

NNF calls for end of climate change "rhetoric"

The NFF says its submission to the Climate Change Review by economist, Ross Garnaut, (the Garnaut Report) rams home the absolute need to turn the rhetoric around climate change adaptation and mitigation into tangible action. "This can no longer be a subject for pontificating and hollow rhetoric," says NFF president, David Crombie. "We've seen politicians - of all persuasions - pay lip-service to the challenges and opportunities... now they must ante up with workable, forward-looking solutions. "Any responsible policy response must take account of the need for new investment in climate adaptation and mitigation strategies for Australian agriculture - including the drought preparedness measures we foreshadowed during the election campaign, that is, investing today to better drought-proof Australia tomorrow through mutual obligation measures, as well as new research, development and implementation of technologies, systems and programs that can fast-track adaption by farmers to the threat of increased climate risk. "These capture the 'new vision' we called for during the election. Labor said they 'got it', that they understood the need and reiterated much of our intent. Now is the time to see the substance of their commitment. "The Government will have to deal with us on the detail to have any hope of getting it right. "Our farmers have a lot at stake in any Australian Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). An ETS is a sensible response to dealing with climate change – provided the policy settings are appropriate. "We must be fundamentally involved in its development, both the framework and actual rules. In doing so, the Government must recognise a few home truths. "Australian farmers have already made a huge, and often unrecognised, contribution, leading the way in reducing Australia's net greenhouse emissions - with primary industry emissions plummeting 40pc during the past 15 years. "That the Australia Government can, in any way, boast its international credentials by meeting Kyoto commitments is almost entirely due to our farmers changing their land use practices... not only have they halted land-clearing, but they now plant over 20 million trees a year for conservation. "Further, both Garnaut and the Government must acknowledge that the existing international greenhouse accounting rules fail to adequately recognise the carbon cycle of agricultural systems – that is, taking account of not only emissions, but also sequestration. "In farming, a natural life cycle is at play. While it is true agriculture is responsible for around 17pc of Australia's total carbon emissions, no account has yet been taken of the carbon being sequestered in farm soils, crops and trees in this assessment. It needs to be."

News.com - Antarctic ice cap melting faster than first thought

The most comprehensive study to date of Antarctica's ice confirms growing concern that the ice cap is melting faster than predicted. The implications are that the global sea level will rise faster than expected, while a huge influx of freshwater into the salty oceans could alter ocean currents. Antarctica holds 90 per cent of Earth's ice. According to the new findings, snowfall is topping up ice in the continent's interior and East Antarctic has held its own. But West Antarctica and the Antarctic Peninsula lost nearly 200 billion tonnes of ice in 2006 alone. That is 75 per cent more than losses in 1996 and the equivalent of a global sea level rise of more than half a millimetre, claim international scientists led by NASA geoscientist Eric Rignot, also with the University of California, Irvine (UCI). "Losses are concentrated along narrow channels occupied by outlet glaciers and are caused by ongoing and past glacier acceleration," the team wrote in the online edition of *Nature Geoscience*. They based their conclusions on satellite data obtained in 1996, 2000 and 2006. According to Dr Rignot, the results showed that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change had underestimated the impact of polar melting in its predictions of possible sea level rises next century. "Each time I look at some new data, I am astonished," he said. Until now, it has been unclear whether snowfall in the interior kept pace with coastal melting, in terms of the overall mass of Antarctic ice. But for Hobart glaciologist Ian Allison - with the Australian Antarctic Division and the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Co-operative Research Centre - the new findings settle the matter. "This work suggests that the ice flow is accelerating," Dr Allison said. "It's worrying because ... the changes are happening due to processes we don't understand." Dr Allison said the findings confirmed previous work, much by Dr Rignot and another UCI scientist Isabella Velicogna. It also fits with observations that the break-up in 1995 and 2002 of two sections of the Larsen ice shelf, in the West Antarctic ice sheet, was sped up by the melting of glaciers that were behind it.

Virgin to use biofuel on test flight

Virgin Atlantic is planning to fly one of its Boeing 747 planes on biofuel during a demonstration flight from London to Amsterdam, next month. Virgin Atlantic Chairman Richard Branson hailed the test flight as the first of its kind, and would reveal crucial information on how to reduce aviation's carbon footprint. The project will be carried out by Branson's alternative fuels division at Virgin, which was created in 2006 from the profits of his airline and trains. Virgin trains began a similar trial six-month ago with a biofueled passenger train, which the company said could lead to its entire fleet switching over to a mix of diesel and biofuel.

The announcement comes as scientists in the UK attacked the decision to use the fuel, and plan to prove bioethanol and biodiesel produced from plants is a "scam". Roland Clift, professor of environmental technology at Surrey University in England, said promoting the use of biofuels is likely to increase greenhouse gas emissions. "Biodiesel is a complete scam because in the tropics the growing demand is causing forests to be burnt to make way for palm oil and similar crops," Mr Clift told Timesonline. "We calculate that the land will need to grow biodiesel crops for 70-300 years to compensate for the CO2 emitted in forest destruction." Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Green Fund has invested millions of dollars in biofuel startups such as Cilion, Ethanol Grain Processors, and Indiana Bio-Energy.

Water curbs to stay

Domestic water restrictions will remain in Adelaide and allocations to irrigators along the River Murray will continue at current levels over summer. Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald said domestic consumers were to be praised for their water saving efforts. "We're tracking well against all our targets, even with the extremely hot weather we've had," she told ABC radio. The minister said for irrigators, the Murray Darling Basin Commission had not released its data for December and there were ongoing negotiations between NSW and Victoria on water sharing arrangements. That meant allocations for irrigators would have to remain on hold at 32 per cent for the immediate future. "I can't do anything other than allocate the water that has been given to me," Ms Maywald said. "All that's been given to me at the moment has been allocated. "I have to leave it at 32 per cent, it will not be reduced, but that 32 per cent is locked in as the minimum that will be received." For domestic consumers the current restrictions allow for gardens to be watered with drippers or hand-held hoses with a trigger nozzle for three hours, one day each week. Homes with even numbers can water on Saturdays and homes with odd numbers on Sundays. Watering cans and buckets can be used at any time but sprinklers continue to be banned. Ms Maywald said there had been some good rain in parts of the Murray-Darling catchment in December but it was falling on incredibly dry land.

