

“Snippets Plus”

May 2007 - A

14th Edition

Compiled by collating information sourced from printed media from all Australian States, the **Australian Water Association** Weekly News, **FarmOnLine** Daily News, **Murray Darling Association**, via the Internet and various other sources that are available. My comments for what they are worth are in **red**.

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30th April – 14th May

Adelaide Advertiser

Tanks in Adelaide yield less water

Adelaide rainwater tanks collect less water than those of other capital cities, a report has revealed. The National Water Commission study found the annual yields of tanks, plumbed into homes, are the lowest in the country, no matter how big the tank is or the size of the roof.

Now it's the wettest in seven years

Four days of rain has given Adelaide its wettest April in seven years, Bureau of Meteorology figures show.

Stormwater cocktail killing our coastline

The Environmental Protection Authority water quality guidelines allow stormwater and wastewater to carry sediment and pollution out to sea. University of Adelaide marine biologist Associate Professor Sean Connell says “most scientists in this State” consider the current guidelines inadequate. **My sentiments entirely, this Government as part of it's, “Water Proofing Adelaide” due to begin in 2005 was to stop stormwater and wastewater from being carried out to sea. If they did this the reliance on River Murray water would cease completely!**

Urgent review sought on water licences

Big corporations are hoarding River Murray water licences, hoping to make millions of dollars selling them to the highest bidder, sparking calls by independent MP Bob Such for an urgent review of the State Government run system.

Oceans linked to warming

The United States' leading hurricane forecaster yesterday said global warming currents, not human

produced carbon dioxide, are responsible for the global warming, and the Earth may begin to cool on its own in five to ten years.

Why or how does he think the ocean currents are conveying warmer water, ie what caused the temperature of the sea to rise?

AWA

Goulburn Murray Water CEO Russell Cooper has explained that an opening Irrigation allocation of zero on July 2 does not mean no water for the entire season. Cooper said that, with normal winter rainfall and inflows, irrigation allocations at season kick-off (Aug 15) are still expected.

An environmental assessment by Sydney Water contains a warning that a toxic plume under Orica's Botany site risks being spread further by construction of the pipeline for the desalination plant but objections on this or other grounds are limited because the project is deemed critical infrastructure.

Much of Tasmania could be declared drought affected within the next couple of weeks, according to the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association. Areas likely to be declared are the Central Highlands, northern and southern Midlands and Flinders Island.

Last week, the Australian Government launched Round 3 the Community Water Grants program, providing funding for community water saving, recycling or treatment projects. Application forms and guidelines are available by phoning 1800 780 730 or download from Applications close on 4 July 2007.

eWater CRC has released a new report titled "Afforestation in a catchment context: understanding the impacts on water yield and salinity" which outlines potential hydrologic consequences that should be considered when planning forest plantations. For copies, contact Meg White on 03 8344 9226.

The Australian Government will contribute \$408m to the Western Corridor Water Recycling Project in South-east Queensland, representing half the total cost of the project and the largest single payment out of the Government's National Water Fund. This is conditional on the Queensland Government not requesting any further Commonwealth funding.

2

\$98m from the National Water Fund will be granted to the Victorian Government for the Bendigo Pipeline, which will link the Bendigo to the Goulburn River System (including Lake Eildon), supplying up to 20 000 ML/yr of water purchased from willing sellers. The grant is the full amount requested by the Victorian Government - further operating or capital costs would be the responsibility of Coliban Water.

WaterAid's April issue of e-news available ([Website](#)). WaterAid and World Vision's joint report 'Getting the Basics Right: Water and Sanitation in South East Asia and the Pacific' argues the case for increased investment in water and sanitation.

The Bureau of Meteorology Research Centre (BMRC) is coordinating a cloud seeding research symposium from 7-9 May 2007 in Melbourne. The forum will cover the scientific basis of cloud seeding, as well as current and future plans for cloud seeding in Australia.

Orica Water care is holding a series of briefing seminars across Australia featuring non-contact UV disinfection and the MIEX process. Each two-hour seminar will introduce and illustrate the applications of both technologies.

The Better Assessment Science Integrating Point and Non-point Sources (BASINS) Version 4 used in US for EPA approved desktop water quality modelling has been released and will help state and local governments with watershed management through access to point and non-point source data.

Scientists are saying that ski resorts in the Alps should rethink making and using artificial snow, a practice by 30% all alpine resorts because it is harming water supplies with 25 billion gallons of water needed per season for resorts in Italy, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Slovenia.

Italy's Ministry for Economic Development has met to discuss a projected summer drought and its likely impact on production of electricity with water levels in the Po River dropping as much as 80 cm in a week and Lake Maggiore in Sesto Calende, 70 cm below average levels. Agricultural production, as well as hydropower, is also at risk.

The town of Spencer, Massachusetts has had a Mass Casualty Incident declared, owing to what appears to be an uncontrolled release of sodium hydroxide into the town's water supply. This release has caused chemical burns to residents who have come in contact with the water. Bottled water is being distributed to consumers for the time being.

Now taking registrations! Recycled Water Guidelines. One-day seminars in 6 states to examine the requirements, purpose and application with practical case studies and examples.

Documents released by Sydney Water on Anzac Day show that Sydney Water has opted for the shortest route for the pipeline from the desalination plant and construction will not be a quiet affair.

The Federal Government will contribute \$408 million towards construction of the \$1.7 billion Recycled Water Scheme around Brisbane bringing relief to drought-affected irrigators there.

Macquarie Bank is selling Thames Water which operates the sewage works that caused outrage when it spilled around 170,000 tons of sewage into the Firth of Forth in Scotland, but will probably only recoup what it paid for it.

Good rain across a wide belt of Eastern and Southern Australia over the last week has the farming community beginning to hope that the end of the drought may be near.

1st May

FarmOnline

Carbon accounting not accurate: NSW Farmers

The NSW Farmers' Association says Australian politicians are being dishonest over how the nation is meeting its greenhouse commitments, claiming farmers are bearing the brunt while the energy sector keeps polluting.

Chair of the Association's Conservation and Resource Management Committee, Louise Burge, says greenhouse myths being peddled by some politicians are being backed by Clive Hamilton, of the left-leaning Australia Institute. Mrs Burge says the institute is attempting to deny the "dirty deals" done by both sides of politics in regard to how Australia is meeting its claimed reduction in greenhouse emissions.

"The public of Australia has been misled for too long," she said.

"Attempts by the Australia Institute or indeed any political party to cover up and attempt to rewrite history on how Australia cost shifted the burden of reducing emissions on to agriculture will come home to haunt them."

Mrs Burge said Australia has not substantially reduced its emissions; it has simply placed land use restrictions on rural land by preventing removal of native vegetation.

3.

"This was then claimed as an offset or credit while Australia continued to pollute," she said.

"In fact, the NSW Government has deliberately locked up land invaded by woody weeds, which is causing soil and gully erosion and destroying the native grasses.

"Under Kyoto rules, the State and Federal governments are claiming this is a forest.

"Farmers and Landcare Groups in Western NSW have fought Government legislation that is causing land degradation for over 10 years, but no Government will allow them to restore native grasslands by controlling woody weeds, because this would force Australia to actually reduce its emissions."

Mrs Burge says since 1990 the energy sector emissions have increased by 88 million mega tones, but Australia claims this has been offset by planting pine trees or by preventing clearing of native vegetation – most of it woody weeds.

"In Australia there was a deliberate strategy mapped out on how emissions reductions could be claimed while the profits from coal and other industries could continue," she said.

"The Australia Institute, the NSW Government and the Federal Government cannot rewrite history and play the blame game."

SOURCE: *The Land*, NSW's weekly rural newspaper, posting news updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

Even money bet for wetter than average winter

The good weekend rainfall across South-eastern Australia was in line with the latest forecasting from the Bureau of Meteorology, which predicts it is an even money bet that there will be above average rainfall Australia-wide this winter.

And it says, the odds are in favour of above-normal seasonal rainfall for May to July in drought-

ravaged South East Queensland and in North-east NSW.

The chances of exceeding the median rainfall are between 60pc and 65pc in an area straddling the NSW/Qld border roughly between Armidale, NSW, and Roma, Qld.

The Bureau says the chances for most of the country of accumulating at least average rain for the coming three months are close to 50pc.

It says the pattern of seasonal rainfall odds across Australia is a result of recent higher than average temperatures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean and also in parts of the tropical and sub-tropical Indian Ocean.

Outlook confidence is related to how consistently the Pacific and Indian Oceans affect Australian rainfall.

During the May-July period, history shows this effect to be moderately consistent in a band from the central Northern Territory across most of the southern two-thirds of Queensland, as well as the north-eastern half of NSW.

Moderate consistency is also evident in much of Tasmania, parts of southern Victoria, and patches through the interior of Western Australia.

The Bureau reports a large body of cool subsurface water persists in the central to eastern Pacific, thereby raising the potential for a La Niña to develop in 2007.

SOURCE: Bureau of Meteorology. For further weather information and forecasts, visit *FarmOnline's* weather page.

4pc water trade limit stays after Vic unbundles licences

Victoria's Water Minister John Thwaites has confirmed that the 4pc annual limit on permanent water trade out of irrigation districts will remain when water entitlements in northern Victoria are unbundled on July 1.

Mr Thwaites said claims that the 4pc limit was to be scrapped after July 1 were wrong.

"Consistent with the National Water Initiative, Victoria will maintain the 4pc limit on permanent water trade out of irrigation districts," Mr Thwaites said.

"Continuing the 4pc limit recognises that rural communities and irrigation areas need to gradually adjust to the movement of water when it is permanently traded."

Under the NWI, the limit is due for review in 2009.

Mr Thwaites said the Victorian Government had also introduced a 10pc limit on ownership of water by non-landholders.

"This is to guard against so-called water barons buying up water for speculative reasons," he said.

The 4pc limit has been in place in 2006-07 in irrigation corporations in NSW and irrigation trusts in South Australia, and is expected to continue.

Unbundling licences will separate an existing water entitlement package into high and low-reliability water shares, delivery share and a water-use licence. Delivery share entitles irrigators to have water delivered to land and a share of the available water flow in a delivery system.

After unbundling, an irrigator who trades water share off the property still pays delivery share as a contribution to the on-going maintenance of irrigation infrastructure.

The State Government says unbundling will give farmers more flexibility in managing their businesses, boost productivity by allowing water to be used where it is most productive, and help mitigate the impacts of the drought.

SOURCE: *Stock & Land*, weekly rural newspaper, Victoria, posting news updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

4.

Carbon trading yet to convince WA farmers

Western Australia grain growers and livestock producers want more specific information on how greenhouse gas emissions and carbon trading schemes and legislation will affect their future operations.

This was clear when at least 70 farmers from the south west of WA were interested enough to attend the Fitzgerald Biosphere Group's (BIG) carbon emission trading forum at Jerramungup last week.

The half-day forum was addressed by Richard McKellar, from CALM's Greenhouse Unit, and Justin

Jonson, of Greening Australia.

BIG chairwoman, Linda Lee, Jerramungup, representing the Fitzgerald River Catchment Initiative Project, said the first step was to understand climate change and carbon emissions and how they would affect farmers and rural communities in future.

Mr McKellar said climate change could result in reduced average rainfall throughout WA's South West, challenging the future of both farming and the natural environment.

"Coastal settlements will become vulnerable to rising sea water levels," he said.

"[Natural] infrastructure as we know it will be at risk, including forests.

"The potential impact on our horticulture may require a search to begin for new plant varieties."

Mr Jonson said Greening Australia could act as a greenhouse broker.

He holds a Masters degree from the University of WA, from where he did research across 30,000ha in the central wheat belt's Wallatin Creek catchment.

"5pc of the catchment has been revegetated by farmers," Mr Jonson said.

"Over the 15 years of tree growth our examination showed that only 43pc of the costs of growing them was paid by the \$12.50 a tonne we might have received for their carbon content.

"Other quotas for carbon dioxide equivalent are as low at \$7.50/t.

"Trees alone won't save the planet and finding a technological solution takes time, but there are secondary benefits from planting trees, such as water use, conservation of soil and aesthetics."

SOURCE: Extract from *Farm Weekly*, WA's leading rural newspaper, posting news updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

Adelaide Advertiser

Rain takes pressure off irrigators, for now

Substantial rains across the Murray Darling basin in the past week have eased pressure on irrigators and revived hopes inflows could return to normal next financial year.

Upper sections of the catchment, which are crucial for flows into South Australia, have recorded up to 60mm of rain in the past seven days.

While Murray Darling Basin Commission chief executive Wendy Craik said "much, much more" rain was needed across the basin, she described it as a "great start".

"It is a bit early to tell if it is going to impact on inflows but because all of March and most of April has been so dry, a lot of the rain will go to wetting the catchment," she said.

"But it means irrigators' demands will be reduced, evaporation will be down, and it makes everybody a little more optimistic."

Any increased inflows to SA, resulting from the rainfall, was likely to be determined today. Inflows for January, February and March were the lowest on record. This has resulted in the State Government implementing their toughest water restrictions and irrigators having their entitlements cut to 60 per cent. Increased rainfall in the Murray Darling basin lessens the chance of tougher water restrictions in SA.

Dr Craik said historic rainfall figures showed there would be a one-in-10 chance that inflows from the basin could return to average during the next financial year.

"We need well above average rains in the Upper Murray, Hume and Dartmouth reservoirs over the next three months, and in some of these areas they have average falls of 600mm," she said. The last time average inflows were operating in the system was in 2000-01.

During April, Adelaide recorded 76.4mm of rain, which was more than double the 38mm average.

Labor 'lifting targets from Europe'

Prime Minister John Howard today accused Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd of borrowing a European emissions reduction target then seeking to work out what impact that will have on Australia.

Mr Howard said the economy of Europe was very different to Australia's.

He said climate change should be addressed by all means and the Government had already invested \$3 billion in various measures.

"But let's not do it in a way that threatens jobs and let us not set targets which we don't know the impact of. Let us not put the cart before the horse," he told ABC radio.

"What Mr Rudd has done is he's borrowed a European target. The Australian economy is far different from the European economy and we should not sub-contract our climate policy to the European Union."

Under Labor's plan, greenhouse emissions will be cut by 60 per cent by 2050.

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The Government has yet to set a target. However, Mr Howard has foreshadowed there will be a target, although not of the same order as Labor has proposed.

