets \$270 million federal funding. Santos has met both sides of politics about the plan to store up to a billion tonnes of carbon dioxide underground in the Cooper Basin, but was yet to secure a funding commitment from either Liberal or Labor. Labor resources spokesman Chris Evans said through a staffer that Labor would not commit itself to funding before the election, while Federal Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane's office said it was "unable to comment on proposals before Government". The minister's office also said "\$275 million is an awful lot of money for one project". When the project first came to light in June, Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer said he was "extremely interested". Santos spokesman Matthew Doman said the plan would not go ahead without government help. "The proposal we've put, even with Federal Government support, phase one is only a break-even financial proposal," Mr Doman said. It is understood that the first phase would cost \$714 million and store an initial million tonnes of carbon dioxide underground a year by as early as 2010. If this was successful, it would eventually increase to 20 million tonnes a year for 50 years. The plan involves capturing carbon dioxide from coal-fired power stations in NSW and Queensland, and pumping it to Santos' gas processing hub at Moomba, where it would be pumped underground. The process would have the dual benefit of storing the gas and also re-pressurising the oil and gas reservoirs it was pumped into, Santos said. Mr Doman said while there were other carbon sequestration proposals being considered, none could offer the volumes or the timeframe of the Santos proposal. "We believe there's no other project able to offer significant abatement," he said. "One million tonnes is what we'll have in five years. No-one else can do that within five years." Mr Doman said Santos had an abundance of geological knowledge about the area, having drilled 2300 oil and gas wells and operated 220 fields.

Climate alert to energy leaders

Australia's energy suppliers have been given a stern warning to change their ways in the face of climate change, or face losing customers. Scientist and Australian of the Year Tim Flannery yesterday urged the country's leading energy suppliers to take notice of public concern about global warming. "I don't know whether the full implications of what we are going to face over the next few decades is really there (in your plans)," Professor Flannery told the Energy 21C Conference in Sydney. "There is so much more you could be doing. . . you may start losing customers if you don't start being proactive," he said. More than 1400 industry leaders from around the world heard Professor Flannery link climate change - which he called a "threat to human existence" - to energy supply. "(Customers are) stuck in a feedlot - the stuff comes down a wire to them - they have never thought where it has come from or how it gets to them," Professor Flannery, a former SA Museum director, said. "Once they start learning about the consequences of it on climate change they are going to take a greater interest and expect more." Professor Flannery said his home had a stand-alone energy source and a decade from now he expected that option to be adopted by many more households, meaning a drop in customers for the energy companies. "We need to start moving now to start building the infrastructure to meet the deadlines that nature will impose on us," he said. Challenging the Government to adopt "mandatory switch-off periods of high-energy devices" and extending subsidies for alternative energy schemes beyond the big electricity users were two of the suggestions Professor Flannery made to industry representatives. Energy Networks Association chairman Richard Powis agreed with Professor Flannery but defended the industry, saying it was not solely responsible for the future impact of energy supply on climate change. "There is no one solution here," Mr Powis said.

Drought speeds up Murray's decline

The key initiative aimed at saving the River Murray's most sensitive environments is failing in the face of the worst drought in history. A Murray-Darling Basin Commission report says the Living Murray environment program it runs for four states and the Commonwealth has failed to stop the river's decline, retain river redgum numbers, or increase bird migration habitat or fish spawning at SA sites. The commission's Living Murray Icon Site Condition Report for 2007 says the drought has accelerated the river's demise and threatened Living Murray's ability to meet

objectives to improve the environment at six key sites, including Chowilla in the Riverland and the Lower Lakes/Coorong region, by 2009. The Living Murray was established in 2002 to recover water and install infrastructure to allow an extra 500 gegalitres to flow down the river by 2009. Adelaide University wetlands researcher Dr Carmel Schmidt said it was clear the Coorong was in trouble. "You can see it needs a really good flood when you're down there. Late in the season we would expect bird numbers to be rising and without the floods they won't come through," she said.