Car makers going green

Toyota has thrown down the gauntlet to General Motors in the battle to build the next "green" car. In the process, Toyota - the world leader in popular gas-electric hybrids like the Prius sedan - may have short-circuited GM's year-old effort to bring the first "plug in" electric cars to market. "We welcome competition because that is how new technology is developed for consumers," Toyota President Katsuaki Watanabe said at the Detroit Auto Show today. "But we don't want to lose." As usual, Detroit – one of the world's highest-profile car shows – has seen all manner of weird and wacky concept vehicles reduced. The difference this year is that many of the concept cars run on biofuels or electricity. Mr Watanabe announced that Toyota will market a test fleet of rechargeable hybrid vehicles to companies or government agencies by the end of 2010. Toyota has already begun preparations to build a factory that will produce the next-generation lithium-ion batteries needed for plug-ins and purely electric vehicles. "Hybrids are a core business for Toyota," he said. "That strategy has absolutely not changed." GM won widespread attention at the auto show last year when it announced plans to build its own rechargeable vehicle, the Volt. Toyota's confident and aggressive tone was in contrast to a briefing about the same time by Bob Lutz, GM's vice chairman and design chief, who has championed the Volt as the keystone to GM's fight to win "green" consumers concerned about global warming and fuel efficiency. "The end of 2010 is a big stretch," Mr Lutz said, when asked if the Volt was on track for production in two years. "It means everything has to go right and so far everything has gone right," Lutz told reporters. "Right now, we are very confident of getting it. But normally for a program this complex and with a technology the company has never executed before, you would like to give yourself more time." Unlike gas-electric hybrids, which run on a system that twins battery power and a combustion engine, plug-ins are designed for short trips powered entirely by an electric motor and a battery charged through a socket at home.

Ferrari unveils biofuel car

Ferrari has unveiled a concept car that can run on ethanol which it said reflected its engineering expertise from Formula One racing and growing demand for alternative fuel vehicles in the US. The sleek Ferrari F430 Spider Biofuel, with green stripes on its silver bodywork, consumes an E85 - 85 per cent ethanol and 15 per cent gasoline - mix, a growing fuel blend in the US. Ferrari's chief executive, Amedeo Felisa, said at the North American International Auto Show that the concept was part of the company's efforts to cut tailpipe emission levels 40 per cent by 2012. Mr Felisa said Ferrari had gleaned experience in using biofuel in Formula I because of regulations that competitors use gasoline with a 5.75 per cent biomass content. The FIA GT and American Le Mans Series racing organisations require 10 per cent ethanol. For the Spider Biofuel, Ferrari made some changes to the fuel injection system and to the engine's computer chip. The result was an increase in power output, with equal weight and a 5 per cent drop in carbon dioxide emissions. Ferrari, a unit of Fiat, shipped 6400 cars in 2007, up 14 per cent on 2006. Sales to the Asia Pacific rose 50 per cent, with 177 cars delivered to China.

Sales to the Middle East rose 32 per cent. The operating result was 15 per cent of turnover, according to a company statement.

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Approval for \$100m NSW ethanol and dairy plant

A \$100 million dairy and ethanol project in the Riverina will be the largest in Australia if not the southern hemisphere, following NSW Government approval this week. The plan to build the 300 million-litre a year dairy at Coleambally and combine it with a state-of-the-art ethanol plant has been proposed by Four Arrows. The group has contracted the Griffith, NSW, firm, Booth Associates, to prepare the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project. Booth Associates principal consultant, Michael Ryan, says work on the assessment started in 2005. State Government approval has been granted. He says the dairy and ethanol plant will complement each other, as the distiller grains, a by-product of ethanol output, becomes a nutritious source of feed for dairying cattle. This grain will be used to sustain the 6000 cows to be milked at any one time. To support the 6000 milkers, Mr. Ryan says there could be up to 7000 dairy cows on the site, which will be fed in an under-cover feedlot setup. In addition to feeding the milkers, he says there will be enough grain from the plant to supply feed to other livestock as well. SOURCE: *The Land*, NSW

Irrigator safeguards summer crop

Cobram couple Chris and Lisa Dikkenberg have turned to centre pivot irrigation and a corn crop to provide the feed resource for their 250-cow northern Victorian herd during the summer months. They calculated the limited three megalitre daily yield of their existing bore could be best utilised by using one three-tower Upton Roto-Rainer Quickshift centre pivot irrigator. Equipped with an end-sprinkler, it can water more than five hectares (2.02 acres) and cover four circles, simply by relocating the pivot. "The outcome of the project is that we can use the same limited water resource to produce corn off about 22ha in total," Chris Dikkenberg said. "And the most important advantage is that by growing our own feed we will save on buying in, increasingly expensive feed for the cows," he added. With more than 60 years of centre pivot and lateral move irrigation experience, Corowa-based Upton Engineering, just over the NSW border, says its Roto-Rainer centre pivot has a maximum clearance beneath the boom of 3.4m (11ft). Each 40m (131ft) length of tower span uses a 127mm (5in) diameter corrosion resistant aluminium pipe and with the 20m (65ft) long end boom, the irrigator waters 140m (450ft plus) diameter circles. Shifting the irrigator between is aided by a jacking system which lifts the electric drive wheels of each boom assembly clear of the ground for towing. The supplier has also installed a computer-selected low-pressure spray package which, in this instance, will apply 15mm of rainfall equivalent in each 24-hour rotation cycle of the pivot. Upton Engineering offers a design service and is able to build Roto-Rainer centre pivot irrigators in a wide choice of boom lengths up to 50m (164ft) and pipe diameters up to 200mm (8in), together with the appropriate number of towers to suit individual property configurations. SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life* farm machinery news service.