Mr Howard said today Labor had set its target then decided to work out what impact that would have.

"We should determine a climate change policy that is right for Australia and of course makes a

contribution to the worldwide effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," he said.

"You do that by working out the impact of potential targets before you embrace them.

"Mr Rudd in his haste to get a headline has said 'I will cut greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by the year 2050. I don't know what that will do to jobs in the coal industry. I don't know what impact it will have on the economy. But it's a good idea because the Europeans like it'.

"Now he's got a group of people to tell him the economic impact. That is the wrong way around."

Mr Howard said it would be logical and reassuring and sensible to work out a target that was consistent with Australia's national interest which also contributed to global emission reductions.

"That is the approach my Government is taking," he said.

Federal Labor and the state governments have hired economics professor Ross Garnaut to inquire into the economic threat posed by climate change and what more should be done to mitigate its effects.

Scientists meet to solve global warming

At least 400 scientists and experts from about 120 countries are attending the five day, third session of the Intergovernment Panel on Climate Change, the UN's leading authority on global warming.

2nd

FarmOnLine

Koperberg gets two climate change departments

NSW's new Climate Change Minister, Phil Koperberg, has announced the creation of two new government departments to combat the impact of global warming.

Mr Koperberg, who was recently elected to the NSW Parliament to represent the seat of Blue Mountains, west of Sydney, was the State's former bushfire supremo and copped plenty of flak for allegedly doing too little to avert some of the horrendous bushfires which have hit NSW in the past two decades.

Now Mr Koperberg is in charge of two new departments to tackle climate change - the Department of Environment and Climate Change and the Department of Energy and Water.

"The science is in and climate change is real - it will have widespread impacts on how we live our lives unless we keep working hard to tackle it," he said.

The science is also in on hazard reduction burning to reduce the impact of bushfires but Mr Koperberg didn't seem quite so keen to embrace that science when the NSW bushfire boss.

Mr Koperberg said the establishment of the two new departments meant the NSW Premier, Morris

Iemma, had honoured his election promise to take the lead in climate change management.

Climate scientists issue new warning from Thailand

Delegates at the meeting of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in Bangkok, Thailand, have warned that governments need to take action quickly to ease the consequences of global warming.

Scientists and diplomats at the meeting will spend the week finalising a report on what actions governments can take to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

Pending amendments from dozens of governments, the draft report calls on the world to cut emissions by shifting away from carbon-heavy fuels like coal

and oil, promote and invest in energy efficiency, and enact reforms in the agriculture sector.

Agriculture can help to mitigate emissions by providing biofuels as an alternative to carbon-heavy fuels and through emissions-conscious land use and carbon sequestration practices such as no-till.

The previous two IPCC reports this year have warned of global temperatures rising as much as 10 degrees Fahrenheit by the end of the century. IPCC has reported that even a 3.5-degree increase could subject two billion people to water shortages and threaten extinction for 20 to 30 per cent of the world's species.

Condamine-Balonne water plan needs fine print focus

Queensland irrigator, Chad Prescott, while "reasonably comfortable" with the just-released draft Condamine-Balonne Resource Operations Plan, has warned stakeholders to closely examine the fine print.

While the draft ROPs for the Moreton and Burdekin districts have yet to be released by the Queensland Government, there's no doubt the Condamine-Balonne ROPs remain the most sensitive catchment in Queensland - hence the almost 10-year-long wait to get the process to this stage.

St George-based Mr Prescott says it is important to realise the document is not yet "set in concrete", encouraging individual licence holders to closely read the 300-page report to better understand how it affects them.

"Since it covers 1600 licence holders, there's bound to be a mistake or two in it - that's inevitable but it can be addressed," Mr Prescott said.

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AgForce Condamine water spokesman, Kim Bremner, acknowledged "it's what we expected" and met the Federal Government's National Water Initiative criteria for trading.

"There doesn't appear to be any major cutbacks and the main thing is its 'as-is', 'where-is' position on tradeable allocations," he said.

Essentially, this means that licence holders can continue to draw similar amounts of water to previous allocations.

He, too, also stressed the importance of concerned licence holders ensuring their final submissions be with the NRW Department by June 8.

Meanwhile, the Queensland Farmers Federation's water expert, Ian Johnson, points out that ROPs are an operational level planning process to implement the water resource plans and, importantly, a way to define water use entitlements.

"The Condamine-Balonne draft ROP also responds to public submissions which sought clarification about issues such as volumetric limits for un-supplemented allocations such as area-based licences, rules for water trading and sharing of water between high and medium reliability users, and the special rules for managing access to flows and certifying water infrastructure in the Lower Balonne flood plain," he said.

Mr Johnson said the just-announced ROPs was not about challenging the fundamentals of the plan, more about coming up with the necessary detail.

"No alarm bells are ringing at this moment," he said.

News.com

Arctic ice cap melting faster

The Arctic ice cap is melting much faster than expected and is now about 30 years ahead of predictions made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a US ice expert said overnight.

This means the ocean at the top of the world could be free or nearly free of summer ice by 2020, three decades sooner than the global panel's gloomiest forecast of 2050.

No ice on the Arctic Ocean during summer would be a major spur to global warming, said Ted Scambos, a glaciologist at the National Snow and Ice Centre in Colorado.

"Right now ... the Arctic helps keep the Earth cool," Mr Scambos said. "Without that Arctic ice, or with much less of it, the Earth will warm much faster."

That is because the ice reflects light and heat; when it is gone, the much darker land or sea will absorb more light and heat, making it more difficult for the planet to cool down, even in winter, he said.

Mr Scambos and co-authors of the study, published in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*, used satellite data and visual confirmation of Arctic ice to reach their conclusions, a far different picture from that obtained from computer models used by the scientists of the intergovernmental panel.

"The IPCC report was very careful, very thorough and cautious, so they erred on the side of what would certainly occur as opposed to what might occur," Mr Scambos said.

The wide possibility of what might occur included a much later melt up north, or a much earlier one, Mr Scambos said.

"It appears we're on pace about 30 years earlier than expected to reach a state where we don't have sea ice or at least not very much in late summer in the Arctic Ocean," he said.

He discounted the notion that the sharp warming trend in the Arctic might be due to natural climate cycles.

"There aren't many periods in history that are this dramatic in terms of natural variability," Mr Scambos said.

He said he had no doubt that this was caused in large part by greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which he said was the only thing capable of changing Earth on such a large scale over so many latitudes.

Asked what could fix the problem - the topic of a new report by the intergovernmental panel to be released on Saturday in Bangkok - Mr Scambos said a large volcanic eruption might hold Arctic ice melting at bay for a few years.

But he saw a continuing warm-up as inevitable in the coming decades.

"Long term and for the next 50 years, I think even the new report will agree that we're in for quite a bit of warming," Mr Scambos said.

"We just barely now, I think, have enough time and enough collective will to be able to get through this century in good shape, but it means we have to start acting now and in a big way."

Adelaide Advertiser

Voters back desalination plant

BUILD IT NOW

Question: -

Should SA be spending at least \$400m on building a desalination plant to provide water for Adelaide?

YES 69% **No** 23% **Don't know** 8%

Press Release Sandra Knack

\$400M FOR 20% OF OUR WATER?

DESAL NOT THE BEST SOLUTION

Responding to news that a poll has revealed 69% of South Australians want a desalination plant, SA Democrat MP Sandra Kanck says de-salination is economically and environmentally irresponsible compared to alternatives.

‘Spending \$400m on a desalination plant that will only provide 20% of our water and produce greenhouse emissions into the bargain is not a good use of our money.

‘We certainly must wean ourselves off the Murray but we should do this by reducing our water use and harvesting rainwater.

‘Rainwater tanks are five times as energy efficient as desalination plants. **I question the five times more efficient.**

‘For \$400m we could plumb every rainwater tank in Adelaide and give major incentives to install new ones.

‘We could easily find another 20% of water simply by reducing our water use.

‘\$400m is enough to give almost every household a grey water diverter that would put the 40% of water used in the shower and laundry back into the garden.

‘There are also showerheads that use 80% less water, flow restrictors that use 40% less water.

South Australians are ready for practical environmentalism in their homes.

‘Practical solutions such as increasing efficiency, reducing waste and harvesting rainwater simply offer a better use of SA’s AAA credit rating than building desalination plants,’ said Ms Kanck.

Couriermail.com.au

Water bores rob city supply

Residents across Brisbane are sinking bores so they can fill their swimming pools and water their lawns and gardens.

Drilling companies contacted by *couriermail.com.au* have so many bookings for bores they are refusing to take new drilling business or they are warning their customers of waiting lists of six months or more.

The draining of the water table under the city has got to the stage that Brisbane City Council wants the State Government to introduce a moratorium on new bores in areas where the council itself is drilling for water.

Council water committee chair John Campbell said the precious water resources taken by individual residents could rob the city of valuable underground water in selected areas the council was seeking to make available in the drinking supply.

Cr Campbell said both the BCC and the South East Queensland Council of Mayors had asked the Department of Natural Resources and Water to rein in the practice in those selected areas.

He said the council's bores had typically found water around 20-30 metres underground in suburbs including Sunnybank, Algester, Runcorn, Chandler, and the Forest Lake region.

"The State Government has asked us to find 20 megalitres per day and we have drilled 150 test holes across Brisbane," Cr Campbell said.

He said the council's project to find, drill, tap, and treat bore water to augment general supply was costing \$75 million, with \$28 million coming from the State Government.

The surge of interest by residents in using bore water to fill pools and hose gardens is happening right across Brisbane.

In Brookfield, in the city's west, residents are typically paying \$10,000-\$12,000 for a licenced driller to bore 60-80 metres underground, where there is a supply of clean, clear water.

Homes in suburbs nearby the Brisbane River are prime locations for bores: at Chelmer, water can be found 25-30 metres underground, but the quality isn't so good.

Backyard drilling in the west also is common at Fig Tree Pocket, Pine Mountain, Mt Crosby, and Pullenvale.

The subterranean water at Fig Tree Pocket is salty and it's understood some residents with bores have installed small desalination plants to treat it.

Brookfield Drilling Company owner Steve Kroechnert said many of the companies licensed to drill backyards were "booked up".

Mr Kroechnert said owners were prepared to take the risk of losing thousands of dollars if no water was found.

If drilling was successful, a resident might pay \$10,000-\$12,000 for exploration and drilling and another \$4,000-\$6,000 for a pump.

He said it was possible a neighbour next door to a bore might find no water -- they would pay \$5,000-\$6,000 for unsuccessful exploration.

Mr Kroechnert said some residents contracted water diviners to convince them reserves were available.

He said some bores were still providing water 5-10 years after they were sunk.

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Water could be pumped typically at 12,000 litres per hour; an average swimming pool would take 15-16 hours to fill. Cr Campbell said it was time to review whether bore water should be available for domestic use particularly in the Sunnybank and Runcorn areas where the council was drilling late this year "until it is proven the water they (residents) took wouldn't deplete general supply.

He confirmed the council itself had experienced difficulty finding decent underground water.

"We've had to drill twice as many test bores, the water quality is not as good as expected, and it will have to be treated."

3rd

FarmOnLine

Beattie still fiddling on Lockyer water lifeline

The State Government needs to "stop procrastinating" and sign a water agreement with embattled Lockyer Valley irrigators, according to the Nationals' local Member, Ian Rickuss.

His comments come in the aftermath of the recent Federal Government decision to contribute \$408m towards the construction of the \$1.7b Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme - a project that could see the pipeline deliver its life-sustaining contents to "salad bowl" irrigators.

Last week the Qld Premier, Peter Beattie, labelled the iconic project "a big win" for Queensland.

But the Prime Minister made it clear the grant was conditional on Queensland ensuring the project's recycled water be made available "on reasonable terms" to Lockyer Valley farmers.

Meanwhile, embattled irrigators, with the support of the Nationals' Ian Rickuss remain on edge over the outcome in the wake of the Federal Government's 30-day deadline for disclosure of the project's full financial position.

"We have been trying to get a Water Supply Agreement for going on 12 months," Mr Rickuss said.

"It started off with SEQ Water, then it went to NRW, now it's gone to the Co-ordinator-General – it's all under (Deputy Premier) Anna Bligh's Infrastructure Department – but there's just no traction on the issue," he said.

Mr Rickuss is frustrated over countless meetings arranged to resolve the dilemma.

"We want an agreement that we will get some water out of the recycled water project," he said.

Chairman of the Lockyer Water Users Forum, Linton Brimblecombe, is concerned not only about delays in negotiation a Supply Agreement with State Government but also the availability of recycled water from the pipeline project.

He said he recently challenged the Queensland Water Commission on a claim it was effectively building dams.

"They were insinuating the recycled water project was as good as a dam - but it's not," Mr Brimblecombe said

"It's only as good as what goes in (to the pipeline) and if there's nothing going in, there will be nothing coming out."

Adelaide Advertiser

Water plant price alert

Water charges could rise by up to \$300 per household a year depending on the size of any desalination plant to supply, Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald has warned.

Solar plant in Whyalla gets \$14.4m

A project which will produce half a megawatt of solar power near Whyalla has received \$7.4 million in Federal

Funding.

The Australian

'Bracks right to demand Murray detail'

Victoria has flagged new objections to the commonwealth's Murray-Darling takeover, as one of the Howard Government's key water experts said the Bracks Government was right to demand more detail.

Premier Steve Bracks attacked Malcolm Turnbull, saying the proposed legislation the federal Water Resources Minister had sent him to win his support failed to address Victoria's key concern. Mr Bracks said the section on constitutional powers - the last main stumbling block to Victoria joining the \$10.5billion plan - consisted of just blank pages.

"In the draft legislation that has only just been received there's details on other matters but nothing on heads of power," the Premier said. "We have still got a way to go to sort this out."

A spokesman for Mr Turnbull said Mr Bracks was yet to receive the full bill and he should stop grasping for a political advantage.

"Mr Bracks knows that sections of the bill are being provided to the states in stages. The drafting is developing through extensive discussions with the states," the spokesman said.

"It's a great pity that Mr Bracks keeps playing politics with this plan, which has the support of all the other states and is plainly needed to address the national water crisis."

The new row comes as National Water Commissioner Peter Cullen said Victoria was right to hold out for now.