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"Some of the (Living Murray) sites have degraded so much over time it's unlikely they would recover unless they get substantial amounts of water over a long period of time." Adelaide University Associate Professor David Paton said the concerns outlined in the report were just the tip of the problem. "Action is needed now, not yet another report," he said. Australian Conservation Foundation healthy ecosystems program manager Paul Sinclair said the Commonwealth had to fast-track the spending of \$10 billion committed to the River Murray.

Desal report awaits Cabinet

A long-awaited report into a desalination plant for Adelaide is finished and awaiting State Cabinet consideration. Premier Mike Rann said in September a desalination plant would be built to supply 25 per cent of Adelaide's fresh water. Details of the plant, including its location and funding model, would be made after Cabinet had considered a report by the Government's Desalination Working Group, due to report this month. The 50GL desalination plant would cost more than \$1.4 billion. The Government is seeking applications for the newly created position of Drought Communications Consultant. The public sector position, offered as a contract for between one and five years on an annual salary of up to \$72,800, has been created in response to "prolonged drought affecting farmers and irrigators across the state".

MSNBC.msn.com

Volcanoes could have caused dinosaur deaths

Growing body of evidence suggests extinction came from more than meteor

New research suggests that volcanoes that erupted between 63 million to 67 million years ago may have contributed to a mass dinosaur extinction. Instead of being driven to extinction by death from above, dinosaurs might have ultimately been doomed by death from below in the form of monumental volcanic eruptions. The suggestion is based on new research that is part of a growing body of evidence indicating a space rock alone did not wipe out the giant reptiles. The Age of Dinosaurs ended roughly 65 million years ago with the K-T or Cretaceous-Tertiary extinction event, which killed off all dinosaurs save those that became birds, as well as roughly half of all species on the planet, including pterosaurs. The prime suspect in this ancient murder mystery is an asteroid or comet impact, which left a vast crater at Chicxulub on the coast of Mexico. Another leading culprit is a series of colossal volcanic eruptions that occurred between 63 million to 67 million years ago. These created the gigantic Deccan Traps lava beds in India, whose original extent may have covered as much as 580,000 square miles (1.5 million square kilometers), or more than twice the area of Texas. Arguments over which disaster killed the dinosaurs often revolve around when each happened and whether extinctions followed. Previous work had only narrowed the timing of the Deccan eruptions to within 300,000 to 500,000 years of the extinction event. Now research suggests the mass extinction happened at or just after the biggest phase of the Deccan eruptions, which spewed 80 per cent of the lava found at the Deccan Traps. "It's the first time we can directly link the main phase of the Deccan Traps to the mass extinction," said Princeton University paleontologist Gerta Keller.

Clues in other life forms

Keller and colleagues focused on marine fossils excavated at quarries at Rajahmundry, India, near the Bay of Bengal, about 600 miles (1,000 kilometers) southeast of the center of the Deccan Traps near Mumbai. Specifically, they looked at the remains of microscopic shell-forming organisms known as foraminifera. "Before the mass extinction, most of the foraminifera species were comparatively large, very flamboyant, very specialized, very ornate, with many chambers," Keller explained. These foraminifera were roughly 200 to 350 microns large, or a fifth to a third of a millimeter long. These showy foraminifera were very specialized for particular ecological niches. "When the environment changed, as it did around K-T, that prompted their extinction," she added. "The foraminifera that followed were extremely tiny, one-twentieth the size of the species before, with absolutely no ornamentation, just a few chambers." As such, these puny foraminifera serve as very distinct tags of when the K-T extinction event started. The researchers found these simple foraminifera seem to have popped up right after the main phase of the Deccan volcanism. This in turn hints these eruptions came immediately before the mass extinction, and might have caused it.

Double trouble

Both an impact from space and volcanic eruptions would have injected vast clouds of dust and other emissions into the sky, dramatically altering global climate and triggering die-offs. Keller's collaborator, volcanologist Vincent

Courtillot at the Institute of Geophysics in Paris, noted upcoming work from her collaborators suggests the Deccan eruptions could have quickly released 10 times more climate-altering emissions than the nearly simultaneous Chicxulub impact. Keller stressed these findings do not deny that an impact occurred around the K-T boundary, and noted that one or possibly several impacts may have had a hand in the mass extinction. "The dinosaurs might have faced an unfortunate coincidence of a one-two punch—of Deccan volcanism and then a hit from space," she explained. "We just show the Deccan eruptions might have had a significant impact — no pun intended."