South Australia's Storages as at 16th January 2008

MDBC Storages	Full Supply	Full Supply	Current	Currant	Dead	MDBC	Change in Storage
	Levels	Volume	Storage	Storage	Storage	Active	for the week
	(M AHD)	(Gigs)	(M AHD)	(Gigs) (%)	(Gigs)	(Gigs)	(Gigs)
Dartmouth Reservoir	486.00	3906	410.56	672 17%	80	592	-3
Hume Reservoir	192.00	3038	174.43	595 20%	30	565	-50
Lake Victoria	27.00	677	23.70	314 46%	100	214	-21
Menindee Lakes		1731*		163 9% (--)#		0	+90
TOTAL		9352		1744 19%	--	1371	+16

* Menindee surcharge capacity 2050GL

% of Total Active MDBC Storage = 16%

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

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FarmOnLine

Drought declarations under the microscope

The committee charged with making drought declaration recommendations to the Federal Government gears up for a national tour in coming months. The trip will come amid strong signs the drought might be gradually disappearing in many areas of NSW and Queensland, but the new Federal Minister for Agriculture, Tony Burke,

wants suggestions to help improve drought assistance to farmers in this and future droughts. At the same time, he has promised a full review of exceptional circumstances now Labor is in government.

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National Rural Advisory Council chairman, Keith Perrett, said, good falls of rain, with consistent follow-up falls, have given hope of some recovery. "We've seen, far too many times, where there's been a good fall of rain and then nothing for months and farmers are back where they started from," Mr. Perrett said. "This time there's a real chance. "There's a long way to go, but it's certainly what I'd describe as a really promising start." Mr. Perrett was cautious, however, about declaring the drought over, even in areas where floods have recently moved through.

Despite some districts such as Coonamble and Coonabarabran, in Central West NSW, receiving their biggest December rainfall in 100 years it's too early to say whether that will be enough for these areas to move off the drought declared list, Mr. Perrett said. "There's a number of things we'll look at, but certainly one fall, although a very good fall, is probably not enough on its own to drag an area out of drought," Mr. Perrett said. "At the same time we've also had anecdotal evidence to suggest that some areas would certainly not qualify for the continuation of EC (exceptional circumstances assistance) but again, it's still too early to say that definitely." He said the New England, in NSW, as well as pockets in Queensland around Dalby and west of Kingaroy, were particular regions which may finally be able to emerge from a long-running drought status. "Certainly the New England has come away as having a very good season since spring last year," he said. "They're looking very good for feed - and stock numbers are looking pretty good. "There are also parts of Queensland, which have had an atrocious run for years, but have had good falls starting in November last year and they've continued. "Now we've got to wait and see what the impacts of that rainfall are." Mr. Burke said there was no threat to those currently receiving EC assistance, but improvements to future drought policy had to be made starting with a review of EC assistance as promised prior to the election. "My aim is to have any farmer who interacts with the Government go away better prepared for the future," Mr. Burke said. "Over time, however, we'd expect the need for relief payments to lessen if we invest in preparedness." "The emphasis of the review would be, improving preparedness, and I am open to suggestions on how this could be best achieved. "At no stage would the Government consider assessing whether farmers were unviable, or dictating what they could or couldn't do on their land. "Those decisions will always be made by farmers, not government." SOURCE: *The Land*, NSW, January 24

Old's drenching: Water surges over biggest dam

More than 700 million megalitres of water has poured over Queensland's largest dam thanks to significant rainfall right across the Burdekin Falls Dam's catchment area in North Queensland. SunWater Acting CEO, Peter Boettcher, said the dam spilled on December 28 and water was currently 1.8 metres above the spillway crest. "The rainfall over the past few weeks has certainly been very beneficial in topping up the dam," he says. "It looks as though the inflows are set to continue while we still have the tropical low in the region. "At this stage, the dam is around 126pc capacity and holding around 2,332,311 megalitres. "Our latest data shows it's spilling around 195,000 megalitres per day," he said. Mr. Boettcher said water was well and truly over the Burdekin River's downstream Clare Weir and the river was now bank to bank under the Burdekin Bridge. SunWater inflow data indicated that the volume of water coming into the dam's catchment is steadily rising. The public is advised that the road across the dam is now closed. SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*, January.

News.com – Irrigators left high and dry – Cara Jenkin

Riverland irrigators relying on water from Wachtel's Lagoon off the River Murray have been left without access to water. Levels fell below the end of pumping pipes this month after receding more than 20m from shore since the drought started in 2006. The sudden decline has been attributed to high irrigation demand and more evaporation than expected during the hot weather. Avocado, citrus and lucerne grower Robert Pope, 50, said State Government representatives had assured him he would have access to water all season, as water was being held at a constant level by locks. He was alerted his pipe no longer could draw water at 11.30pm on January 5 when his pump alarm sounded. Two pipes beside his and four further to the north also were affected. The lack of water has killed his avocado crop and is killing his citrus trees. "We were told the levels would be maintained, that (the Government) would try to maintain pool levels through the season," Mr Pope said. He said salinity in the lagoon, which had four times the salt tolerated by citrus trees, would prevent him from keeping what remains of his crop alive even if he could access water. River Murray Minister Karlene Maywald said evaporation and low flows made it difficult to maintain weir pools at full supply. "SA Water is attempting to restore the level in Wachtel's Lagoon by installing stop logs into lock 3 to raise water levels and push water into Mr Pope's off-take area," she said.

The Australian - Drought takes toll on Yangtze

China's longest river, the Yangtze, is suffering from a severe drought, with water levels in some areas falling to the lowest in 142 years. China is suffering its worst drought in a decade, leaving millions of people short of

drinking water and has shrunk reservoirs and rivers. Hardest hit are large swathes of the usually humid south, where water levels on several major rivers have plunged to historic lows in recent months.

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On January 8, the Yangtze water level at Hankou plunged to 13.98m, the lowest since records began in 1866, the China Daily said today, quoting the Wuhan-based Changjiang Times. "This year's drought is rare," Li Changmin, a farmer from central Hubei province, was quoted as saying. "Just days ago, I saw ship after ship running aground. I have never seen that before." Since October, more than 40 ships have run aground in the main course of the Yangtze, the world's third longest river which stretches 6,300 km from west to east, the traditional dividing line between north and south China. This year's dry season came a month earlier than usual and water levels fell sooner than expected, an official was quoted as saying. The China Daily said large amounts of water were stored at the Three Gorges Dam last month, which caused the flow volume in the river to fall 50 per cent. The report also said the Yangtze River Water Resource Commission believe the drought has nothing to do with the dam. The Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest hydroelectric project, is an engineering feat that seeks to tame the Yangtze. Backers say the dam will end devastating floods downstream and generate clean electricity. Critics call it a reckless folly that has brought wrenching dislocation for many people. Drought and floods are perennial problems in China but meteorologists have complained about the increased extreme weather, pointing to global climate change as a culprit. *Reuters*