"I think Victoria is correct in demanding more detail," Professor Cullen told The Weekly Times. "I am not comfortable with it."

While the two governments have been wrangling over the plan, heavy rain that has fallen across much of the lower Murray-Darling catchment has done little to allay fears about the future of the nation's food bowl after six years of drought.

Murray-Darling Basin Commission chief executive Wendy Craik said it would take another 40 falls

of similar magnitude to adequately supply irrigators next season.

In 100 years of records, the Murray-Darling system has never been so dry. Last month Prime Minister John Howard warned that unless there were significant inflows within six to eight weeks, there would not be enough water for any allocations for irrigation at the start of the 2007-08 season.

Last week Dartmouth Dam, the most upstream storage in the Murray system located in northeastern Victoria, dropped to 12 per cent capacity.

The Hume Reservoir, 16km upstream of Albury-Wodonga, increased by six billion litres to 4 per cent capacity.

Bring Third World in on climate pact

‘Climate change’ is a fact, not a theory. It is present tense, not an if but a now. The answer to global warming must be a massive reduction, in the course of this century, in the level of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions (*writes Malcolm Turnbull*).

Don’t let anyone tell you this adjustment will be easy for Australia. It won’t be. This is going to be the greatest economic challenge our nation has faced. The cheap energy that has provided our prosperity and in effect supported higher wages and rising living standards is under threat.

This is precisely why we have to get it right. We must protect both the environment and the economy.

To date the major framework for mitigating greenhouse gasses has been the Kyoto Protocol - which is a treaty, not a sacrament - and which agreed that a number of developed countries would meet certain emission targets between 2008-2012 representing a 5 per cent reduction from their 1990 levels.

Our National Greenhouse Accounts show we will meet our first Kyoto commitment period target through our own actions within our national borders. Fast-growing emitters such as China and India have no binding obligations under the agreement. And it is now too late for the US to meet its target.

The real question for Australia and the rest of the world, therefore, is what should come after the first commitment period, or Old Kyoto? What should the frameworks of the post-2012 world - the New Kyoto - look like?

First, we must recognise that a more practical and effective way of substantially reducing greenhouse gas emissions is needed to limit the rate of global warming.

Old Kyoto’s target was only a 5 per cent reduction in developed-world emissions and we know it may, if we’re lucky, achieve just a 1 per cent reduction in the growth of global emissions. This is not nearly enough.

Second, New Kyoto must be truly global and it must include all major emitters including the US, China and India. A tonne of CO2 emissions has the same impact whether it is emitted in Sydney, Shanghai or Stockholm.

China is expected shortly to overtake the US as the world's largest emitter, perhaps as early as this year. By 2030 China's emissions will exceed those of all other industrialised nations put together.

Third, we must give real priority to early, cost-effective action. In the end, technology will be the main means of producing the electricity we need while emitting much less carbon. However right here, right now, we have the means to make a massive and material impact on greenhouse gas emissions by sustainable forestry. No rocket science required: just money, a shovel, seedlings and good governance.

That is why the Australian Government recently launched a \$200million Global Initiative on Forests and Climate.

For if through reducing deforestation, planting new forests and more sustainable forest practices, we only halved the rate of global deforestation this would lead to global emission reductions five times greater than Australia's total annual emissions and almost 10 times as large as those aimed to be achieved under the existing Kyoto Protocol.

Fourth, we must continue to work together through the Asia-Pacific Partnership for Clean Development and Climate (AP6), which covers more than 50 per cent of global emissions, GDP, energy use and population, as well as our bilateral partnerships to develop and demonstrate the new low-emission technologies that the world will need if we are to make the required deep cuts in emissions.

Finally, and perhaps of most immediate importance given the political debate in Australia, any new arrangement must be equitable and not simply shift industry out of countries where greenhouse gas emissions are regulated into parts of the world where the legal regime may be less environmentally stringent.

Australia has a number of vital trade-exposed industries which are both energy and carbon intensive: coal, gas, steel, aluminium and cement among others. Each of these competes with countries such as Indonesia, states in the Middle East, China and Brazil - which have no Kyoto obligations at all. Unilateral targets would serve no purpose other than making us paupers and would disadvantage our industries relative to those in other countries whose carbon intensity and emissions are the same or greater than our own.

Compare this approach with that of Labor.

First, Kevin Rudd proposes that Australia should ratify the Kyoto Protocol. In doing so he confirms his agreement that in future commitment periods the burden of global greenhouse gas emissions cuts should fall solely on the shoulders of developed nations such as Australia.

Domestically, Rudd seeks to impose a 60 per cent cut in greenhouse gas emissions against 2000 levels by 2050, regardless of what other countries may do and regardless of the impact it will have on Australian industry and jobs. This policy would export both jobs and pollution. Greenhouse gases would continue to rise. And aluminium, steel, coal and natural gas would continue to be produced - but not as much of it in Australia.

Labor's lack of vision and sincerity on the climate change issue is nowhere better seen than in its total opposition to nuclear power. It calls for low-emission power sources, but then refuses to countenance the one which is proven to be both feasible and affordable.

It calls for European-style targets but then refuses to accept the clean energy source that provides much of Europe's electricity. Already 15 per cent of the world's electricity comes from nuclear power; in France it is 80 per cent.

Indeed in Rudd's world, we could find ourselves mining uranium and sending it to other countries so they could generate electricity more cheaply and more cleanly than we can.

We are moving into dangerous times. Wise leadership is critical if we are to emerge from the post-Kyoto negotiations with our industrial and export industries and the jobs of Australians protected. Other nations stand ready to take advantage of any Australian government that is naive or inexperienced enough to drop its guard and act against the national interest.

The Howard Government's policies are designed to get the right environmental result for the world, and at the same time protect Australia's interests. Climate change is the great economic challenge of our times, and we need cool heads and steady hands to steer the course to a cooler world.

Malcolm Turnbull is federal Environment Minister.

Couriermail.com

Mayor wants bores controlled

Brisbane Lord Mayor Campbell Newman has called on the State Government to regulate the "open slather" use of bore water so that underground city supplies were "not squandered".

The Lord Mayor today entered the debate on bore water after yesterday's exclusive [report](#) on couriermail.com.au that residents were lining up to have bores drilled in their backyards.

We reported the sinking of backyard bores across Brisbane was so popular, drilling companies had waiting lists of six months or more. Some companies had closed their books temporarily to new customers.

Residents typically paid \$10,000-\$12,000 for exploration and drilling to about 60-80 metres, and another \$4,000-\$6,000 for a pump if bore water was found.

Cr Newman said he realised he might offend some residents who had shelled out thousands of dollars by wanting the "open slather" use of bore water controlled, but water remained a precious resource in the drought.

"The situation is so desperate in southeast Queensland, we need to do something to ensure this resource is not squandered," he said.

He said the depletion of the city's subterranean water basin needed to be controlled.

"It is well documented that the aquifer in Perth was depleted over 20 years," Cr Newman said.

After yesterday's report, residents on level five restrictions told couriermail.com.au they felt distressed when they saw neighbours with recently installed bores squandering water in their gardens.

They said neighbours were not only using bore water to fill their pools and water their gardens and lawns, they were resuming hosing of driveways, and liberal quantities of water were again sometimes flowing into gutters and drains. A resident in Cornubia, on Brisbane's southside, said a neighbour with a bore had also installed a new automatic popup sprinkler system which was liberally watering his half-acre block twice a day.

A Boondall resident said a neighbour with a recently installed bore not only was hosing his driveway, the neighbour had planted a new bright-green turf nature-strip which he was hosing regularly.

"It's like he is taunting everyone as they drive by," the resident said.

Yesterday BCC water committee chairman John Campbell told couriermail.com.au that householders in specific suburbs such as Sunnybank, Algester, Runcorn, Chandler, and the Forest lake region should stop using bore water for non essential purposes as they would rob the council of 20 megalitres per day it wanted to add to general supplies from those areas.

The council was spending \$75 million and had already sunk 150 bores in a bid to add 20 megalitres per day of treated bore water to the city's supply, he said.

But the Lord Mayor said he wanted residents to use bore water carefully right across Brisbane -- not just in council drilling areas.

Cr Newman said the region was in drought and the use of bore water was "a social equity issue".

He said only a proportion of residents could afford the \$10,000-\$15,000 needed to sink a bore and install a pump.

11

"I see this (bore water) as a Brisbane resource owned by the people of southeast Queensland," Cr Newman said.

He said residents who squandered their bore water around could expect anger from neighbours.

"If people have existing bores in suburbia, and they have neighbours around them, they need to perhaps be prudent and show restraint.

"I know I will offend some people by me having this position, but it's about this whole city getting through the drought."

Cr Newman said he had written to the State Government last year requesting it regulate bore water

use.

In Brookfield, in the city's west, residents were tapping into a supply of clean, clear water at about 60-80 metres below the surface, although bores had been sunk to 140 metres.

Homes in suburbs near the Brisbane River were prime locations for bores: at Chelmer, water could be found 25-30 metres underground, but its quality wasn't so good.

Backyard drilling in the west also was common at Fig Tree Pocket, Pine Mountain, Mt Crosby, and Pullenvale.

The subterranean water at Fig Tree Pocket was salty and it's understood some residents with bores had installed small desalination plants to treat it.

Brookfield Drilling Company owner Steve Kroechnert said many companies licensed to drill backyards were "booked up" and owners were prepared to take the risk of losing thousands of dollars if no water was found from drilling in their yard.

Water plant delay fears

A central plank in the State Government's strategy to save southeast Queensland from running dry could be at risk of running over time.

The Government plans to deliver 145 million litres of treated wastewater a day into Wivenhoe Dam, but it emerged yesterday orders have only recently been placed for a crucial component.

The hi-tech membranes, which filter ultra-fine contaminants from wastewater, are taking up to two years to deliver to some treatment plants interstate and overseas because of the massive global demand.

The Government is building advanced treatment plants at Bundamba, west of Brisbane, and at Gibson Island and Luggage Point, near the mouth of the Brisbane River.

They will produce recycled water which will be pumped to power plants, industrial users and to Wivenhoe for household use.

A source close to the project confirmed orders for some of the membranes were placed only a few months ago but were needed by June 2008.

Another source said the Government had been forced to engage three overseas suppliers because no single one could deliver all the membranes in time.

Infrastructure Minister Anna Bligh rejected suggestions the project could be delayed and said the Government had ensured lead times were as long as possible.

However, Tweed Shire Council, in northern NSW, has still not received membranes for its water treatment plant despite placing an order in 2005.

Tweed water engineer Anthony Burnham said the components were "scarce as hen's teeth".

"Demand is high and there is a limited number of suppliers," he said.

It was possible the Government might be able to negotiate a faster turnaround because of the scale of its order, but the source admitted he was worried.

Ms Bligh's office released a statement saying the Government was negotiating with its partners on the final scope of the treatment plants.

"We need to ensure on-time delivery and value for money for taxpayers," it said.

The statement went on to claim the Government and its partners were "in constant contact with membrane suppliers/manufacturers" and that "production capacity for these components has been secured".

However, the Government's water infrastructure consultants, Evans and Peck, stated in a recent report projects like the Western Corridor scheme normally took five to seven years

Ms Bligh, who inspected work at the Gibson Island plant yesterday, said "teams are pulling out all the stops and on some sites going around the clock. They know we are in a race against time".

Opposition Leader Jeff Seeney said the unrealistic completion date would increase the chance of errors.

"I can't find anything like it built in the world in this timeframe. It is less than half the time required," he said.

Murray Valley Standard

Rain does little to benefit irrigators

Rains that have benefited broad acre farmers in the past week will do little to benefit local irrigators, says SA Murray Irrigators president Ian Zadow.

Farmers' debt rises

Murraylands farmers are facing record debt levels this year but rural lenders say its hard to draw a direct link to the drought.

12

Leave Mallee aquifer alone: Pederick

Memembr for Hammond has issued a statement saying he caterorically does not support the transfer of groundwater from the Mallee wells aquifer to bolster dwindling River Murray levels after recent comments by Independent MP Bob Such that the reserves of wateer in the aquifer were hugh and it could be piped to the River Murray as a "one-off" to ease the current crisis. **What a stupid idea, Bob.**

FarmOnLand**Federal Govt postpones water meeting with VFF**

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) has questioned the federal government's commitment to gaining the full support of Victoria for the \$10 billion Murray-Darling water plan.

The organization's president Simon Ramsay has raised his concerns after the government postponed a meeting that was scheduled with the VFF for today.

Staff from Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull's department were due to meet with VFF members to discuss the government's plan to take control of the Murray-Darling basin.

But Mr Turnbull postponed the meeting on Wednesday night and did not immediately reschedule.

Victoria is the only Basin state that has not signed over its constitutional water powers to the Commonwealth.

Mr Ramsay said the postponing of the meeting suggests the government is not serious about getting Victoria's full support before they continue with the water plan.

"Our organisation is of the view that there is not serious commitment by the Federal Government to allow this plan to continue with full support from Victoria," Mr Ramsay said.

"Don't put deadlines in our (VFF) face that we have to meet certain commitments, when they (government) are not willing to actually come and meet around the table."

Mr Turnbull said he postponed the meeting because his officials needed time to prepare for a meeting to discuss the draft legislation of the water plan with the Victorian and other state governments.

"We very politely suggested to the VFF that it would be more constructive if our officials got ready for the meeting on Friday and then we met with the VFF again early next week," Mr Turnbull said.

"We are not in a position that we have to go to every meeting to which we are summoned by the Victorian Farmers Federation.

"People who are polite and courteous in the way they do business recognise that you have to fit in with the timing and commitments of others." SOURCE: AAP and *FarmOnline*.

Federal water takeover faces Qld resistance too

AgForce is urging Premier Peter Beattie not to allow Queensland to become a participant in the national takeover of the Murray Darling Basin, until the Federal Government provides farmers with assurances that it will not meter stock and domestic water bores.

AgForce water spokesman, Ian Burnett, says AgForce holds grave fears that stock and domestic bore

metering could be the next area to be targeted by the Commonwealth.

"Despite numerous letters and phone calls, we still cannot get any response from the Federal Government regarding its original announcement that it would provide some funding to cover the cost of metering stock and domestic bores," he said.

"Although we have received verbal assurances that this statement was in fact a mistake, they have refused to provide this assurance in writing and we have been left in the dark.