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Although paleontologist Kirk Johnson at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science called these new findings "significant," he noted a great deal of evidence connected a single massive impact with the K-T extinction event. He suggested that advances in radioisotope dating could now hone down when the Deccan eruptions occurred to within 30,000 to 65,000 years. "That could help put to bed some of the disputes regarding the issue," he said. Keller and her collaborator Thierry Adate at the University of Neuchatel in Switzerland detailed their findings Oct. 31 at the annual meeting of the Geological Society of America in Denver.

14th

FarmOnLine

Major quarantine review promised

Federal Agriculture Minister, Peter McGauran, today announced a major new review of Australia's quarantine system, once the Callinan Commission of Inquiry into the equine influenza outbreak has been completed. The measure was one of several new initiatives in the Coalition's agriculture policy launch in Sydney, including:

- \$15 million to continue support of the National Livestock Identification System
- \$30m towards weed control,
- \$15m for a national program of pest and feral animal control and eradication
- \$11m for the export partnership fund
- \$6m to help expand Australia's horticultural exports and
- \$6m to speed up the processing for "minor use" farm chemicals.

Mr. McGauran said he was "fervently optimistic" about the future of the family farm in Australia, despite many farmers being "bruised and battered, financially and psychologically" by the drought. The NSW Farmers' Association says it views the maintenance of high quarantine standards as one of its priority issues. "Now it appears that, whichever major party wins the forthcoming election, there will be a quarantine review," president Jock Laurie said today. SOURCE: *The Land*, NSW's weekly rural newspaper, with breaking news updated daily by *FarmOnline*.

Rural and remote Australians need an education voice

Australia's estimated 300,000 rural and remote students, their families, communities and teachers have no effective national voice when it comes to shaping education policy and programs. Chairperson of the Rural Education Forum Australia, Marina Izatt, says, "Rural and remote people need to know that the major parties are serious about closing the gap between those who have ready access to quality education and those who don't. "Ensuring that rural and remote children and families can access education and services like their city cousins is a basic human right. "It is being denied to far too many in a prosperous country like Australia." So funding is urgently needed to establish the Australian Rural Education Alliance (AREA), to rectify this situation. Ms Izatt says the forum needs just \$500,000 to run AREA annually. This amount is literally chicken feed, she says, when compared to the billions both major parties have said they will spend if they win government. SOURCE: Breaking national news from Rural Press National Agricultural News Bureau, Canberra.

The Australian

Business gets water ultimatum

Residents in Australia's fastest growing region will be forced to truck in water from outside southeast Queensland to fill pools and businesses will be told to slash consumption by a quarter under the nation's toughest water restrictions. Queensland water authorities announced yesterday the nation's first Level 6 restrictions imposed on a major metropolitan area would come into force from November 23 as the state's dam levels remain dangerously low. Despite the fact that southeast Queensland's 2.3 million residents have cut their water usage to 129 litres a person a day, down from their average of 296 litres in May 2005, Queensland Water Commission chairman Elizabeth Nosworthy said there was little more authorities could do to cut consumption. "There won't be Level 7 restrictions," she said. "There aren't any more big levers to pull. We've done everything pretty much that we can." Ms Nosworthy hit out at businesses for failing to do enough to tackle the region's water crisis, warning they faced fines of \$125,000 unless they met the dramatic targets. "It's completely unfair that while residents are bending over backwards to make world-class water savings, some businesses can't even be bothered to ... save a single drop," she said. Under the Level 6 restrictions, water to fill new or renovated swimming pools will need to be trucked in from

outside the region. Households with fewer than five residents using more than 800 litres a day will face fines of up to \$1050, outdoor water bans and flow restrictions. Southeast Queensland water storages have been at precariously low levels for the past 12 months as the region's worst drought on record has reduced the Wivenhoe Dam to 16 per cent of its capacity. The Queensland Government has announced the building of the controversial Traveston Dam near Gympie to increase the state's water storage capacity, and a series of pipelines connecting the major dams, but the state needs an additional 200mm of rain this summer to avoid a water crisis.