Amazon's destruction on the rise

Deforestation of the Amazon has surged in recent months and is likely to rise this year for the first time in four years, a senior Brazilian government scientist says. The rise raises questions over Brazil's assertion that its environmental policies are effectively protecting the world's biggest rainforest, whose destruction is a major source of carbon emissions that drive global warming. "I think the last four months is a big concern for the government and now they are sending people to do more law enforcement," Carlos Nobre, a scientist with Brazil's National Institute for Space Research, told a seminar in Washington. "But I can tell you that it (deforestation) is going to be much higher than 2007." Nobre, whose government agency monitors the Amazon and gathers data, said that 6,000 square kilometres of forest had been lost in the past four months. That compares with an estimated 9,600 sq km in the 12 months ended July 31, which Brazil officials hailed as the lowest deforestation rate since the 1970s. Brazil's government has said that policies such as more controls on illegal logging and better certification of land ownership were reducing the deforestation that has destroyed about a fifth of the forest - an area bigger than France - since the 1970s. But environmental groups have warned that rising global commodity prices are likely to fuel more clearing of land for farms, as occurred in 2004 when Brazil recorded the highest deforestation rate of more than 27,000 sq km. Nobre said the cause of the recent surge was unclear, but that the major drivers of deforestation such as illegal logging and land clearing for cattle farming remained intact, despite the recent annual declines in forest clearing. "All those drivers of change are there. The three years of reduced deforestation ... did not bring by themselves a cure for illegal deforestation," he said.

Destruction of forests produces about 20 per cent of man-made carbon dioxide emissions, making conservation of the Amazon crucial to limiting rises in global temperatures. But the government has struggled to stem deforestation, partly due to strong global demand that has made Brazil one of the world's biggest food suppliers. Environmental groups also warn that a rash of planned infrastructure projects in the coming years could bring more settlers to untapped regions. "Infrastructure is associated with aggressive and progressive land use change," said Nobre, noting that 90 per cent of Amazon deforestation occurred within 50km of roads. He also warned that continued high world oil prices were likely to result in a surge in demand for Amazon land to produce ethanol, the alternative transport fuel for which global demand is already booming. "If oil prices keep increasing there will be an explosion of biofuel production in the Amazon, contrary to Brazilian government policy," Nobre said.

Reuters

Rudd calls on US to sign Kyoto

Australia has again called on the US to ratify the Kyoto protocol ahead of its presence at a second round of climate change talks. The talks will take place between major world economies and will be hosted by US President George W Bush. President Bush has invited Australia, Brazil, Britain, Canada, China, the European Union, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea and the United Nations to send representatives to the January 30-31 meeting in Hawaii. The meeting will discuss reducing greenhouse gas emissions, increasing energy security and efficiency and sustaining economic growth for the world's major economies. The talks will also discuss voluntary measures for helping poor countries acquire cleaner technology that would help them to stem their own greenhouse-gas pollution. Mr Rudd said

Climate Change Minister Senator Penny Wong would represent Australia. "We believe that all forms of global cooperation in dealing with the great challenge of climate change are necessary," Mr Rudd told reporters in Brisbane. "That's why the first action of this national government was to ratify Kyoto." He said it was an action the US needed to undertake. "I believe it is time for the United States to ratify Kyoto as well," he said. "We need America as part of the global climate change negotiations. "America has been an overwhelming force for good in the world in so many areas - we need their voice at the table on climate change as well."

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President Bush held a first round of climate change talks in September last year under an initiative he proposed in June in the face of intensifying international pressure for Washington to do more to battle greenhouse-gas emissions. AAP

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FarmOnLine

Aust should follow EU biofuel lead

Australia should act to introduce strict guidelines to ensure that biofuels sold or manufactured here, are not causing environmental problems elsewhere, a spokesperson for the Palm Oil Action Group said today. In Indonesia alone, rainforest clearance is currently occurring at the staggering rate of 300 football fields an hour, and the major driver of this destruction is the demand for palm oil, which is used in food, cosmetics and biodiesel. "It makes no sense for the Australian government to provide financial incentives to encourage rainforest destruction, when it is spending taxpayers money to actually stop it," the spokesperson said. "There is currently no certification scheme operating anywhere that ensures that palm oil hasn't come from cleared rainforests, and there is only a very small amount of sustainable palm oil available in the marketplace." The EU Environment Commissioner, Stavros Dimas, announced yesterday that the EU would introduce a certification scheme for biofuels, and promised a clampdown on biodiesel from palm oil, which is leading to forest destruction in Indonesia. Biofuel manufacturers and importers also currently receive tax rebates in Australia, and these rebates extend to those companies that import palm oil from cleared rainforests in countries such as Indonesia and PNG. While biofuels have been touted as a way to reduce greenhouse emissions, a recent CSIRO report found that the use of palm oil from cleared rainforests actually increases emissions by between 50 and 136 times more than does normal diesel. SOURCE: National farm machinery news, *FarmOnline*

