

January 2007: Edition 10

"Snippets Plus" compiled using information from the Australian Water Association, Murray Darling Association, FarmOnline & various other sources including various printed media & presentations attended.

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Australian Water Association – "Promoting the Sustainable Management of Water"

Murray Darling Association – "For Conservation and Sustainable Development"

January 2007

1st January

Tougher water restrictions to start today

LEVEL 3 water restrictions come into force today as record low inflows to the River Murray have led to rapidly-falling storage levels.

Water boss backs recycling

Queensland's Water Commissioner has launched a pre-emptive strike in the recycled water debate, claiming it would be better for the commission if voters backed the plan.

Elizabeth Nosworthy says the March 17 southeast vote on the use of purified recycled water for drinking would be a "key turning point in Queensland".

The independent commission, appointed by the Government earlier this year to ensure that water supplies in the southeast and other designated areas are sustainable, won't take sides in the run-up to the vote.

However, Ms Nosworthy told *The Sunday Mail* it would be better for the commission if people backed the plans.

She said she did not want to be alarmist but "if it doesn't rain, restrictions will have to get tighter".

"We've got to get to the point where infrastructure can provide assistance (to the climate)," she said.

"Once the infrastructure is there, in order to avoid getting back into this situation again, it would be better for us if the population is prepared to consider using purified recycled water as an option.

"It will be less expensive, and there will be another option on the table."

Residents of 19 southeast Queensland council areas will vote on whether to allow the use of purified recycled water as a permanent part of the drinking supply.

State Parliament on February 6 will decide the wording of the plebiscite.

The Government is already pushing for a "Yes" vote with Premier Peter Beattie warning of an "Armageddon-style" solution to the water crisis if voters reject the proposal.

He has so far refused to give the details of the tough alternatives, but promised to do so before voting day.

In the meantime, Ms Nosworthy is promising a "warts and all" public education campaign on the issue and has set up a panel of national and international experts to lead the scientific discussions.

"We are trying to get advice from the best scientists and engineers we can find, good or bad. We are talking about a plan for the next 50 years. We are not talking about putting a lot of recycled water in immediately."

She said the commission would not be saying there was no risk, as some people did.

"That is not fair or sensible, because every time you drink water around the world there is a risk," she said.

"But in southeast Queensland we don't worry about it, because there are reliable and effective risk-management systems.

"It is a question of systems, and science and saying to people, 'You are not stupid or silly for being concerned about this, there is a real issue . . .'"

The Water Commission has delayed the release of the Southeast Queensland Regional Water Supply Strategy until mid-year.

Herald Sun

Farm water sold to city

Melburnian's are spending thousands of dollars on farm dam water to keep their gardens alive on the eve of tough new water rules taking effect.

Water transport businesses have received hundreds of phone calls from Melbourne gardeners since the stage 3 restrictions were announced.

The search for alternative water sources comes as Victoria's \$750 million pool and spa industry has secured a salt water aquifer in Werribee to fill new pools and spas.

But Melbourne's gardening, turf, car dealership, cleaning and nursery industries are bracing for the new rules, saying jobs are at risk.

From tomorrow, gardens can be watered only twice a week with a dripper system or hand-held trigger-nozzle hoses at limited times, while watering lawns remains banned.

Sunbury water carter Alan McKenzie said he had received at least 100 calls this week from people wanting dam water. "My phone has gone completely crazy with people everywhere wanting to buy water," he said. Water carted to Melbourne costs at least 9c a litre - 100 times more than Melbourne drinking water -- and a tank and pump costs about \$1500. "You have to look at your sums. It's not for a fortnight of watering, but for about five months. That's upward of \$2800," Mr McKenzie said.

Mont Albert gardening business owner Tracy Wright is worried about her business.

"We look after some big gardens that may buy extra water. But what about those who only want lawns mowed?" she said.

Holden Cranbourne dealer Tom Davis said rules that banned washing cars except for windows, lights and mirrors, unless using a commercial car wash or grey water, were hurting.

"Who's going to walk into a yard to buy a dirty car?" Mr Davis said.

Tasmanian Mercury **Towns hung out to dry**

There is no excuse for the people of Bothwell to run out of water.

It may be the holiday season but if the State Government can't ensure adequate supply in the next few days it deserves to be condemned.

Bothwell is not alone. At the height of the tourist season, the resort town of Coles Bay is running dry. In historic Ross, another tourist hot spot, visitors and locals have been warned not to drink the water or even shower in it because of an outbreak of blue-green algae. Residents of the booming East Coast centre of Swansea have had to boil their water for years. Drought conditions have brought the crisis to a head. In Bothwell's case, the crunch has come with little warning. Its supply of river water has been cut off because of concerns by the Department of Water and the Environment that low levels in Lake Sorell and Lake Crescent could threaten the rare golden galaxias fish. It's a decision Central Highlands Council Deputy Mayor Richard Bowden describes as "bureaucracy gone mad".

Primary Industries and Water Minister David Llewellyn has assured the town he will not let it run out and has promised to meet council officials on his return from holiday next week. There is talk of buying water from local irrigators, even of trucking it in at great expense.

How could it have come to this?

There can be few more basic rights than a citizen's right to clean drinking water. The development of Third World countries is judged by their success in providing it. Yet in a rich country which has been riding an economic boom for a decade, governments around Australia are failing people in this most fundamental way. Cities and towns are facing water storage crises and millions of people are on restrictions. None of this is necessary if governments manage water resources well and invest for the next generation. Construction of water infrastructure such as supply pipes and storage dams in catchment areas is an unfashionable use of public money. It's much easier to win votes with new roads and other more visible projects that earn kudos at the next election.

The water crisis in many Tasmanian rural towns has been a sleeping issue for far too long, largely ignored by state governments and too expensive or difficult for some local governments to handle over the years. Now it is coming back to bite.

Tasmania is the envy of other drought-stricken states, with substantial water supplies thanks to our weather patterns, mountains, rivers and lakes but we are not doing enough to tap those riches.

While we have focussed on forestry, tourism and agriculture, the inadequate supply of clean or sufficient water to towns such as Bothwell, Coles Bay and Swansea is a disgrace. Why is it that only now we are seeing stop-gap measures being put in place?

The crisis is beginning to affect all parts of the economy, vital sectors such as tourism and agriculture.

Farmers in the Bothwell area should be applauded for their sacrifices to ensure the town supply comes first but it should not be a matter of one or the other.

We are paying for the complacency of the past and it's time governments at all levels got serious about fixing it.

Farmonline

Drought resistant crops don't sweat it

The discovery of drought-resistance genes in crops by Queensland Government scientists will help farmers increase grain profitably, despite declining rainfall.

New levy on milk could save drought-affected farmers

A temporary levy on liquid milk at retail level has been proposed as a way to channel aid money back to dairy farmers struggling with the drought.

Adelaide Advertiser**City endures driest year since 1967**

Adelaide has endured its second driest year on record, according to the Bureau of Meteorology. Adelaide recorded just 286.8mm (11.47") of rainfall in 2006, well short of the long-term average of 558.2mm (22.33").

Water ads 'promote the Premier'

As tough new water restrictions come in force today Premier Mike Rann has been accused of inappropriately using advertisements to promote himself. PRS "I agree".

Double conservation efforts, says PM

Australians need to double their efforts in tackling the Nation's chronic water shortage, Prime Minister Howard has warned.

Herald Sun**Tougher water bans on the way**

MELBOURNE could face extreme stage 4 water restrictions by mid-April – just 16 weeks after stage 3 bans come into force today. Acting Premier John Thwaites confirmed yesterday the Government was preparing for the most severe water restrictions by autumn if the big dry continued.

And he warned that inspectors would get tough with those who repeatedly flouted the stage 3 restrictions.

A team of 140 inspectors will scour greater Melbourne this morning, armed with the power to cut offenders' water to a trickle. The first instance of inspectors cutting pressure where householders had repeatedly ignored restrictions could come as early as today, retailer South East Water said. Local councils and sporting clubs will also face on-the-spot fines if caught breaching the rules.

And the Government's new laws guaranteeing minimum environmental flows into the Yarra and other rivers may also hit a hurdle, with the Government to hold off releasing the water if restrictions above stage 2 are still in force. Melbourne's dams were yesterday at 38.9 per cent of capacity -- 20 per cent less than for the same period last year. But they were still some way from the 29.3 per cent level that would trigger stage 4.

"It all depends on how much rain we get," Mr Thwaites said. "If it remains dry, our water storages will continue to decline," Mr Thwaites said.

"If that happens, we could see stage 4 restrictions, if you work it out mathematically, around mid-April, but it really depends on how much rain we get."

Mr Thwaites said water consumption had fallen in December, and that the Government would turn its attention in 2007 to saving water inside the home, where 80 per cent of water was used.

As well as continuing to distribute 180,000 low-flow shower heads, the Government will legislate this year to require all homes be fitted with dual-flush toilets and low-flow taps before they can be sold.

Mr Thwaites said the Government might hold off on its planned July release of 17,000 million litres of water into the Yarra, saying the environmental flows might be released in stages if Melbourne remained on water restrictions. Melbourne Water manager of water supplies John Woodland said Melbourne still had plenty of water, despite reservoirs being low. He said the authority could access "every drop" if it needed to, and dismissed the concept of "dead water" in the bottom of the reservoirs.

"Even without rainfall we can survive because we have got such big storages," he said.

South East Water spokesman Luke Enright confirmed that water inspectors would be spreading out across 1.3 million households in greater Melbourne from this morning.

They can issue on-the-spot fines and, in extreme cases, cut water pressure to a trickle preventing householders from showering for up to two days.

Mr Enright said the inspectors would be focusing on those who had ignored warnings.

"Only a handful of people will be in line to have their supplies restricted at this stage," he said.

"We're not going after every householder who has a green lawn."

Melburnians are encouraged to call the 13WATER hotline and dob in people and businesses deliberately breaking the restrictions.

Also yesterday, Victoria and New South Wales signed a deal to sell water across their borders.

The two states and South Australia will now permit permanent cross-border water-trading.

2nd January

Adelaide Advertiser**New details revealed****WEIR COST MAY SOAR**

River Murray Minister Kalene Maywald concedes the final design for a weir at Wellington may cost "considerably more" (surprise surprise) than the \$20 million announced in November by Premier Mike Rann and could have some permanent (surprise surprise again) sections.

\$20m minimum price: Weir cost may jump

Despite Premier Mike Rann's announcement in November that planning for the construction of a sheet piled weir was under way and the estimated cost was \$20 million, Ms Maywald said a final decision on the structure and its precise location had yet to be made.

Last-minute water splurge

Adelaide water consumption rose dramatically in the leadup to tough new water restrictions, as householders gave their gardens a good soaking ahead of a ban on weekday sprinkler use. From me: When they were announced late in November many people including myself could not understand why they did not begin on the first of December.

2006 – year farmers would like to forget

Temperatures around Australia were almost half a degree above average in 2006.

Murray Valley Standard

Drought forces 'Bridge council to tighten water allocations

The ongoing drought has forced the Murray Bridge council to apply the toughest restrictions ever. Council has to restrict watering in some areas of the city and stop watering other areas.

Balance in key Peake water plan

The SA Murray Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board has started preparation of a water allocation plan for the Peake Roby prescribed wells area.

3rd January

Farmonline

Water: Interstate trading a step closer

NSW and South Australia have announced an important agreement to support permanent interstate water trading.

Water: Top priority for Howard in 2007

In his New Year's message, Prime Minister John Howard has identified faster water reform as a priority for 2007. While Labor has been pushing for a new cooperative federalism, Mr Howard says solving Australia's chronic water problem will require the states to put aside their personal priorities in favour of the national interest.

"We also need to re-double our efforts to tackle the chronic water problem that our country has," Mr Howard said.

"This will require us more than ever to look at the issue from a national perspective.

"The river systems and waterways of Australia are national assets, and we can only solve our water problems if we think as Australians and not as New South Welshman or Queenslanders or Victorians."

Mr Howard last week backed calls from Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran for rivers which run across state borders to be managed by the Commonwealth.

Mr Howard pointed to the reluctance of NSW to allow water from its Northern Rivers to be pumped across the border to thirsty Brisbane.

\$9m for new climate change centre

The Queensland Government will spend \$9 million to establish a new Climate Change Centre of Excellence - the first centre of its kind in Australia.

Broadscale clearing ends in Queensland

The Queensland Government has ignored warnings of environmental damage and lost productivity to hail an end to broadscale land clearing as its greatest green achievement.

The two-year transition period since the legislation to end broadscale land clearing in Queensland was passed has come to an end over the weekend.

Premier Peter Beattie says millions of hectares of remnant vegetation will now be preserved forever.

"One of the world's largest states in land area will have some of the strongest protections for its remnant native vegetation," Mr Beattie said.

"Before that commitment was made (during the 2004 election), up to 500,000 hectares of native vegetation was being cleared annually. This has now been halted.

"It has led to a cut in greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 20 million tonnes each year."

All existing broadscale permits expired at midnight on December 31, prompting warnings from landholders and farmer group AgForce that there will be economic and environmental damage as a result.

Government scientists have previously criticised the laws for ignoring the fact that broadscale clearing is the only economically viable method for farmers to control vegetation thickening and woody weeds.

It has been estimated that the cost of such thickening will run into the billions and could threaten native grass and bird species.

But the State Government says landholders will still be able to clear vegetation for management purposes. "Clearing for activities such as building fences, controlling weeds or harvesting fodder, especially during the current drought, could still be carried out," Mr Beattie said.

R & D spending vital to surviving the drought: Keniry

With Australia's agricultural research and development policy under the spotlight of the Productivity Commission, industry heavy-weight John Keniry has gone into bat for continued R&D funding.

Mr Keniry, chair of the Pork Cooperative Research Centre and board member for several other agricultural bodies, says the on-going investment in rural R&D has been vital to helping farmers survive the drought and declining terms of trade.

"If we didn't keep our productivity gains going then we wouldn't be competitive against the people we're selling against in the United States," Mr Keniry said. The PC inquiry, 'Public Support for Science and Innovation', is currently investigating the performance of and the returns from the \$6 billion invested annually in Australia's R&D system. And while it found in its interim report that the R&D structures are generally delivering returns, some changes are required to how the money is spent, with agriculture singled out for special attention. The report found the objectives of the CRCs should be re-aligned to the broad attainment of economic, social and environmental goals, not just commercial gains, and for the CRCs to be more nimble and less management intensive. And the draft PC report states that while strong public funding support is justified for Rural R&D Corporations, the level of public co-funding for some of the industry-focused corporations could be reduced once the economic circumstances of the rural sector are more favourable. But Mr Keniry says the spillover benefits for the broader community from agricultural R&D have justified the Government's investment in CRCs and the Rural R&D Corporations.

Adelaide Advertiser

\$20m weir estimate was 'foolhardy'

River Murray Minister Karlene Maywald yesterday revealed the construction of a \$20 million sheet-pile weir at Wellington "may not be possible" and at least four design options were being considered.

More confusion on weir project

Ms Maywald told ABC talkback radio yesterday 'The Advertiser's' report the Government considered plans for a Wellington weir four years ago was "absolute rubbish". However she conceded a 'very preliminary investigation was conducted for a permanent weir but ruled out almost immediately.

Driest year for some on record

South Australia was one of the driest States in 2006 with parts of the State recording low rainfall levels, a new report shows.

Only three water abuse fines in SA

Only three South Australians have been fined since Level 2 water restrictions were introduced in October though more than 1500 reminder notices also have been issued and 271 warning notices sent out.

Dams dip to half last year's levels

South Australia's 10 reservoirs hold 53 per cent less water than at this time last year, latest figures show.

4th January

Farmonline

Permanent water trading underway between NSW & Vic

Permanent interstate water trading has kicked off between New South Wales and Victoria, with the long-awaited goal of water experts finally realised on January 1.

Tourism offering farm alternatives in SA

With the drought crippling large tracts of South Australian agricultural land, farmers are being encouraged to look at tourism opportunities to boost their businesses.

Murray Valley Standard

Weir unviable less than five years ago

The construction of a weir at Wellington was deemed environmentally unviable in an investigation in 2002, it has been revealed. The State Government investigation showed the weir would be economically, socially and environmentally destructive.

Weir could split station

For one Wellington farmer, the weir could mean more than a change to the water levels of Lake Alexandrina. This means the station's 13 kilometre water frontage could straddle both sides of the temporary weir.

Local committee releases weir impact

The Lower Lakes and Coorong Infrastructure Committee has released a report on the impact a temporary weir would have on the community.

6.

Buy out Cubbie instead of building weir: Democrats MP

South Australia should join other States to buy out giant Queensland cotton farm Cubbie Station instead of wasting money on a weir at Wellington, according to Democrats MP Sandra Kanck.

Wellington weir could cost up to \$100m: Pederick

The State Government has admitted a temporary weir at Wellington may cost more than the \$20 million first flagged. Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick said he had heard the weir could cost up to \$100 million. Mr Pederick said the money would have been better spent on a desalination plant.

Water trading fairer for irrigators

Murraylands irrigators will receive a fairer deal when it comes to water trading with a strengthened interstate agreement.

River Murray water levels fine for cruising despite drought

The River Murray tourism industry is open for business this summer, according to Murraylands Tourism Marketing manager Caroline Phillips.

Community participation sought in salinity fight

Salinity impacts on farm production and on the quality of our environment and natural resources.

Grey water system first to meet standards

A Houseboat grey water filtration system designed by Mannum inventor Colin Newton is the first – and so far only – system to comply with the new standards to be set by the State's Environment Protection Authority.

Drought helps keep mozzie numbers down

One of the few positives to come from the drought in the Coorong council districts is a lack of mosquitoes.

5th January

Adelaide Advertiser

2006 was one of our warmest on record

South Australia in 2006 experienced its third warmest year since records began, with a mean temperature almost 1C above average.

More waterways on save the Murray hit-list

A further nine wetlands and waterways could be blocked off from the ailing River Murray. That would be an attempt to save more than 33,500 megalitres of water, despite grave fears some ecosystems might never recover. * Nelwood Swamp, near the Victorian border, 457ML saving * Horseshoe Swamp, Murtho, 428ML * Nelwart Swamp, Renmark, 316 ML * Lake Bonney, Barmera, 18,000 ML * Gurra Gurra, Berri, 8,000 ML * Yatco Lagoon, Moorook, 5,100 ML * Jeaschke Lagoon, Waikerie, 349 ML * Ross Lagoon, Waikerie, 649 ML * Causeway Lagoon, Berri, 233 ML. Water savings based on a years closure.

Thefts to push water meters underground

A spate of water meter thefts cost South Australians more than \$300,000 in the past six months.

Parliament stays green

The lawned roof of Canberra's Parliament House will be kept green throughout the drought because the building could be damaged if it were allowed to dry out.

Firearms uncovered

As drought in Victoria dries up lakes and river beds, it is exposing an interesting cache of illegal firearms.

Fishermen, farmers warn of a disaster

There is a "clear and present danger" of inducing an ecological, social and economic disaster by building a weir at Wellington, says a lobby group backed by farmers and fishermen. An exclusive report by the Meningie and Nurrung Districts Community Group estimates that local businesses, including dairy farmers, fisherman and tour operators, will lose up to 60 per cent of their business if a weir is built at Wellington. If anybody would like a copy of the report by the Meningie and Nurrung Districts Community let me know and I will email you a copy.

A waste of money, say angry residents

Wellington residents fear the proposed River Murray weir above Lake Alexandrina could destroy the region's ecosystem, wasting millions of taxpayer dollars.

6th January

Adelaide Advertiser Front Page

Few incentives in SA to save water

South Australians are being offered the lowest incentives to install water-saving devices of any mainland State, with the State Government admitting the failure of its \$2 million rain water rebate scheme. The Queensland scheme is \$49 million. In SA 184 tank rebate application had been received by SA Water over the past 6 months but only 17 had been approved.

7.

Households ignoring curbs

Adelaide householders have used the equivalent of 411 Olympic-size swimming pools more water this week

than last, despite the toughest water restrictions in the State's history starting Monday.