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Recent rain in Victoria and NSW has eased the water crisis in Melbourne and Sydney, although dam levels remain far below full capacity. Among capital cities, Melbourne's Thomson Dam was at 40 per cent yesterday. Sydney's Warragamba Dam was 57 per cent full. Adelaide's Mt Bold Dam was at 81 per cent, but the city obtains much of its water from the drought-depleted Murray River. Perth's Serpentine Weir was 45 per cent full, but the city is largely dependent on underground aquifers. Ms Nosworthy said the consumer response to the Level 5 alert had been "fantastic", with residents consuming less than the commission's target of 140 litres a person a day since July. However, she said 14 per cent of businesses had ignored a requirement to submit to local councils' mandatory water efficiency management plans by the end of July. The new restrictions, requiring businesses to meet a target of 25 per cent reduction in water use or best practice by November next year, will be permanent, although residents can expect relief when the dams fill. Businesses will also be required to install sub-meters on equipment using 15 per cent or more of their water. Those failing to comply with the restrictions face fines of up to \$124,875.

Gore opts to follow his green dream

More than 200,000 people have signed on to the "draft Al Gore" website in the hope the environmental crusader will run for the White House. But their man has always said he is not planning a second tilt and yesterday it was apparent Silicon Valley, rather than Washington, beckons. Mr Gore, this year's joint Nobel Peace Prize winner and star of the climate change film *An Inconvenient Truth*, is to join one of the world's most pre-eminent venture capital firms, Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, which made a name for itself in the technology boom. Mr Gore will join the Californian company as a partner focused on alternative energy investments and, given his already fantastic wealth, has said he will donate his salary to the Alliance for Climate Protection, a non-partisan foundation he chairs. Mr Gore narrowly lost the 2000 presidential campaign to George W. Bush. Since 1972, Kleiner has backed seminal computer start-ups ranging from Sun Microsystems to Compaq Computer to Amazon.com to Google Inc, and has emerged as a leading funder of alternative energy companies. Silicon Valley is abuzz with attempts to finance clean and green energy ideas. Mr Gore, 59, is joining the Kleiner board as part of a collaboration between his Generation Investment Management fund and Kleiner to fund so-called "green" business, technology and policies that address climate change. Other active or affiliated partners at Kleiner include computer company backer John Doerr, alternative energy financier Vinod Khosla and former US secretary of state Colin Powell. In addition, Mr Doerr, long a major backer of Mr Gore's political and policy efforts, would join Generation's advisory board. Kleiner has historically focused on making investments in and around Silicon Valley, but it recently expanded operations in China. And as it moves into energy investments, it has taken on a more global profile. Generation and Kleiner will remain focused on separate activities, with the latter investing in start-ups and the former continuing to focus on investing in publicly-traded companies focused on alternative energy or agriculture. As a member of the US Congress for 25 years, Mr Gore popularised the term "information superhighway" and was instrumental in providing funds for the internet. In the 1990s, his critics pilloried him for implying that he deserved credit as "the father of the internet". Since leaving government, Mr Gore has played an active role in advising top Silicon Valley companies. He sits on the board of computer and phone maker Apple and is a senior adviser to internet services leader Google.

Additional reporting: Reuters

Turnbull in 'U-turn' on rivers promise

Malcolm Turnbull has signalled that the states can continue to exercise control over water allocations in the Murray-Darling Basin, prompting a claim by Labor that the Coalition has gone back on its pledge for commonwealth management of the rivers. The claim arose as the federal Environment and Water Resources Minister attacked his Coalition colleagues, the Nationals, for pushing for water sales from Queensland's Paroo River. In notes provided to *The Australian*, Mr Turnbull's office said the Murray-Darling Basin Authority would establish caps on the quantities of water that could be allocated from catchments. "While it remains the responsibility of the states to manage allocations, they are required to do so within the legally binding diversion limit set by the authority," Mr Turnbull's office said. "Whether we have responsibility for the allocations or not does not matter." The Government has previously insisted that the refusal of Victoria to sign up to a national agreement had prevented the commonwealth from exercising effective control of the Murray-Darling because states continued to manage water allocations. In September, Mr Turnbull said he was powerless under new federal

legislation establishing the authority to stop the Queensland Government's planned sales of water from the Warrego River, a basin tributary. Queensland eventually bowed to pressure from John Howard and cancelled the sales. Opposition water spokesman Anthony Albanese said the comments from Mr Turnbull's office indicated that the Coalition was breaking its pledge for commonwealth control of the Murray-Darling. "This contradicts everything Malcolm Turnbull has been saying for months," Mr Albanese said. "This about-face has happened as a result of the minister's inability to negotiate a national agreement."