A land of drought and flooding rains

The loss of valuable topsoil, fencing and crops is Rathdowney, Qld, beef and dairy farmer Warren Drynan's biggest concern in the wake of floods in the area earlier this month. "That lost soil is something we will never be able to restore," he said. Of more immediate concern is the loss of crops destined for the silage pits that support the Drynan family's 280 head predominantly Friesian dairy herd on the 1600 hectare "Glenapp". "We lost about 28ha (70 acres) of corn and a smaller area of forage sorghum and the paddocks are just gutted," Mr. Drynan said. "Those crops were going to provide 2000 tonnes of silage and we're now at least 1500 tonnes short. "We actually had more feed on hand this time last year in the drought." The Drynans are now facing a situation where it's too late to plant corn. Warren Drynan outlined his concerns to AgForce vice president, John Cotter, when Agforce toured the flood-hit area on Friday. Mr. Cotter said the floods in the Beaudesert area, 100km south-west of Brisbane, had certainly caused hardship with the loss of crops, fencing and livestock but they also had benefits. "The nearby Maroon Dam is now at 50pc full and the rainfall will promote pasture growth. It's just the recovery from the flood damage that will take time, particularly as it comes on top of the effects of a long running drought," Mr. Cotter said. "It's important to remember that drought isn't over yet. "One flood does not equal drought breaking rain as we need consistent follow up rainfall events before we can safely put the drought behind us." Mr. Cotter said the purpose of the tour was to ensure rural people were not overlooked in terms of any available assistance for flood victims because as well as damage to personal property, the flood impacted on farm businesses. "The impacts go well beyond the farm gate. "Damage to public infrastructure - such as bridges - impacts on the ability of primary producers to get their product to market or simply to carry out their day to day operations and that's something we will certainly highlight to the State Government," he said. Mr. Cotter said the visit on Friday, hosted by AgForce Beaudesert branch chair Greg Dunne, had underscored the importance of community, with neighbour helping neighbour to clear debris and what remained of pushed over fences in the wake of the flooding of the Albert and Logan river tributaries. "Also, a team of low security prisoners from the Darling Downs was in the area and they are available to help landholders as well. "The last flood we had anywhere near this height was in the early 1990s. "We had 250mm of rain and it raced down Running Creek but this time, the creek was already half full before 200mm of rain fell upstream and then we had 125mm in five hours here." In all, the Drynans lost pumps in the floods, despite moving them above previous peak levels. "Our submersible pump is gone but I haven't looked too hard for it mainly because the tree it was attached to is gone too." SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*, January 17

Drought doesn't stop rice field day

The resilience of southern NSW rice growers is evident in their support for the annual Jerilderie rice field day, despite consecutive seasons without water allocations and harvest. This year's rice research field day has not been stopped by drought. Many growers and scientists are expected to attend to see cutting-edge technology, new agronomy and seed research and to catch up with researchers and staff from NSW DPI, SunRice and Ricegrowers' Association.

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Highlights of the field day will include cold and aerobic nursery evaluation, prescription sowing and nitrogen application, pure seed and quality assurance, seed for 2008-09 and stubble and a demonstration of precision sowing. There will also be an opportunity for growers to travel on to "Boondilla" Coleambally, NSW, to view a precision agriculture project. The Rice Field Day will be held on Tuesday February 26 at "Old Coree" via Jerilderie, NSW, from 9.15am.

News.com.au - Food fear beats climate change

A worsening global food shortage is a problem far more urgent than climate change, top Australian scientists have warned. The Australian Science Media Centre briefing heard why prices for some staple foods had risen by as much as 60 per cent in the past year, and how dramatic price rises are expected to sweep across all staples in the near future. Executive director of the Australian Farm Institute Mick Keogh said dairy products, grain and poultry had seen the strongest price rises in recent months. Beef and lamb were forecast to follow, with nationwide livestock shortages taking the average price for a cow from \$700 a head 12 months ago to \$1400 a head going into autumn. Key speaker at the national science briefing Professor Julian Cribb said the security of our food supply is "the global scientific challenge of our time". The problem was more urgent even than climate change, said Professor Cribb, from the University of Technology in Sydney, because it will get us first . . . through famine and war. "By 2050 we will have to feed the equivalent of 13 billion people at today's levels of nutrition," he said. "This situation brings with it the very real possibility of regional and global instability. Investment in global food stability is now defence spending and requires proportionate priority." A "knowledge drought" – the lack of innovation to address farm productivity challenges – had added to the crisis, Professor Cribb said. He called for a massive increase in public investment in agricultural research and development. Farmers face challenges posed by drought, climate change, rising oil prices, erosion and nutrient loss combined with more demand for food stocks and biofuels. Global grain stocks have fallen to their lowest level since record-keeping began in 1960, while Australia's sheep flock is at its lowest since the mid-1920s, with about 86 million. In September last year 2007 the Australian Bureau of Statistics found consumers were paying 11.9 per cent more for basic food items than they were two years before. That is almost double the Consumer Price Index rise of 5.9 per cent during the period.

Floods sending more water on way to SA

Fresh flooding in Outback Queensland is sending more water towards the Darling and Murray rivers and, eventually, South Australian irrigators. On the Warrego River, which runs into the Darling upstream of Bourke in NSW, residents of the Queensland town of Charleville are watching their town disappear as heavy rain continues to flood the area. When the flow reaches the Darling, it will add to flows from earlier floods in NSW and Queensland which are slowly filling the Menindee Lakes storage that supplies Broken Hill and holds Darling water for SA irrigators. The first flood release from the lakes is expected to reach the Murray by the end of next week and continuing rain in Queensland and NSW has given irrigators hope that some real relief from the crippling drought could be on the way. Charleville - also hit with major flooding in 1990 and 1997 - woke to the sound of an evacuation signal about 3.30am today, when people in low-lying areas were told to move to higher ground. People from about 30 properties are sheltering in the town's showground hall, but more may yet choose to evacuate. Emergency Management Queensland area director Scott Walsh said crews were monitoring the Warrego River upstream of the town 24 hours a day. In town, it was a tense wait to see how high a creek called Bradleys Gully, which runs through the centre of town, would rise, he said. "We are now just watching and waiting for the flood peak to come through on Bradleys Gully," Mr Walsh said. "(Residents) have experienced this type of flooding before. "No doubt they have some trepidation, but the major message we have been putting out and the mayor too, is just to continue to listen to advice from the authorities." Also evacuated was the town's hospital, with patients transferred by air to Roma Hospital. Nursing home patients were moved to the first floor of the hospital as a precaution. Queensland Health's acting district manager of the south-west health service David Smith is overseeing the operation. Mr Smith said water was lapping the hospital's driveway, but had not reached the buildings. "We will have enough time, should the river rise, to actually then make the evacuation of nursing home-type patients," he told ABC Radio. Charleville is well-stocked with sandbags and SES flood boats are being brought in. Further north at Longreach, crews are ready for the Thomson River to peak today, causing moderate to major flooding. The Bureau of Meteorology has issued flood warnings for the Thomson and Warrego rivers, as well as the Don, Proserpine, Houghton, Fitzroy and Burdekin. The central Queensland towns

of Emerald and Alpha are isolated by floodwaters, but in north Queensland police say all roads in the area, including those from Bowen to Townsville and Charters Towers to Townsville and Mount Isa, are open. Early estimates put the damage to public infrastructure in north and western Queensland at more than \$25 million.