Coorong a rubbish dump

The Coorong's sandy beaches have become a dumping ground for its visitors who are leaving their rubbish to be collected by someone else.

Picture is grim on the Coorong

A flock of pelicans taking off from the Coorong this week was a stunning vision – but the region's farmers paint a grimly different picture. This action being taken by the members of the, "Meningie and Nurrung Districts Community Group" is not just about saving their livelihoods but about saving a centuries old ecosystem. The pelicans may be flying in numbers now two months ago hundreds of chicks were abandoned as water and food ran out on their Coorong breeding grounds.

Water alert

Melbourne's water storage level has fallen to its lowest point in nine years as Mt thwaites, the State's Water Minister appealed to Victorian's to conserve water, with figures showing the city's reservoirs were down to 38.7 per cent of capacity – or 33.5 per cent down on last year.

Voters to have say on water plant

A Referendum could be held in Port Augusta this year to gauge support for a desalination plant.

Heritage Matters

Weir plan recipe for long-term disaster

Mike Rann is to stop the fglow of the Murray River at Wellington by building a dam there. Aside from affirming South Australia's status as the nutty State, a Wellington dam is a dangerous piece of political, as well as hydro, engineering. Worst of all, the calamity of the Wellington weir will divert attention from the real problem, the sustainability of the Murray-Darling system.

The Advertiser Review Saturday 6th January

On the ropes...but our sick river can be saved – agreat article by Peter Hackett

7th January

Perthnow

Drought to jack up food costs

Despite patcheyrain across New South Wales last month, more of the state has slipped into drought, the latest figures show. The vast majority of the state continues to be drought declared, with an increase of 0.5 per cent from November to 93.2 per cent, and another 4.7 per cent declared marginal.

Just 2.1 per cent of the state is experiencing satisfactory conditions, Primary Industries minister Ian Macdonald said. NSW residents could expect the cost of meat, eggs and other goods to rise as the cost of feed jumped, the minister said.

"We've had some rainfall across some areas of the state but it's very patchy and isolated," Mr Macdonald said today.

"In those areas where it fell it was very good for farmers, it lifted their morale ... however, right across the state we're still facing extreme conditions."

Inflows into the Murray River system were just 34 gigitalitres in December, a new record low, and total NSW water storages were at 20.4 per cent capacity, a decrease of 2.5 percentage points on last month, Mr Macdonald said. A predicted easing of the El Nino could bring some relief, but Mr Macdonald could not guarantee whether tougher restrictions or greater assistance would be offered in the interim.

"I won't guarantee a change in any of the situations in the state at the moment," he said.

"The conditions are so appalling, so dry overall that we'll have to continue to monitor month by month the prevailing conditions."

8th January

Farmonline

Drought: Hay heads to \$30 a small bale

Small bales of lucerne hay could soon cost up to \$30 if dry conditions continue across the eastern seaboard. And by winter, quality hay for horse owners could be almost non-existent, warn producers who are already struggling to keep up with demand.

Soaring feed costs have hit all livestock owners hard, but those with horses, particularly on the outskirts of major towns and cities are being squeezed particularly hard as lucerne prices climb to around \$26 a bale in Sydney's horse belt and \$20 in country areas.

Rural produce supplier, Better Produce, at Terrey Hills, is selling lucerne hay for \$24.50, clover hay for \$22.50 and triticale hay for \$19.50.

8.

Principal, Jacob Piekus, is unable to obtain hay from the popular Hunter Valley growing region and has to truck supplies from as far as southern Queensland (lucerne), Deniliquin (clover), and near Cowra (triticale). "If you're willing to pay the dollars and travel for it, it's not too difficult to source hay, but I expect it to

become very difficult to source," Mr Pieksu said.

"I'd anticipate prices will get towards \$30 a bale."

Despite being in a generally wealthy demographic area of Sydney, Mr Piekus knows many horse owners in his area are having to destock because the price of hay is becoming too high.

Gunnedah prime lucerne hay producer, Greg Sanson, 'River Grove', predicts winter will be "a big test", because so little freshly made hay is going into storage.

"Demand is so great for every cut that at this stage there'll be no reserves for winter," he said.

Water pipeline on track in SA

The \$48.5 million pipeline being constructed on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula is on track to ease pressure on local groundwater sources by providing access to River Murray water.

But chief operating officer, John Ringham, says the State Government-funded project will not result in extra water extracted from the Murray to supply EP.

Water is being purchased from licences that are already operating and reallocating the water to EP that would have been used elsewhere along the river.

The government is also investigating longer-term use of the pipeline to deliver water from a seawater desalination plant, such as the one proposed by BHP Billiton to supply the Olympic Dam mine from Spencer Gulf.

On track to be commissioned in mid-2007, the new pipeline will deliver filtered River Murray water to more than 800 SA Water connections at Kimba, Lock, Darke Peak and Rudall.

Groundwater from systems at Uley South, Uley Wanilla, Lincoln Basin and Polda presently supply EP with reticulated water.

Herald Sun

Piping to farms could solve crisis

Enough water is lost from Victoria's leaky irrigation channels to supply Melbourne for two years.

And the city's ageing water pipes and dodgy meters are losing about 10 per cent of the city's dwindling reserves – enough to fill 48 Olympic swimming pools every day.

More than 750 billion litres are lost each year through evaporation, seepage, theft and metering errors in rural water systems.

With most of Victoria on severe water restrictions and Melbourne starting tough stage 3 restrictions, pressure is mounting to fix the drain on precious resources.

Melbourne's water storages are at 38.4 per cent capacity.

Replacing open channels with pipes is expected to save billions of litres and provide enough water to permanently secure urban water supplies.

The Wimmera Mallee Pipeline project will cut water losses to evaporation and seepage by more than 80 per cent – about 120 billion litres are lost at present.

However those savings are a drop in the ocean compared with the Goulburn Murray irrigation system, which lost more than 662 billion litres last year.

Much of Victoria's irrigation system, which takes up 77 per cent of the state's water supply, was built 50 to 100 years ago. Theft, metering faults and other factors also drain reserves. Dozens of alleged thieves have been caught and charged or face charges. Most water was stolen by illegally diverting channels.

Goulburn Murray Water's manager of water resources, Graeme Hannon, said the system's losses were a concern, but steps had been taken to fix the problems.

"We are very keen to make investments to reduce the losses for better efficiency," he said. "There is a lot of work to do. We are doing the work that is cost effective." But that does not include covering main channels – work deemed too expensive for the possible benefits. "It's just not cost effective to do that," he said.

A spokesman for Water Minister John Thwaites admitted more water could be saved.

However the Government has also ruled out large-scale piping of northern Victoria's channels, claiming the multi-billion dollar costs would be prohibitive.

Kyabram farmer Frank Fanning said selling water from Lake Eildon to the lower reaches of the Murray River was causing massive losses through evaporation and seepage.

However the dairy farmer could see no likelihood of water in the immense irrigation system being piped. "Selling water from the Goulburn into the Murray system has caused huge losses . . . there's got to be a rethink of how the system operates," he said.

While irrigation systems lose almost 30 per cent of rural supplies, Melbourne authorities are trying to stem leaks in the urban system. About 44 billion litres are lost each year to leaking pipes, burst water mains, metering error and other unaccounted factors. Yarra Valley Water managing director Tony Kelly said losses had been halved in the past 15 years, but more work needed to be done.

"By an international standard our losses are very low," he said. "In London, for instance, they lose one in every four litres."

Farmers on the Rochester Campaspe Water Services Committee are seeking compensation for 30 million litres of water they say was taken by a local authority. The farmers say Coliban Water accidentally pumped too much from Lake Eppalock reservoir. Victorian Farmers Federation water spokesman Richard Anderson said he accepted it was an accident but it belonged to irrigators.

AWA

PM Howard has used his New Year's message to urge all Australians to re-double efforts to tackle the country's chronic water deficits and to address the associated issues from a National Perspective rather than a local, state concern.

In planning for the purified recycled water Plebiscite on March 17, the Queensland Water Commission is calling on an advisory panel for independent advice on the science. Senior Deputy VC of the University of Queensland, Professor Paul Greenfield will chair with a team of experts in ecotoxicology, advanced water treatment, the environment and microbiology.

For November 2006, inflows to the Murray River were at a record low of 55GL (the median is 650GL). Irrigators will continue to receive 60 percent of their allocations, while regulated wetlands have been blocked and investigations continue into the minimisation of losses.

Western Australia now has new Planning Guidelines to help ensure that development does not damage Water Resources.

In 2007, the Essential Services Commission will commence a review of the prices to apply to water and sewerage services provided by Victoria's 20 water businesses for the second regulatory period. Each water business is required to submit a Water Plan for the regulatory period commencing 1 July 2008.

Four international companies - AWS/Degremont, Veolia, GE and IDE Technologies Ltd - have been asked to submit Expressions of Interest to build Sydney's Desalination Plant as dam levels move nearer the 30% level, the trigger for a firm decision on construction of the plant by the NSW Government.

The Queensland government has announced Funding of \$7.6 million over four years to evaluate the effectiveness of Cloud Seeding in increasing rainfall in Queensland. A pilot project will be conducted this year in South East Queensland using new "warm cloud" seeding processes.

Econova, based on the Sunshine Coast, has achieved a world first in Domestic water Recycling technology. The patented water recycling system NovaClear has been certified for aboveground irrigation without requiring further disinfection.

A \$3 million project will investigate the different aquifers across the Swan Coastal Plain that may be used for managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) schemes. The research, to be undertaken by Water Corporation and CSIRO with support from the WA Premier's Water Foundation, will help define the appropriateness of aquifer recharge and pre-treatment.

Sydney's largest Industrial Water Recycling project commenced operation last month. Orica's recycling project at Botany pipes highly treated groundwater to three of Sydney's major manufacturing companies, potentially saving up to 5 billion litres of drinking water annually.

A new online "Drought Portal" has been developed to provide information on drought-related research projects from Australia's 15 rural research and development corporations. The website was designed to give producers access to practical tools and research results from different industries which may aid them in dealing with the current drought. (Website)

Sarina Shire Council will receive \$3 million, as an interest free loan, from the Queensland Government in addition to the \$3 million already committed in November 2006 to build a 19km water pipeline from the Mackay Water Treatment Plant to the town of Sarina.

10.

The SA Government is considering the extension of current water Conservation Measures (restrictions) to non-potable water use. Consultation with users of wells, stormwater and other surface waters is planned in early 2007. Users of rainwater and greywater would not be affected by restrictions.

New South Wales and South Australia have agreed to support permanent interstate Water Trading, following

from the release of the Australian Consumer and Competition Commission (ACCC) report in November. Both states aim to have permanent administrative and legislative arrangements in place by July 2007.

The WA Government has received ten expressions of interest for the further development of irrigated land whilst meeting the needs for sustainable management of the environment and hydro-electricity generation in the Ord River Irrigation Area in the East Kimberley.

Irrigators in the Murray and Goulburn systems may be able to keep water they do not use in the current season for next season as part of a drought response measure, instead of it being returned to the bulk pool at the end of the season, as is usual practice.

Recent images of fresh water storage by NASA's Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment (GRACE) satellites show how water is distributed globally and monitor tiny month-to-month changes in Earth's gravity field that are caused mainly by movements of water on land and ice, in ocean and atmospheric reservoirs. The data helps identify possible trends in precipitation changes, groundwater depletion and snow and glacier melt rates and their causes. (Website)

Acting WA Premier Eric Ripper has asked the federal government to help fund a trial scheme to pump 1.5 GL of treated waste water a year into the Gnangara Aquifer.

The arguments about the merits or otherwise of a desalination plant for Sydney are about to be re-ignited.

AN overwhelming majority of Australians would be prepared to drink recycled sewage to help ease a national crisis in urban water supplies that has forced escalating restrictions on water use.

A Newspoll conducted exclusively for *The Australian* shows almost seven out of 10 people favour water from sewage treatment plants being supplied to homes for all household uses, including drinking, provided it is treated to the same quality as existing water supplies. Most of the remainder say they would be prepared to use recycled sewage for non-drinking purposes, such as flushing toilets and watering gardens. The survey comes ahead of Queensland Premier Peter Beattie's March 17 referendum for southeast Queensland on using recycled water to top up falling dam levels.

Southeast Queensland's dams are down to 24.2 per cent. They were last full in January 2000. If the summer rains fail again, the rapidly growing region will have less than two years' supply left. With the major capital cities suffering depleted water supplies as the worst drought in a century continues, the Newspoll shows almost universal support for some use of treated effluent.

In the past week there has been promising rainfall of up to 20mm across parts of Victoria and NSW, although well short of the drought-breaking falls needed.

Of the 1200 people who were surveyed for the poll, conducted on December 15-17, only 2 per cent opposed any use of recycled effluent. Sixty-nine per cent of respondents said they would be prepared to accept supply of treated effluent for all household use, including drinking, provided the water was treated to the same quality as current supplies. And 29 per cent were prepared to accept such supplies for non-drinking uses. The idea won across-the-board support, regardless of the respondents' age, gender, location or political leaning, with a minimum of 66 per cent of respondents in favour across the various statistical groups. However, Australians aged 35 years and over were slightly more likely to be in favour of the idea than those aged 18 to 34. Slightly more men than women were in favour of drinking recycled effluent. The poll result follows the July referendum in the Queensland inland city of Toowoomba where two-thirds of residents voted to reject a \$68 million council plan to top up drinking water supplies with recycled effluent. The Newspoll found people outside capital cities were slightly less enthused about using recycled water for drinking than their capital city counterparts. Treated effluent is used overseas and has been proposed by water experts as a way to end uncertainty about Australia's water supply amid the drought and difficulty in finding appropriate locations for new dams.

11.

Adelaide leads the country, recycling more than 20 per cent. The recycled water goes to agriculture, freeing up drinking water.

Saltwater desalination, buying water from irrigators, and storm water recycling are among other proposals put forward.

Scientists insist that advanced treatment methods used in recycling effluent produce water of a higher quality than that currently coming out of taps.

The Water Services Association of Australia has recommended recycled water for drinking be put back into environmental buffers such as rivers or dams rather than straight into pipes.

Prime Minister John Howard, the National Water Commission, city utilities and scientists all agree Australian towns and cities must consider using recycled waste water to top up dwindling supplies. The Newspoll findings will boost Mr Beattie's vote on whether 2.5 million southeast Queenslanders should have recycled sewage pouring from their taps. In the Toowoomba referendum, authorities proposed pumping treating sewage into the local dam, then treating it again before supplying it to homes. The proposal had the backing of the state and federal governments, which agreed to help fund the project provided it had community support. But the plan was rejected after a "toilet to taps" fear campaign bankrolled by a local developer. Not all communities oppose recycling. The drought-ravaged NSW city of Goulburn, which is conducting a six-month consultation process on the issue, found in a recent survey that 47 per cent of the 23,000 residents were open to the idea of the council building a recycling plant with 41 per cent against. Goulburn has been in drought for five years and its dam is nearly empty.

Despite encouraging rainfall over parts of southeastern Australia last week -- but largely excluding southeast Queensland -- weather experts say the falls are still far too small to make a meaningful impact on the crisis.

A recent CSIRO report shows that the drought gripping southeast Australia is due to natural climate variations rather than greenhouse effect.

The Commonwealth Government has again pushed the case to control Australia's cross border management of water resources causing angst for their state counterparts.

While other states have tightened water restrictions and consider drinking recycled water, the NSW government is standing firm against further water restrictions and focusing on desalination for Sydney and the Central Coast of NSW.

The Queensland Government has spent \$6.4 million in the past year for consultants' advice on tackling the water crisis.

The Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) of Pakistan's Punjab Province has approved the mandatory installation of domestic water meters in the city of Rawalpindi and the public will be educated on the importance of the meters for saving water.

**9th January
Farmonline**

Turnbull rejects Labor plan for irrigation buybacks

Parliamentary Secretary for Water, Malcolm Turnbull, has dismissed Labour plans for a buy back of irrigation licences as dangerous and misguided.

Labour's water spokesman, Anthony Albanese, caught the headlines today by recommitting the Opposition to a water buyback under new Leader Kevin Rudd.

Mr Albanese has been reported as saying the Government's plan of only returning water to the environment via on-farm efficiency savings is "extremely short-sighted".

But Mr Turnbull says the Government has already been returning water from irrigators to the environment, but in a way that is mindful of retaining viable rural communities.

The Government has previously contributed compensation funds to cutbacks in groundwater entitlements, and is currently offering to buy water back from irrigators where it can be sourced through efficiency savings.

"Which towns do you want to close down?" Mr Turnbull asked of Mr Albanese's plan.

"This is a delicate business and it has to be done in an intelligent and sensitive fashion."

12.

Drought forces Pacific National job cuts

The drought has put the squeeze on grain exporter Pacific National, which has offered voluntary redundancies to several Moss Vale employees.

Driest year on record in parts of Southern Australia

2006 was the driest year on record across parts of Southern Australia, most notably in northern and eastern Tasmania, northeast Victoria and adjacent parts of southern NSW and the ACT.

The revelation from the Bureau of Meteorology comes after December rainfall totals were generally below average across the drought-affected parts of eastern and southern Australia.

The Bureau says the period from August to December was especially warm and dry across the southern half of the country. Averaged over the Murray-Darling Basin, it was the driest such period on record - records

date back to 1900 - as well as being the second warmest.

Much of the central-west and southwest slopes of NSW had mean maximum temperatures more than 3°C above the long-term average.

South Australia and Victoria had their second driest August to December period, while in area-average terms it was the warmest last five months of the year for the country as a whole, as well as for Western Australia, SA and Victoria.

The Bureau says a poor start to the northern wet season has also caused short-term rainfall deficiencies to develop across some parts of tropical Australia.

For the five-month period from August to December, generally severe rainfall deficiencies covered most of SA, apart from the northeast quarter; all of Victoria, northern and eastern Tasmania; most of NSW west of a line from Bega to Tamworth to Bourke; southern inland Queensland; parts of northwest and northern Queensland; areas in the northern NT; and the coastal zone between Albany and Esperance in southern WA. Record low falls were widely scattered about all these areas.

The deficiencies have occurred against a backdrop of multi-year rainfall deficits that have severely stressed water supplies in the east and southwest of the country.

Drought: Polar cyclones may hold the key

Weather experts from Monash University will fly high-tech remote-control aircraft through the centre of storms in the Southern Ocean in a bid to understand Australia's worsening drought.

A three-year study headed by Professor Amanda Lynch, from the School of Geography and Environmental Science, has been funded by the Australian Research Council.

The team also hopes to secure Australian Federal Government and United States Government funding to pay for two six-week field trips to the Antarctic, from where the aircraft, known as Aerosonde, will be launched.

Australia is suffering one of the driest periods on record with a near total absence of late winter and spring rains across the southern half of the country.

"This will help us to understand why we get droughts in southern Australia and why they are getting worse," Professor Lynch says.

"It seems that the rain is moving south and falling in the Southern Ocean during these extreme storms or cyclones.

"We hope to go down to Terra Nova Bay in Antarctica and fly remote-control aircraft into the storms to study them."

The high-tech Aerosonde, an Australian invention first manufactured in Melbourne and owned by AAI Corporation, carry instruments that measure elements such as temperature, humidity and air pressure.

They can be launched from trucks and can even be controlled by their operators over the internet.

"One of the big problems we have in planning for drought has to do with understanding whether the drought that we are in right now is a climate-change signal or part of a natural cycle," Prof Lynch said.

"If we want to understand that we need to understand where the rain is coming from."

River runs restore western Old water supplies

Flows in western Queensland's Thomson and Barcoo Rivers have replenished water supplies for three isolated communities.

Barcoo Shire Mayor, Bruce Scott, says the runs in the rivers have allowed off-stream water storages at Stonehenge (population 40), Jundah (pop. 120) and Windorah (pop. 80-100) to be refilled.

Jundah has been relying on a reverse osmosis plant, which was installed in 2002.

All three communities were close to running out of water because of on-going drought, Cr Scott said.

However, the runs in the Thomson and Barcoo have been insufficient to flood outside the river channels and create valuable cattle feed.