"AgForce is completely opposed to any metering of stock and domestic bores regardless of whether funding is allocated."

Mr Burnett said currently in Queensland only irrigation from bores was required to be metered.

"The National Water Commission, the Queensland Government and agricultural groups all know that trying to meter for stock and domestic usage is completely impractical and far too expensive to implement – why does the Federal Government think differently?" he said.

Mr Burnett said that water used for stock and domestic purposes was negligible, however, AgForce does support new applications for stock and domestic bores to be monitored by the State Government so there was no risk of overuse.

"Any plan to meter for stock and domestic water use is complete overkill and makes no practical, economic or environmental sense," he said.

Mr Burnett said AgForce would take its concerns direct to Federal Minister for the Environment and Water Resources Malcolm Turnbull and seek written assurances from him in a special meeting in Canberra next Thursday.

SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*, weekly rural newspaper, posting news updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

Feed crisis worsens: \$1m of hay destroyed in SA fire

About 3500 tonnes of hay valued at about \$1 million was destroyed in a hayshed fire at Freeling, SA, on Tuesday night.

13

Australian Fodder Industry Association executive officer, Colin Peace, said it was a devastating tragedy for the industry.

"We need this hay more than at any other time," he said.

"Feed is absolutely critical. It doesn't just help keep the domestic market ticking over but also our export markets.

"We are running on an oily rag as it is."

SOURCE: Extract from the May 3 issue of *Stock Journal*, SA's weekly rural newspaper.

Avocado crop triumphs over drought

Australia is producing its biggest avocado crop ever this year despite the drought, according to chief executive officer of Avocados Australia, Anthony Allen.

He said other fresh fruit and vegetable products were suffering from the devastating effects of the drought.

"We have gone from producing 28,000 to 40,000 tonnes per year in just five years, an increase of 42 per cent," he said.

He said avocados were a "treasure trove" of nutrients and the Guinness Book of Records listed them as the most nutritious fruit in the world.

Australia's avocado industry comprises about 1200 growers in all mainland states and is worth about \$100 million a year at farm gate and \$375m at retail level.

Smallest wine grape harvest in seven years

The 2007 Australian wine-grape harvest is all but complete, with a harvest of 1.34 million tonnes expected, the smallest since 2000.

The harvest estimate from the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation is based on a survey of wine companies covering approximately 85pc of the industry's wine-grape crush.

If the current estimate eventuates, the 2007 harvest will be 29pc or 560,000t lower than last year and will give Australian winemakers around 400 million litres less wine this year than last year.

AWBC estimates the white crush to have fallen by 17pc to 702,000t, 52pc of the total crush.

Reds were harder hit, with the crush falling 39pc to 639,000t, 48pc of the total crush.

The red share of the total crush is the lowest since 1999.

The reason for the production drops lies squarely with the season, which AWBC says has reduced yields (tonnes per hectare) to a 30-year low.

The national vineyard this season was subjected to drought, frost, bushfire taint and a widespread rain episode in mid-January.

As a consequence, yields in 2007 are expected to be around 28pc down on the average of the last six years, and the lowest since 1976.

The yield reduction this year will be only marginally offset by an expected increase in bearing areas of around 2pc. This follows at least five years of subdued planting in the industry.

SOURCE: AWBC and a Rural Press publication.

News.com.au

Voters offered a new 'green bribe'

Government looking to trump Labor's green loan plan

Rebates for solar energy expected to be doubled

Greens say move is a 'bribe after years of inaction'

THE Howard Government is looking to trump Labor's green credentials with this year's Budget, but saving the earth will be up to households, not big business.

Rebates for green technology like solar panels are expected to be increased, but a carbon tax or emissions trading scheme for polluting industries is still off the table.

The Australian Greens predict the Government will try to play catch-up on climate change this year after more than a decade of scepticism.

"Having failed to mention climate change in last year's budget, Mr Costello's going to have it brimful of solar panels, water tanks, solar hot water systems, insulation," Greens leader Bob Brown said this week.

"Piles of things as a bribe to Australian voters after 11 years of not only inaction but hostility to the Greens and others advocating this direction."

One such "bribe" is expected to be an increased rebate for the installation of solar energy technology in houses, schools and public buildings.

The current \$4000 rebate is likely be doubled and – unlike Labor's green loan scheme – will not need to be paid back, Fairfax newspapers reported.

The Government is also expected to create rebates for green technologies included in Labor's loan plan, including rainwater tanks and grey water recycling systems.

Treasurer Peter Costello admitted climate change was a key issue but dismissed the introduction of drastic measures in favour of a slow-and-steady approach.

14

"It's a very important issue, but it's a long-term one," Mr Costello said last month.

"You've got to start with measures which over the course of 30 years will start making an impact."

Environmental groups want the Government to impose restrictions on polluting industries as well as encouraging households to adopt green technologies. Greenpeace Australia has called for a carbon

tax set at a rate of \$35 per tonne.

"This is considerably below the social cost of \$109 calculated by the Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change and should be seen as a preliminary pricing step," the organisation said.

Greenpeace and the Australian Conservation Foundation want the Government to end subsidies to the fossil-fuel industry and introduce a renewable energy target of 25 per cent by 2020.

The Minerals Council of Australia has opposed a "costly" emissions trading scheme and instead called for increased funding for research and development into low-emission technologies. A Government taskforce on emissions trading is due to report to Prime Minister John Howard at the end of this month. *With AAP*

The Australia

Farmers tell Turnbull he's on his own

Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull has lost the support of the farmers group he needs to have onside to convince Victorian Premier Steve Bracks to sign the Commonwealth's \$10billion takeover of the Murray-Darling system.

The Victorian Farmers Federation accused Mr Turnbull of cancelling a vital meeting yesterday and questioned the federal Government's commitment to its own plan.

Mr Turnbull hit back, saying it made sense to cancel the meeting and accusing the VFF of threatening to attack him in the media and making "rancorous" and discourteous comments.

The spat between the two is a setback for the commonwealth because the Victorian Government - which has misgivings of its own - will not back the plan without the VFF supporting it.

Mr Bracks, the only state leader holding out against the Howard plan, seized on the rift between the VFF and Mr Turnbull to portray the commonwealth plan as half-baked.

He agreed that, given the latest setback, there might not be agreement on the plan before the federal election, expected in October or November.

"The VFF have staked their claim and made it very clear they are not satisfied with the draft legislation," Mr Bracks said.

"The federal Government is saying (that) by the end of May they will have more detailed legislation (but) they haven't yet determined entitlements, caps, the allocation of the \$10billion and, of course, the transfers of powers or responsibilities."

Mr Bracks relished the shift of focus from his own water woes - Melbourne's storage levels dipped below 30 per cent - and accused the commonwealth of misunderstanding his stance.

"I don't think the Prime Minister has got it, really," he said.

"I think he thinks in terms of the political outcomes all the time. I think he thinks Victoria is doing this to get political advantage. It's not about politics; we have a fundamental policy difference."

VFF president Simon Ramsay said he doubted the commonwealth's commitment to its own plan after Mr Turnbull cancelled the meeting.

"Don't put deadlines in our (VFF) face that we have to meet certain commitments, when they are not willing to actually come and meet around the table," Mr Ramsay said.

Mr Turnbull said he had politely told the VFF it made more sense for him to meet farmers next week after commonwealth and state officials had met.

"The VFF's response, as you know, was to say that if we did not meet within the time they insisted they would attack us in the media, which they then proceeded to do," Mr Turnbull said.

"I don't think that's either a courteous, businesslike or constructive way to conduct discussions between a farmers' organisation and a government.

"There's been a few rancorous comments made in the media by individuals but we have got to rise above that. We will meet with the VFF early next week if they are available, and we will be much better informed because we will have had a meeting with all of the states."

Irrigators across the border are frustrated by the stalemate, saying they don't want to be branded as on side with the VFF.

"We don't want to get in a slanging match with the VFF, but there is nothing new in their concerns," one insider said.

NSW Irrigators Council chief executive Doug Miell said his concerns, similar to those of Victoria, had been allayed weeks ago.

Warning over recycled water

A proposal to recycle Canberra's sewage for human consumption could lead to a catastrophic contamination event, according to a leading microbiologist.

15

But the nation's leaders would be happy to drink treated, used water and the local water authority says it can safely supply the capital.

The Stanhope Government is investigating a \$350million proposal to treat Canberra's sewage and place it back in an enlarged Cotter Dam.

An independent expert panel will report back to government by mid-year and its chair says recycled water is generally safe.

But even if the treatment works were built, it might be rarely used, the water authority, ACTEW,

said.

Peter Collignon, from the Australian National University, said there was no need to put the community at risk of illness when safer, cheaper alternatives were available.

ACTEW said all other options had been investigated and that reliable systems were in place to protect supplies.

Prime Minister John Howard and the Opposition back recycled water for drinking where communities support it.

Toxicologist Ian Falconer, head of the investigating panel, said he had received generally positive responses from locals. "I am not prepared to sign off on the Canberra proposal until I have examined all of the detail, but I don't buy bottled water in London just because the tap water has been through five sewage plants," he said.

UN gives 2015 deadline on greenhouse gases

NATIONS must get greenhouse gases to start declining by 2015 to avoid the most destructive effects of climate change, UN experts said today in a new set of global warming recommendations.

Their report came after a week of marathon negotiations as countries haggled over recommendations on how to tackle global warming, which saw China lead efforts to blame rich nations for the crisis. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the UN's leading authority on the subject, said greenhouse gas emissions should peak in 2015 and then fall by 50 to 85 per cent below 2000 levels. That would limit global warming to 2C-2.4C, generally recognised by experts as the threshold at which some of the most extreme impacts of climate change will begin.

Adelaide Advertiser

11 months of record lows for Murray

Inflows into the River Murray system have been at record lows for 11 consecutive months latest figures show. In April the flow was 40G1 compared with 70G1 last April. **But the Minister for the River Murray still denies we need more severe restrictions, it will be good when she comes back to reality.**

INDONESIA: Quick forest destruction

Indonesia had the fastest pace of deforestation in the World between 2000-05, with an area of forest equal to 300 soccer pitches destroyed every hour Greenpeace said yesterday.

5th

The Australian

Emissions deadline gone: UN

It may already be too late to cut global greenhouse emissions to safe levels, with the latest report from the world's leading climate change policy-makers flagging the need for massive and sustained reductions for the rest of the century.

The third report from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says emissions should have peaked by now if the world stood any chance of containing global temperatures within 2C of pre-industrial levels.

Instead, emissions are rising, driven by rapid growth in developing economies, and global cuts of 50-85 per cent are now needed by mid-century to approach the 2C target.

The federal Government has not set any target for cutting greenhouse emissions but Kevin Rudd wants emissions cut by 60per cent by 2050.

This suggests technologies are needed to start removing greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, rather than simply cutting emissions. The IPCC report estimates the cost of such deep cuts at up to 5.5per cent of global GDP by 2050, which translates to a cut of about 0.12 per cent each year, although these figures could vary considerably for different countries and sectors.

Week-long negotiations by the working group finalising the report in Bangkok managed to avert contentious references to the role of fast-growing economies such as China and India in the climate change debate and the discussion of nuclear power as a solution.

Eventually nuclear and clean coal technology were identified as potential solutions, but they were not formally endorsed by the IPCC as part of an estimated \$US20trillion (\$24trillion) in new energy infrastructure needed by 2030.

It is estimated that renewable energy will make up as much as 35 per cent of world electricity supply by 2030, with nuclear estimated at 18 per cent, subject to constraints relating to safety, waste and proliferation.

The IPCC report was carefully worded not to direct countries to any targets or policy solutions, paving the way for a global agreement to be thrashed out through the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, which will meet again in Bali this year.

Australia's lead author of the report, CRE International vice-president Brian Fisher, said the world faced extremely tough negotiations to find effective solutions to the challenges identified.

"This is the most difficult negotiation you can imagine for an economic issue like this. This is much more difficult than a trade negotiation," he said.

"To solve this problem you must have the full suite of technologies available. If you exclude any technologies, you have the potential to drive the cost up."

Yesterday's report follows two others released by the IPCC this year. They warned unabated greenhouse gas emissions could drive global temperatures up as much as 6C by 2100, triggering a

surge in ocean levels, destruction of vast numbers of species, economic devastation in tropical zones and mass human migrations.

Coming out of tough overnight negotiations, which ran until 4.30am yesterday, delegates said the negotiations were smoother than expected, averting a bid led by China to seek a greater build-up of greenhouse gases in the environment before action would be taken.

Australian atmospheric scientist Geoff Love, vice-chairman of the IPCC bureau managing the report's release, said the absence of Saudi Arabia from the Bangkok meeting appeared to help progress negotiations.

"Nobody has any idea at all (why they did not attend) but this made the meeting less polarised," Dr Love said.

Along with China and the US, Saudi Arabia had fiercely disputed wording of the previous IPCC report, Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability, released early last month.

The disagreement led to disputes, delay of the report and allegations that the three nations wanted to water down the scientific findings for political purposes. There were widespread predictions that similar in-fighting would lumber this week's discussions.

Experts evaporate in shifting field

Australia's fast-growing climate-change industry is facing a skills shortage as businesses look to manage their energy demands better and understand the risks and opportunities arising from a cap on greenhouse gases.

The sudden demand for this service sector - akin to what happened in the dot-com boom - means environment firms cannot find enough suitably qualified experts.

Recruiting by Energetics, the country's biggest consulting firm on energy efficiency, has swollen its staff to 70 employees. The number is limited only by the availability of talent, particularly in science and electrical and mechanical engineering.

Human resources manager Annie Carapetian said Energetics was so concerned about losing staff it insisted on a no-poaching clause in contracts even though most fees have not increased and salaries are modest in comparison with other professions.

Last year the firm recruited Tanya Fielder almost a year before she finished her post-graduate degree in environmental management. Ms Fielder toured the world for 15 years as a classical pianist before deciding to return to Australia to work in a practical way to address climate change.

"I am already project managing really interesting jobs that are cutting edge in nature and which, given my previous lack of experience in the field, is truly amazing," Ms Fielder said.

Gavin Gilchrist set up Big Switch Projects in 2000 to improve the environmental performance of buildings and has switched in the past 18 months from aggressive marketing to turning work away

because of the shortage of energy auditors.