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News.com.au - Bread, milk, meat prices tipped to soar

Australian consumers are facing another sharp rise in meat, dairy and bread prices, stretching budgets already under pressure from rising mortgages, rents and petrol. According to the Australian Farm Institute, meat prices could surge by 15 per cent or more in the next few months. Institute executive director Mick Keogh said the rain now bringing relief from the drought would result in a shortage of livestock available for meat production. "Typically what happens going in to a drought is that farmers sell off any stock they can to avoid having to feed those stock through the drought," Mr Keogh said. "Then at the end of the drought, a lot of farmers go into the re-stocking phase." Mr Keogh said the increased competition to buy livestock for re-stocking had already seen big increases in prices at saleyards in NSW, and the same could be expected in Queensland soon. He said that would quickly flow through to supermarket meat prices. "I think most people would suggest a 10 or 15 per cent increase wouldn't be surprising at all. In fact, you would think it would be likely to be more than that over the next couple of months," he said. Mr Keogh also predicted consumers would be paying more this year for dairy products and bread, due to increasing costs. Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation chief executive Adrian Peake said further price rises for milk and general dairy products were almost certain this year. "I don't know how much they'll rise because supply and demand will sort that out," Mr Peake said. Prices had already risen about 30 per cent over the past six to eight months. Coles spokesman Jim Cooper said supermarkets could not avoid passing on the rising cost of raw ingredients for foods such as bread and milk. "We've done our best to absorb these costs but at some point they have to be passed on," he said. "People say we control prices but there is a market out there and we are players in it." AgForce grains president Lyndon Pfeffer said although bread prices had jumped an average 70 cents per loaf in the past 12 months, of which grain growers had received just 10 cents. The price of wheat reached its highest-ever level on international commodity markets in August and has jumped about 70 per cent in 18 months, with world stocks at a 26-year low. But Mr Pfeffer said farmers were sick of seeing soaring wheat prices being used as justification for bread price increases. Growcom's chief advocate Mark Panitz warned the recent rains could impact on fruit and vegetable prices if crops sustained damage or diseases.

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FarmOnline

Bread price rises surpass drought impacts

Grain growers are increasingly frustrated to see soaring wheat prices being used as justification for bread price increases of up to 70c/loaf in the past 12 months, according to Queensland farming lobby, AgForce. AgForce Grains president, Lyndon Pfeffer, said bread prices have increased by up to 70c/loaf on last year, but only 14 percent of this is accountable to higher grain costs. The remaining increase of 86 percent is the costs and profits of transporters, marketers, flour millers and bakers. He said basic calculations on additional returns to wheat growers from price rises in the past 12 months only amount to about 10c out of the 70c/loaf increase, returns which have been reduced through increased farm input costs such as fertiliser, fuel and herbicide. "In a typical loaf of bread there is about 400g of flour. This 400g of flour comes from about 534g (0.000534 tonne) of wheat based on a standard flour turn out of 75 per cent," Mr. Pfeffer said. "If wheat is \$200 a tonne, it costs 10.7c a loaf, if it is \$250 a tonne as it was 12 months ago that's 11.35c a loaf, and if it is \$400 a tonne as now then it costs 21.4c a loaf." Mr. Pfeffer said there was a far greater impact on bread prices from rising fuel and energy costs, labour costs and other inputs than the price of wheat. "It is disappointing that flour millers are providing their bakeries with pictures of headers harvesting wheat with the caption blaming the drought and wheat prices for the increase. It is not wheat farmers who are to blame for the price rises," he said. "With a standard white loaf now costing about \$3 per loaf, how can the 21c worth of wheat be the publicised reason for the increases consumers are facing?" Mr. Pfeffer challenged those retailers who are saying that drought and the higher prices being paid to farmers is the reason for escalating food prices to provide the factual evidence to back up their claims. "From the farmers' point of view, consumers are being misled by some retailers with farmers being used as the scapegoat." SOURCE: AgForce and *FarmOnline*

Rudd Government to fast-track skills training

The Federal Government has announced it will fast-track the establishment of Skills Australia to help lift the productive capacity of the Australian economy and fight inflation. Skills Australia will oversee the Rudd

Government's commitment to providing an additional 450,000 training places over the next four years and 820,000 over the coming decade. Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, said to get down to work on increasing the skills base of the Australian workforce, the first 20,000 of the Rudd Government's additional training places will be available by April and new legislation to establish Skills Australia will be fast-tracked and brought before Parliament as "a priority".

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Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, will consult with relevant State and Territory Government Ministers and industry skills councils seeking cooperation in prioritising the first tranche of training places in areas that are experiencing acute shortages. Key industries likely to receive the new training places will include mining, construction, health & community services, and personal & other service industries. Mr. Rudd said skill shortages have been identified by the Reserve Bank as being a factor contributing to higher inflation and interest rates.

Drought gives way to water-logging

Mix dry drought-affected soils with persistent moisture and the potential for water logging problems arise, a conundrum that has eluded cotton growers for a number of years. Management of water logging is even more crucial this season due to the small area planted to cotton, and the importance of harvesting high yields for financial success. Dr Mike Bange, CSIRO, Narrabri, has addressed water logging issues on a special presentation for Cotton Seed Distributors. "Water logging is essentially where there is a lack of oxygen available to the roots in the soil. Less than 10 per cent air in the soil by volume is what defines water logging, so it is essentially when the cotton roots are under water," Dr Bange said. "A number of factors come into play when crops are subjected to water logging. "The first thing that happens is that the roots cease to function, and when the roots are not functioning they cease taking up nutrients. "With the roots not taking up and having access to oxygen, they start to build up levels of ethylene which has a nasty reaction in the plant and it starts to inhibit photosynthesis.