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Mr Albanese said a Rudd government would negotiate with the states for a handover of water allocation powers to Canberra. He said the present arrangements would allow a Coalition government in Queensland to tap the Paroo River, the basin's last free-flowing river. The Australian reported last week a push by federal Nationals MPs to make water from the Paroo available to irrigators and for the Warrego sales to proceed. Mr Turnbull told The Australian he opposed any allocations from the river. "The Paroo is the last remaining unregulated river in the northern basin," he said. "It has some of the most important wetland systems for waterbirds in eastern Australia and is of great cultural significance to traditional owners. It would be irresponsible to allocate more water from the river."

How we're destroying our habitat

Like a recklessly profligate spendthrift, humanity has largely ignored ever shriller environmental warnings and continued on a destructive path that has already done extraordinary damage. Climate change, air pollution, land degradation, overpopulation, increasing natural disasters: all these are the symptoms of a sick planet. An extensive new audit of the Earth, written by 400 scientists and reviewed by 1000 experts under the aegis of the UN Environment Programme, contains an urgent call to action. The fourth Global Environment Outlook report runs to more than 500 pages of detail on the world's woes. The audit has found that each human being now requires one-third more land to supply their needs than the planet can provide. Humanity's footprint is 29.1ha a person, while the world's biological capacity is on average only 15.7ha a person. The result is net environmental degradation and loss. Failing to address persistent atmosphere, land, water and biodiversity problems, UNEP says, "may threaten humanity's survival". The report's authors say there is no significant area dealt with in the report where the foreseeable trends are favourable. More than 30 per cent of the world's amphibians, 23 per cent of mammals and 12 per cent of birds are now threatened with extinction. More than 75 per cent of fish stocks are fully or overly exploited. Six in 10 of the world's leading rivers have been either dammed or diverted. One in 10 of these rivers no longer reaches the sea for part of the year. More than two million people die prematurely every year from indoor and outdoor pollution. Less than 1 per cent of the world's marine ecosystems are protected. The report's foreword is written by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who warns that "issues of energy and climate change can have implications for peace and security". Competition for dwindling natural resources such as water, he notes, may become a trigger for conflict. James Cook University's pro vice-chancellor Chris Cocklin went to a concept meeting at the UNEP headquarters in Nairobi two years ago, where he was invited to help frame the GEO-4 report. There had been some dissatisfaction with previous GEO reports, he says, and there was concern the reports had lacked the level of peer review required by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. That shortcoming has been remedied in part and Cocklin, an environmental scientist, considers the latest report credible. "I think the UN does have a degree of distance; they are reading the evidence and presenting the report around the evidence, rather than making ambit claims." Cocklin, though, takes issue with the notion that humanity's survival is at risk. "We're a bit like cockroaches, really: we can survive quite a lot," he says. "But the quality of life is absolutely at stake; that's under serious threat, if you like looking at green trees and seeing animals and birds." He says biodiversity is at an important point where action is needed to maintain the balance, and there isn't much room for delay. The GEO-4 report notes that the accelerating loss of biodiversity is linked to humanity's increasing use of energy, and warns changes in biodiversity and ecosystems can lead to changes in disease patterns and human exposure to disease outbreaks. Maintaining present biodiversity levels, the report says, is critical. Functioning ecosystems provide buffers to extreme climate events, filters for waterborne and airborne pollutants, and carbon sinks. Cocklin says that at the rate we're going, the survival of certain parts of the globe will soon come into question. "Some of the world's leading experts in biodiversity are warning of a mass extinction of plant and animal species," he says. The report elaborates on the theory that the available evidence points to a sixth "major extinction event" now under way. Unlike the previous five extinction events, which were the result of natural disasters and planetary change, the present loss of biodiversity can mostly be sheeted home to human activity. The Australian Museum's principal research scientist Daniel Faith says he reviewed part of the GEO-4 report, and although he largely agrees with its conclusions, he took exception to one measure of biodiversity - mean species abundance - which he believes can distort the real picture. For instance, mean species abundance in a specific place can be quite high, but certain species can still be depleted. "But overall I think it's a very good study," says the biodiversity specialist. "It's really