"What we need is an energy-efficiency industry plan," Mr Gilchrist said.

The sustainability reporting manager at KPMG Consulting, Gary Veale, said the firm was looking at recruiting overseas to fill its shortage of qualified environmental experts.

Couriermai.com

Our desal 'triples' WA price

Western Australia paid only \$367 million for a desalination plant producing the same amount of water as Queensland's \$1.12 billion Tugun facility.

And Queensland could have struck a similar deal if it had started the project earlier, desalination engineer Gary Crisp of the Water Corporation of Western Australia said yesterday.

Most of the tripling of cost was due to Queensland waiting too long to start the project, he said.

Mr Crisp said Perth residents would pay \$1.16 per kilolitre for their desalinated water – while southeast Queensland residents face \$2.40 to \$2.60 per kilolitre.

Since level 5 restrictions went into effect last month, the region's average consumption has held steady at about 600 million litres a day.

The Queensland Water Commission wants usage kept to 550 million litres of water a day, or 140 litres per person.

QWC spokesman Gerald Tooth said Brisbane and 11 other shires under level 5 restrictions faced a grim reality – they could be nearly out of water in 2009 if heavy rain did not fall in dam catchments. State projections keeping the dams above 5 per cent of capacity are based on residents reducing consumption to 140 litres a day.

17

Perth started work two years ago on its 144 million litre-a-day desalination plant at Kwinana, while Brisbane debated water restrictions.

Kwinana is finished and now at full production.

"We got in nice and early. Now there are many huge plants being built around the world and there is a high demand for workers," Mr Crisp said. "Seventy per cent of the cost of the plant is materials and labour."

While there were some differences, the Kwinana and Tugun plants were comparable.

Shaun Cox, director of Gold Coast Water, said timing had less to do with the higher pricetag than many extras at the Tugun plant, which was due to be at peak production in January, 2009.

The Tugun site required remediation and the plant required reservoirs, water pre-treatment, access roads and a more complex intake.

Tugun would also have a visitor centre and had been aesthetically designed for a city environment.

Adelaide Advertiser

Pulp mill 'disaster' for ailing Murray

Pollution from the planned Penola pulp mill will have a "disastrous" effect on the River Murray, a climate expert says.

Climate consultant Aron Gingis managed a team of scientists who researched the effects of the Tamar Valley pulp mill in Tasmania.

Mr Gingis said the pulp mill there had had a devastating impact, and that the situation here would be "even worse".

He said inflows could be reduced by 10 million megalitres. Inflows to the River Murray are already at record lows.

Mr Gingis said pollution from the \$1.5 billion pulp mill would affect clouds that pass overhead, making them rain over the Pacific Ocean instead of over the Snowy Mountains and the Victorian Alps.

"This means there will be no runoff, or it will be so reduced that nothing will end up going into the Murray River," he said.

"I predict that the problems will be so substantial that the pulp mill will have to be shut down."

Mr Gingis said internationally renowned scientist Professor Daniel Rosenfeld, from Israel's Hebrew University, had proven air pollution suppressed rain. His findings were published last year in Science.

The clouds that pass over the area normally then go on to rain on the mountain slopes in Victoria.

But if the mill goes ahead as planned, Mr Gingis said the emissions would mix with these clouds and reduce the size of the cloud particles so they cannot produce rain.

The clouds will travel to the ocean before the water inside them coalesce enough to produce rain.

"In the Tamar Valley . . . they will need to shut down the pulp mill or relocate to Launceston," Mr Gingis said. "In Penola there are even bigger problems. It will be a disaster."

Under the original proposal by developer Protavia, a smaller mill was to be built with a sister

development over the border in Victoria.

Developer Protavia announced in April that one larger pulp mill would be built in the state's South East.

Local residents are taking Supreme Court action to prevent the mill being built.

Salt Water leaking into the Murray

Swalt water pouring back into the river through leaking barrages causing extremely high salinity levels just before the Murray flows into the sea, rendering unusable water used for stock.

Stabilising emissions 'is affordable'

Australia has been urged to speed up its response to 'climate change' after a major report found tackling global warming is affordable and achievable.

Eyre gets wind power

Wind turbines which generate enough power for up to 25,000 homes have been connected to the electricity network on Eyre Peninsular.

Warming drives wolves to the door

Global warming has sent maruading wolves into an Alaskan hamlet, killed Norwegian reindeer with unlikely parasites and might even spur suicide among Inuit youth, Artic leaders say.

6th

The Australian

Our Stern' in for a fight

The policy and strategic flaws of the Howard Government have been exposed this week with the appointment by ALP leader Kevin Rudd of Australian National University economics professor Ross Garnaut to produce Australia's version of the Stern report. This is what John Howard should have done a year ago.

Howard's refusal to investigate the optimal solution to climate change on Australia is a blunder that will haunt him. As a public policy and market economist of global status, Garnaut was the ideal candidate to define an Australian market-based solution.

18

Yes, Howard commissioned Ziggy Switkowski to report on the nuclear option. But that was to serve his specific tactic on nuclear energy. Howard has not commissioned an inquiry that deals with the effect of climate change, our best response and how Australia promotes a global solution.

This is Garnaut's brief. It comes after the Howard Government recently rebuffed a request from the ALP states to conduct such an inquiry. Rudd wants to reproduce the Stern report for two reasons: to establish in the Australian context that action on climate change is an economic necessity and to entrench climate change policy as Labor's terrain. This is a serious policy threat to the Coalition, with Rudd acting as de facto prime minister. The certainty is that Garnaut's report, due in September next year after a June draft for discussion, will become the Australian blueprint. If Rudd is PM it will shape his policy. If Howard is re-elected it becomes a climate change policy pressure on him.

Remember that Garnaut as Bob Hawke's adviser argued for the float of the Australian dollar and lower tariffs, that he is a free-trader versed in agriculture economics and a specialist on Asia-Pacific economies, having served as ambassador to China in the late 1980s. As with Nicholas Stern, he has a pen that can dramatise a policy concept.

"I believe the analogy is with the protection debate of the 1970s and 1980s," Garnaut said of climate change in an interview with Inquirer. "I was in the engine room of that debate. The argument made against trade liberalisation was 'where will the jobs come from' with a quarter of a million jobs in textiles affected by tariff cuts. The answer was that new jobs came from a competitive Australian economy and from the demand and supply side."

Garnaut doesn't make the obvious point; his argument is a frontal assault on Howard's insistence that strong Australian action on climate challenge will threaten resource-sector jobs.

As with tariffs a generation ago, climate change demands a restructuring of the economy. Garnaut will apply the market principles that guided his advice on trade policy. He says Australia has a "significant role" in the solution. This flows from its tradition as a multilateral power and its public policy skills. Beyond this, Australia has three distinct pluses: it is America's greenhouse ally; it has close ties with China; and it has deep agricultural expertise.

"It is relatively easy to define the economic and environmental elements of the best solution," he says. "The difficulty is about how you get there. The best solution is to have global limits to emissions allocated among countries with each either meeting these limits or buying emissions permits from other countries."

Garnaut's inquiry will have a secretariat provided by the Bracks Government in Victoria and he will have input from the ALP states. He is impressed by Stern but not uncritical, saying he thinks Stern "over-egged the pudding".

Some of the criticisms of Stern "have validity" and Garnaut will re-examine Stern's assumptions. He queries the scientific consensus accepted by Stern; yet, offsetting this, he insists that Stern, with his European outlook, has "hugely underestimated" future global growth, implying an underestimating of future emissions.

Garnaut says Australia has a deeper interest in solving climate change than "any other developed nation" because of higher cost from an agricultural sector exposed to temperatures now "at their upper limit".

"Given this fact it is unlikely the international community will be tolerant of us being free riders," he says.

“Australia has to carry its proportionate share among developed countries. Otherwise we will not be credible.”

In relation to Australia’s tactics, Garnaut is an optimist.

“On greenhouse, we are close to the US because we have been its only ally,” he says.

“For Australia to change its mind and feed that back into the US would be far more influential than Europe and Japan beating their same old drums. It is an opportunity for Australia, with the political mood changing in the US.”

Garnaut, similar to Rudd, sees the chance for Australia to engage China on greenhouse policy. He says it is time for developing nations to move on climate change and argues that China has begun this process.

“I have discussed this with people in China for the past 16 years,” he says.

“Next year China’s emissions will probably exceed the US and China has started to take the problem seriously. Its officials have contemplated over the next 20 years reducing the intensity of China’s emissions by 40 per cent. This is an inadequate number because it is likely China’s GDP will increase fivefold in this time.

“But the important thing is that China is now focused on this as a policy problem. It is willing to accept limits on emissions because it has dreadful regional problems affecting hundreds of millions of people.”

However, Garnaut’s most subtle and lethal message involves a warning to the Labor Party. It is about the looming conflict between market-based and industry-based solutions. This will become the dominant struggle in greenhouse policy and is a re-run of old ideological battles. Garnaut slams government winner picking of preferred low-emission technologies.

“Given the rapid technological change that characterises our economy, I don’t think government officials in Canberra or Sydney or Melbourne have a clue about what will be the successful technology in 20 years,” he says.

“We need to get the framework right. That means letting the winners emerge in the marketplace.”

Garnaut says there is a legitimate place for subsidies in relation to research and development but stresses the need for discipline.

“Australia has a lot of exciting options for low cost, low-energy production,” he says. “But it is very hard to predict which alternatives will end up playing major roles in the climate change solution.”

These comments are highly sensible and highly unpopular. Garnaut’s framework brings him into conflict with the ALP premiers, the climate change lobby and much of the media, notably the ABC, whose coverage is dominated by a sustained indignation at government for its reluctance to offer

special deals, tax breaks and old-fashioned rorts to a variety of alternative energy industries and companies. So much for public responsibility.

Garnaut's report will involve a showdown within Labor over the policy response to global warming, similar to the market v protectionist struggles in Australia's past.

Of course, using Garnaut's framework, Howard's nuclear option will struggle in Australia. "From what we know, nuclear starts a fair way behind in Australia on economic grounds," Garnaut says.

He warns it would be a mistake to assume nuclear was part of the solution and to subsidise the industry on this basis.

Herald Sun

Bracks meets the Governor

Steve Bracks met Californian Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in Los Angeles yesterday to cement a green partnership between Victoria and the US state.

The pair discussed ways to deal with drought and greenhouse gas emissions, then signed a memorandum of understanding between the two states for collaboration on climate change action.

Mr Bracks said he hoped the partnership would enable Victoria to join California as a world leader in environmentally-friendly policy and technology.

"This agreement is about sharing information, sharing ideas on how to tackle climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and making sure we can get the best practice around the world," Mr Bracks said.

"We know in Australia that California is a leader. That's why I'm keen to sign this agreement and take that leadership back to Australia and our states in order to convince our Commonwealth Government of the same arrangements."

Governor Schwarzenegger said the partnership between the two states was "very important".

"I want to compliment Premier Bracks for being a great environmentalist because we have to take care of our world; we have to fight global warming," he said.

"If sometimes the federal government is a little slower than the states are, then we have to step up to the plate and we have to create the leadership -- and then eventually the federal government picks up on it and carries it on."

Mr Bracks said he believed the Australian Government should cap greenhouse gas emissions.

"Our state of Victoria and NSW and Queensland have all signed on to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and having a training scheme to bring down emissions by about 60 per cent by 2050," he said.

Japan promises \$121m for clean energy

Japan has pledged \$US100 million (\$121 million) to support clean energy projects in Asia, as rapid economic growth brings rising emissions of greenhouse gases.

Japan will also offer loans totalling up to \$US2 billion (\$2.4 billion) over five years to promote sustainable development and measures to combat climate change, Finance Minister Koji Omi told the Asian Development Bank's annual meeting.

"With Asia's role in the world economy growing, CO2 (carbon dioxide) emissions from Asia are having an increasing environmental impact," he said.

"At present, Asia accounts for about 30 per cent of global energy consumption," he said, adding that the region's energy use would double by 2030 from current levels.

"More efficient use of energy and the reduction of CO2 emissions in Asia are necessary for achieving sustainable growth not only in the region, but also in the world," Mr Omi said.

The ADB said on Friday it would invest \$US900 million (\$1.09 billion) in clean energy projects in 2007 and slightly more in the following two years, with the priority on China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Vietnam.

But the development bank came under attack from non-governmental campaigners led by Greenpeace, which said that a large portion of the ADB's energy financing was still being channelled into smoke-belching fossil-fuelled power.

"The bank must end the obvious contradiction of saying they want to fight climate change, while supporting coal, the most climate-damaging of energy technologies," Greenpeace's Athena Ballesteros said.

20

Sunday Mail

A cost we have to bear

Water Security Minister Karlene maywald has warned that water charges could rise up to \$300 per household per year if we were to build a water desalination in Adelaide.

7th

FarmOnline

Libs want to dam WA's mighty Fitzroy

The WA Liberal Party is not letting the water issues of the State rest with its leader, Paul Omodei, announcing last week a plan to build a dam on the West Kimberly's Fitzroy River to establish a food basket for the nation.

Mr Omodei said he wanted to create a new agriculture industry in the WA North West by damming the river to develop an irrigation system similar to the Ord River scheme.

He said Australia faced a food production crisis because of the poor state of the Murray Darling basin.

He said a new agricultural industry on the Fitzroy, in addition to the existing scheme on the Ord River, would make WA the nation's largest provider of food.

"WA already produces most of the nation's wealth through our booming mining industry," Mr Omodei said.

"We could put ourselves in a position to produce the nation's food.

"A food bowl in the Fitzroy Valley would create massive economic spin-offs for the local community including new jobs and opportunities for indigenous people."

Mr Omodei said farmers hit by the drought conditions of the eastern states or the drier areas of WA could be attracted to the Northwest due to the exciting new opportunities it presented for those willing to live off the land.

But there was no mention of contributing to the establishment or relocation costs associated with such a move.

"WA must use the abundance of water in our north to tackle the food and water shortages facing the nation," Mr Omodei said.

"This is not a pipe-dream, it is our responsibility."

SA Cabinet backs Fleurieu Peninsula drought bid

The South Australian Cabinet has given its support for an application to the Federal Government to extend the current Fleurieu Peninsula Exceptional Circumstances (EC) drought boundary to include the Mount Lofty Ranges.