Cr Scott, who operates the 28,000ha Windorah property, Moothandella, with his wife Maureen, says the Barcoo Shire remains in the grip of drought.

13.

"There has been rain around us but this shire continues to miss out," Cr Scott said.

"It is desperate but hopefully the rain will come."

The 62,000sq km Barcoo Shire is about the size of Tasmania and a total population of 460 people.

The Thomson and Barcoo Rivers meet north of Windorah to form Cooper Creek.

Adelaide Advertiser

Farmers say meat price a rip-off

Consumers are being "ripped off" by supermarkets and butchers not passing on hugely discounted prices, farmers claim.

Talk: Blueprint to breathe life into waterway

By Grant Chapman Liberal Senator for South Australia

When The Rivers Run Dry

The Murray-Darling Basin is Australia's food bowl. The river system supplies water for irrigated agriculture worth more than \$5.5 billion. In its sixth year of drought, it is suffering record low inflows and is threatening to become very saline.

Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resources Economics forecasts that drought will wipe \$3.5 billion off the grain crop now appearing wildly optimistic.

The impact on rural communities and families is devastating.

This devastation is a cost we all share through increasing prices for water and basic commodities.

Adalaidenow

WE WON

Toxic dump plans dropped

PLANS for a toxic waste dump near Mildura have been scrapped in a major backflip by the Bracks Government.

The decision not to go ahead with the Nowingi dump follows massive opposition from a coalition of residents, Riverland farmers and environmentalists.

An independent panel's investigation found while the project was environmentally feasible, there were too many planning barriers to the project.

South Australian Opposition Leader Iain Evans welcomed the news which, he said, his party had lobbied against.

"If it had proceeded the Nowingi dump would have sat 200 kilometres closer to Adelaide and was more hazardous than the cancelled Woomera radioactive waste repository," he said. "To make matters worse, it would have been in the River Murray catchment." The Victorian Government also ruled out establishing any other toxic dump in the state, and will instead introduce a range of measures to deal with the state's toxic waste. This includes raising levies on landfill from \$26 to \$130 per tonne, rising to \$250 per tonne in two years, to cut the problem of toxic waste.

Businesses would also be given incentives to reduce their toxic waste, while the Acting Premier John Thwaites announced more funds for processing toxic waste.

An environmental effects statement had previously backed the project.

The decision is a major victory for anti-dump campaigners who had argued the facility would threaten at least five threatened species, including the Mallee emu-wren and mallee fowl.

As the champagne and tears flowed in Mildura at the decision today, Save the Foodbowl Alliance deputy chair Sharon Peart told Southern Cross radio that group was ecstatic at the result.

She said the group was always hopeful that the "facts would win out" and "commonsense would prevail".

"I think it's a great thing for ordinary people to realise they can come up with the goods."

The government also faced a great deal of political heat on the issue, with Independent MP Russell Savage losing his seat at the last election to the National's Peter Crisp on the back of the project, as he was seen as being a Labor Party supporter on the project.

The plan would have also faced serious opposition in the Upper House where the Liberals, Nationals and Greens were all considering fighting legislation allowing the development.

The project would also have needed approval from the Environment Protection Authority and the federal government. Acting Liberal leader Louise Asher said a shadow cabinet decision would be necessary to decide the party's stand.

Greens upper house MP Colleen Hartland said the party would have been unlikely to support the dump.

The DLP, which had one member in the new upper house, was undecided on how it would vote.

The government has been holding onto the panel's report since last month.

Mr Thwaites said the government had followed the advice of the independent panel which recommended against building the facility. "While Government's preference was to have a long term facility at Nowingi, we said all along that we would abide by the independent panel's finding," Mr Thwaites said.

14.

"It is clear from the panel report that while such a facility is environmentally feasible, there are planning concerns. "In light of the Panel's recommendations, the Government has ruled out examination of any other sites for a new long term waste containment facility in Victoria." Instead, the government would rely on new technology to reduce toxic waste.

While the government had previously announced the rise in landfill levies to \$130 per tonne by July this year, they would now rise to \$250 per tonne by mid-2008.

The \$30 million raised over four years would pay for new waste technology for reprocessing and recovery of industrial waste, he said.

"The Government's measures will reduce hazardous waste by at least 30 per cent, to about 60,000 tonnes per annum next year and about 40,000 tonnes per annum within approximately two years," Mr Thwaites said. In

the meantime, the government would continue to rely on the an existing Lyndhurst landfill for industrial waste until 2020.

Murray Valley Standard

Water restrictions impact on Murraylands businesses

With level three restrictions introduced Murraylands businesses have had to tighten their belts with their water usage. Sports grounds, commercial nurseries and garden supply companies have strict guidelines to follow under the new restrictions. The golf club is taking a proactive approach whilst businesses adapt to the restrictions.

Shore-based testing for Wellington weir

Testing at Wellington and Lake Alexandrina is planned to continue, with shore-based tests to take over from the river soil investigations.

10th January

Farmonline

Drought: NSW Farmers' wants to graze National Parks

The NSW Government must support struggling farmers affected by the drought by opening selected National Parks for grazing, according to the NSW Farmers' Association.

Association president, Jock Laurie, says the State Government must be prepared to look at the option, given that more than 93pc of the State is drought affected.

"Feed for the State's livestock is at a critical level and this Government must look at opening selected parks to help with the shortfall," Mr Laurie said.

In November last year, the State's Rural Lands Protection Boards (RLPBs) called for the opening of parks for grazing – a recommendation rejected by the State Government.

But this week, the State Opposition has again brought the issue to the Government's attention.

"We are not asking for the most environmentally sensitive parks to be opened – but a select number that could be managed responsibly," Mr Laurie said.

"History shows that grazing can have positive benefits with the reduction of fuel build-up.

"This option will help reduce devastating bushfires around the State.

"Many farmers are running out of alternatives to feed drought-affected stock and it's high time this State Government support them."

\$100m for WA salinity, land and water projects

Combating salinity and improving water quality in Western Australia will be the top priorities of a two-year \$100 million joint State-Federal Government package.

The latest round of regional funding from the Federal Government's National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) and the Natural Heritage Trust was announced yesterday and will be boosted by cash and in-kind contributions from the WA Government, local government, landholders and private industry.

Federal Ministers for the Environment, Senator Ian Campbell, says funding will support on-going projects in the Avon, Northern Agricultural, South West, South Coast and Swan regions.

"We're seeing great results from work funded under the last investment round and this new funding will help regional groups continue their innovative approaches to land management," Senator Campbell said.

"Up in the Northern Agricultural region, for example, a mix of drainage and engineering projects are tackling the dual problems of rising groundwater and dryland salinity.

"The \$1.6 million Yarra Yarra surface drain and the development of a commercial brushwood venture are helping us learn how drainage and replanting can be part of the salinity solution.

"Like most of the regional projects, these are carefully designed to both improve the health of the environment and increase farm productivity."

WA Minister for Agriculture, Kim Chance, says substantial funding will go towards finding uses for salt-affected land.

15.

"We're on target to plant 1.5 million oil mallee trees across the Wheatbelt as a part of our commitment to combat salinity," Mr Chance said.

"Oil mallees are hardy trees that reduce the salt problem and safeguard farms from rising water tables.

"On another salinity front, some of the funding for the South West region will support the installation of gauging stations along the Blackwood River to monitor and report on water levels."

Water trading a step closer between Qld and NSW

Hot on the heels of last week's announcements of water trading rules between NSW, Victoria and South Australia, agreement is near for trading to commence between Queensland and NSW.

Queensland's Department of Natural Resources and Water yesterday released a draft Border Rivers

Resource Operations Plan for public comment. Department Director-General, Scott Spencer, says the plan is

a major step in ensuring the future sustainable allocation and management of water resources in the Border Rivers, which stretch from Stanthorpe to Goondiwindi.

"This draft resource operations plan for surface water in the Border Rivers plan area provides the proposed management rules and mechanisms to implement the existing water resource plan," Mr Spencer said.

"The draft plan includes the conversion of many existing entitlements to tradable water allocations.

"A major milestone is the provision for interstate trading of water allocations along the rivers that form the border with NSW.

"Water allocation holders will be able to buy, sell or lease water within the rules specified in the plan to best fit their own farming plans."

The draft plan will also make available up to 5000 megalitres of unallocated water in the Stanthorpe shire area.

"This water will be released through a public auction process with a potential 3500ML for irrigation and associated industry and 1500ML reserved for town water supply," Mr Spencer said.

Comments on the draft resource operations plan will be accepted until 28 February 2007.

Drought rips \$150m off the value of Qld's summer crop

AgForce is predicting the on-going drought will cost the Queensland grains industry about \$150 million this year, with the summer crop estimated to be down a devastating 50pc on normal yields.

AgForce Grains president, Lyndon Pfeffer, says the bulk of the State's summer crop would be grown in Central Queensland's Dawson Callide Valley and the Central Highlands, unless urgent soaking rain falls across southern Queensland.

"Normally Queensland produces a summer crop of 1.5 million tonnes of grain - made up of sorghum, corn, soy and mung beans - which is conservatively worth about \$300 million," Mr Pfeffer said.

"This year, CQ is the only area where significant production is expected, areas in southern Queensland - particularly the Darling Downs and Burnett - have few crops and those who managed to plant will see yields reduced to zero without significant rainfall."

Mr Pfeffer says recent falls in CQ have enabled farmers to plant, helping the State to achieve a best estimate of just 750,000t of grain this summer.

Data from the Queensland Department of Primary Industries also predicts that southern Queensland has a 0-10pc chance of exceeding average yields.

But Mr Pfeffer says it is heartening to see many CQ growers finally experience a better than average winter crop last year and be able to again plant this summer, after missing out on successive seasons over the past five years due to the drought.

"There has been good rain across CQ particularly in late December and early January with growers taking advantage by planting mostly sorghum and mung beans," he said.

"Indications are these conditions mean there is a 50-60pc chance of exceeding the median yield for the summer season across most of CQ, which is good news."

Adelaide Advertiser

Coorong is dying: Is it too late to save the Coorong?

By Cara Jekin; Environment Reporter

South Australia's most precious natural asset, the Coorong, has been reduced to a trickle, with fish and birds rapidly disappearing. The condition of the Coorong has reached a new low as a lack of freshwater into the estuary has led to the 140km stretch dying. Adelaide University School of Earth and environmental Sciences Associate Professor David Paton said the internationally recognised ecosystem was in the worst condition he had ever seen.

10th January

Farmonline

16.

El Niño weakens and promises a wet autumn

It's been confirmed: the El Niño event that has crippled Australia with drought has begun to weaken. All of the Bureau of Meteorology's support a weakening of the event, boding well for a switch towards wetter conditions across Australia sometime in the late summer or autumn.

The Bureau says the timing of the weakening also fits in well with that observed during previous El Ninos, although it is still possible for there to be renewed strengthening of the El Niño event for a month or to before it finally disintegrates. The Bureau reports that since late November near equatorial sea-surface temperatures have cooled by about 0.1-0.4°C; cooler-than-normal sub-surface water has extended well into the eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean; and the Trade Winds have been stronger than normal across the western and central Pacific. Furthermore, monthly Southern Oscillation Index values were neutral for both November and December, and central Pacific cloudiness has been near to or slightly below average for almost a month.

However, it says a moderate to strong Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO), with an associated Westerly wind burst, is currently affecting the area between Northern Australia and Indonesia.

If the MJO maintains its intensity as it propagates into the western Pacific, a fall in the SOI, a decrease in the Trade Wind strength and a

This may cause temporary strengthening of the El Niño event, but given the recent trends and the predictions from computer models, neutral conditions are expected to return during the southern autumn.

Water: Turnbull orders investigation of new Old licences

A Queensland Government plan to create new irrigation licences in the south west of the State has prompted an outcry from the drought-parched southern areas of the Murray Darling Basin.

And it has prompted Federal Parliamentary Secretary Water, Malcolm Turnbull, to instigate a National Water Commission Inquiry into whether the proposal breaches the National Water Initiative.

The Queensland Government is planning to auction new irrigation licences to farmers on the Warrego River near Charleville. The ephemeral river is often dry, but has been known to flood Charleville during big wets. As such, the new licences will only allow for extraction of eight gegalitres of water for irrigation during high-flow periods.

But Mr Turnbull says the public concerns about of the idea - given its timing during the worst drought on record when southern irrigators are facing severe cutbacks - are valid and should be looked into.

"I've asked the NWC to look into it, talk to the Queenslanders and come back to me with a report," Mr Turnbull said.

But Mr Turnbull has acknowledged the Warrego River currently has only 2pc of its flows allocated to agriculture.

Woolworths to donate a day's profit to drought relief

Woolworths is holding a national drought action day on January 23, donating its entire Supermarket profits that day to drought relief. Woolworths CEO, Michael Luscombe, says the majority of the money raised, expected to be more than of \$3 million, will primarily be used by the Country Women's Association to provide immediate support for rural families' household needs, such as bills, groceries and fuel. The remainder will be used to help fund research into sustainable farming practices. Mr Luscombe says the day is important in terms of raising awareness and understanding of the drought amongst all Australians.

Drought: SA pasture cover at minimal levels

Paddock feed is at a minimal in most districts of South Australia, with pastures largely exhausted and stubbles rapidly diminishing. And according to the December 2006 PIRSA Crop and Pasture Conditions Report prepared by Rural Solutions SA, some supplementary feeding has already started.

Report author, Peter Fulwood, says an increasing number of paddocks have "very little surface cover and are at constant risk of wind erosion".

Some areas are already showing significant soil movement, the report says.

"Recent germination of summer weeds will provide some paddock cover and green pick for stock," the report states.

"Some farmers are using confinement feeding systems to carry stock through and help maintain paddock surface cover.

"Bores/dam are drying up in some areas forcing producers to cart water."

A hotline is available for farmers seeking access to drought information, including support services, rural financial counsellors, and managing stock and crops in dry times.

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17.

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MDA

Govt rejects Labour plan for irrigation buybacks

The Federal Government has dismissed Labor plans for a buy back of irrigation licences as dangerous and misguided. Labor's water spokesman, Anthony Albanese, caught the headlines today by recommitting the Opposition to a water buyback under new Leader Kevin Rudd. Mr Albanese has been reported as saying the Government's plan of only returning water to the environment via on-farm efficiency savings is "extremely short-sighted".

But Parliamentary Secretary for Water, Malcolm Turnbull, says the Government has already been returning water from irrigators to the environment, but in a way that is mindful of retaining viable rural communities. The Government has previously contributed compensation funds to cutbacks in groundwater entitlements, and is currently offering to buy water back from irrigators where it can be sourced through efficiency savings. "Which towns do you want to close down?" Mr Turnbull asked of Mr Albanese's plan. "This is a delicate business and it has to be done in an intelligent and sensitive fashion."

Similarly, Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran says Labor's plan will undermine farmers during the worst drought on record. Mr McGauran says buying water from farmers to take it out of production is a simplistic blunt instrument that had to be "an absolute last resort" in dealing with the drought and overallocation.

"When the drought breaks there are far better ways of achieving the sustainable use of water than buying it," Mr McGauran said. "Buying it, especially during this drought, would be to the long term disadvantage of farming families and rural communities."

Mr McGauran also challenged Mr Albanese and Professor Peter Cullen to nominate which farming communities they would shut down or make unsustainable by buying their water, and to justify their opposition to achieving gains through efficiency improvements.

January 10th 2007

Media Release Murray Darling Association

The National Chairman of the Murray Darling Association, Cr. Bill Gorman of Corowa Shire Council, has today applauded the decision by the Victorian Government to shelve the plans for a Toxic waste dump at Nowingi, in the Sunraysia region of North West Victoria. The findings of the panel selected by the government in May of 2006 and its recommendations to the Victorian Government, have not been in vain. Cr. Gorman said that the Murray Darling Association has always been committed to ensuring that the clean and green image of the Murray Darling Basin remains intact.

"The Environmental, Geological, Cultural, and Economic reasons to site the Waste dump outside the Murray Darling Basin vindicates the stance taken by the Rural City of Mildura and the Association congratulates them on their efforts in obtaining a very pleasing outcome," he said. In the current climate of water shortages and drought, the Sunraysia community, bore a high cost in the defence of "No toxic waste dump" at Nowingi. This achievement has provided some hope for the continued prosperity of the region and the basin as a whole.

Adelaidenow

Wetland to dry out to help Murray

A MAJOR wetland in South Australia's Riverland will be allowed to dry out to help save River Murray water. The Banrock Station wetland, between Waikerie and Barmera, north-east of Adelaide, will be left dry every second year to save about 1.15 gegalitres of water which normally flows in from the Murray.

18.

South Australia's River Murray Minister Karlene Maywald said allowing the wetland to dry out reflected the way water naturally flowed to the region years before locks were built across the river.

"After the Murray-Darling Basin's driest year on record, these water savings will contribute toward keeping as much water as possible in the main river channel, which will ultimately be helpful to communities and towns that depend on the River Murray," she said. Once its current water holding has dried up the wetland is expected to remain dry until August this year. It will then be replenished with water allocated from the Murray under its current licence before being allowed to drain again in 2009. Banrock Station manager Tony Sharley said that while locals had become used to seeing the wetland full of water, that situation was not what nature intended. "Allowing it to dry out every two years is a natural phenomenon that will have fantastic benefits for the plants and animals in our wetland," Mr Sharley said. "We have partially dried out the wetlands many times in the past with positive results for plant and wildlife and these environmental benefits will be boosted by this new water management strategy."

Direct benefits to the wetlands include the eradication of European Carp, encouragement of native species of fish, birds and frogs, improved water quality and reinvigorated plant life as nutrients are returned to the soil. Mr Sharley said the 100,000 people or more who visited the Banrock Station complex each year would see a

different, equally interesting, side of the wetlands with self-guided walks and interpretive information to reveal new plant and wildlife features of the dry areas.

Adelaide Advertiser
Fears of Murray Poisoning

Anticipated blue green algae outbreaks in the River Murray system could poison the State's dwindling water supplies, experts have warned.

Weir still a last resort, says adviser

Former premier and key Government water advisor Dean Brown has cautioned against building a weir at Wellington, warning of dire environmental consequences.

12th January
Farmonline

Bushfires: Thirsty gum trees put alpine water at risk

With bushfires burning across southern Australia today, there are warnings that the thirsty post-fire regrowth could put water supplies at risk.

Irrigators struggle as water costs skyrocket

Water prices continue to rise dramatically in South Australia, even though the volumes being traded in December were down on last year. The National Water Index recorded an average price of \$497 a megalitre for temporary water in December, 2006. This was \$118/ML more than the previous month and a \$450/ML increase on December, 2005. Volumes traded are considerably less than last year, with 9870mL being traded in December 2006, a 12,090ML decrease on December 2005. South Australian Murray Irrigators chairman, Ian Zadow, says some growers are choosing not to irrigate some of their crops, rather than pay high prices for top-up water. "Prices are now at least 10 times what they were at this time last year, just for leasing water," he said.

Fears SA weir may devastate river, lakes farming

A rally on the steps of South Australia's Parliament House will protest against the possibility of a weir being built across the River Murray at Wellington. Residents of the Meningie and Narrung districts fear a Wellington weir will have far-reaching and potentially devastating effects on their community. Coorong District Council chief executive, Tim Drew, says there are concerns that the weir will go ahead without adequate community consultation. "There's a lot of fear and distrust in the community," he said.

"People feel that they haven't been adequately consulted and have had something dumped on them.

"But the local community is determined to remain positive.

"If the weir goes ahead we'll work to try and minimise the impact."

Adelaide Advertiser

BANROCK STATION: Wetlands to be dry

South Australia's Banrock Station has announced a plan to save about 650 megalitres of water a year by drying the station's famous wetlands completely every two years.

Adelaidenow

Worst case drought plans

The federal government has unveiled a series of contingency measures to help secure water supplies in the Murray-Darling Basin. The proposals, arising from last November's water summit held between Prime Minister John Howard and the premiers of NSW, Victoria and South Australia, include the construction of a temporary weir on the Murray River near Wellington, in South Australia.

19.