difficult to work with a broad brush at a global perspective." As well as assessing the planet's health, the report focuses on human wellbeing: essentially two indivisible elements making up the world picture. Humans affect, and are affected by, the environment to an enormous degree. The GEO-4 report includes a number of disquieting statistics on humanity. The global population has grown by 1.7 billion in the 20 years since 1987, to a grand total of 6.7 billion. And these 6.7 billion humans consume like a plague of ravenous insects.

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One small example noted in the report: every year, 1.1million to 3.4million tonnes of undressed wild animal meat, or bushmeat, is eaten by people living in the Congo basin. And people are flocking to the cities. By the end of this year, more people will be living in cities than in rural areas for the first time in history. Already, more than one billion people live in slums across the world. Water-related diseases, such as cholera and diarrhoeal infections, kill about three million people a year. Ten million children under five die every year - 98 per cent of them in developing countries - and three million of these deaths are the result of unhealthy environments. The report considers seven distinct regions and Australia slots into the category of Asia and the Pacific. Home to 60 per cent of the world's population, the region has seen some solid gains, the report says, including improvement in environment protection, energy efficiency and the provision of clean drinking water. Yet vastly increased consumption and its associated waste have accelerated existing environmental problems and contributed to some of the worst urban air quality in the world. The World Health Organisation estimates that more than one billion Asians are exposed to excessive air pollution. The report says climate change is likely to cause more severe droughts and floods in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as soil degradation, coastal inundation and saltwater incursions caused by rising sea levels. Agricultural productivity, it warns, is likely to decline substantially because of warmer temperatures and shifting rainfall. Murdoch University's Frank Murray, one of the GEO-4 report's authors, says one of the broad themes concerns the relationship between humanity's wellbeing and economic development, and how they largely depend on the health of the environment. Murray, an environmental scientist, was on the team that wrote the chapter on atmosphere, including climate change, air pollution and ozone depletion. Murray used the Kuznets curve - devised by the Nobel prize-winning economist Simon Kuznets - to explain how the environment degrades as development proceeds. This continues until a certain level of development is reached and the general public - now mostly richer and better educated - begins to agitate against air pollution or water pollution. Agencies are then established to control development and pollution. "Air pollution and water pollution in the US is much lower than it used to be," he says. "China is trying to clean up Beijing, with (next year's) Olympics in mind." Murray says the GEO-4 report is a flagship UNEP publication that has taken a number of years to research, write and edit. Various governments, he says, did remove certain elements they didn't like, but that simply meant the assessment was moved to a broader regional level rather than an individual national level. "Rarely is any individual government criticised in this report," he says. "Countries are very sensitive about being named adversely." One of the big issues in the report, which has been comprehensively addressed by other organisations, is climate change. "Climate change is a major global challenge," the report says. "Impacts are already evident, and changes in water availability, food security and sea-level rises are projected to dramatically affect many millions of people. Drastic steps are necessary." The report ranks climate change as a global priority, yet the authors note a "remarkable lack of urgency" and a "woefully inadequate" global response. Murray says change is on the way. Although very little happened for many years, climate change has now been recognised as a fact of life by ordinary people in developed nations, and governments are responding to community pressure. Remedies are possible, he says. Ozone depletion, for instance, has been halted by global action to ban chlorofluorocarbons. Cocklin is less sanguine and he is doubts whether relying on governments to effect change is a good idea. "We certainly can't look to politicians for leadership on climate change," he says. "The leadership, if it's anywhere, has come from the private sector." Ominously, UNEP warns that some of the damage resulting from the world's most persistent problems could be irreversible. Tackling the underlying causes of environmental problems, the GEO-4 report says, often means dealing with the vested interests of powerful groups that can influence policy decisions. "Our common future," the report says, "depends on our actions today, not tomorrow or some time in the future."