SA Minister for Agriculture, Rory McEwen, said that while the Mount Lofty Ranges as a whole was not as drought affected as many other regions in his State, there were a number of producers who had been significantly impacted, particularly in the dairy industry.

Including the Mount Lofty Ranges in the Fleurieu Peninsula region would enable those producers in financial difficulty as a result of the drought to apply for EC support.

"The SA Government has received a letter from the Fleurieu Peninsula Drought Response Group requesting the boundary extension," Mr McEwen said.

"We are pleased to give the State Government's backing to this proposal.

"The SA Government looks forward to a timely response from the Federal Government."

The Australian

Sports grounds rapidly turning into dust bowls

For Peter Ingram and other parents barracking from the sidelines, the easiest way to follow sport is to follow the dust.

The Brisbane father of two junior footballers is among thousands of parents who have watched in recent weeks as the playing fields in southeast Queensland have turned to dust.

And with no rain in sight the situation is about to get worse.

"The football season has now picked up and without the ability to water, the grounds are just getting chewed up from week to week," Mr Ingram said yesterday.

"They're just deteriorating at a rapid pace at the moment."

Sports clubs are allowed to water their fields for one eight-hour stint a week.

Some are carting water in to try to maintain enough grass on the fields to minimise injuries.

With 45 junior clubs in Brisbane alone, the Queensland Rugby League said it was monitoring the condition of its fields.

Competitions and operations manager Bill Hunter said the QRL had closed two of its fields and had been asked by two clubs not to schedule games on two others in a bid to save water.

"We're monitoring some grounds because a lot of them are very, very hard," Mr Hunter said.

"But at the moment everyone's coping ... and we're all working together to try to get us through till it rains."

He said no serious injuries had been reported as a result of the hard grounds.

But Mr Ingram said that as the ground got harder contact sports such as rugby union would have to stop, leaving a gap for soccer to make its mark.

"I just can't see how they can continue; it's going to be the end of the rugby season as we know it for junior sport."

After kicking a soccer ball around a dusty oval with his brother Andy, 8, yesterday, Matt Ingram, 12, was more philosophical.

"In a way it gets easier and in a way it gets harder to play," he said of the dry ground.

Why easier? "Because the ball goes a lot faster.

Consumption well above targets despite restrictions

Sporting fields, golf courses and school ovals are being closed as the drought tightens its grip on southeast Queensland, with water consumption well in excess of the level-five restrictions target.

As the Beattie Government launched a \$2 million advertising campaign yesterday aimed at slashing water usage in southeast Queensland, it came under fire from water experts over plans to sell eight billion litres a year in the state's far west. Bidding is expected to be fierce when allocations for water from the Warrego River are auctioned next month.

In Brisbane yesterday, Queensland Water Commission chairwoman Elizabeth Nosworthy said southeast Queensland residents were consuming an average of 153 litres a day. Ms Nosworthy said it was essential that consumption be reduced to the level-five target of 140 litres if water in dams was to last to the end of next year, when recycled and desalinated water would become available.

"If we don't get to that target, we could be down to 1 per cent capacity," Ms Nosworthy said. The dams are currently at 19 per cent capacity.

Sports Federation of Queensland president Peter Cummiskey said sporting fields were beginning to close. "The grounds are getting harder and we're reaching the point where they're not playable," Mr Cummiskey said.

Ms Nosworthy said school ovals and golf courses had also begun closing. "We have done all we can to help them," she said.

"It is unfortunate that as the drought continues, these are some of the things that are going to be hit the hardest."

Ms Nosworthy said she was optimistic that the target for level-five restrictions introduced last month would be met. Daily water usage was down almost 40 per cent on the pre-drought figure of 277 litres per person.

University of Southern Queensland climatologist Roger Stone said heavy rain could fall in the state's southeast within weeks. Mr Stone said the coolness of the Pacific Ocean was an indication that relief was on the way.

Queensland Water Minister Craig Wallace confirmed that the controversial Warrego River sales in the state's sector of the Murray-Darling Basin would proceed. "Unlike the southern states, we don't over-allocate water in Queensland," Mr Wallace said.

"Queensland makes the smallest call on the water resource available to it in the Murray-Darling Basin."

But National Water Commissioner Peter Cullen said the auctions should be scrapped.

He said people living downstream would have less water as a result of the sales.

Prime Minister John Howard last month announced that the allocations of irrigators in the Murray-Darling Basin would be cut to zero within eight weeks if the drought persisted.

However, Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull said the cancellations applied only to the portion of the basin south of the Menindee Lakes in NSW.

Premier plug for green energy

Weststralian Premier Alan Carpenter has raised the stakes on his anti-nuclear policy, yesterday revealing plans for a \$37 million industry fund to promote the development of wind, solar and geothermal energy options.

The climate change package, four days ahead of the state budget, includes a 20 per cent non-mandatory renewable energy target by 2025 and minimum requirements for sustainable building codes.

Mr Carpenter said the fund demonstrated the Labor Government's view that alternative energy sources were both available and viable. "We will not support the development of nuclear technology in Western Australia ... we don't need it and I don't believe the general community want it," he said.

"We have solar, we have wind, we have bio-energy and we can have, I believe, a very significant contribution from geothermal energy."

Mr Carpenter, with Queensland Premier Peter Beattie, a week ago voted in support of the ALP's decision to lift the 25-year-old ban on new uranium mines, but maintains the mineral will not be mined in Western Australia under a Labor government.

"We've got a clear policy on uranium mining and that is that there's not going to be any," the Premier said.

"I've been explaining that policy ... to industry and the resource sector for years. I don't find industry demanding that they be allowed to mine uranium or they'll take some sort of action against the government."

A key part of the climate change package is a set of codes requiring new-home builders to include plumbing options for alternative water supply and easy grey-water recycling.

The "Five Star Plus" rating is backed up by the Building Industry Code of Australia. Earlier plans for a West Australian version of the controversial building sustainability index BASIX, designed in NSW, have now been dropped in favour of a more industry-friendly code.

Housing Industry Association support for the regulations were contingent on the abolition of BASIX, which the building industry in NSW claims has helped increase the cost of new homes.

"It really is a much more practical way of going about it," HIA West Australian executive director Sheryl Chaffer said yesterday about the new model.

"The five star program ... appears to be modelled up so that it does in fact achieve the same outcomes (as BASIX) but without all the red tape."

The Premier said the new code could in the future halve domestic energy and water consumption at little to no additional long-term cost. "One to three thousand dollars would be the general cost ... for the new requirements," Mr Carpenter said. "Depending on human behaviour, we can get from those changes up to a 50 per cent reduction. On the average bill that will save around \$750 per year."

The HIA said much of the detail on the new building codes was yet to be worked out. This included which lot sizes would require a rainwater tank, a grey-water system and the grey-water approval process from the Health Department. "They aren't clear at this point," Ms Chaffer said.

It was forecast this year that maximum demand for energy in Western Australia would increase by 3.2 per cent or 120 megawatts per year, until 2016.

This was higher than the growth forecast in 2005 and was due in part to the "increasing penetration of air-conditioning".

Turnbull's wife in 'conflict' over water

Lucy Turnbull, the high-profile wife of federal minister Malcolm Turnbull, is at the centre of a conflict-of-interest row over her role as an administrator of the Tweed Shire Council.

Ms Turnbull was one of three administrators when the council agreed to provide information on the water capacity of the Tweed River to a study commissioned by her husband.

The administrators also agreed that the council prepare a report on Tweed River catchment water yields.

Former Tweed Shire mayor Warren Polglase said Ms Turnbull took part in decisions about water management in the shire at the time her husband, as parliamentary secretary for water, was promoting his plan to pump water from northern NSW to southeast Queensland.

"It was totally inappropriate for her to serve as administrator when there was the potential for shire resources to be used in a way which advanced policies being pursued by Malcolm Turnbull," Mr Polglase said.

"She should have resigned as soon as he was appointed a parliamentary secretary."

The Tweed council provided information to a Snowy Mountains Engineering Corporation study commissioned by Mr Turnbull to examine if northern NSW had sufficient capacity to provide water to Queensland.

The study, released last month, concluded that 20,000 megalitres a year could be pumped from a dam on the Tweed to the Gold Coast's Nerang River. The council report on water yields was presented to

the administrators in December. It concluded that existing dams had the capacity to produce 13,750 megalitres a year.

While Ms Turnbull was involved in the council's deliberations concerning water, she is understood to have abstained from voting at meetings on the issue to avoid a conflict of interest.

She resigned as administrator in February following her husband's elevation to cabinet as Water Resources Minister.

Report slams PNG logging

Laws to prevent the illegal logging of rainforests in Papua New Guinea are not being policed and the country's forestry sector is "plagued with serious problems", says a report commissioned by the Somare Government.

In a damning indictment of the logging industry in PNG, the report said it was usual practice for a single government officer to be left to manage vast areas of forest without support.

The report by the International Tropical Timber Council will be presented to the council's annual conference in Port Moresby this week.

Forestry practices in PNG are under scrutiny by the Howard Government, which has committed \$200 million to efforts to stamp out illegal logging in the forests of Australia's neighbours.

The timber council's report, compiled by a team of five experts, undermines repeated claims by the PNG Government and the industry that logging practices are sustainable and in line with international standards.

The report said the PNG National Forest Board had made decisions -- such as extending timber authorities without consulting landowners -- which ignored Forestry Act requirements. "Concern is often raised about the capacity of PNG to monitor and enforce its own laws," the report said.

Government officers responsible for policing forestry operations lacked the facilities to do so.

"Each field officer must attend to an area of hundreds of thousands of hectares with almost no equipment or infrastructure for support."

Officers required to mediate disputes between loggers and landowners could not do so because of personnel shortages and inadequate logistics.

The report said landowners complained constantly about their lack of involvement in forestry decision-making.

It said PNG was losing about half a per cent of its 30 million hectares of forest a year.

Protected areas were not well-defined, with government figures of the area of protected forest

ranging from 500,000ha to 1.6million hectares.

The report said the PNG Forest Authority had a narrow focus on exploiting forest resources for the primary financial benefit of the Government. Concerns had been raised about the paucity of remunerations to landowners from logging.

Concerns had also been expressed about the price-setting monopoly of a single foreign company which controlled as much as 70 per cent of logging.

Monitoring of compliance with PNG's environmental protection laws was inadequate. "The environmental impacts of timber harvesting decisions and operations are poorly addressed and the regulatory framework is not being enforced."

The report said there were significant problems with the transparency of the forestry decision-making process.

There was a "significant dependency" on the logging industry by the PNG Government for infrastructure such as housing, schools, transport and other public services.

On a brighter note, the report said laws governing PNG logging operations were "generally excellent". The problem lay with the capacity of the country to enforce them.

Cloud seeding under spotlight

After fiercely opposing cloud seeding for years, scientists from CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology will meet today with international climate experts in Melbourne for a three-day symposium to review advances in the field.

Cloud seeding boosts rainfall by dispersing small amounts of chemicals, such as silver iodide, into clouds to help form rain drops.

Libs to run on virtue of logging

The Coalition will again make forestry policy a key battleground of the federal election, with plans to link jobs and logging in marginal seats outside Tasmania.

Following analysis of seats where logging could be affected by Labor policies, the Coalition will focus its efforts on Victorian and NSW electorates deemed most "at risk".

Some of the most vulnerable seats, according to Liberal Party numbers, are Lyne, Richmond and Page on the NSW north coast, Eden Monaro on the NSW south coast and Corangamite in the Geelong area of Victoria.

A Liberal Party source said it had gone largely "unremarked" that Labor, at its national conference in Sydney, had pledged to protect "at least 60 per cent of old-growth forests" (increasing to 100 per cent for rare and depleted old-growth), and 90 per cent or more of high-quality wilderness".

Labor environment spokesman Peter Garrett said the Coalition should not be believed.

"This is flimsy politics aimed at diverting attention away from the Government's 11 years of delay, denial and inaction on climate change," he said.

"Labor's platform is consistent with the approach taken by all governments through Regional Forest Agreements."

The agreements are intended to provide for the conservation and sustainable management of native forests.

The Coalition spokesman said the campaign would resonate with rural voters, who would be "most unhappy to see RFAs, which were meant to provide a generation of certainty, reopened under Labor, providing more uncertainty and further job losses".

Labor's pledge to "establish a national system of comprehensive, adequate and representative national parks and reserves" outlined in Mr Garrett's speech to the national conference would be used to fuel this argument.

"It should be noted that this pledge also leaves open the option of locking-up non-old growth forest," the Coalition spokesman said. "Many of these electorates are already seething at the way existing reserves have been left to degenerate into fire bombs, fuelling increasingly massive bushfires summer after summer, spewing millions of tonnes of Co2 into the atmosphere and affecting water resources for decades."

It is understood the theme of the campaign will be that Labor's promised further forest lock-ups are "bad for jobs and bad for the environment".

The Coalition will assert that under Labor, a potential additional 22 per cent of old-growth forests in Tasmania will be available for lock-up.

The Labor platform commits the party to keep the Tasmania Community Forest Agreement, a deal secured by John Howard with the Tasmanian Labor Government after the last election.

Labor promises no overall loss of jobs in the forestry industry but also promises further protection of identified Tasmanian high-conservation-value, old-growth forests, rainforests, and other ecosystems.

Aquifers threatened by buoyant bottled watermarket

Insufficient regulation in the booming bottled water industry could see natural underground resources depleted.

Visiting American researcher and Fulbright scholar Sara Hughes said the "incredible" profits made by water companies should not exclude them from careful water management, particularly in times of drought.

"It's an industry that needs more scrutiny, not just for the environment but also for social impacts," she said.

"It should be something that is happening sustainably, that doesn't self-implode because of a lack of scrutiny and self-regulation.

"Bottled water should be held to the same standards all other water users are held to."

The Australian bottled water market has grown by 42 per cent since 2002.

Ms Hughes studied a case in Michigan where a bottled water company was taken to court over concerns about the impact on local groundwater. "They did everything right according to what was on the books at the time, but some people in the community thought they were having a negative impact on the environment and drawing on downstream levels," she said.

The case forced legislative changes to increase regulation of bottled water companies.

Ms Hughes, who is studying Australian water policy, has been comparing the effects of drought here and in the US.

"What Australia has going for it is it's been able to make the kind of changes California is still stuck on," she said.