The contingency plan has been developed as a response to a "worst case scenario", should 2007 be as dry as last year. The proposals also include measures to lower the target end-of-season reserves in Lake Victoria, NSW, reduced minimum flow targets and early pumping to build reserves in Mt Lofty storages in South Australia. Permanent wetlands that are artificially inundated with water from the system would be discontinued. The South Australian government has already begun investigations into the weir and will make a final decision in February should drought conditions continue, acting Prime Minister Mark Vaile said today. Mr Vaile said that while the federal government already had received support from the Victorian and South Australian governments, the NSW government had yet to commit to the proposals.

He said he hoped the Iemma government would decide to do so at its cabinet meeting next week.

"With the continuing drought in Australia there are severe concerns about the lower Murray-Darling basin system's ability to be able to continue supplying water to the communities along that water course, through down to South Australia and particularly Adelaide," he said. "We are getting into extreme circumstances in terms of availability of water in those areas. "There are over two and a half million people in that part of Australia who could be adversely affected. "There are 32 to 33 cities and towns ... that rely very heavily on that system for domestic water supplies."

Mr Vaile said the measures were being introduced "so people have certainty and security in the knowledge

that their governments will continue to ensure that water is available to them".

Malcolm Turnbull, parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister with responsibility for water, said the five measures amounted to "planning for the worst". "We are seeing some signs of an easing in the Southern Oscillation Index, so there's an increasing optimism about rain this year," Mr Turnbull said.

"But this whole contingency planning exercise is predicated on it being as dry and hot as last year was."

MDA

MEDIA RELEASE

Murrumbidgee Irrigation

IRRIGATION SEASON CLOSURE END OF MARCH

Murrumbidgee Irrigation today announced that due to the ongoing dry conditions, the irrigation season will be closed in the last week of March, subject to water availability continuing as expected. This follows warnings in mid-December that early closure was a possibility.

Brett Tucker, Managing Director of Murrumbidgee Irrigation advised that "the end of March shut down is necessary given the prevailing seasonal conditions."

"Despite the best efforts of staff and customers to maximise water delivery efficiency, we will simply run out of water if conditions do not improve. Whilst some individuals will have water remaining after this time, Murrumbidgee Irrigation will have no alternative but to cease diversions from the river because we have insufficient conveyance allowance to deliver small amounts of water following the cuts announced by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in November," said Mr Tucker.

Customers who had previously planned to run Autumn watering programs should reassess these plans. Any customers with fixed requirements for water in April and May, including stock and domestic needs, should carefully consider options such as increased on-farm storage. Murrumbidgee Irrigation is currently working through options to secure essential supplies after system closure in March, subject to water availability. We will endeavour to hold water in the channels for as long as possible after shut down and work with customers to make best possible use of this residual water. There may also be some chance that we can offer an additional brief period of supply for high security users under strict rostering after shut down. Likelihood of this event will be advised by the company as the season progresses. Consultation with customer groups will also take place to ensure that the resource goes to where it is most needed at that time. Mr Tucker also reminds eligible high security customers that the 5% Crop Protection Package is only available for use after February. Accessibility to the package after March will be subject to season conditions and resource availability.

A new allocation announcement is expected from DNR early next week. At this stage we are not aware of the details of this announcement however there have only been minor natural inflows into Burrinjuck and Blowering dams throughout December.

"These are very difficult times for our customers and our company. Water is vital to the future of this community and we will continue to maximise operating efficiencies and provide everyone with the latest information available so they can make informed decisions" advised Mr Tucker.

13th January

Adelaide Advertiser

170 jobs at wind farm site

A \$200 million wind farm in the Mid North will create 170 construction jobs

20.

DOUBLE STANDARDS: MPs ignore their own conservation message urging us all to wisely use every precious drop: No water rationing in the house

A record amount of water has been consumed at Adelaide's Parliament House as State politicians fail to heed their own conservation messages.

Dry lagoon alters bird flight plans

One of the largest freshwater lagoon systems in Southern Australia, Bool Lagoon, dried up earlier than ever this season, forcing many rare and endangered migratory birds to change their flight plans.

Weir may be built upstream

The Wellington weir was more likely to be built near Tailem Bend, Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Water Malcolm Turnbull has revealed. A decision would be made next month if the weir would proceed but Mr Turnbull said, "If the weir is built on the river, it's more likely to be built where the river narrows a little bit upstream from Wellington, near a place called Tailem Bend, I would think. But there's a lot of planning going on."

Bat pups starve as drought bites

Rare baby Southern bentwing bats are starving to death at the Naracoorte Caves World Heritage Area because of the drought has curbed their mother's milk.

Mountain water supplies dip

Global warming and eucalypt regrowth in the alpine region could drastically reduce mountain water supplies crucial to Australia's biggest river system, research suggests.

Retail giants' drought 'insult'

Woolworths and Coles have begun a marketing battle to lure customers through drought appeals, but a farmers group has described the effort as "almost insulting".

14th January 2006

The Sunday Telegraph & Sunday Herald & Perthnow

State fuming over 'rainwater tax' plan

THE Victorian Government is outraged at a leaked Federal proposal to tax rainwater collected from roofs. The idea was revealed in a leaked email seen by the *Sunday Herald Sun*.

Acting Premier John Thwaites yesterday warned that if water was privatised - as proposed by some federal Liberals - a tax on rainwater in tanks would follow. The Bracks Government is furious at the mooted tax - it pays rebates on tanks as a water conservation measure. In the email, National Water Commission chief Ken Matthews says, "Legally, all water in Australia is vested in governments."

Mr Matthews' email continued: "Governments have not yet considered the capture of water from roofs in rainwater tanks to be of sufficient magnitude to warrant the issuing of specific entitlements to use this class of water.

"However, if rainwater tanks were to be adopted on a large scale such that their existence impacts significantly on the integrated water cycle, consideration could be given to setting an entitlement regime for this class of water."

Such a regime already exists for farmers catching rainwater and storing it in dams. A residential household version could include a licensing arrangement and taxes for those wanting to collect more than a set amount. The commission yesterday confirmed the email was accurate.

Mr Thwaites said there were also fears the Federal Government could seize control of the resource from the states and tax rainwater. Federal water parliamentary secretary Malcolm Turnbull has said that if the Australian constitution were drawn today, control of water would be given to Canberra.

Prime Minister John Howard's environment parliamentary secretary, Greg Hunt, also has talked up water privatisation. Mr Thwaites said yesterday the Bracks Government opposed any taxes on rainwater.

"We want people to use rainwater to take pressure off Melbourne's storages," he said.

"We are encouraging people to install rainwater tanks and that's why we offer a rebate of up to \$1000 on them.

"Greg Hunt is saying private companies should take over recycled water.

"If private companies were allowed to take over water they would seek to maximise profits at the expense of the public.

"Private companies would not want the competition from water tanks and would therefore seek to control tank water or have it taxed."

Mr Howard said in his New Year message water had to be looked at from a "national perspective".

Mr Hunt has signalled a plan to force states to recycle more waste water or allow private firms access to it.

Mr Matthews said in his email: "It is important to think of the capture of water from any source in an integrated way.

21.

"If 1000 homes were to install 5000-litre tanks with an annual yield of 57,000 litres, this is 57 million litres that would not have reached a river or ground water system, or - viewed another way - is taken from either the environment's entitlement or another productive use."

15th January 2007

Farmonline

Drought claims 100 horses a month near Canberra

At least 100 horses a month from the drought-stricken Canberra region are going to the knackery because of the soaring cost of feed.

Emergency plans enacted for Murray water

Emergency contingency plans to secure the water supply for drought-ravaged Murray River communities will be implemented immediately. It follows agreement by the Federal Government with the Victorian and South Australian governments on the plans, which have been drawn up in the wake of November's Murray Darling crisis summit in Canberra. End of season reserve targets and minimum flow targets will both be lowered; there will be early pumping to build reserves at South Australia's Mt Lofty reservoir; and selected permanent wetlands that have been artificially inundated will now be disconnected from the river. When raised as a possible course of action by Prime Minister John Howard in November, the green movement roundly bagged the last option. However, the joint statement this morning from Acting Prime Minister Mark

Vaile and the Premiers of Victoria and South Australia, says that "disconnection of wetlands that would be problematic in terms of environmental and cultural heritage impacts will not be affected by this measure". During 2006, inflows to the Murray River were 60pc less than the previous record minimum.

"If this was repeated in 2007, or if inflows were in the lowest 1pc of years on record, special measures would be needed to supply the critical needs of many towns, in particular Adelaide, which rely on the water systems of the southern Murray-Darling Basin," the joint statement says.

However, it says that the possibility of there being at least sufficient water for urban supplies is higher than the possibility that there will be a shortfall.

The Acting Prime Minister and Premiers have also agreed to prepare for additional measures that require further planning and to put them in place if necessary.

A key proposal being considered is the building a temporary weir near Wellington on the Murray River - a move that has local farmers fearing for their future viability.

South Australia has already begun preliminary investigations in case such a weir is necessary, with a decision to be made in February 2007 whether it will go ahead.

Greens push for Govt buyback of irrigation licences

Federal and State Governments must prioritise buying water back from irrigators if they are serious about addressing the on-going water crisis, according to the Australian Conservation Foundation.

The ACF has backed Labor's plans for a licence buyback, on the same day the Acting Prime Minister and Premiers of Victoria and South Australia announced new contingency plans to secure urban water supplies. ACF says over-allocation and over-extraction of water from rivers is the driver of this current crisis, which has the governments on the verge of draining wetlands to secure urban supplies.

"Drought and climate change have brought Australia's water crisis to a head, however the fundamental problem is over-extraction of water from our rivers," says Dr Arlene Buchan, ACF healthy rivers campaigner.

"If our leaders are serious about solving this water crisis, Australian governments must purchase water from irrigators and develop a long-term plan for restoration," she said.

Dr Buchan says governments have been dragging their heels in the face of years of warnings of the risk of over-allocation in the system.

"If we had a properly balanced system where the right amount of water went to the environment, to irrigators and to townships, when faced with crises like drought, we would have much greater flexibility to re-prioritise our water usage without causing irreversible damage," she said.

"Our wetlands and floodplains are well adapted to drought and floods and while they can withstand drought for two or three years, many precious wetlands have been deprived of water for a decade because of poor river management.

"If we do not provide water to these stressed wetlands and floodplains they could be irreversibly damaged and could permanently lose the platypus, frogs, yabbies, and other wildlife that live there."

More drought workers means more help for farmers

The NSW Farmers' Association has welcomed a State Government decision to provide an additional team of drought workers to speed up processing Exceptional Circumstances drought assistance claims.

22.

Water Commission gave all clear to Warrego irrigation

The National Water Commission has endorsed the management of water in Queensland, including management plans for the Warrego River, according to the State's Acting Water Minister, Paul Lucas.

The claim comes after Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Water, Malcolm Turnbull, this week asked the NWC to investigate Queensland's plans to grant new irrigation licences on the Warrego River at a time of such water shortages. A *FarmOnline* poll this week found more than 86pc of respondents were against the new allocations being granted. But Mr Lucas says a 2005 report by the Commission states "Queensland's activities for addressing water planning and allocation ... are consistent with the National Water Initiative". "Malcolm Turnbull's misinformed calls for an investigation into Queensland's Warrego water allocation have left him with egg on his face," Mr Lucas said.

"If the Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Water had done his homework he would have discovered this allocation was identified in 2003 and that the Commonwealth Government had been aware of it since this time."

Mr Lucas says the Queensland Government is fiercely committed to the responsible management of water supplies, and that the Warrego allocation can only be accessed under the strict conditions that it has no detriment to the end-of-system flow.

"Even after this allocation [it] will be at 89pc, one of the highest rates in the Basin," Mr Lucas said.

Of the total water taken from the Murray-Darling Basin, Queensland takes 5pc, in comparison to NSW's 55pc, Victoria's 34pc and South Australia's 6pc.

Adelaide Advertiser

Urban water' wastage' while irrigators suffer

Irrigators say River Murray water is being wasted on city gardens while they fight for their livelihoods and they have accused the State Government of being too soft on home-owners.

16th January 2007

Farmonline

Drought Bus geared for action

Despite hopes of a waning El Nino weather pattern, the Federal Government says it is still "doing everything we can think of" in terms of ameliorating the effects of the prolonged drought.

Industry Minister, Ian Macfarlane, says the Government's Drought Bus, which has been touring rural areas in recent months, is making it easier for farmers to gain advice on how to access drought assistance. Some rural communities have raised concerns about accessing the Government's \$2.3 billion package that has been aimed at struggling producers throughout the prolonged drought.

The Minister says changes to drought assistance, including the extension of Exceptional Circumstances payments, will benefit eligible small businesses linked to the farming sector. "If you are a small business that gets more than 70pc of its income from rural enterprises, then you can also apply for the same sort of assistance like household support, plus interest subsidies and financial advice," Mr Macfarlane said.

However, he also acknowledged a number of small business issues raised by Commerce Queensland, promising he would examine their concerns. "Obviously, hay and harvest contractors have no real problem in terms of eligibility but some businesses that have been hard hit by the drought, and have either a sizeable asset in a town, or get a part of their income from hobby farmers and people buying general merchandise, are having trouble fitting into the criteria," Mr Macfarlane said.

Murray crisis plan includes irrigation issues

Federal Agriculture Minister, Peter McGauran, has moved to reassure irrigators that their interests will be protected by the emergency contingency measures the Government enacted on Friday.

Acting Prime Minister Mark Vaile announced the emergency measures on Friday, including the draining of wetlands, to secure urban water supplies in the event of another year of low flows into the River Murray system. Mr McGauran says that while planning measures announced to date dealt with the need to shore up water supplies for urban communities, irrigators should be reassured that their interests are being protected. "If there is another year of inflows at or near the record low levels of 2006-2007, there will be little if any water available for anything other than human consumption in Adelaide and other towns that rely on the Murray," Mr McGauran said.

"But, progressively, agriculture and other users will get their share as more water becomes available.

"At that stage, in the irrigation sector, permanent plantings will have the first call on water, to save as many trees and vines as possible." Mr McGauran says irrigators with annual crops will face another bleak year if there is not a dramatic break in conditions.

"But all irrigators should be assured that their interests and needs are being supported," he said.

23.

Water Commission denies tax plans for rainwater tanks

An angry National Water Commission says weekend media reports that it is proposing a tax on rainwater collected from roofs is plain wrong.

Chairman and chief executive of the Commission, Ken Matthews, says the NWC has not proposed, and would not support, such a tax.

Mr Matthews says that the leaked email referred to in a report in Melbourne's *Sunday Herald Sun* newspaper did not even mention the word "tax".

In a statement to the media, the NWC says the *Sunday Herald Sun* had been told in writing before publication that:

- * the NWC strongly supports use of rainwater tanks where cost effective; and
- * the NWC is not proposing that governments introduce entitlement regimes ('licencing') for rooftop water.

Mr Matthews says the Commission took the view that with the current bad seasons and growing evidence of climate change, all new sources of water and forms of water conservation need to be carefully fostered in Australia. A positive and stable regulatory regime would contribute to that, while a new tax on rainwater would not, he says.

AWA

The Acting Prime Minister and Victorian and SA Premiers have flagged plans to deal with all-time low flows in the southern Murray-Darling Basin. Measures being considered include a temporary weir, cutting discretionary flows to some wetlands and even adapting operations of Snowy Hydro. Pumping from the Murray to the Mt Lofty Range will ensure maximum stored reserves for Adelaide.

Media reports that the National Water Commission proposed that governments introduce a tax or licensing regime for rainwater collected from rooftops are wrong, according to Chief Executive of the Commission, Ken Matthews. The National Water Commission has not proposed, and would not support, such a tax.

Remains of ex-Tropical Cyclone Isobel last week combined with a strong mid-latitude trough to cause record-breaking rainfall in the southeast of Western Australia. The highest rainfall amount occurred at Esperance Airport where more than 221mm fell in a two-day period.

As part of the first biennial assessment of the National Water Initiative (NWI), the National Water Commission is calling for public comment on its implementation and progress. Refer to the NWI website for further information on submissions and the assessment.

The South Australian Government is preparing for an expected increase in algal blooms in rivers and reservoirs as the drought continues and temperatures climb. SA Water and the Australian Water Quality Centre have been working on strategies to deal with blooms including an extensive monitoring program in drinking water supplies, modelling scenarios and risk assessments.

Sustainability Victoria is calling for organisations championing environmentally sustainable practices to enter the 2007 Premier's Sustainability Awards. These awards recognise VICTORIAN businesses, communities and individuals that contribute to a more sustainable future for Victoria. Nominations close 14 February 2007. For more information visit the Banksia Foundation website.

Queensland EPA's Sustainable Industry Awards are open for nominations from enterprises investing in more sustainable business strategies. Entries are encouraged from companies, community groups, local and state government working in partnership with industry, and individuals. Nominations close 23 February 2007.

For any organisations doing business in India, the "Everything About Water" trade exhibition being held 15-17 March this year will be of interest. AUSTRADE is facilitating an Australian pavilion, which can have independent, grouped or virtual displays at competitive prices. <http://www.eawater.com/expo2007/>. Anyone interested should follow up with Gitesh Agarwal at Austrade in Chennai.

Byron Shire Council (NSW) has awarded a \$4.7m upgrade of Bangalow sewage treatment plant to Tyco Australia Pty Ltd, trading as Water Technology Australia. Water Technology Australia is a specialised water and wastewater design and construction contractor.

24.

New Desalination plants proposed for Episkopi and Paphos in Cyprus to meet growing water needs, plus warnings from the government of forthcoming water restrictions, have been spurred by continued low rainfall leaving the island's reservoirs at 20% capacity, half what they were a year ago. Farmers are also irrigating crops (other than vegetables) with recycled wastewater. (Website)

The Greek government has new laws to charge higher rates to households that waste water and to cover improved monitoring of drinking water quality, in an attempt to comply with European Union directives after the EU threatened Greece with legal action in 2005, claiming that more than 18,000 people were being forced to drink contaminated water. (Website)

A draft water management plan released by the Queensland government will open the way for water trading between Queensland and NSW farmers.

Water experts claim that poor control of pumping of stored groundwater from aquifers to top up Sydney's dams need to be carefully managed for sustainability.

The federal Government's water reform commission has ruled out any plans to recommend a levy on rainwater collected by the owners of residential tanks.

Adelaide Advertiser

Lake Bonney barrier possible

Blocking Barmera's Lake Bonney from the River Murray could save 11 gigalitres of water in six months.

Murray Valley Standard

Town wages war on weir

Opposition to a proposed weir at Wellington is gathering momentum, with residents of Meningie and surrounding communities banding together to take action.

Liaison manager sides with community

The man responsible for reporting the views of the public to River Murray Minister Kaylene Maywald the

Hon Dean Brown agrees with the affected communities that a weir should not be constructed.

Potential rock sources explored for Wellington weir

Rock sources for a proposed temporary weir at Wellington were investigated last week as decision-time creeps closer for the State Government.

17th January 2007

Farmonline

SA Murray allocations to stay at 60pc despite record dry

River Murray Minister, Karlene Maywald, says despite another month of record low inflows to the Murray-Darling Basin, South Australian River Murray irrigation allocations will remain at 60pc.

"The median inflow for December is usually 360 gigalitres and in December 2006, the basin recorded just 34GL," Minister Maywald said. "This is another record low and means the River Murray has now experienced its lowest year of inflows in 116 years of data.

"While there are currently large volumes of water held in weir pools along the River Murray, these temporary storages may be drawn down to help with river flows.

"The water that is available will be carefully managed through South Australia's river system in terms of flows, weir pool levels, diversions and flow into and out of lakes, wetlands and backwaters.

"A key part of this strategy is to keep as much water as possible in the main river channel.

"Already, 26 regulated wetlands have been closed off, saving 14 gigalitres in evaporation.

"Other backwaters are under consideration, as well as Lake Bonney where up to 30 gigalitres is lost in evaporation annually."

Minister Maywald says as the drought continues and inflows to the Murray-Darling Basin system remain at record lows, there are a number of challenges arising with water management.