"Coupled with that, we often have water logging associated with cloudy weather, so photosynthesis already limited, with less cotton growth overall and less nutrients being taken up by the crop that are needed for growth later on." Dr Bange said if there is serious water logging it will translate to reductions in yield, as there is less growth occurring, fewer nodes being produced, and fewer bolls on the plant. He advised that early flowering or just prior to flowering is the most vulnerable time for water logging, when the plant is setting the boll nodes. Some research has shown that water logging of crops later in their growth cycle can have minimal impact. Dr Greg Constable, CSIRO Plant Breeder, told CSD that different varieties respond to water logging in various ways, with modern varieties better adapted. "Sicot 71 is better than Sicala V-2 was, and Sicala V-2 was better than (say) Deltapine 16 was, so there has been some indirect selection for adaptation to our conditions," Dr Constable said. "Varieties from the South-east of the US and from the South, in the lighter sandy acid soils, really don't like our situation here, so they will respond to water logging much quicker in terms of going yellow than our more modern varieties. "Pima apparently does have better adaptation to water logging, and I think that is partly due to reduced sodium uptake in our sodic soils not interfering with some of the other nutrients. "Of course if there is no oxygen in the soil I don't think any of the varieties are going to function that well because oxygen is required for the function of the roots and for nutrient uptake so, in-between no oxygen and plenty, there are a range of variety reactions in there." The knowledge that water logging is capable of reducing yields by up to a bale per hectare has spurred research into traditional areas such as direct selection for nutritional uptake, but also biotechnology advances. Dr Ian Rochester, CSIRO Narrabri crop nutrition specialist, told CSD that cotton growers have access to management tools, prior to and during the growing season, which can reduce the impact of water logging. "These include higher beds that allow the soil to drain much more easily so that you get more oxygen back into the soil after the water has receded, and getting water on and off the field as quickly as possible. The duration of irrigation is also important." Dr Rochester said growers often confuse crop yellowing as a consequence of water logging with nitrogen deficiency due to denitrification, but iron deficiency is also an issue. SOURCE: CSD and *FarmOnline*.

The Australian - Outlook changes to normal as system moves offshore

The weather system that has brought flooding rains to central Queensland, and rain to nearly all of NSW and Victoria, has moved offshore, with the outlook this week back to normal for much of eastern Australia. The rains have filled inland Queensland's dams to 88 per cent. But southeast Queensland's dams received less than 25mm last week, and are still sitting at just 27 per cent of capacity. Bryan Rolstone, of the Bureau of Meteorology in Brisbane, said the slow-moving monsoonal low had formed from Tropical Cyclone Helen, and had gone on to drench central Queensland before it "slipped into NSW and weakened". But the monsoonal trough extends out to the Coral Sea and crossed the coast at Mackay yesterday, where it was generating heavy rain and thunderstorms. "That is expected to move north very slowly with time, so over the next few days that

trough on the coast will move up towards Cairns and Townsville area and just push the localised heavy rain further north," Mr. Rolstone said. Mr. Rolstone said the last heavy rain over Wivenhoe, Brisbane's main dam, occurred in 2004. A number of centres in Queensland received more than 400mm over the past week, including Proserpine, on the coast north of Mackay, which had 540mm. There were widespread falls of more than 25mm for the week through most of NSW. Gosford and Mangrove Mountain, just north of Sydney, had falls of 127mm and 136mm respectively.

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The outlook for the week in NSW is for scattered thunderstorms and isolated showers along the coast with the chance of thunderstorms inland later in the week. Temperatures are forecast to be about average for this time of year. Sydney's dams are at 60 per cent of capacity. Peter Newham of the bureau's Melbourne office said most of Victoria had reasonable rain since Friday. "In general, between 20mm and 50mm fell across the state, with some falls of around 100mm in the northeast," he said. The top fall for the week was 133mm at Mt Buffalo. Mr. Newham said the low that brought the rain had moved southeast and was "gradually drying out". Some shower activity is expected through Gippsland, with some isolated showers and drizzle elsewhere for the beginning of the week. "There is a chance of isolated showers and thunderstorms in the northeast on Tuesday and Wednesday, but most of Victoria will be fine," Mr. Newham said. A trough is expected to bring isolated showers and thunderstorms to western Victoria later in the week. The Kimberley region of Western Australia received good falls last week, and isolated showers, thunderstorms or scattered drizzle are expected over most of the coastal regions of the state.

NEWS.com.au - Bizarre weather sends hay bales up in flames

The recent unusual weather patterns have accelerated one of the strangest phenomena witnessed in the bush: an unprecedented number of haysheds have been spontaneously bursting into flames. Throughout the grain belt, it has been the worst season ever for spontaneous hayshed fires, according to the executive officer of the Australian Fodder Industry Association, Colin Peace. He estimates there have been 400 incidents of spontaneous combustion of haysheds in NSW alone. From northern NSW to South Australia, haystacks and haysheds have been bursting into flames. Drought, followed by summer rains, microbial growth in the stack and then hot, dry conditions can result in the spontaneous combustion of hay. "The combination of flammable material, moisture and bacteria - you get those three things together, they generate heat and it spontaneously combusts," Mr Peace said. Most of the fires are occurring in wheat and barley too poor to reap because of the drought. Instead, farmers baled them for hay. One theory is the wheat and barley have a higher level of sugar than the usual oaten hay, leading to increased microbial activity. Another view is that the hay has not been properly dried or cured. Hay is routinely checked with a moisture probe. Large bales must have a moisture content of less than 14 to 18 per cent. A moisture content of more than 18 to 22 per cent puts them at risk. The heavy summer rain has penetrated haysheds, and soaked into bales. "Paddock-stacked bales have become wet and they are spontaneously combusting," Mr Peace said. "You have even had individual bales in paddocks going up in smoke." Gordon Hill, regional operations manager for the west region of the NSW Rural Fire Service, said: "In our region since late October, we have had 84 fires. It is unusually high. In an average year, we'd be flat out getting any more than five or six."