"California hasn't made significant changes in its water management system.

"It's starting to do things like water trading and environmental water allocations, but Australia is further along."

Ms Hughes said a US move similar to the commonwealth takeover of the Murray-Darling system seemed unlikely because of recent laws reducing federal power over water.

The Murray-Darling has seen record low inflows over the past 11 months.

Herald Sun

Rain fails to boost stores

Melbourne's water storages have fallen again, dropping another tenth of a per cent despite the last week's rainfall.

The city's catchments were at 29.8 per cent capacity yesterday, with rainfall over the past three days failing to stop the relentless shrinkage.

The 50-year low comes despite Melburnians saving 4.5 billion litres of water in a month under tough stage 3a restrictions.

The greening-up of the city's parks and gardens has masked the fact that not enough rain has fallen across catchment areas.

The Thomson Dam, considered Melbourne's back-up, is at an alarming 17.6 per cent capacity.

The dam accounts for 60 per cent of Melbourne's water capacity, but despite receiving 20mm of rain on Friday and another 1mm overnight on Saturday, it fell another 134 million litres by 8am yesterday.

Storage levels of six of the city's nine reservoirs fell, with the city's water storages shrinking 771 million litres by yesterday, despite water storage levels in the O'Shannassy, Maroondah and Silvan reservoirs increasing after Friday's rain.

Acting Premier and Water Minister John Thwaites confirmed the early autumn showers had failed to have an impact on the city's water stores.

"While the showers over the past fortnight have provided some welcome relief for Melbourne's parks and gardens, we would need to see a significant period of sustained rainfall before we see any real variation in our storage levels," Mr Thwaites said.

The average daily water use for individuals in Melbourne in April was 271 litres -- down from 389 litres each a day in the 1990s, when water restrictions were not in place.

The Government may place the city on stage 4 restrictions by August 1 if autumn and winter rain doesn't eventuate.

Showers are forecast for Melbourne from late today through tomorrow and clearing on Wednesday.

Mr Thwaites praised residents for saving water, saying the result was exceptional.

"It's crucial that households continue saving water as they use 60 per cent of Melbourne's water."

The Government has previously said Melburnians were saving 22 per cent more water than in the 1990s, but Mr Thwaites said yesterday this had increased under stage 3a to 30 per cent savings.

He denied there was any dispute in the Bracks' Government's senior ranks about the best plan for a drought-busting project for Melbourne.

Treasurer John Brumby is thought to favour a \$2 billion, 74km pipeline proposed by irrigators to move water from the Goulburn River to Melbourne, in return for Government spending on irrigation infrastructure.

But Mr Thwaites, who is also Environment Minister, is thought to favour a \$2.3 billion plan to recycle sewerage water from Melbourne and pipe it to the Latrobe Valley power plants, replacing the billions of litres of drinking water used to cool the plants.

Landowner offers land

A Landowner in rural Victoria has volunteered her pastoral land for Australia's first carbon dioxide elimination project. Researchers will begin injecting naturally occurring carbon dioxide 2km beneath the cattle grazing property in September.

The State Government has given \$2 million from this year's Budget to the Australian-first pilot scheme, on top of the \$4 million it has already invested.

The trial, in the tiny Great Ocean Rd township of Nirranda, will determine if carbon dioxide can be stored safely underground.

The method, known as geosequestration or carbon burial, could be a long-term solution to removing CO₂ produced by the oil and coal industry from the atmosphere.

The landowner, in her 70s, has leased her property to the Canberra-based research centre for greenhouse gas technology, CO₂CRC, for an undisclosed fee. Over the next two or three years naturally occurring greenhouse gas will be sucked from a well at nearby Buttress, compressed and piped to the depleted natural gas field under the paddock, and injected in liquid form into sandstone below the surface.

The first well into the storage site was drilled in March.

CO₂CRC chief executive Dr Peter Cook said sandstone was ideal because it was porous and the liquid gas permeated it like a sponge. There is no danger of the CO₂ exploding because it is not flammable and layers of mud will form a natural seal over the cavity, Dr Cook said.

Leakage is a possibility but the gas is only harmful to humans in a confined space.

"We have a good picture of the sub-surface before we start," Dr Cook said. "We knew that area could hold natural gas."

The State Government is considering the Gippsland and Otway Basins as future storage sites.

Storing carbon underground has been embraced by the Labor Party as a way of tackling global warming. British climate change guru Sir Nicholas Stern has also nominated it as an option for coal-energy producers to explore.

The Greens and environmental groups are less enthusiastic, saying its effectiveness had not been proven and the effort should go into cutting emissions rather than storing the gas.

Commercial or research projects are operating in the US, Canada, Norway, Scotland and Algeria but it has not yet been proven that carbon burial can be economically viable.

State Energy Minister Peter Batchelor said the Victorian trial was the most advanced.

Climate change campaigner Tony Mohr, from the Australian Conservation Foundation, said further trials would be needed because Nirranda was testing naturally occurring CO₂ instead of gas produced by industry.

"It is drawing a bit of long bow to suggest this is the pilot plan for clean coal in Australia," Mr Mohr said.

Adelaidenow

Irrigators' hopes dry up

Irrigators appear certain to receive no River Murray water allocations from July 1 because desperately needed rain has not fallen in the eastern states.

Water Security minister Karlene Maywald is expected to make the announcement on next season's water allocations next week.

Zero allocations were predicted in early April, but there was then still a hope that above-average May rains could arrive to produce average flows into the system.

Although good rain fell in the southeast of the country late last month, only average falls were recorded in the Murray-Darling catchments and no significant falls have been forecast for those areas in the next week.

Ms Maywald said, however, there was a good chance water availability would improve as the season progressed and irrigators could receive 15 per cent or more of their allocation in August.

By October, irrigators would have a nine in 10 chance of receiving at least 43 per cent of their allocation, she said.

"It has been assumed that the impact of the very dry conditions experienced over the past few months will persist," she said.

"As a result, these figures should provide a reasonably conservative estimate of the likelihood of improvement."

SA Murray Irrigators chairman Ian Zadow said a 15 per cent allocation would be enough to keep vines and trees alive.

"If that happens to occur, it will certainly be a boost for everybody, but we've got to wait until it happens and it is definitely nothing concrete," he said.

Total water storage at Adelaide's reservoirs is now at 60 per cent of capacity, compared to 56 per cent in early April and 54 per cent at the same time last year.

Run-off from the recent rains and continued pumping from the River Murray has boosted supply.

Meanwhile, Greening Australia will host this year's River Blitz, an annual program run by Landcare to improve the health of one key river system in Australia.

School groups, corporate and community organisations will plant 14,000 local native seedlings at the Paiwalla and Teringie wetlands.

Perthnow

Premier outlines climate vision

Experts will begin preparing WA for a national carbon trading scheme as part of efforts to address climate change announced by the State Government.

Premier Alan Carpenter today outlined an action plan to reduce WA's greenhouse gas emissions to 60 per cent of 2000 levels by 2050, including tougher building rules to be introduced from September 1.

New homes will need to have water- and energy-saving devices aimed at slashing consumption by about 50 per cent and halving household water and energy bills under the "five star plus" building initiative.

In line with a decision in February by Labor premiers to develop a national carbon trading scheme, Mr Carpenter today said a team of experts would be established to prepare the state for a future scheme by 2010.

"It's absolutely imperative that WA has got good engagement on the debate on the national emissions trading scheme," he said.

"There will be a national carbon trading scheme in Australia despite what John Howard may or may not want."

Mr Carpenter said Prime Minister John Howard should accept this was not a "party political" issue and that the states were "genuine" in their desire to take action on climate change.

"I think it is unsettling we still have the PM and his water resources minister resisting what needs to be done," he said.

Mr Carpenter said his policy would deliver water savings of 30 gigalitres - the equivalent of one million backyard swimming pools - and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 129,000 tonnes, the equivalent of taking 30,000 cars off the road.

New houses in WA will be required to have solar or five-star gas hot water systems, water-efficient shower heads and tap fittings in all sinks and basins, water efficient dual-flush toilets and pool blankets for new pools to reduce evaporation rates.

From 2008, new home owners would be required to install plumbing to toilets to allow for an alternative water supply at a later date, plumbing drainage to allow easy recycling of grey water, and an alternative water supply for flushing toilets and for washing machines for single dwellings.

Mr Carpenter said a Low Emission Energy Development fund would be established to promote emission reductions and support technology advancements to cut greenhouse gas emissions, including development of geothermal energy.

Greens MP Paul Llewellyn gatecrashed Mr Carpenter's press conference today, repeatedly interjecting with demands the premier promise to meet him to discuss climate change.

The interruptions led the premier to ask for Mr Llewellyn to be removed from the display home where the event was being held.

“This is the sort of thing that Bill Heffernan and Wilson Tuckey, those sort of people, do,” Mr Carpenter said.

Mr Llewellyn later told reporters that short-term rather than aspirational targets were needed, and that renewable energy growth in the state was being driven entirely by Federal Government policy and incentives.

Greenpeace protest at logging meeting

Environmental group Greenpeace has unfurled a large banner on a major hotel in the Papua New Guinea capital Port Moresby calling for a halt to the destruction of forests.

The bright yellow banner unfurled on the Crowne Plaza this morning, just before a meeting of the International Tropical Timber Organisation, was deployed by two Greenpeace activists who abseiled down from hotel room balconies.

The PNG government and foreign logging companies in the country have long been accused of colluding to allow illegal logging practices in the Pacific nation.

The government and the companies have vehemently denied the accusations and accuse Greenpeace and other environmental groups of mounting a smear campaign against them. About 20 minutes after the banner was unfurled, an unidentified official untied the top of the banner to the jeers of onlookers in the street below.

Adelaide Advertiser

More rain

The Queensland Government may solve their water woes if a climatologist’s predictions of drought breaking rain in the next few weeks are correct.

8th

FarmOnLine

Aussie rain takes edge off world commodity prices

While the rain has been warmly welcomed by farmers across Australia, the bad news is that it has contributed to a slip in global commodity prices. The Westpac-NFF Commodity Index, measuring the weighted world price of Australia's major agricultural commodities, dropped 2.2pc over April as the rain – combined with speculation of higher production volumes in North America and relaxed beef import restrictions in Asia – start to take their toll in Australia's key markets.

National Farmers' Federation vice-president Charles Burke says the global market for agricultural commodities is exceptionally responsive to emerging trends and the prospects for future production, even to the point of shifting as a result of last week's widespread rain.

"Already we are seeing the promise of better planting conditions in Australia influencing world prices, with all major crop price indices easing during the month," Mr Burke said.

"When you throw into the mix the international expectation that plantings of wheat, barley and canola in key production regions of the United States and Canada are expected to yield much larger crops in the months ahead, it's no surprise the market is already making adjustments.

"Meanwhile, the uncertainty surrounding Korea's response to the re-entry of US beef products into the country is also having an impact.

"Unfortunately for Australian beef producers, the re-entry has lowered demand for our beef at a time when many have been forced to de-stock due to the prolonged and ongoing drought."

According to Westpac senior economist, Matthew Hassan, the general situation is still positive for rural exporters.

"Commodity prices are well up on a year ago and demand looks likely to remain strong," Mr Hassan said.

"The world economy continues to grow strongly, led by booming demand in China and good growth across the rest of Asia.

"Consumers are also playing a bigger part in Asia's expansion, which bodes well for continued strong growth in demand for rural commodities."

NFF plots way forward on National Water Plan

The National Farmers' Federation has moved to break the deadlock between the Commonwealth government and Victoria over its ambitious \$10 billion water plan.

The NFF has reaffirmed its support for the "intent" of the National Plan for Water Security (NPWS), on the basis that it accelerates the implementation of the National Water Initiative.

But the NFF has sought - and received - assurances from the Government on issues of importance to irrigators, including a commitment that existing water sharing plans will be respected.

The issue of "referral of powers" from the states to the Commonwealth under a NPWS has also been sensitive.

However, the NFF says it has also developed a way forward on this front, and is seeking agreement from the Australian Government accordingly.

NFF president David Crombie said the organization's "in-principle" support was conditional on the Commonwealth assuming specific, rather than broad, water resource management powers.

"The NFF believes that only the powers required to enable an effective whole of Basin water management approach need be referred," Mr Crombie said.

"The Commonwealth and the States have already agreed to the NWI and the current Murray-Darling Basin Agreement.

"These agreements clearly establish the management principles for the Murray-Darling Basin and are supported by the NFF.

"Governments must ensure that these principles are implemented effectively and efficiently within agreed timeframes to ensure whole-of-Basin outcomes.

"The NFF supports the Commonwealth's agreement to respect current State water sharing plans and the arrangements enshrined in the MDBA.

"The NFF believes that State and regional organisations must continue to be responsible for regional management of water resources, operational issues and all future reviews of water sharing plans."

Tas EC drought application fast-tracked

Full exceptional circumstances drought assistance may not be far off for struggling Tasmanian farmers, with the Federal and State governments now assessing the need to provide financial aid. Federal Minister for Agriculture, Peter McGauran, has been advised the Tasmanian Government would submit an application for EC drought assistance covering the North East, Midlands and Flinders Island within four weeks.

"Officials from my Department are working closely with their counterparts in Tasmania to help them develop the EC application as quickly as possible," Mr McGauran said.

"However, it is not until the Tasmanian Government actually lodges the application that the Commonwealth can formally assess it for interim EC assistance.

"Once we have received it, I will consider the application as a matter of urgency."

Mr McGauran said the application has to demonstrate that the drought has had an adverse and prolonged impact on Tasmanian farmers.

"This could include that they have suffered a significant downturn in income, that they have been forced to de-stock, or that their supplies of feed or water have been reduced," he said.

"I would urge farmers to work with the Tasmanian Government to help them complete the application so it can be submitted and assessed as speedily as possible."

Mr McGauran also encouraged farmers located outside the regions covered by the Tasmanian Government's EC application to put their case to State officials if they felt they should be entitled to drought assistance.

Under agreed Commonwealth-State guidelines, it is the responsibility of State Governments to determine the boundaries for EC regions.

"If interim EC assistance is granted, farmers and farm-dependent small businesses will be able to apply for six months' EC income support from when the declaration is made," Mr McGauran said.