"The Bureau of Meteorology is forecasting a 50-60pc chance of exceeding median rainfall from January to March for the Murray-Darling Basin," the Minister said.

"This is much more promising than was anticipated earlier in the season.

"Also, the bureau's temperature outlook is much improved, with a 40-45pc chance that the maximum temperature from January to March for South Australia would be higher than the median."

25.

Cubbie grows only 2pc of crop

South West Queensland irrigation giant Cubbie Station is set to harvest cotton from less than 2pc of its potential growing area. Cubbie Group agronomist, Greg Nico, said while relatively mild conditions and limited rain over summer had produced an excellent crop on the Dirranbandi property, a lack of irrigation water had resulted in only 300ha of a potential 19,500ha being planted. Mr Nichol said, "It's a wonderful crop but we would certainly like to have a lot more planted." The crop of RoundUp Ready Sicott 71BR is currently at the peak flower stage. Picking is expected to start on April 1. Light insect pressure has seen the crop grown without being sprayed. Cubbie will have used all of the water stored on-farm by season's end.

Adelaide Advertiser

Locks to cut boat use

Movement of boats through locks at Goolwa barrages will be restricted from Australia Day because of the drought.

Adios El Nino - hopefully

Australian farmers might soon be able to bid adios to El Nino if the recent southern oscillation indicators (SOI) and sea surface temperatures are on the mark, with cooler temperatures and a rise of the SOI pointing to a wet autumn and winter.

River News

Water level impacts on Lake Bonney

Preliminary investigations into closing of Lake Bonney's supply from the River Murray have shown the potential impacts on water levels, River murray minister Karlene Maywald says. "It is estimated that in one year, 30 gigalitres, or 1.7m in water depth evaporates from Lake Bonney.

18th January

Adelaide Advertiser

State fails to meet crucial 'waterproofing targets'

Only two of the nine Waterproofing Adelaide strategies scheduled for completion in 2006 have been implemented, the State Government admits.

Weir Opposed

Alexandrina Council has voted to oppose the State Government's proposal to construct a River murray weir

at Wellington.

Murray Valley Standard
Likely weir location chosen

The location of the temporary weir is most likely to be below Wellington, River Murray minister Karlene Maywald revealed this week.

Some Murraylands wetlands could be left to dry out

Irrigators on some Murraylands wetlands could find themselves seeing their main water source cut off, as wetlands could be left to dry out.

Coorong Council to stop watering lower use public spaces

Karoonda council abiding by new water restrictions

River murray irrigator allocations stay at 60pc

Coorong in trouble

The Coorong one of South Australia's most precious natural resources, has been severely affected by the ongoing drought, forcing fish and birds to rapidly leave the area. Years of low flows and drought have caused the well-known tourist attraction to fall into a dire situation.

Calls on Government to make desalination plant top priority

Family First State leader Andrew Evans has called on the State Government to make a desalination plant for Adelaide a top priority in preparing for future worst-case drought scenarios.

19th January

Farmonline

Southern NSW irrigators receive \$20m for lost water

The NSW Government, just days after it was threatened by an irrigator class action, is today expected to announce a \$20 million drought assistance package for southern irrigators who lost carryover or purchased water allocations last year. NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald, will fly to Wagga Wagga, Griffith and Deniliquin today to make the announcement to irrigators. The package will provide payments of up to \$50,000 for irrigators affected by the drought in sections of the Murray and Murrumbidgee Valleys.

26.

The government has also confirmed that carryover accounts will be re-credited as soon as there is sufficient rainfall. In order to access the assistance, southern irrigators will have to demonstrate applied drought mitigation strategies through the carryover of unused water from 2005-06 irrigation season in the Murray Valley or have purchased water in Murray/Murrumbidgee Valleys in 2006-07.

Mr Macdonald has stressed the package is for drought assistance, and is not classed as compensation or structural adjustment. It comes just days after irrigators met in Griffith to affirm calls for a class action against the government for the cuts. The Government slashed up to 52pc of irrigators' carryover allocation without warning late last year owing to record low inflows from the Snowy scheme.

Some summer crops have since been abandoned and permanent planting's are also at risk.

The cutbacks equate to a cost of \$37 million in the Murray alone, based on their trading values, which at that time were \$250 to \$290/ML.

ANU's chilling long-term drought forecast

Australia and Indonesia will experience more severe and prolonged droughts, with stronger Asian monsoons and drier winds across the Indian Ocean, according to new research by the Australian National University. Scientists warn the social and economic implications of the research are "sobering", placing rural livelihoods and regional food supplies at risk.

"It's not good news for Australia's farmers or for Indonesia's rice crops, even though the biggest impact of these changes may be 50 years away," ANU palaeoclimatologist Dr Mike Gagan said.

"On the bright side, it's a climate pattern that's recognisable and that means we can make plans to adapt to it.

"But if these patterns that we're seeing are going to continue, there's no way you'd want your grandchildren to be trying to make a living as farmers."

The ANU research findings also reveal El Nino conditions in the Pacific Ocean will play a lesser role in generating regional droughts than will the winds and temperature changes across the eastern Indian Ocean. Using core samples taken from ancient fossil corals in waters off western Indonesia, ANU scientists were able to track climate behaviour over the last 6500 years. They found during the mid-Holocene (6500 to 4000 years ago), Asian monsoons were stronger and El Nino conditions were weaker. Cooler temperatures in the eastern Indian Ocean were accompanied by longer droughts.

The El Nino/Southern Oscillation system is associated with the tropical Pacific Ocean.

When ocean temperatures are warmer than normal (an El Nino), increased cloudiness causes rain to move eastwards, away from Australia.

But the ANU research shows a similar combination of cooling ocean temperatures and atmospheric

conditions, known as the Indian Ocean Dipole. This has a more dramatic effect than El Nino conditions on the climate of countries surrounding the Indian Ocean. ANU research leader Dr Nerilie Abram said, "What's really concerning is that the Asian monsoon system seems to be growing stronger, which means we could see a return to the heightened droughts that hit countries around the eastern Indian Ocean 6500 years ago. They warn that if Asian monsoons intensify with climate change, the accompanying longer droughts will have serious consequences for food supplies, health and hydro-electricity throughout Indonesia. This will result in "significant challenges to conservation management" in a country ranked as global biodiversity hot spot.

South Australian Stock Journal 18th Jan **Groundwater group wants cutbacks to bore licences**

A South Australian group of groundwater professionals say over-allocated groundwater resources must be returned to sustainable levels. And they are concerned that key water resources are over-developed and mismanaged. While the focus of the State Government and irrigators has been on the River Murray during the past six months, the group has attempted to raise the profile of groundwater use, with the aim of encouraging a change in addressing national groundwater issues.

A National Groundwater Reform position paper has been sent to State and Federal governments and other interested bodies.

One suggestion includes governments implementing a plan to identify sustainable levels of groundwater extraction and return over-allocated systems to manageable levels.

These levels have risen because of accelerated groundwater development during the past few decades, which has benefited communities, but depleted water resources.

Licensing and meter issues have also been highlighted, with the paper calling for all groundwater users to be licensed and bores metered correctly.

27.

Farmonline

Acting Qld Premier denies water pipeline sell-off

The Queensland Government has no intention of selling a major pipeline and recycling scheme being built in Queensland to supply recycled water to industry, Acting Premier, Anna Bligh, said today.

Ms Bligh categorically refuted a front page story in the *Australian* newspaper today that the Qld Government would sell off the critical piece of water infrastructure.

"Our Government has no intention of privatising the Western Corridor Recycled Water Project," she said.

"It is being built and funded by our Government and it will be owned by our Government.

"We all know Mr Turnbull's well publicised view that the nation's water assets should be sold off and privatised.

"This is not a view shared by our Government.

"Water is becoming a victim of Mr Turnbull's personal ambition.

"He is trying to create a name for himself and secure a front bench position by playing political games with a serious issue - the water security of our region.

"In December last year, our Government announced a plebiscite to ask south-east Queenslanders whether they supported the addition of purified recycled water to the region's long-term drinking supplies.

"However, at that time we made it clear that in an emergency situation, if required, we would add purified recycled water to our water supply system through this new pipeline and recycled water scheme.

"That is why this critical asset will remain in Government hands.

"We are building this pipeline with or without funding from the Federal Government.

"This recycled water scheme is a vital part of our Government's comprehensive strategy to secure south-east Queensland's current and future water supplies in the face of the worst drought on record."

Murray Valley Community Action Group

CLASS ACTION TO FLUSH OUT WATER COMPENSATION

The Chairman of the Murray Valley Community Action Group Lester Wheatley said NSW Murray Valley irrigators should join a class action against the Minister for Natural Resources Ian Macdonald for compensation for the water confiscated last year.

"The government has definitely shown no compassion or understanding as to the situation this has left our irrigators and the community in this region. They commandeered the water with absolutely no just terms compensation," Mr Wheatley said.

"After 3,000 people protested in Deniliquin on the 15th December and then numerous delegations which the Minister has fobbed off, irrigators should now rise up and proceed with a class action

which is the only avenue left for them.

“Member for Murray Peter Black has thrown his hands in the air saying he has no idea what stage the compensation issue is up to and he is the government’s representative. He certainly is not representing his southern irrigation constituents.

“The MVCAG will keep asking for the compensation to be paid. It represents \$37 million worth of carry over water confiscated from irrigators last year just because Minister Macdonald’s department made a miscalculation of how much water was available in the system,” Mr Wheatley said.

“The Minister seems to have conveniently disappeared over the Christmas break while the irrigators here are daily living this hell, stifled because they don’t have the water or financial compensation to refinance extra fodder purchases.

“If I was really cynical I think the NSW Government enjoys the status of being called “thieves”. One has to wonder when there is only ten weeks to the state election why the compensation settlement would not be an immediate priority,” Mr Wheatley added.

20th January
Adelaide Advertiser
Affairs of State

NEW VISION: Plenty of options available: Rann must do more to ease water crisis

Water, or the lack of it, is likely to be the dominant issue this year in SA politics. The Rann Government is going to come under increasing pressure to do more about the crisis which is engulfing the Nation. Dealing with the River Murray might be a National issue but providing water for Adelaide and the rest of the State is up to the Premier Mike Rann and his plethora of water ministers. (**And it should not be at the expense of other South Australians – that’s from me!**)

28.

21st January 2007
Sunday Mail

“Water’s an emotive issue when not on tap 24/7”

But we’re just not a dob-in culture, says Mike Smithson

Our current water restrictions might be a bit hard to swallow, but not half as much as being urged to dob in those who break the rules.

Farmers hope for end to drought’s reign

Farmers are confident the drought will finally break this year following the record-breaking rains over the weekend.

22nd January
Farmonline

Groundwater group wants cutbacks to bore licences

A South Australian group of groundwater professionals say over-allocated groundwater resources must be returned to sustainable levels. And they are concerned that key water resources are over-developed and mismanaged. While the focus of the State Government and irrigators has been on the River Murray during the past six months, the group has attempted to raise the profile of groundwater use, with the aim of encouraging a change in addressing national groundwater issues.

A National Groundwater Reform position paper has been sent to State and Federal governments and other interested bodies. One suggestion includes governments implementing a plan to identify sustainable levels of groundwater extraction and return over-allocated systems to manageable levels.

\$10M for regional Vic to get on with business

The Victorian Government will pump \$10 million into a new project to attract new major industry and support existing industry expansion in regional areas.

Minister for Agriculture, Joe Helper, says the new Regional Industry Investment Program will support major industries in Exceptional Circumstances-declared regions.

And the money will also assist in diversifying regional economies so they could better-prepare for future droughts, he said. "The effect of drought and bushfire is having a significant impact on regional communities and affecting their ability to grow and provide the jobs needed to sustain local communities," Mr Helper said.

"The Regional Industry Investment Program recognises these longer-term effects and is designed to attract investment to boost the regional industry base and improve the capacity of communities to adapt to change." Businesses with a projected capital expenditure of more than \$5m and which propose to create at least 50 new jobs or retain at least 100 existing jobs in a region, are eligible. The Regional Industry Investment Program will be administered by Regional Development Victoria as part of the Bracks Government’s Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. These levels have risen because of accelerated groundwater development during the past few decades, which has benefited communities, but depleted water resources.

Licensing and meter issues have also been highlighted, with the paper calling for all groundwater users to be licensed and bores metered correctly.

Rudd's water summit challenge

Federal Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd has challenged the Prime Minister to convene a National summit on water in exchange for a three month truce on political point scoring over water.

23rd January

Farmonline

Drought subsidies in NSW, but SA still missing out

In good news for drought-affected NSW graziers, the State Government has extended a program of transport subsidies to help dispose of poor stock unwanted at the saleyards.

The State Government funding will continue the transport subsidies scheme until May 1 and provide almost \$1 million to help farmers meet the costs associated with disposal of unsaleable livestock.

"Sadly, we are seeing it hit home across the livestock industries with large numbers of sheep in particular failing to sell – this is yet another indication of just how serious this drought is," NSW Minister for Primary Industries, Ian Macdonald,

"The funding will ensure these livestock owners will be helped transport their stock to places including abattoirs, or in some cases, in disposing of animals. The plan follows work with the NSW Farmers' Association and the RSPCA aimed at ensuring that the financial and mental health impacts of disposing of livestock affected by this drought are dealt with compassionately and efficiently.

29.

But calls for fodder subsidies in South Australia continue to go unheeded. The South Australian Farmers' Federation says assistance provided by the eastern states' governments to their farmers during the drought makes a mockery of the SA Government's response. SAFF agribusiness committee chairman, John Ratcliff, has reiterated the Federation's call for financial support from the SA Government for farmers to get feed and water to breeding livestock or to enable transport to agistment. So far, SA Agriculture Minister, Rory McEwen, has been resolute in his opposition to introducing any kind of subsidised transport program, claiming that it would be of little help to graziers and would distort the market.

"The economics are simple – if producers can retain their breeding stock, they won't have to start from scratch to build up genetics," Mr Ratcliff said. "As a result their productive contribution to the SA economy will resume much sooner once the drought breaks."

Victoria is the only other mainland state not offering support for freighting fodder and water.

Meanwhile, the Federal Government has granted full exceptional circumstances assistance to the NSW Hunter-Maitland region, potentially helping 1000 farmers.

Turnbull slams Labor's water summit call

Labor Leader Kevin Rudd wants the Federal Government to host yet another water summit, but the idea has already been rejected by Parliamentary Secretary for Water, Malcolm Turnbull.

Mr Rudd says a water summit is needed to deal with what he describes as a "national water emergency".

As part of Mr Rudd's push for greater cooperation with the states, he says the summit would have to put aside the politics of the water debate to "get all the best proposals on the table".

"What we have seen on a daily basis is politicians taking pot shots at each other," Mr Rudd said.

"It's time for everyone to put the football jerseys back in the locker and work together.

"The other thing we need to do is through such a summit, work through quickly, getting approval for many of the State and Territory practical proposals which have already been put forward to the National Water Commission over a long period of time, and where no effective response has been delivered yet by the Commonwealth."

But Mr Rudd's idea has been mocked by the Government, which has highlighted the bagging Mr Rudd gave the most recent water summit, convened by Prime Minister John Howard in conjunction with the states on Melbourne Cup day last year. Mr Turnbull says last year's summit has provided adequate recommendations.

"Only ten weeks ago, on Melbourne Cup Day 2006, the prime minister called together all the Murray-Darling Basin premiers for an emergency drought summit ... (which) resulted in important short term and long term commitments being made for water security in the Murray-Darling Basin," Mr Turnbull said.

"Since that summit we have been getting on with the job and have already announced a range of measures, both short and long term, designed to ensure a secure and sustainable water future.

"The national interest would be better served if Mr Rudd encouraged the Labor premiers to focus on the outcomes of that summit and delivering on their commitments under the National Water Initiative and Living Murray Initiative."

However Mr Rudd says existing approaches, including the NWI, are not working and a central Federal Government department needs to be established, bringing together the various agencies currently handling

the task.

Water meters to cost Qld irrigators \$55 million

Queensland irrigators are about to be charged \$55 million to pay for infrastructure they will never actually own, according to AgForce Queensland Water spokesperson, Ian Burnett.

"And to make matters worse, once irrigators have bought and installed water meters on their properties, they will then pay \$600 or more per meter per year for a government employee to collect the data from them," Mr Burnett said.

AgForce believes water metering makes sense as it allows for more accurate data on water use to be collected, which would lead to better decision making by irrigators and government.

"However, given irrigators use only 4pc of the State's water, surely this is a cost which should not be borne by irrigators alone," Mr Burnett said.

"And worse, we are in our sixth year of drought and it is not a time to be ripping \$55m out of the bush.

"Individual irrigators will be paying up to \$20,000 per licence to install the meters."

Mr Burnett says the Department of Natural Resources and Water last week took the first major step toward implementing water metering across the state, by holding a public meeting in the Condamine catchment.

30.

"Both the State and Federal governments have so far ignored an AgForce proposal for a joint funding arrangement similar to the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative," he said.

"Under the GABSI program costs are shared 30:70 between irrigators and the State and Federal governments.

"This is a fair and equitable system given the data collected from these meters will benefit the entire community, not just irrigators."

UFCC vows to bounce back from \$3.5m loss

The drought and a bungled diversification strategy has led to Western Australia's United Farmers Co-operative Company posting a \$3.6 million loss for the last financial year.

Woolies digs deep for drought relief

The National Farmers' Federation is urging Australians to get behind Woolworths' National Drought Action Day tomorrow and put some retail therapy into a new context.

AWA

While criticising lack of progress in spending the \$2 billion allocated federally to resolving Australia's water crises and current efforts to streamline administration of water agencies, Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd has secured the support of the Premiers to create a national water authority intended to spearhead reform and abolish duplication between the states and the commonwealth.

In a position paper circulated to federal and state governments calling for urgent national reform, a group of seven of Australia's leading Groundwater experts claims that uncontrolled urban and industrial discharges and agricultural intensification are degrading aquifers across the continent. They also claim Australia is losing the scientific knowledge and technical skills to deal with these problems. (PDF)

The Queensland Water Commission has announced the full membership of the independent Expert Advisory Panel that will provide advice to the Commission on technical issues associated with purified recycled water: Chair Prof Paul Greenfield AO, Prof Brian Priestly, Prof Richard Bull, Prof David Hamilton, Dr Joan Rose, Harry Seah, Prof Mike McLaughlin, Prof Ian Frazer and Dr Zelle Hodge.

With dam levels on NSW Central Coast falling to 13.5%, Gosford and Wyong councils plan to build a Desalination plant on the edge of Lake Macquarie several times larger than the smaller, temporary units planned for Central Coast beaches; earlier than originally planned. Gosford Council's Water Plan is open for comment until February 16.

A team of palaeoclimatologists lead by researchers from the Australian National University have warned that droughts of greater severity and length could be in store for Australia and Indonesia if the Asian monsoon system continues to strengthen.

The Acting Premier has announced that the Queensland Government has no intention of privatising the Western Corridor Recycled Water Project, which will supply recycled water to industry in the southeast of the state despite media comments to the contrary.

A giant percolation pit under the cricket oval at University of NSW, designed to collect stormwater runoff from the main campus and allow it to seep into the Botany Sands beneath for subsequent re-draw and reuse, is a practical demonstration of how its possible to capture run-off and boost depleted stores. It is a continuation of the work outlined in the assessment into managed recharge into the Botany aquifer as

summarised in the assessment report.

The World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2006-07 has ranked Australia 29th for the quality of its Maths and Science Teaching, behind countries like Belgium, Singapore, India, Indonesia and New Zealand. APESMA noted that the rankings were based on assessment by industry and major businesses of Australia's maths-science capabilities, and reflect their lack of confidence in the workforce.

The Lack of Snow in the Alps during an unusually warm winter has prompted ski resorts in Italy to invest in unprecedented artificial snowmaking. Now World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) says artificial snow is bad for the environment: it uses up potable water supplies, stresses soil because it contains more carbon dioxide and remains on the ground longer than natural snow.

31.