Beware of green muggers: Cathay

The Asia-Pacific aviation industry must move to prevent a European-style mugging by the environmental lobby or it will find itself drowning in a sea of green taxes, Cathay Pacific chief executive Tony Tyler has warned. Mr Tyler, who also revealed Cathay would increase services to Australia by 25 per cent over the summer, identified climate change and rising fuel prices as the top two political issues that could disrupt and damage the industry. He said there was little he could say about the relentless rise of jet fuel prices except that it was a growing nightmare for all airlines and at some point it would pose a threat to the global economy. But the industry had been caught flat-footed in Europe and mugged by a green lobby that had both sincere members and others who did not "seem to be quite on

the planet that they're trying to save". He said the fact that aviation contributed about 2 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions - a fraction of that emitted by other forms of transport - seemed to be lost in a welter of bizarre claims about the industry's impact on climate change. "And we can't let this same kind of nonsense cloud the issue - if you'll pardon the pun - in our part of the world," he told the National Aviation Press Club in Sydney. "If we don't get this right, we'll find ourselves drowning in green taxes that will go to government funding of all sorts of things but everything other than reducing the amount of CO2 in the atmosphere."

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Mr Tyler, who was appointed chief executive of Cathay in July, said it was up to the industry to face up to its responsibilities and introduce effective measures to address its contribution to what could be a global crisis. But it had to do it in a way that helped focus the debate in a more sensible manner and not just rely on special pleading for the aviation industry. "We need to introduce some perspective on the role aviation plays in shaping and bettering our world," he said. "Planet Earth is becoming a much more affluent and connected place through globalisation, and aviation is the wheel that drives that process. "More and more people want to travel, not just on business but for pleasure, and surely they deserve to enjoy the fruits of their labour. "It's labour that's increasingly lifting living standards around the world - the boat's being lifted on a rising tide of prosperity. Let's not sink it." Describing Cathay's operations to Australia as "a bloody good story", Mr Tyler said the Hong Kong carrier would increase its services to its six local destinations from 56 flights a week to 71 over summer. It would also introduce improved cabins to two of its daily Sydney flights by the end of this year and would have them in place on Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide services by the end of next year and on all flights by the first half of 2009. "I have to say the services to Australia at the moment are going extremely well," he said. "We are enormously pleased with the Australia operations and with the country's growing economic trade and cultural connections with mainland China. We can only see it growing further." The new Cathay chief also backed up Qantas chief executive Geoff Dixon's recent comments dismissing the competitive threat posed to premium airlines by fast-growing low-cost carriers. He agreed that airlines offering premium services would continue to thrive as the global aviation market expanded. "Don't get me wrong, we're very cognisant of the fact that there are start-ups and no-frills airlines out there who are eyeing our business. And why not - it's a big pie. All I can say is that it's a tough business and we don't intend to give them an inch."

Adelaide. Now

SA Water gets tough on wastage

SA Water has toughened its stance on water wasters in the lead-up to summer. More people are being fined and the authority has authorised three times as many staff to catch offenders. As South Australia braces for its first week of summer temperatures above 30C, new figures show a surge in the number of fines issued since rules were introduced to allow SA Water staff to give on-the-spot fines. In the past month, seven fines have been issued for water-restriction breaches, compared with just four in the first six months this year. Five fines were issued between the start of July and October 15. An SA Water spokeswoman said triple the number of staff compared with this time last year, had been given power to issue fines to ensure those seen breaching restrictions this summer did not get away with it. Last November, 10 water conservation officers and 40 other SA Water staff could issue fines. "SA Water now has 163 people across the state, including our water conservation officers, who are authorised to issue expiations," she said. Adelaide's water consumption is still below the limit set by the State Government at which harsher water restrictions would be introduced. Consumption has peaked on weekends when gardeners are allowed to use drippers and hoses. Bureau of Meteorology climate meteorologist Darren Ray said dry, sunny conditions and temperatures of 32C or above have been forecast until at least Tuesday. "It's not a heatwave but it is significantly above average," he said. "The first five or six days of November were four to five degrees below average and we got most of our month's rainfall. Now it has switched to the opposite and in the last week has been five degrees above average - and after that cold start people will be feeling it." He said a cold front was headed towards SA and might move across the state late on Tuesday.