There's gold in them thar poles

I was eating a whale burger when I saw a story about a plane landing in Antarctica. Call me Starbuck, but I read Moby Dick too early in life, and I've always been fascinated by whaling. I try to eat the barnacle-covered buggers every time I go to Japan; whale flesh really hard to get in Australia and apparently it's great for the libido. The story about the plane landing in Antarctica gave me an idea that almost made me drop my chopsticks: surely it's time to begin mining there. I can hear the howls. "Pristine environment", "vandalism", "Visigothism", "does this bus go to Bondi?", "I'd declare a jihad on you but my brain just exploded" ... But when you think about it, Antarctica is the perfect place to mine. Why mine Australia? That's where we all live. What about the penguins, you ask? Apart from that toe-tapping dude in the film *Happy Feet*, penguins are among the most stupid, useless creatures in creation. They stand around for six months of the year with their backs to the wind. After half a year the wind changes and they all turn around, so their backs are facing the other way. If ever there was a species that deserved to be sent to perdition, it's penguins. There are plenty of species in Australia that are more deserving of protection, or at least not as worthy of extermination, so let's stop mining here and move it where lesser species will be affected. Antarctica is bulging with oil that we can turn into petrol for our cars without paying anyone for it. There is gas for our buses, uranium for our bombs, reactors, missiles, subs and nuclear-tipped torpedoes; gold for bribing shonky foreign governments, coal for our power stations; iron we can flog to China; diamonds for our wives, girlfriends and mining drills; nitrous oxide for our dentists and palladium for our catalytic converters. What's that? We can't drill through all that ice. No need. According to Al Gore, global warming will soon melt the ice cap and all our plucky miners will have to do is dig through a slight dusting of frost. In winter, that is. In summer they will be toiling in Hawaiian shirts and sunnies, their short

sleeves barely covering their brawny arms, freshly bronzed from the harsh sun in the Australian Antarctic Territory. That's right, the AAT. Because we already own a huge slice of it. According to geologists, Australia was joined to Antarctica a few hundred million years ago, which gives us every right to do what we want: mining, whaling, whatever. Oh, but we're too cultured to kill any whales any more. Never mind that Australia, the US and Britain were responsible for hunting these juicy and delicious cattle of the sea to the brink of extinction in the first place.

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Talk about a pack of hypocrites. Kevin Rudd obviously cut a deal with Peter Garrett during last year's election campaign: "Keep quiet over greenhouse and uranium mining and, well, everything else really, and I'll let you have a war with Japan when we get into power." Did you see the way those Sea Shepherd Conservation Society clowns Benjamin Potts and Giles Lane capered around after they climbed aboard the Japanese whaling ship, the Happy Harpooner? The way Harbhajan Singh acted after he got Ponting out came to mind. No doubt they'll soon be selling their story to the mags. I can see the headlines: "Tea dance hell: cocktails were drug-free", "Forced to have sex with strangers while sober" and "Hostage ordeal: whale sashimi and sake served at room temperature", before they were rescued by an Australian spy ship, the Marauding Viking. Now of course the poor old skipper of the Viking is in a pretty pickle. These dark green greenies are getting ready to ram the Happy Harpooner. If the Viking's skipper does nothing and lets the greenies ram the Japanese (as they did last time it was whale-hunting season), the whalers will say it was Australia's fault. But if the Marauder's skipper stops the greenies, we'll be helping the whalers kill a mighty invertebrate which has cute little two-tonne baby calves. There is an upside to all this: if Garrett succeeds in harpooning the Japanese whalers, then forget about flying to Antarctica, pretty soon they'll breed up and we'll be able to walk to our new mine sites in Antarctica on these tasty blighters' crusty backs. Crunch, crunch, crunch. "Thar she blows."

Adelaidenow.com - Floods to boost Murray

A body of water equivalent to a quarter of Adelaide's annual consumption is heading towards the state, the result of flooding across Australia. Experts say at least 50 gigitalitres of inflows will reach the ailing River Murray in the coming weeks, but that figure could rise to 200 gigitalitres. There has been flash flooding across the country after heavy rain in parts of Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Queensland Premier Anna Bligh today toured the flood-hit southern Queensland town of Charleville as residents. Emergency crews also spent Saturday night battling floods in parts of northern Victoria. Murray-Darling Basin Commission chief executive Dr Wendy Craik said at least 50 gigitalitres would flow into the River Murray. "We will get some water into the Murray that's for sure but there are no certainties as to how much or when this will be," she said. "It looks like it could be similar amounts to what we got from rains that fell last December, when we got 150 to 200 gigitalitres of inflow." A summer deluge hit much of Australia late last year providing a much needed boost to the River Murray. "It's all positive and some of it will get to SA in the end but it doesn't change the big picture." Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald said she hoped this latest rain along the eastern seaboard would result in strong flows into the Menindee Lakes. She said once the capacity in the lakes reached 640 gigitalitres, the lakes became part of the water resources shared by the states in the Murray-Darling Basin. "Currently, the capacity in the lakes is only up to about 440 gigitalitres," Ms Maywald said.

"We are hoping that this latest rainfall will take it over the 640 which will be the first time this has happened since 2001." Ms Maywald said all the indicators were that the weather patterns across Australia were changing for the better. She said there had been some good rains to the catchments along the Murray-Darling so "we will be looking to see what the flows are into the Murray". "2008 is shaping up to be a better year," Ms Maywald said. "La Nina is well and truly formed and we just hope the rain it brings falls in the right places." "While we don't appear to be getting significant rains in SA, people must remember that our Murray catchments are in NSW and Victoria where they have been getting good falls."

Stanvac Desal plant ready by July

Adelaide's first desalination plant - worth \$10 million - will be in operation by July at Port Stanvac. The pilot plant will test the technology for the planned main \$1.1 billion plant, to be built on the same site. SA Water will begin calling for expressions of interest today for the pilot plant. The call closes on February 1, with a request for the proposal closing on March 4 and the plant supposed to be installed by or before July this year. Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald said the pilot plant would test water quality, filtration and pre-treatment technology required for the proposed 50 gigitalitre desalination plant. The main plant is expected to be operating by 2011. Ms Maywald said the first stage of pilot plant testing would run for six to 12 months to assess the pre-treatment process under a range of climatic conditions. She said the second stage would involve up to six months of reverse osmosing membrane testing. Reverse osmosis is the most popular form of turning salt water into drinking water. "This very small plant will help determine the key design criteria and processes that will allow sea water to be pre-treated to a sufficient quality and at a feasible cost for desalination," she said. Ms Maywald said a \$3 million environmental study on the gulf was continuing and a full environmental impact assessment

would be conducted. "Building a desalination plant is an extremely complex and expensive undertaking," she said. "Desalination is a key component of the Government's strategy for securing Adelaide's drinking water supply into the future." SA Water warns in its documents calling for expressions of interest that companies will have to consider issues of site contamination. "There is potential that some areas of the Pt Stanvac site (of the old Mobil oil refinery) may be contaminated and the exact extent of this contamination is unclear," SA Water says.