With Urban Drainage flooding in England costing €270m pa and predicted to reach €15b in 75 years, a series of 15 pilot studies is being rolled out across England now to April 2008 to look at ways of resolving ongoing problems such as the lack of clarity over who is responsible for protecting town and cities against drainage flooding.

WEF (the Water Environment Federation) has acquired World Water & Environment Engineering magazine, and launched WEF Publishing (UK) Limited, which will begin publishing the magazine in March 2007 and eventually expand into a full-service publishing company to produce and market WEF technical and educational products in Europe.

The \$1.7 billion pipeline that the Beattie Government plans to drought-proof southeast Queensland is to be sold, creating the largest piece of private-sector water infrastructure in Australia.

Malcolm Turnbull has warned Queenslanders to expect "very substantial" increases in water costs as a result of the Beattie Government's \$7 billion plan to drought-proof the state's southeast corner.

River Murray Minister, Karlene Maywald, says despite another month of record low inflows to the Murray-Darling Basin, South Australian River Murray irrigation allocations will remain at 60%.

Australians are more worried about climate change and water shortages than terrorism or any other global issue but believe there is widespread public misunderstanding about it.

State government plans to cut water pressure to save dwindling supplies could jeopardise fire-fighting efforts and result in multi-million-dollar disputes over insurance claims.

A temporary desalination plant producing 8ML of water each day has been proposed for Vales Point Power Station.

An opinion piece in Sydney Morning Herald Jan 22, p11 shows frustration at continued focus on an expensive desalination plant by NSW government while giving only tepid support first for stormwater capture, aquifers, better and more high quality treatment of poor water.

Adelaide Advertiser

'Bickering' over water must stop

Premier Mike Rann yesterday called for an end to politicians "bickering" over water. He welcomed a proposal by Federal Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd to form a National water authority. Under Mr. Rudd's proposal, agencies would be merged to create a Commonwealth water department with a minister in Cabinet.

GLOBAL ALARM:

Desert floods in Australia, raging storms in Europe and a big freeze in U.S. heartland

If you think the weather is changing dramatically, you just might be right.

Help for farmers

Farmers in drought hit New South Wales will be given help to dispose of unsaleable livestock, the State Government said. The NSW Government said it would extend until at least May 1, transport subsidies for primary producers in more than 90 per cent of the State.

24th January

Farmonline

Cabinet reshuffle: Turnbull Water Minister

As widely tipped, Malcolm Turnbull's rapid rise through the political ranks has continued today, with his

shift into the Cabinet as the new Minister for Environment and Water Resources.

Prime Minister John Howard this morning announced the Cabinet reshuffle, ending weeks of speculation about when it would happen and who the winners and losers would be.

Mr Turnbull's promotion was widely anticipated, given Mr Howard's regular comments that water is "the biggest issue for everybody in Australia at present". As part of the shake up, Nationals MP John Cobb has been shifted from his role as Minister for Community Services to help Mr Turnbull as the Assistant Minister for Environment and Water Resources. Mr Howard has rebranded and expanded the Department of Environment and Heritage to now include water resources, bringing the numerous government agencies dealing with the issue under one roof. The idea is likely to be claimed by the Opposition, after Labor Leader Kevin Rudd earlier this week called for a removal of the duplication of services from the various Government water agencies. Mr Howard also rejected questions that the reshuffle could be read as a sign of panic by a tired Government.

32.

"The next election will be a very tough one for the Government - that's something I have acknowledged for a long time," Mr Howard said.

"What I have done today is make some difficult decisions.

"Fortunately the Liberal Party has been infused over the last couple of elections with a number of talented new people."

Reshuffle ignores climate change: Labor

The Federal Cabinet reshuffle does not go far enough, according to Peter Garrett, who says it should have created a new Ministry for Climate Change. Mr Garrett, who is Labor's spokesman for climate change and the environment, now faces off with his corresponding star recruit from the Liberal Party, newly appointed Minister for Environment and Water Resources, Malcolm Turnbull.

Labor also has Anthony Albanese tackling the issue of water separately.

"Everyone knows Australia is getting hotter and drier, but the Prime Minister remains in denial and continues to shirk responsibility," Mr Garrett said. "Today in the midst of record-breaking temperatures, bushfires and droughts, he has said no to appointing a Climate Change Minister."

However, Mr Turnbull says the Australian public is viewing the issue of climate change "through the prism of water scarcity" - an issue he hopes to tackle in his new role.

"This has meant that the drought, which farmers and country communities and rural communities have always had to live with, has now come to town," Mr Turnbull said.

"All of our big cities, without exception, can and should be drought proofed."

Floods revive western Qld drought areas

The weekend's rain is being hailed as a one-in-50-year event by some producers in drought hit western Queensland, according to AgForce president, Peter Kenny.

Rain in Murray Basin lifts hopes

Heavy weekend rain across central and south eastern Australia will take some pressure off Murray-Darling Basin irrigators, but has failed to deliver substantial inflows to the parched river system.

Murray Valley Standard

Wellington weir action planned

The Murray Bridge Council conference room was full with people wanting to take action against the Wellington weir on Friday (19th Jan 07). The meeting was organised by the Murray Darling Association Region 6 and allowed a public forum on the Wellington weir. Affected stakeholders given the opportunity to voice their concerns, asking the State Government what are your other options and proposing Region 6 facilitate a seminar about the weir.

Weir construction should start

An advisor to River Murray Minister Karlene Maywald told a group of concerned stakeholders at a meeting (to which Murray Darling Association were not invited or informed was happening) on Sunday the construction of a temporary weir should be started.

Wellington weir could turn river to seawater

For every gigalitre of water that runs down the River Murray, with it comes 320 tonnes of salt, and a weir would compound the amount of salt held in the river.

25th January

Farmonline

Two state forests opened up for drought cattle

The NSW Government has opened up areas of Vulcan State Forest near Oberon and Canobolas State Forest near Orange for droving cattle that have been affected by the drought.

River News

Waste water off floodplain

Morgan now has a state of the art pump-out station for houseboats after the recent completion of the upgrades. The upgrade has shifted the water from being disposed of on the flood plain to it being treated and reused through a plant above that level.

Drought support way behind Eastern States

The South Australian Farmers' Federation (SAFF) says assistance provided by Eastern States Governments to their farmers during the drought makes a mockery of the South Australian Government's response.

Go upstream for drought proofing solutions

South Australia's Murray Irrigators (SAMI) believe a moratorium on all horticulture development in the Murray Darling Basin should be introduced until the drought passes.

33.

Adelaide Advertiser

PM reveals: Billion Dollar Water Rescue Plan

(From me: here we go again)

Another \$2.5 billion will be pumped into water initiatives by the Federal Government in a move that paves the way for a likely Commonwealth takeover of the Nation's water management.

Water targets 'vague'

New State Government targets for future water management and population growth in South Australia have been criticised as vague and meaningless. The Government plans to target "sustainable water supply" and River Murray salinity as part of its revised strategic plan.

SA RELIEF: Emergency aid for up to 3200 in four ares: Drought-hit farmers to share \$100m

The Federal Government yesterday said emergency drought relief would be available to up to 3200 farmers in four South Australian regions until March 31, 2009.

Don't waste storm water

Stormwater rushing out to sea represents a missed opportunity, as the state fails to capture recent rains that could help to reduce reliance on the ailing River Murray.

AdelaideNow

Rann demands water commission

Premier Mike Rann has called for a "truly independent" (Why should the Federal Government listen to Mike Rann – he won't listen to us when we want a "truly independ" study carried out in reference his wanting to build a temporary weir at Wellington – he is a bloody hypocrit) national commission to take charge of water in the Murray-Darling Basin, following a Federal Government announcement of a \$10 billion national management plan. This afternoon Mr Rann welcomed the commitment of "billions of dollars" but said he would wait to see the details of the plan before entering into any agreement with the Federal Government. The 10-point plan includes the biggest modernisation of irrigation infrastructure in Australia's history, pumping almost \$6 billion into improving structures like pipes and channels in a project aimed at saving 3,000 gegalitres of water a year.

But Mr Rann said he wanted a "truly independent body acting in the national interest" - run by commissioners not politicians. Mr Rann raised issues of trust, saying Mr Howard was going back on an assurance he made at last year's Melbourne Cup day water summit that there would be a collaborative, not a takeover approach, to the water problem.

"Now he seems to be saying we should hand over to politicians in Canberra dominated by eastern states," Mr Rann said. "When do we believe what we are being told when we were told on Melbourne Cup day has gone out the window."

We MDA in SA are seeking a "truly independent" body to take over control of the Murray-Darling Basin with **no** political input, similar to the Reserve Bank Board. Set it up and then butt out!

26th January

Adelaide Advertiser

RIVER'S FUTURE: Savvy Howard trumps States & Opposition with \$10bn water security plan

ONE VISION FOR THE MURRAY

The 10-point water plan

- 1) A Nationwide investment in irrigation infrastucture to line or pipe major channels at a cost of almost \$6 billion.
- 2) A Nationwide programe to improve on-farm irrigation technology and metering.
- 3) A plan to share water savings on a 50/50 basis between farms and rivers to secure environmental flows.
- 4) A buyback of irrigation licences along the Murray Darling system at a cost of\$3 billion.
- 5) Commonwealth management of the river system after States give powers to the Federal Government.

- 6) New limits on surface and groundwater use in the Murray Darling Basin.
- 7) Major engineering works at slow-flow areas of the river system such as Barmah Choke and Menindee Lakes.
- 8) Creation of a new division in the Bureau of Meteorology to measure water resources Nationwide and to allow for informed planning of future resources at a cost of \$480 billion.
- 9) Creation of a taskforce to examine future water and agricultural opportunities of Northern Australia.
- 10) Completion of restoration of the Great Artesian Basin.

34.

PM makes reforms his own

John Howard's plan for a Federal takeover of Australia's biggest and most important river system is both clever politics and serious reform.

Rann will fight, but wary of legal brawl

Premier Mike Rann is hoping to avoid a legal brawl over PM John Howard's \$10 billion, 10-year water plan. From me butt out Rann and stop thinking about yourself and your perceived power base and think of the best for Australia – we must all work together.

TALK: Weir will devastate environment with Henry Jones

* Do we want to be an international laughing stock? 8 More than 20 years, ago the Coorong wetlands were included in the International RAMSAR Convention for the protection of endangered wetlands. * It was signed by the SA and Commonwealth Governments to protect one of the World's best wetland systems. * If a weir is built across the river, they will have to tear up that agreement because the weir – not the drought – will put the final nail in the Coorong's coffin. * It would be the first time any Western country has abandoned this treaty. In short, it will be an International environmental disgrace for SA.

Farmonline

\$10 billion for 10-point Federal water grand plan

The Federal Government is prepared to spend a whopping \$10 billion to fix the chronic water problems of the Murray Darling Basin.

Prime Minister, John Howard, said a plan on this scale was needed because water management in Australia requires "radical and permanent change".

But there's a catch: the states must first waive their constitutional rights to manage rivers and sign over the responsibility to the Commonwealth. And irrigators will face adjustments in their entitlements.

This will include licence buybacks, to address the "chronic over-allocation" of water in the Murray Darling Basin. In his Australia Day speech to the National Press Club, Prime Minister, John Howard, said the plan heralds a new chapter in water management in Australia.

But it is conditional on the states agreeing to reform the governance arrangements for the Murray-Darling Basin.

"We must think and act as Australians - not as Queenslanders, Victorians and New South Welshmen," Mr Howard said. "The current trajectory of water use is not sustainable.

"Without decisive action we face the worst of both worlds: the irrigation sector will go into steady but inevitable decline, while water quality and environmental problems get steadily worse."

Bold water plan has NFF wanting more detail

The National Farmers' Federation has welcomed the Federal Government's \$10B water plan as a strong initiative, but it is reserving judgement until it sees the detail.

Decision on SA Lake, likely within next six weeks

SA River Murray Minister, Karlene Maywald, said the lake blockage was not a done deal.

"This community is being given every opportunity to be part of process to work out how to manage this," she said.

"Opposing the lake's blockage for the sake of opposing it won't help anyone."

Berri Barmera mayor, Peter Hunt, described the meeting as "the biggest turn-out there has ever been in Barmera".

He urged those at the meeting to consider the need to retain growers' allocations.

"Horticulturalists and viticulturalists are the backbone of our economy," he said.

Department of Water, Land & Biodiversity Conservation's Paul Harvey said rains of "biblical proportions" were needed to make a difference to river storages.

It was not only South Australia feeling the pain.

"A lot of irrigation in New South Wales has already been stopped and in Victoria they're looking to bring the end of the irrigation season forward," Mr Harvey said.

"It is almost certain that initial allocations for 2007-08 will be extremely low, whatever happens between now and July.

"There will be long-term environmental damage, which will impact on the health and quality of the river into the future."

The environmental manager for the SA Murray Darling Basin, Natural Resources Management Board, for the River Murray, Ms Judy Goode said blocking off Lake Bonney could have environmental benefits.

"An uncontrolled drop in river levels would result in up to 26 gigalitres of water draining from the lake into the river, bringing with it 150,000 tonnes of salt," she said.

35.

Action group spokesperson Mark Beech said it was not a matter of growers versus tourism, but what was best for Barmera.

"The way we see it, everyone has an equal right to the water, not only in Barmera and not only in the Riverland but in all of SA," he said.

"People are going after this lake like pigs at a trough.

"The reason we're in this predicament is because of the mismanagement of governments past and present.

"The whole River Murray system has been grossly mismanaged."

Lake Bonney is one of eight Riverland sites that have been prioritised for further investigations into their blockage.

The sites offer a combined annual water saving of 43 gigalitres.

The sites include Nelwood Swamp, near the Victorian border, Horseshoe Swamp, Murtho; Nelwart Swamp, Renmark; Gurra Gurra, Berri; Yatco Lagoon, Mooroo; and Jaeschke Lagoon and Ross Lagoon, Waikerie.

27th January

Adelaide Advertiser

WATER CRISIS: Balclash to Wellington proposal intensifies as Rann calls for independent board to Govern the Murray: Weir decision in weeks

The State Government has ruled out a temporary weir near Taillem Bend or Murray Bridge. Further work (testing) will concentrate on a couple of sites below Wellington.

PM's plan is no solution

The Federal Government's \$10 billion water management plan will not impact on a possible weir at Wellington, the State Government says.

Water talk for region

A water forum between Government departments, community agencies and developers will be held on Yorke Peninsula next month.

28th January

news.com.au

No plan for NSW recycled drinking water

From me: **Another State Government like SA no vision for the future it must be hard to Govern with your head in the sand.**

THE NSW Government has ruled out the need to follow Queensland's lead and introduce recycled drinking water for Sydney households. Queensland Premier Peter Beattie today said south-east Queensland would get recycled drinking water whether it wanted it or not, and plans for a water referendum had been dumped. He said the Government had no choice but to introduce treated sewage water in the area given falling dam levels.

But NSW Water Utilities Minister David Campbell said there were no plans to follow suit in Sydney, where dam levels are also at record low levels.

"It's not in our strategy at all," he said.

"I understand their dam capacity for south-east Queensland is 15 per cent less than what is available in Sydney.

"So it's a different set of circumstances and there's no one size fits all to this."

Mr Campbell said it would be up to local councils in regional towns to decide on whether to introduce recycled drinking water for their communities.

Mr Campbell said the NSW Government would continue its push for industry to switch to recycled water. He also repeated calls for the Federal Government to approve NSW's plans for a major industrial water recycling project in Sydney's west.

Meanwhile, NSW Premier Morris Iemma says he wants to expand the number of water recycling plants across the state.

"(The Government is) always examining ways to do more and yes there are more water recycling plants on the way," he said.

"For example, just before the end of last year, I opened the biggest industrial recycling project in Sydney in Botany and there's more on the way."

Mr Iemma also reiterated his support for Prime Minister John Howard's \$10 billion water plan, unveiled last

week.

"I'm not going to allow issues of power and control stand in the way of securing better water supply, more efficiency on water and better outcomes for the people of NSW," he said.

36.

Recycled water brought forward

THE Queensland Government's scrapping of a referendum on the use of recycled drinking water shows it was a "farce" in the first place, the Opposition said today.

Queensland Premier Peter Beattie today announced south-east Queensland would get recycled water whether it was wanted or not, and the \$10 million plebiscite on the issue would be scrapped.

Mr Beattie said the Government had no choice with limited rain in the state's densely populated south-east corner and Brisbane's Wivenhoe Dam water level now just above 20 per cent of capacity.

"The reality is there is no choice," he said, warning that an "armageddon" situation was rapidly approaching over water. "I wanted to put this decision to the people but the reality is that sometimes a leader has to just go ahead and do what needs to be done," he said.

Barring a major cyclone and accompanying rains, Mr Beattie said recycled effluent would be pumped into major dams as soon as the new water grid pipeline was completed late next year.

State Liberal Leader Bruce Flegg today said Queenslanders never really had a choice.

"This referendum became a farce, all the premier has done is concede what every Queenslanders already knew and that is that we did not have a choice anyway," Dr Flegg said.

"The referendum itself was part of Mr Beattie wanting to look like he was doing something."

He accused Premier Beattie of failing to ensure the necessary infrastructure for drinking recycled waste water was in place.

"Even if Queenslanders had voted yes, the premier has not provided the pipeline and infrastructure to give them recycled water.

"A referendum wouldn't deliver one drop of water to Queensland."

He also said the Government had taken too long to address the water crisis.

Premier Beattie's backflip comes just days after Water Commission boss Elizabeth Nosworthy said there was no water crisis in Queensland and follows sustained criticism of the decision to hold the plebiscite in 18 local government regions.

Mr Beattie and his deputy led an emergency Cabinet meeting by phone yesterday, with all ministers agreeing the two leaders should now make the final decision on the issue.

Ms Bligh said the dry summer meant the "luxury of giving the people an option had disappeared".

"The armageddon is closer than our original prediction," Ms Bligh said.

"Not only is it increasingly inevitable that we will have to use purified water as soon as the pipe is available but we may have to use it for quite a long time.

"What is the point of offering people a vote on something that is not optional?"

It has emerged that research commissioned by the Deputy Premier through the Infrastructure Department showed that most Queenslanders thought the plebiscite was a waste of time.

Of 1000 respondents across all 18 southeast Queensland council areas, 78 per cent said they would vote yes.

Mr Beattie agreed that using recycled water in the dams was inevitable and defended his decision to call the plebiscite last year after Toowoomba voted against using recycled water in its drinking supplies.

He said his decision had also been influenced by growing cross-party acceptance of the need to drink recycled water, citing Brisbane Lord Mayor Campbell Newman and Prime Minister John Howard as Liberals who had supported it.

"I think there is some bipartisan understanding about the need to do it," Mr Beattie said.

Mr Beattie and Ms Bligh took advice from the Water Commission and are believed to be hammering out the details of the move.

Ms Bligh moved to reassure people recycled water was safe to drink, with both politicians drinking bottled recycled water from California and Singapore to prove their point.

"The option of having a say is perhaps not a luxury that we can afford now," Ms Bligh said.

Perthnow

Recycled water way of the future

AUSTRALIANS must face up to the inevitability of using water recycled from sewage to wash, bathe and drink, the head of Prime Minister John Howard's new water task force has warned.

Senator Bill Heffernan said: "There is plenty of science available today that recycled water can be made more sterile than our rivers and streams. If this dry spell continues, there will come a time when some areas will have to inject recycled water into the drinking supply."

His message – backed by Australian of the Year environmental scientist Tim Flannery – will re-ignite the debate on whether drinking treated effluent is the only solution to the water crisis.

Senator Heffernan – heading a task force to address the crisis – said: "We shouldn't be using A-grade drinking water to water The Domain – at the very least you should be using recycled water for that." With the Government launching its \$10 billion plan this week to tackle drought in the bush, the pressure will now shift to the cities to help overcome the crisis, with recycled water increasingly being seen as the only option.

Dr Flannery claimed all Australians should be drinking recycled water, taking the lead from countries such as Singapore. "All water is recycled ultimately anyway. There's been no new water on the planet since the dinosaurs," he said.

Dr Flannery warned major residential areas could run out of water.

"The cities are on the cusp. Places like the Central Coast are in a pretty bad way," he said.