Get set for a long, hot summer

Drought-hit South Australia is facing a long and tropical summer, the Bureau of Meteorology has predicted. Its three-month outlook for December, January and February forecasts temperatures will be warmer than normal across the state. Summer rainfall for the state is expected to be about average, which will not bring relief from the heat. Climate meteorologist Darren Ray said Adelaide and the South-East might receive slightly less-than-average rainfall. "There's a pretty strong chance that temperatures will be above average for the next three months, so it's looking to be warm," he said. In the first six months of the year, temperatures had been on track to make 2007 the hottest year on record. Mr Ray said cooler temperatures in some parts of Australia since then had reduced the likelihood of a new national record. South Australia, however, could still sweat through its hottest year yet. The

average maximum and minimum temperatures during August, September and October recorded in Adelaide have been above the long-term monthly averages. The forecast comes as the CSIRO warned that uncertain climate predictions were making it difficult to predict how much water will be available to parts of the Murray-Darling Basin during the next 25 years. The CSIRO, which has been commissioned by the federal and state governments to prepare a series of water availability estimates, released a pessimistic outlook for the Border Rivers region of the basin yesterday.

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The region - which straddles the NSW-Queensland border on and to the west of the Great Dividing Range - faces a 10 per cent decline in water availability, but it could be a lot worse or a lot better, according to the report.

"There is considerable uncertainty in the climate predictions for 2030 arising from different climate models and different global warming scenarios," the CSIRO said. "Extreme estimates range from a 28 per cent reduction to a 20 per cent increase in average annual run-off." The report says without management changes, projected increases in groundwater use would be unsustainable in the long term. The CSIRO said the report would be used to develop the new sustainable diversion limit for the river systems in the basin which was a requirement under new federal laws.

Press Release

RAIN LIFTS RIVER MURRAY ALLOCATIONS

Minister for the River Murray Karlene Maywald says irrigation allocations for 2007-08 will increase to at least 22 percent from December 1, based on the latest assessment from the Murray-Darling Basin Commission. The commission's End of October 2007 Water Resource Assessment, released on Monday, reported an increase in available water across the basin, because of three factors:

- Inflows to the River Murray system in October 2007 were higher than previously forecast.
- Slightly more water will be released into the system from the Snowy Mountains Scheme.
- The commission's forecast for minimum inflows in November 2007 has improved, based on recent rain across the Basin from 10-100 millimeters.

Minister Maywald says allocation increases in South Australia are now possible because the total volume of water available for diversion across the basin had passed 1500 gigalitres. This was a key threshold in determining South Australia's share of water for irrigation and dilution flows under the revised water sharing arrangements agreed to by Murray-Darling Basin states earlier this year. "The commission advises that early rainfall in November has improved the minimum inflows expected in November and so far there is sufficient improvement to support an increase in allocations to at least 22 percent from December 1, up from 16 percent currently. "Total available water will again be reviewed at the beginning of December once we have the commission's final assessment of November inflows. If further rainfall and inflows are received in the basin before the end of November, allocations will again be updated. **"While this increase will be welcomed by irrigators it is still not enough to keep all permanent plantings alive and is well below the 60 percent irrigators received in 2006-07.**

"The situation in the Murray-Darling Basin is extremely serious and consistent above-average rainfall is needed to break the continued widespread drought." Minister Maywald says conditions are expected to be hot and dry over summer with the Bureau of Meteorology forecasting only a 45-55 percent chance of receiving above-average rain before January 2008, while there is a 65-70 percent chance of temperatures being hotter than normal. "Murray-Darling Basin storages have peaked at 23 percent of capacity during October, and are now currently at 22 percent," she said. "Flow to South Australia has now been increased to 3400 megalitres per day to help reduce salinity impacts and the likelihood of algal blooms occurring.

"The increase to River Murray water allocations will not impact domestic water restrictions and Adelaide consumers are still tracking well against the target consumption line for 2007-08."