Mr Howard appeared to endorse drinking recycled water yesterday.

"I think Australians will accept that. I'm certain we will accept that very readily provided the thing is done in a very scientific fashion," he said.

Senator Heffernan called for a campaign to dispel the myths about recycled water.

He said a referendum on recycled water in the Queensland town of Toowoomba last year had failed because people had "played politics".

While the Toowoomba referendum was a setback for recycled water advocates, recent surveys have found a majority support it.

A Newspoll in December found 70 per cent of people would not object to drinking recycled sewage.

Sydney Olympic Park water and energy manager Andrzej Listowski has been running the facility on recycled sewage since 2000.

"The quality of the water is fantastic, it's just as pure as ordinary drinking water but we don't use it for drinking because of the public opposition to it," he said yesterday.

The water system at Olympic Park and in the nearby suburb of Newington uses recycled sewage for toilets, washing clothes, airconditioners and irrigation.

Adelaide's: Sunday Mail

Turnbull backs sewage water: But not in our city, says Rann

From me: SA's no vision for the future!

Malcolm Turnbull said: 'If the weir is built on the river, it's more likely to be built where the river narrows a little bit near a place called Taillem Bend'

Residents: Get out here and see for yourself

Urgent research needed, Turnbull told

Coorong District Mayor Keith Scobie thinks new Federal Environment and Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull urgently needs to get up to speed with developments in the Lower Murray region because water conservation decisions would affect thousands of South Australians.

Builders flout tank law – No loopholes: Holloway

SA's precious rainwater is being wasted, with builders ignoring a new law aimed at saving water. House builders have found a loophole to avoid installing tanks in new houses.

River sport drought ban

Wakeboarding competitions at Murray Bridge are the latest casualties of the drought, with council (Rural City of Murray Bridge) banning the events due to low water levels.

29th January

Farmonline

\$10B water plan: Irrigators want more detail

The Federal Government's \$10-billion water announcement could be seen as an admission that efforts to get governments to work together on water has failed, according to NSW Irrigators Council CEO, Doug Miell. Mr Miell has described the funding announcement as "ambitious", "far reaching" and "breathtaking".

But he says there are still many details the council wants to go over before the government's new plans for water gets the tick. Mr Miell says irrigators will have concerns with governance arrangements, allocation buy backs and sustainable caps, particularly when there is already a cap on water plans.

He says the separation of land and water titles in NSW in line with the National Water Initiative was supposed to provide irrigators with entitlement security.

\$10B water plan: Rudd and Labor Premiers split

It's vintage election-year politics from Prime Minister John Howard, and so far it has worked a treat. With Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd beating the drum of ending the State/Federal "blame game", the Federal Government's \$10-billion water plan has already wedged the different levels of the Labor Party.

Mr Rudd has welcomed the plan for the Commonwealth to take control of the Murray Darling Basin, but the Labor Premiers from the four affected states are not all as keen.

"I think when it comes to big questions like water, it's really important that we put the politics to one side and work together," Mr Rudd said.

But South Australian Premier Mike Rann says ceding power to Canberra would leave his state interests forgotten by the eastern states politicians, who dominate the numbers in Canberra and are "beholden to upstream irrigators, including the powerful rice and cotton lobbies"

Instead, Mr Rann says an independent commission is needed to manage the Murray-Darling Basin.

Victorian Premier Steve Bracks is cautiously going along with the plan, provided irrigators from his state are not disadvantaged and that the Federal Government funds Victorian water projects that have been held up by red tape.

"We will be one of the first states to co-operate and work with the Commonwealth because there's a national interest to do that," Mr Bracks said.

Similarly, NSW Premier Morris Iemma is "100pc in support of a national approach", but says it must be based on a partnership with the states. Queensland Premier Peter Beattie says he will consider the proposal but noted "the last time the states referred power to the Commonwealth, to provide consistent regulation for corporations, it was used by John Howard to strip away the basic rights of working Australians" in the recent industrial relations laws. Mr Howard yesterday declined to say what course he would take if the states did not sign over control of the Murray Darling, and says he will give the Premiers a "reasonable amount of time" to make a decision. However, if they do not give control to the Commonwealth, Mr Howard could challenge the situation in the High Court. Or he could put it to a referendum when the Federal election is held later this year, making the proposal the central issue of the campaign and not issues like his troublesome industrial relations laws.

Old irrigation community facing bleak future

The useful rains falling throughout large swathes of outback Australia have been of little consolation for small irrigation communities like the Cunningham District Irrigators Association in southern Queensland. Association spokesperson, Gary Cooper, says the future for irrigators continues to look "very bleak" until there's a good general wet across parched broad-acre paddocks, requiring at least a couple of good seasons to return to more normal crop production patterns. The district's 200-300 acre farms are struggling to pay their way by irrigating lucerne and sorghum crops, plus maintain local dairy and vegetable production.

"Our ground water allocation is all that is keeping us going," Mr Cooper said.

In a bid to diversify Mr Cooper is running a small feedlot, while other producers are getting involved in the transport business, and still more are looking to take jobs in nearby towns.

While the lack of water is bad enough, irrigators across Queensland continue to be wrangled by the apparent inaction of the Queensland Government to quickly implement a promised rebate for the State's Part A component of its fixed water charges. "We've only had a bellyful of promises with no answers," Mr Cooper said. "This is our fifth year without water and even though know we're not going to get any water, we hate paying for something we haven't even got a chance of getting," Mr Cooper said.

Annual charges of about \$4500/year for 250ML, split between the two Cooper brothers' properties, are typical of the district's 30 irrigators with the largest allocation totalling 280ML.

SA being short-changed on weir answers

Opposition to a weir at Wellington in South Australia is growing, despite the Government's claims that it is necessary to guarantee Adelaide's water supply. Local MP, Adrian Pederick, is asking the State Government to take South Australians into its confidence and elaborate on what options they are considering, other than a weir at Wellington, in order to maintain the State's water supply, which is under siege from an extreme drought.

"We keep hearing that government is looking at a number of options and that a weir at Wellington is a 'last resort' if the drought persists," Mr Pederick said.

"Repeated requests to them to elaborate on those other options have been refused on the grounds that they didn't want to frighten people with possibilities that may not happen.

"Are suggestions like coffer dams around the river off-takes and floating pumps seen as possible alternatives to a weir or merely interim measures?"

Border Rivers cotton growers close to water trading

By as early as July this year, interstate water trading could commence between cotton growers in Queensland and NSW, with the Border Rivers Resource Operating Plan (ROP) nearing completion.

Currently undergoing submissions for public comment to the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Water (NRW), the finalisation of the ROP has been in the pipeline since the early 2000s.

According to the immediate past executive officer of Border Rivers Food and Fibre, Bruce McCullom, the

ROP should be implemented between July and September 2007.

By far the most notable outcome of the ROP will be the ability to separate water titles from land, and thus create significant trading potential.

"It will certainly enable interstate trading, although it is very hard to predict what the level of trading will be," Mr McCullom said.

With the public comment process open until the end of February, he says BRF&F will be making a number of submissions regarding their areas of concern. These concerns include: the access rules for the thresholds for when to commence and cease pumping; environmental flow rules; the impact of the introduction sleeper licences; and how water will be shared between different groups of water users.

Adelaide Advertiser

SEA RESCUE: Libs propose \$400m desalination plant

A giant desalination plant to provide fresh water to Adelaide has been pledged by the State Opposition as part of a new water policy. Liberal leader Iain Evans said the plant, which would cost up to \$400 million, would guarantee the city's supply and take pressure off the River Murray.

DRINKING OPTION: To many risks, says recycling expert: Water from sewage not safe enough

The Adelaide scientist who developed Australia's drinking water guidelines says he would not drink recycled sewage and would not back its use. As residents of drought-stricken Southeast Queensland were told yesterday they would have no choice but accept recycled water for drinking, Professor Don Bursill said there were too many risks attached to the practice for it to be introduced here.

Reforms could lead to buy-outs

Farmers could be forced off their land in areas with old and leaky irrigation systems under the Federal Government's \$10 billion water plan. New Federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull confirmed that farms could be compulsorily acquired to modernise irrigation channels and stop wastage.

I warned Minister John Hill (the then Minister for the River Murray) years ago that they should not expect the lower Murray irrigators to take over and maintain the over aged channels, pumps and gates etc they should be the responsibility of the Government!

News.com.au

Recycled water 'drunk safely now'

AUSTRALIANS are already drinking water recycled from sewage even as state governments refuse to consider using the process despite city dams running dry. Dr Stuart Khan, a research fellow at the University of New South Wales, says he understands that west of Sydney the Penrith sewage plant discharges directly into the Nepean River.

The river then flows about 17km downstream before water is taken out at the Richmond drinking water plant and processed for city consumption.

"The amount of water that comes out of the (Richmond) plant that's actually recycled treated effluent, depending on the weather conditions and river flow, can be anywhere from 2 per cent to 20 per cent," Dr Khan said. NSW Premier Morris Iemma today denied suggestions that his Government would impose water recycling on residents after the March 24 state election if catchment levels continued to drop.

The Western Australian Government has also ruled out using recycled water for domestic consumption, however the Beattie Government has announced it intends to have southeast Queenslanders drinking recycled water by the end of the year.

A spokesman for the NSW Premier's office confirmed there was a "a very small percentage of average flows comes from sewage treatment plants, this is distinctly different to the large scale potable reuse of effluent as proposed in Queensland".

A spokeswoman for David Campbell, NSW Minister for water utilities, also confirmed a small percentage of recycled water made it into the Warragamba dam and the Nepean River each year.

"In an average year the discharge from the sewage treatment plants would account for about 2 per cent of the flows in the Nepean," the spokeswoman said.

Premier Iemma's office also said it would turn to desalination processes before it would utilise recycled sewage as a water source. Despite the undeniable and understandable "yuk factor" many people would associate with drinking recycled sewage, it's a perfectly safe and already a widely used practice, according to Dr Khan, of the Centre for Water Waste and Management UNSW.

It is also cheaper and less environmentally harmful to recycle water than to desalinate it and with proper planning the end product is just as safe, Dr Khan says.

According to Dr Khan the energy needed for the reverse osmosis process in desalination, where the water is pushed through a membrane for purification, is far greater than that needed to recycle.

"We have to consider the amount of greenhouse gases and the amount of money it costs," Dr Khan said.

“We also have extra environmental implications to do with disposing large quantities of brine that are produced. “

And the real energy requirement comes from trying to push this water that contains chemicals or salt through the membrane.

“Sea water also contains about 35g per litre of salt whereas treated sewage contains much less than a tenth of that.”

The quality of drinking water could be better controlled if the NSW Government were to agree to “planned water recycling” rather than rely on the “un-planned water recycling” system that is in place, according to Dr Khan.

“It is interesting that Goulburn is talking about having a planned water recycling scheme because that water is already being recycled (at the Goulburn Sewage Treatment plant), just in an unplanned way.

“We have seen absolutely no health affects from unplanned water recycling, we consider it to be a safe process,” Dr Khan said.

“But planned water recycling where we put the advanced water treatment process (reverse osmosis) in makes the whole process considerably safer.

“We have a lot more control over what’s going on and very importantly we have a lot more management ... we can confirm the water meets quality criteria.”

The Australian

Fight looms with Nationals over water

THE Nationals' concerns about the compulsory acquisition of water licences in the parched Murray-Darling basin has forced the Government to say such a move would be a "last resort".

The Howard Government has set up a potential election year stoush with the Nationals over the possibility it would compulsorily acquire irrigation licences, which is part of the Prime Minister's \$10 billion water security plan announced last week. Incoming Environment and Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull has confirmed licences could be compulsorily acquired under the project to modernise irrigation channels and stop water wastage. Queensland Nationals senator Barnaby Joyce and NSW MP Kay Hull today hit out at the idea, warning any such move would devalue properties, create too much uncertainty in communities already crippled by the drought and kill some Murray-Darling towns. "If you start compulsorily acquiring something then it starts to undermine the value," Senator Joyce told AAP. "If they're undermined then the loan to valuation ratio is undermined and the banks have a right to say well, we're unsecured and we need to fix that position up. "The other issue is if you take the majority of water licences from an area, it's not just the people who have water you affect, it's all the people in town who have houses and mortgages and small businesses who also go out of business."

Ms Hull, whose electorate of Riverina covers a large area of irrigated farmland, said compulsory acquisition would rob communities of their only resource.

It was conceivable that towns could collapse under such a scheme, she said, and forced buyouts should be a last resort.

"I don't mind people voluntarily offering their water up, but I'd like to see it done through the irrigation corporations in order that we can understand what the social dislocation of that would mean," she told AAP. "You can't go in and dismantle communities."

She agreed the government had to address the over-allocation of water in the basin, but said the solution was achieving greater efficiency in irrigation systems.

Mr Turnbull today backed away from his comments, saying it would be "an ultimate last resort scenario" to force farmers to sell their water licences.

"Not only is there no plan to compulsorily acquire water, there is no need to do so," he told ABC Radio.

Senator Joyce - a fierce advocate of states' rights who has already called for a 10-year sunset clause on the planned commonwealth takeover of the Murray-Darling basin - today said the issue should go to a referendum at this year's federal election.

If the commonwealth wanted permanent control of the river system, it should be put to a vote, he said.

"If you want to make a serious constitutional change ... you've got to take it to the Australian people," Senator Joyce said.

"And if you say it'll never get passed, well congratulations - that's democracy."

Mr Howard will write to the premiers of NSW, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland this week asking them to refer their powers over the Murray-Darling to the commonwealth.

States split on plan to recycle

A CONTROVERSIAL plan to introduce recycled drinking water in Queensland has split the Labor states, reinforcing the difficulty of forging a national consensus on water reform.

Just days after John Howard unveiled a \$10billion plan that involves seizing control of the vital Murray-

Darling Basin, Queensland Premier Peter Beattie yesterday said the state's southeast could be drinking recycled sewage as early as next year.

Citing public support for recycled water - and record-low dam levels - Mr Beattie said he was scrapping his plans for a state-wide plebiscite on the issue, claiming he had no choice but to make Brisbane the first capital city to drink recycled waste water.

"The reality is we have to provide people with water - this is the time for leadership and we have accepted that responsibility and we will lead on this issue," Mr Beattie said.

The decision to introduce treated sewage for drinking has the support of the Prime Minister and the federal Opposition but was not backed by the other Labor states.

South Australian Premier Mike Rann and NSW Premier Morris Iemma, who faces an election in two months, rejected the Queensland plan.

Mr Rann ruled out using recycled sewage for anything but irrigation, saying he would prefer desalination.

"It will be interesting to see whether (Mr Howard's water reforms) includes plans to give billions of litres of pristine river water to the Liberals' friends in the cotton and rice industries whilst asking households downstream to drink treated sewage," he said.

"Any premier who would agree in advance to sign something he hadn't seen would not be worthy of the job."

But Malcolm Turnbull, who will tomorrow be sworn in as minister for the environment and water resources, called on the states to be more open-minded.

"Don't rule out desalination because it is expensive, or recycling because it sounds yucky, or building a dam," Mr Turnbull said. "Put everything on the table, assess all the economic, environmental and financial costs and then make a decision."

The push to introduce recycled drinking water came as the Howard Government confirmed farms could be compulsory brought under a \$3 billion structural adjustment package, announced as part of Mr Howard's \$10 billion water blueprint.

Mr Turnbull said it was "not inconceivable" that farms could be compulsorily acquired under the plan, which involves funding to modernise irrigation channels and cut water wastage. "There might be an area where you buy out the farms, close down a channel because it's inefficient," he said during a one-day tour of rural centres in NSW and Victoria to sell the water package. But Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran said no irrigator would be forced off the land. "This is more about structural adjustment than it is about buying water, let alone compulsory acquisition," the Nationals minister said.

Farmers are concerned that buying water entitlements could force them off the land, and the Nationals will have to tread warily to avoid an election-year backlash.

A defiant Mr Beattie yesterday predicted other major centres would follow in introducing recycled water as critical water shortages worsen around the country.

People in southeast Queensland are expected to be drinking recycled effluent by the end of next year when a pipeline feeding the main water storages is completed.

And if below-average rainfall continues, they could be drinking it for up to 10 years.

Two of the state's main dams - at Wivenhoe and Somerset - are now at 23 per cent capacity, with in-flows 20 per cent lower than the worst on record.

The Queensland inland city of Toowoomba last year rejected a proposal to introduce treated sewage for drinking water. But Mr Beattie claimed there was popular backing for yesterday's announcement, citing government-commissioned polls that show 78 per cent of people supported drinking purified recycled water. The breakthrough decision will be controversial in the conservative state but Mr Beattie said the Government would ensure the new standard of drinking water was 100 per cent safe.

"It will be treated to the extent that is world accepted ... there will be no skimping on health standards," he said. "I personally believe ... that one day all the major centres of Australia will be using recycled water."

"It's not like we are part of a freak show - the rest of the world is doing this."

Mr Turnbull backed Mr Beattie. "We support the decision to go ahead with the recycling," he said.

But he said Canberra would not be seeking a national decision on the use of recycled water, saying it was instead a matter for the individual state and territory governments.

In NSW, where recycling is part of the state Government's water conservation strategy, there are no plans to use recycled water for drinking.

Facing a tough election on March 24, Mr Iemma said his Government had a plan to boost supplies in other ways.

"There are many things we can do before we need to consider that," he said. "Secondly, we are not in the same position as Brisbane. We have our own strategy to deal with the water situation today and should things get worse." Mr Iemma claimed that dam levels in Queensland were well below those in NSW, forcing

Mr Beattie to adopt more-radical options to address the shortage of drinking water.

South Australia's Premier, Mr Rann, said the "Howard Liberal plan appears to be to connect recycled sewage water to household drinking supplies". "That's not my plan and South Australian voters will have a clear choice at the next election," he said.

Access to Murray mouth restricted

WITH his \$400 million marina the last business along the 2530km stretch of the Murray River, few people have a bigger vested interest in its future than Andrew Chapman.

"Everybody else meddling upstream affects us most at the Murray mouth," said Mr Chapman, whose family started developing the marina, near Goolwa, in 1984.

Over-allocation has seen the nearby Coorong estuary choked at its southern end with wildlife disappearing and salinity increasing to dangerous levels. The Murray mouth needs to be dredged around the clock to keep silt at bay.

And now boat owners face restricted access through the lock at the Goolwa barrage to stop saltwater flowing back into the river.

But Mr Chapman said business had never been better, with clients prepared to pay on average \$1200 a year for a berth at the luxury marina complex.

"Let me tell you we have never been busier than we are this year," Mr Chapman said. "Our boat numbers have been going up daily."

The marina - whose development ultimately stirred the Hindmarsh Island "secret women's business" affair - owns land on both sides of the barrage, holding saltwater frontage and freshwater frontage.

The South Australian Government has introduced the restrictions because of falling water levels in the lower lakes - Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert - and the frequency and length of a phenomenon known as reverse head, when the seawater level is higher than the level of freshwater at the barrages.

The construction of a weir upstream at Wellington - which the state Government is considering as part of a plan to secure Adelaide's water security in future years - could also affect the amount of fresh water that flows towards the barrages.

The weir proposal has angered local residents, community groups, academics and farmers, who fear it would cause environmental devastation to the Coorong estuary.

River Murray Advisory Committee member Henry Jones said the weir would cause "the biggest environmental disaster" the state had ever seen.

City water pressures being cut

WESTERN Australia's Water Corporation yesterday became the latest utility to halve water pressure in capital cities - a move aimed at protecting infrastructure and reducing wastage.

Residents in Perth's riverside suburbs of Shelley, Waterford and Rossmoyne will today receive letters from the corporation advising them of a 12-month trial to reduce the water pressure from 700 to 350 kilopascals. The corporation said the pilot, which would address "higher leakage rates, consumption and ... bursts in the network" would not affect garden reticulation, dishwashers, washing machines, hot water systems or toilets, all of which needed between 150 and 250 kilopascals to function, if properly fitted and installed.

A similar move by Sydney Water last week prompted the Insurance Council of Australia to raise concerns about the impact of reduced water pressure on fire-fighting preparedness, especially if water needed to be delivered to high rise or large residential complexes.

But Water Corporation spokesman Phil Kneebone said yesterday they had been assured by the state's Fire and Emergency Services Authority that a single fire hydrant needed 25 metres of head or 250 hectapascals to deliver adequate fire flows. The corporation's letter advises that while business operators with a mains pressure fire system should not be concerned, they should contact FESA or their firesystems manager with any questions. Those that use large amounts of water, such as laundromats and kitchens, would be contacted by the corporation to have their water needs discussed. "They (the public) won't call ... we don't expect any problems at all," Mr Kneebone said yesterday. "All of the really large operators such as hospitals and shopping centres access water under different rules. They have to have their own emergency back-up systems for water and power."

Brisbane City Council has just introduced a pressure reduction program that it claims will save 13million litres of water a day, with similar schemes either in place or under way for the Gold Coast, Wide Bay and Central Highlands areas. Sydney Water will extend a project it began in the Stanwell Tops area, south of Sydney, last year.

43.

AWA

PM John Howard seeks four states' agreement to give the Commonwealth management authority for the Murray-Darling Basin. \$6 billion over 10 years is to for a range of measures to modernise irrigation: lining channels, improved water meters, evaporation controls and a new Basin Commission with power to set caps

on water extraction and enforce catchment and aquifer plans.

A further \$3 billion will be invested to reduce over-allocated water for Irrigation, buy back non-viable areas and assist marginal farmers leave the industry. The Bureau of Meteorology will be given a national brief to collect water data and make forecasts with new legislation to cover it, for an extra \$480m.

The existing Department of the Environment and Heritage will become the Department of the Environment and Water Resources under changes announced by PM Jo Howard prior to the above announcements this past week. Malcolm Turnbull, MP has been appointed Minister for The Environment & Water Resources, replacing Senator Ian Campbell.

Funding from the Australian Government Water Fund of more than \$220m has been agreed for large projects that will improve Australia's water infrastructure and the management of Australia's scarce water resources. In NSW these include Prospect Area industrial Roof Water Harvesting, Central Coast Water Recycling Proposal, Newnes Plateau Mine Water Recycling Scheme.

Premier Peter Beattie has called off the planned March Plebiscite on Recycled Water for South East Queensland and stated that, because of the current drought, recycled water will be introduced into the public drinking water supply.

SEQ Water originally submitted a proposal seeking \$184m for the Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme, to the National Water Commission in June 2006 for funding under Water Smart Australia round two. The National Water Commission requested a copy of the business case and awaits its receipt.

The Victorian Government has sought funding for projects to secure the water supply for Bendigo (\$25m) and Ballarat (\$90m) by pipelines connecting to the Goulburn Murray system, and a recycling project in Geelong (\$19m) and discussions with the Commonwealth are underway.

South Australian Government submitted a proposal seeking a \$160m towards the cost of a Desalination plant and associated infrastructure to supply water to the Upper Spencer Gulf and Eyre Peninsula. The National Water Commission is preparing a financial model including revenue to identify the level of external funding required to make the project commercially viable.

The Western Australian Government has sought funding of \$356m for the South West Yarragadee borefield and pipeline, and submitted a proposal at the concept stage for the redevelopment of the Wellington Dam (indicative costing only).

The Victorian Government has announced that new Victorian residential estates will be mandated to have Recycled Water. More than 40,000 new homes in Melbourne's outer east between Cranbourne and Officer will be required to connect to recycled water in an attempt to save 4000 ML/yr.

Water Services Association (WSAA) has expanded the scope of its Product Appraisal service to include Trade Waste pretreatment products as well as water supply and sewage infrastructure products to provide a national approach to their assessment for their suitability in the delivery of water supply and sewage services.

The water supply for Kangaroo Island off the South Australian coast has been boosted by an agreement for forestry group Great Southern Plantations to sell up to 300 ML of water from one of its large dams located on the island's west to SA Water for use by local residents.

Sydney Water has invested in 3 new Jetter Trucks, worth more than \$1.2m, to improve response capability and repair times for faults, such as Sewer Overflows, blockages and failures at pumping stations and this is part of a \$645m, 2007 program of investment in water and sewer infrastructure across Sydney.

The CRC Irrigation Futures has developed Irrigation TBL, a tool for use by urban irrigators for annual assessment and reporting on the sustainability of irrigation systems. Step-by-step instructions are available to guide the process as well as core indicators that can be used for performance measures.

44.

The Local Government Association of Queensland commissioned the Centre for Water and Waste Technology (UNSW) to investigate existing studies relating to the health risks of Indirect Potable Reuse schemes. The report is available from the LGAQ (Website).

US EPA has announced criteria to certify high-efficiency, high-performing Toilets under WaterSense - a program to improve the market for water efficient products and practices and which was first announced at

Agforce says that Queensland irrigators are to be charged \$55 million to pay for infrastructure they will never actually own.

A radical plan to boost irrigation water trading by building a channel to bypass a natural blockage in the Murray River will be pushed by the Bracks Government.

New Minister Turnbull has nominated water as the "biggest" aspect of his portfolio but also he has not ruled out embracing carbon trading.

There will be an irrigation cap to prevent over-allocation of water from the Murray-Darling system but no target for rivers.

The state say they are willing to talk with the PM about the Commonwealth's plan to take over the Murray-Darling Basin system and want an urgent meeting with him.

30th January

Farmonline

\$10B water package: Division over licence buyback

There is division with the Coalition over the extent of the Government's \$10B plan for the Murray Darling, and whether irrigation licences will be compulsorily acquired.

Doctor drought relief still a decade away

The Queensland Government's commitment to increasing rural and regional doctor numbers through funding medical student training places, has been welcomed but it may be 10 years before it makes a real difference to the bush. President of the Rural Doctors Association of Queensland, Dr Christian Rowan, says the doctor drought is as real a problem as the shortage of water.

"While Governments can't make rain, doctor numbers are something that can be controlled and it's good to see that happening at last," Dr Rowan said.

"However, I'd warn [Premier Peter] Beattie that these students aren't the doctors of 'tomorrow' as he promised, but the doctors of the next decade.

"Building a medical workforce is a lot like building water infrastructure: you can't do it overnight."

Medical students take several years to train into doctors, after which there is a long postgraduate training pipeline before they can deliver services.

"In fact, there is a particular issue with how these doctors are going to be trained well, because with cuts to bed numbers and trend to shorter hospital stays for patients, we do have a concern about their exposure to enough teaching cases," Dr Rowan said.

"Students need exposure to the thrills and skills of rural practice, and rural doctors are keen to teach them, but we do run into problems with their travel and accommodation.

"Cuts to rural services like birthing have also meant that the value of their time on a country rotation is not always what it used to be."

NSW irrigators stoush on \$20m compo

Farmers in NSW are seeking urgent clarification on the eligibility criteria for the State Government's \$20m assistance package for southern irrigators, fearing many who planned for drought and carried over unused allocations will miss out.

The \$20m extraordinary assistance package (EAP) was announced by NSW Minister for Primary Industries and Natural Resources, Ian Macdonald, last week to provide up to \$50,000 to irrigators who lost water when the government slashed 52pc of carry-over and purchased water entitlements in the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys late last year. But the application process for accessing the assistance appears unclear and may not recognise the range of impacts suffered as a result of the water reduction. The package announcement has also split the community into three camps – one group which is rejecting the package because it is seen as inadequate; a second lobbying for a flat dollar sum per megalitre payout for water lost; and a third keen to see entitlement holders go through the application process and have

45.

assistance allocated depending on the individual impacts. It's believed members of the Rural Assistance Authority have met with Department of Natural Resources staff, which developed the application criteria, to establish some clearer guidelines for administering the funds. The NSW Farmers Association, Southern Riverina Irrigators and NSW Irrigators Council have all raised concerns about the haziness of the criteria, and are worried it is too focused on the past three year's financial data and may not necessarily recognise those farmers who prepared for drought, and therefore appear better off "on paper".

Beattie's wants Fed funds to pay for water recycling

In the wake of the Federal Government's \$10B rural water plan, Queensland Premier Peter Beattie is calling on Prime Minister John Howard to chip in for his controversial urban water recycling plan for urban areas. Mr Beattie has written to the Prime Minister seeking a \$408 million Commonwealth contribution for the State Government's \$1.7 billion Western Corridor Recycled Water Project.

"This week the Prime Minister endorsed using purified recycled water to meet Australia's water needs," Mr Beattie said.

"This application gives him an opportunity to back those words with action by making a tangible contribution to the cost of the pipeline project.

"The application provides an enormous amount of technical detail about the project and includes information on the engineering, economic, environmental and social implications for South East Queensland."

In July last year the Prime Minister asked the states to nominate ambitious projects of national significance, that would have a transformational impact on water conservation and management in Australia. "The Western Corridor Recycled Water Project meets all these criteria," Mr Beattie said.

"It is iconic and will provide for Australia's largest water recycling project, the third largest advanced treatment recycled water project in the world and the fourth largest recycled water scheme in the world." However, Mr Beattie's commitment yesterday to delivering recycled water not just to industrial uses, but into drinking water storages has met with controversy. Mr Beattie previously promised a referendum on the issue, but always warned the State may go ahead with it regardless if drinking water supplies reached "Armageddon levels". The Government will be constructing three major wastewater treatment plants and laying more than 200km of pipes. Construction of the pipeline is advancing rapidly on several fronts, especially around the Bundamba site, where construction of the first advanced wastewater treatment plant is underway.

SA irrigators feel the pinch of water allocation cuts

Irrigators in South Australia's Murraylands are drastically scaling back or shutting down farming operations because of tightening water restrictions. While last week's rain was a welcome relief across the State, plenty still needs to fall in the Murray Darling Basin catchment area before there is any hope of easing water restrictions next summer. Irrigators continue to pay for their full water entitlements, but are only able to use 60pc of the allocation. The 40pc cut was finalised half-way through the irrigation season, when many had already planted crops and made plans on the basis of full entitlements. The result of this has been extremely severe, particularly for vegetable growers. The Murraylands grows 40pc of the State's onion crop and about 50-60pc of the State's white and washed potatoes. But a lot of these growers have temporarily wound-up their operations, laid-off staff and sought short-term employment elsewhere to earn money to get through the drought. Others have cut back on production and staff. While there is no shortage of temporary work in nearby towns like Murray Bridge or in the booming mining industry at Mindarie, there is the ever-present danger that once farmers leave the land, they may not come back. This could lead to a serious skill shortage of older, experienced growers, and a trend of young farmers leaving the land for more lucrative job opportunities.

Adelaide Advertiser

Liberals warned: Don't split on climate

South Australia's Young Liberals President has warned the movement it risks undermining the Howard Government with its stance on climate change.

Adelaide water plan rejected

Plans for a desalination plant to produce extra water for Adelaide have been rejected by the State Government which says it would cost too much and force up water prices.

Howard backs Beattie recycle strategy

Prime minister John Howard has backed Queensland Premier Peter Beattie's water recycling plan, saying other State Governments will have to go down the same path.

Waste is only fit for toilets and gardens

South Australian recycles more water per person than any other State, but we're not about to start drinking it.

46.

Buyback scheme 'could harm towns'

Federal Government plans to buy back over-allocated water licences along the Murray daling system could damage communities say some of the Government's own backbenches.

EDITORIAL

Giving SA a voice on the Murray

No single resource in Australia is more important than the Murray-Darling River system. Yet in little more than 200 years under the fragmented, self-interested control of four States and the Commonwealth, the river system has become an environmental disaster threatening not only the livelihoods of diverse rural

commonities but the very survival of South Australian cities and towns which rely on its water.

Perthnow

Humanity causing sick planet

SCIENTISTS have now found the connection between man-made carbon emissions and global warming, proving once and for all that human activity is changing the world.

And scientists have debunked the myth that global warming is simply a global cycle, saying that according to its cycle the earth should be in a period of cooling, not warming.

The stunning find is to be released in the final report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in Paris on Friday, the biggest undertaking yet on the earth's changing climate.

A leaked draft copy has detailed the main thrusts of the findings and leaves no doubt the effect mankind is having on the planet.

Every inhabited continent on earth is affected, with different parts of the world visibly responding to human activity, such as melting ice caps.

For the past six years 2000 of the world's leading climate scientists -- climatologists, glaciologists, meteorologists, oceanographers and other specialists, have studied all known scientific literature on climate change, with the findings to be released on Friday.

"It is highly likely (greater than 95 per cent probability) that the warming observed during the past half century cannot be explained without external forcing (human activity)," the draft says.

And while the naysayers might dismiss the findings as a conspiratorial hoax, the IPCC is traditionally regarded as being conservative, with a preference for erring on the side of caution.

Its assessment could not be more damning.

Some of the findings included:

- 11 of the earth's 12 warmest years since 1850 have occurred since 1995.
- Indications are the earth's temperature will rise 3C by 2100, possibly as much as 6C. This could be catastrophic, with a similar temperature shift marking the last ice age 12,000 years ago.
- It is virtually certain (99 per cent probability) that carbon dioxide levels and global warming is far above the range in the atmosphere over the past 650,000 years.
- It is virtually certain that human activity has played the dominant role in this.
- It is likely that human activity is responsible for other observed changes to the earth, such as ocean warming and melting of the Arctic sea ice.

The IPCC report revealed climate change could be far worse than previously thought. Scientists say 11 of the Earth's 12 warmest years since 1850 have occurred since 1995.

31st January

Farmonline

Promising outlook for Aust farmers post-drought

Australian farmers will be well positioned to take advantage of a positive global environment in 2007, once they emerge from the effects of the current drought, according to a Rabobank report.

The Rabobank report says, solid, if somewhat slowing, global economic growth, should continue to underpin rising demand for most agricultural commodities.

Mr Bill Cordingley, head of Food & Agribusiness Research for Rabobank Australia, says, the March-April period will determine 2007 farm production prospects for most farmers.

"A decent autumn break then, and typical rainfall patterns thereafter, would enable production levels in the cropping sector to recover quickly, with the potential to return to a normal harvest by the end of 2007," he says.

"While recovery will be slower for the livestock sector, given the time lags inherent in rebuilding culled herds, improved pasture growth will also provide some immediate benefits to most.

"Strong global demand for agricultural commodities is at present, coinciding with poor climatic conditions in many key producing regions around the world," Mr Cordingley says.

47.

"As a result, export prices are generally above long-term averages for most rural commodities, with grains, oilseeds, meat and dairy prices very high in historical terms.

"Conditions are expected to continue to underpin generally firm pricing for many rural products in 2007."

Australian consumer spending on food is expected to continue to grow in 2007, continuing the trend witnessed in 2006, according to the report.

Australia's retail food market proved vibrant throughout 2006, delivering strong sales growth.

"On balance, the Australian economy looks set for another year of solid growth in 2007, laying the foundation for continued growth in demand for agricultural products at home," Mr Cordingley says.

On the down side for agricultural producers, some factors driving the current high prices for their products

on world markets are also responsible for higher input costs for their businesses.

"In particular, strong growth in China, and in the world more generally, is also contributing to higher prices for oil, freight and fertiliser," Mr Cordingley said.

Old irrigators caution on Howard water plan

An "early lack of detail" surrounding the Federal Government's grand \$10 billion plan for the mighty Murray Darling river system has Queensland irrigation communities cautious about the impact of the plan. Chair of Queensland Irrigators Council, Ced Loch, maintains that Queensland's 14,000 irrigators will be "very concerned" as to the future security of their water entitlements should the Federal Government intervene.

"Under the statutory water planning process that has been underway in Queensland for the past 10 years, our biggest worry is still the security and reliability of our water," he said.

"If we have water taken back off us, then we must be compensated for our loss of water, income and redundant infrastructure

" Mr Loch said, And he remains troubled about the time being taken to achieve State-Federal Governments' agreement over funding for the ambitious plan, to pipe recycled water from Brisbane to parched Darling Downs districts after years of lobbying on behalf of its proponents".

I don't know whether it's the usual Federal-State stoush over funding.

"But the big question for the future, is whether Canberra intends to extend its early control of those cross-border rivers that affect neighbouring states and take a bigger role in the day-to-day issues in other areas like central and north Queensland," Mr Loch said.

On the \$3 billion apportioned for purchasing entitlements in over-allocated catchments, Mr Loch said that action to 'retire non-viable areas' must be a last resort.

With many rural communities dependent on irrigation, the suggestion is that efforts must be directed at improving viability of irrigation areas through efficiency measures and infrastructure investment.

His comment about the "early lack of detail" referred to the \$6 billion set aside for infrastructure works, such as piping open channels – a move that could save 3000 gegalitres lost to seepage and evaporation.

"Will that funding just be for channel-lining or outlets along the Murray Darling?" Mr Loch queried.

"While a programme of this nature must be implemented widely, it seems that the Murray Darling will be the prime focus."

The QIC chair said, " .. it would be an awful shame" if much of the money were squandered once again on administration, with " ... nothing on-the-ground" at the end of the day.

Completion of Great Artesian Basin upgrade in sight

Capping all bores in the Great Artesian Basin will demonstrate how better management can make water systems sustainable without stopping primary production.

Deputy Prime Minister, Mark Vaile, made this point yesterday when giving details of the extra \$85 million that the Coalition Government has committed to the third phase of the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative.

The third phase allocation, a part of the National Water Security Plan, will finish the job.

The first phase was begun in 1999.

Mr Vaile said, "It is estimated that the capping program has saved 18,538 megalitres a year, thanks to a partnership between governments and landholders.

"Vast amounts of water were being lost from the uncontrolled flow from bores and open earthen bore drains."

About 60pc of all bores will have been capped and 75pc of the drains replaced by the end of phase two, which ends in 2009.

48.

"This new investment will make it possible to put in place, a deadline for all bores to be capped and piped," Mr Vaile said.

The Great Artesian Basin extends under 22pc of Australia, mostly in Queensland, but also in parts of South Australia, New South Wales, and the Northern Territory. Water from the Basin supports an extensive pastoral industry, significant mining ventures and a growing tourism industry.

Traditionally, artesian water that came to the surface under natural pressure was allowed to flow uncontrolled into open drains and creeks for distribution to stock. Even in well-maintained drains, up to 90pc of this water was wasted through evaporation and seepage.

his waste has caused a fall in artesian pressure across much of the basin. The fall threatens continued access to artesian water by pastoralists and is contributing to the loss of groundwater dependant ecosystems.

Compulsory water acquisition a must: Democrats

The Democrats say the federal government's \$10 billion water package must allow for compulsory

acquisition of water entitlements, at least as a last resort.

Otherwise, the package risks becoming just a costly pork-barrelling exercise, according to Senator Bartlett. "The Democrats would be prepared to use our Senate vote to support the government on this matter," he said today.

"That would cancel out the possible impact of Barnaby Joyce crossing the floor.

"It is a simple fact that a key reason why the Murray-Darling is in such a mess is because of over-allocation of water entitlements.

"Hopefully, this problem can be addressed through greater efficiencies, more realistic pricing and the subsequent operation of market forces and readjustment incentives.

"However, the possibility of compulsory acquisition, at a fair price, must be kept open."

Adelaide Advertiser

Recycled sewage? You are already drinking it

Adelaide residents are already drinking recycled waste water with SA Water confirming that treated waste water from Hahndorf was channelled into Mt Bold reservoir.

Rann to fight Federal control of the Murray

A National campaign has been launched by Premier Mike Rann (**From me: visionless**) to fight Prime Minister John Howard's plan to take over control of the River Murray (**From me: it's the only way to ensure fairness across the whole basin if a totally independent body – similar to the Reserve Bank assumes total control**).

River rescue reveals leader at pragmatic best

Prime Minister John Howard has left the States flat-footed with his \$10 billion plan to rescue the River Murray. He also has seized new Labour Leader Kevin Rudd's agenda of ending the Federal/State blame game.

DEAN JAENSCH: Federal water proposal needs to go further

There might just be a small light near the end of the tunnel. The statement from John Howard that he wants to transfer all authority over water in Australia to the Commonwealth is not really a surprise.