"This would allow time for the National Rural Advisory Council – an independent group of farmers and agribusiness professionals – to undertake a comprehensive on-the-ground assessment and advise the Government as to whether a full EC declaration is warranted."

AWA

Apology: Item 3 in last week's news erroneously reported that Sydney Water had identified the potential for the new Kurnell desalination plant pipeline to disturb the contaminated plume in the Botany aquifer. In fact, the pipe route has been amended, expressly to avoid the plume, so the implication (derived from a media report) was incorrect.

The April edition of 'Distilled', the National Water Commission newsletter, leads with an interesting piece on groundwater, and also reports on a commissioned paper on rainwater tanks.

The federal government's \$10 billion Water Plan continues to face opposition to the referral of state powers over water to the Commonwealth, with Victorian irrigators still concerned about being disadvantaged.

Melbourne Water MD, Rob Skinner, says that a Melbourne Water report referred to in The Age (see clippings) was an internal working document prepared in November 2006, canvassing a range of water supply options for Melbourne. It was not forwarded to the Minister and neither he nor the Government were briefed on it before the Victorian election.

A paper, based on balanced arguments, is being developed by senior officials and is intended to go before the next meeting of environment ministers, proposing expansion of the NPI (National Pollution Inventory) to include greenhouse gas (GHG) reporting, with an obligation to report GHG emissions through the NPI beginning mid-2008, pending any alternative legislated scheme.

Robbi Bishop Taylor, winner of the Australian Stockholm Junior Water Prize (ASJWP) will be travelling to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to represent Australia at the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair being held next week. Thanks to our ASJWP sponsors, ITT Flygt, Gold Coast Water and TYCO Water, Robbi will also travel to Stockholm for the prestigious Stockholm Junior

Water Prize in August.

The International Water Centre is working with WaterAid on a Guide to low-cost sustainable Sanitation for developing countries; focussing on South East Asia and the Pacific, to provide program guidance for NGOs and communities. Danielle Pedi, Project Coordinator, hopes to unearth any SEA Pacific projects for profiling in the guidebook, to highlight what worked, what didn't and why.

The new NSW Department of Water and Energy (DWE) incorporates most of the functions of the former Department of Energy, Utilities and Sustainability (DEUS), the water-related functions of the former Department of Natural Resources as well as the Metropolitan Water Directorate from the former NSW Cabinet Office plus more.

At the Australia and New Zealand Food Regulation Ministerial Council meeting last week, Ministers discussed voluntary inclusion of Fluoride in bottled water. South Australian MP John Hill urged for the current ban on adding fluoride to be over-turned. Food Standards Australia New Zealand has an application before it and will progress this later in the year.

The Victorian 2007/08 State Budget included an extra \$136m for vital water projects, including a number of recycling initiatives; specifically \$16m in major recycling projects in Altona, Westernport and Frankston to save 3.5 GL of drinking water every year.

During inspection of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline project, Water Minister Turnbull announced that the Australian Government will provide \$5m towards the finalisation and introduction of a single State Water Register and retail account for Victoria, a joint venture with the Victorian Government.

US EPA and Department of Energy have begun a three-year research project to evaluate how the underground storage of carbon dioxide might affect groundwater resources, including potential displacement of shallow, fresh groundwater by saline water and impact of migrating CO₂ on underground drinking water sources.

The average Italian family spends 300 euros a year on mineral water despite the fact that tap water is cheaper and just as safe. Italy also manufactures 250,000 tonnes of plastic bottles a year, which not only clutter up landfills but emit a significant amount of carbon dioxide during the production

process.

Forget the sugar in energy drinks and the fluoride in tap water! "When we're done, tap water will be relegated to showers and washing dishes." according to Gatorade's former American president.

Concern is growing about project delays as Brisbane's water levels dip to 19%, but Deputy Premier Bligh maintains that, despite difficulties in securing supplies of pipes, concrete and workers, the water projects are on track.

Victoria's Water Minister Thwaites says he was not briefed about the dire future of the state's water supplies before last year's election victory.

Sporting fields, golf courses and school ovals are being closed as the drought tightens its grip on southeast Queensland, with water consumption well in excess of the level-five restrictions target.

Adelaidenow

Buy a car, save the planet

A leading South Australian car dealer claims to be the first in the nation to offer buyers a properly audited system of paying for trees to offset carbon emissions.

Car buyers will nominate their anticipated kilometres to be covered per year and how many years they wish to pay for. A formula established by the Australian Greenhouse Office taking into account the car's fuel economy will be used to calculate the cost of trees.

CMI Toyota, the state's top Toyota dealer, will pass the voluntary payment to not-for-profit group the Canopy Project.

The money will be used to plant trees, managed by Greening Australia, on private land near Kanmantoo east of Adelaide.

The trees in the "CMI Forest" will be registered so it will be illegal for any to be cut down. The trees will absorb carbon dioxide from the air.

A buyer wanting to offset carbon emissions from a small Yaris over 40,000km can pay \$134, a medium-large six-cylinder Aurion is rated at \$198 for that distance while a fuel-thirsty large LandCruiser will need \$322 of tree planting to offset its emissions over 40,000km.

Paul Crawford, joint managing director of the CMV Group which includes CMI Toyota dealers, said

today the target was to have 30 per cent of its new-car buyers join the program in its first year. The voluntary payments would be tax deductible.

"The community has been crying out for government and business to act," he said of the climate problem.

Climate change harming coral reefs

Climate change is increasing the severity of coral-damaging disease in oceans across the globe, scientists say.

A team of scientists from Australia and the US claim to have found a clear link between coral disease and warmer ocean temperatures after a study of 48 reefs spread along Queensland's Great Barrier Reef.

"We've long suspected climate change is driving disease outbreaks," the study's lead author, Dr John Bruno from the University of North Carolina, said.

"Our results suggest that warmer temperatures are increasing the severity of disease in the ocean."

The research team tested their theory by combining six years of disease survey data from the Great Barrier Reef with new ocean temperature figures measured by satellite.

They found major outbreaks of the coral disease 'white syndrome' only occurred on reefs with high coral cover after especially warm periods, while white syndrome was less prevalent after periods of cooler temperatures.

"Our results suggest that climate change could be increasing the severity of disease in the ocean, leading to a decline in the health of marine ecosystems and the loss of the resources and services humans derive from them," Dr Bruno said.

Dr Bette Willis, from Australia's Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies, said the findings highlight the need for restrictions on human activity on the reef during periods of warm ocean temperatures.

"In the past, apparently pristine reefs with high coral cover were thought to be the most resilient reefs," Dr Willis said.

"Knowing that they may be particularly vulnerable to disease outbreaks highlights the need for caution when it comes to permitting activities that add additional stress, especially during times of high temperatures."

NEWS.com.au

'Leak' shows \$20bn green funds

The Australian Green Party says it has been leaked details of environment spending in the Budget and it shows the Government is paying lip service to the hot political issue.

Greens leader Bob Brown handed reporters papers purporting to show detailed costings, moments before they went into the Budget lock-up today. If genuine, the documents point to a major security breach.

The spreadsheets said the Government would spend nearly \$20 billion over the next five years on environmental measures.

The Greens' material said the Government would spend \$741 million over five years on climate change, \$52 million on energy efficiency issues and \$60 million on greenhouse-friendly transport solutions.

Some \$2.4 billion had also been allocated for the Government's \$10 billion water plan.

Senator Brown said he believed the Government's total spending on green issues had been increased only slightly over last year's figures, despite climate change now being a major election issue.

"Australians who were hoping for a green budget have been dumped by the Howard Government, by the treasurer and by the minister for the environment," Senator Brown said.

"We are going to see the big end of town do much better out of this Budget than the nation's environment and the future prospects of its children."

Senator Brown said the Budget would be an exercise in "greenwash" - meaning the Coalition would attempt to paint itself as being concerned about the environment to win votes.

Senator Brown said a good start for the Government would be to remove the GST from public transport costs.

He said it would be a mistake to pour federal funds into large road building projects when Australia should be working to reduce emissions from cars.

"I doubt we are even going to see the Commonwealth Comcar fleet being greened, let alone the prime minister putting in a dual flush loo in his suite in this parliament," Senator Brown said.

"This is crisis of climate change for the nation, it needs to be addressed by this Government, it needs to be addressed by the national Government taking a lead here and they are not going to take that lead in tonight's Budget."

8th

Adelaide Advertiser

Growth danders in fringe suburbs

New fringe suburbs and their communities will become the victims of poor urban planning unless State and Local Government work together, council leaders have waned.

A Planning 4 Growth Forum at the Adelaide Town Hall tomorrow will focus on urban growth in Onkarparinga, Playford, Salisbury and Mt Barker.

Because of lack of or the ever growing problems associated with the supply of potable water or poorly maintained infrastructure isn't this what we have been saying?

From a letter to the Editor: Why the delay on Murray, PM?

If Professor Peter Cullen, head of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, is correct and Southern Australia has entered a 30-year cycle of decreasing rainfall as well as global warming, then it is indeed a "double wammy" (his words) which needs informed and appropriate decisions from all levels of Government.

9th

FarmOnLine

BUDGET '07: \$50m for farm stewardship payments

The Government has come through with \$50 million funding for an environmental stewardship program in this year's budget, which will pay farmers to preserve and restore high value environmental "assets" on private land.

The funding is budgeted over the next four years, with follow up payments to be made for up to 15 years.

Federal Minister for Agriculture, Peter McGauran, said the \$50 million was a practical approach to protect nationally significant assets on private land and recognises the crucial role farmer's play in conservation.

He said the payments would encourage farmers to undertake environmental work beyond what they should be expected to do as part of their business responsibilities.

"On ground work could include fencing, replanting, and restoring degraded areas," Mr McGauran said.

"Eligible landholders will be able to bid to supply their services over periods of up to 15 years, delivering benefits for both the environment and for the wider community."

The stewardship program was the major item on the wish list of the National Farmers' Federation.

The funding breakdown for the scheme over the next four years will see \$5m spent in 2007-2008, \$10m spent in 2008-2009, \$15m spent in 2009-2010 and \$20m spent in 2010-2011.

SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

BUDGET '07: Drought improvement to lift GDP

The budget's domestic economic outlook presented no real surprises, with farm sector forecasts assuming average seasonal conditions during the next financial year while still taking into account very low water availability across the country, particularly the Murray Darling Basin .

The partial "recovery" from drought is expected to add about half a percentage point to the country's growth, with real gross domestic product (GDP) forecast to grow 3.75pc in 2007-2008.

31

Farm GDP is forecast to improve by 18pc if farmers get a normal season this year, following a 20pc slide in farm production the 2006-2007 year.

Drought will continue to affect net exports, but the depletion of grain stocks should soften the impact of the fall in farm production on exports.

The US dollar exchange rate is likely to remain around the US82 cents, while domestic interest rates should stay at current levels.

World oil prices are expected stay above the US\$65 a barrel level.

SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

BUDGET '07: Education, tax cuts the main focus

Education and training and another whopping round of tax cuts will be the key spending areas for the Federal Government as outlined in this year's eagerly awaited pre-election budget, handed down on Tuesday night.

While still managing to deliver a tidy \$10.6 billion surplus, Treasurer, Peter Costello, was grinning ear to ear when he announced further tax cuts worth \$31.5 billion over the next four years as one of his key budget commitments.

Mr Costello said this year's budget put Australia in one of the strongest economic positions in the world, adding that after reducing the nation's debt to zero, the Government was now funding its future liability.

This week the government acknowledged it was facing its toughest election battle since taking power in 1996 and Tuesday's budget tackled one of the key campaign platforms of the Federal Opposition, announcing significant funding to the university and vocational training sectors, most notably with the establishment of a \$5 billion higher education endowment fund.

On top of that were additional incentives to boost current student assistance and address the nation's skills shortage crisis, delivering a considerable trump to Opposition Leader, Kevin Rudd and his education revolution policy.

Mr Costello said the endowment fund was a "bold, innovative investment in the future" and "would set Australians up forever".

Major new money for the farm sector comes in the form of a \$50 million over four years in environmental stewardship payments to farmers to encourage protection of high-value environmental areas on private farmland.

As expected, little information was provided on the intricate costing details being called for by irrigators and the Opposition in relation to the Prime Minister's \$10 billion national plan for water reform.

In the breakdown on the plan's key initiatives, money being spent in the first year of the plan (2007-08) can be broken down \$26 million will be spent to address over-allocation, \$28m will be spent improving water information systems, \$53.3m will go to modernising irrigation infrastructure, \$2.5m will go to projects in northern Australia and the Great Artesian Basin and \$59.5m will go to reforming the Murray Darling Basin Commission.

Other environmental funding includes a previously announced commitment of \$126m over five years to establish an Australian Centre for Climate Change Adaptation, along with \$52.8 million to help families and small businesses reduce their own greenhouse emissions, also over the next five years.

Despite earlier media reports suggesting the Federal Government would give \$120 million towards an inland rail link from Melbourne to Brisbane, there was no mention of it in this year's infrastructure papers.

SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

BUDGET '07: Labor says "more of the same" for farmers

Federal Labor spokesman for primary industries, Kerry O'Brien, says this year's budget really only delivers "more of the same" for farmers and agriculture.

He said a lot more could be done in the areas of climate change for the farm sector.

"I think the Government has been very tardy in addressing the climate change issue from the point of view of agriculture," Senator O'Brien said.

"I think there's a lot of work which could be done there and they're areas we're interested in working on."

Senator O'Brien said he thinks the budget would disappoint groups like the National Farmers Federation.

"Whilst I'm sure they would welcome the concept of the environmental stewardship (program) I'm certain they would look in dismay at the amount of money being offered for environmental stewardship and would be looking for a lot more detail than appears in the budget papers.

"In terms of other expenditure, in the main you'd have to say it's a continuation of existing programs and some small additional funds you would have expected in the circumstances of drought that we're experiencing."

Senator O'Brien said the very important water and land management programs were being obviously removed from the historic control of the Minister for Agriculture to Minister for Environment.

SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

32

BUDGET '07: More counsellors to drought areas

Five additional rural financial counsellors will be provided in areas reliant on irrigation in the Murray Darling Basin, as part of the Federal Government's continuing commitment to drought support outlined in this year's Federal Budget.

The government says it has introduced further measures to assist farmers in response to the severity and length of the drought, which also include advice and planning grants to help farmers manage their finances, stock and natural resources during the drought. This year's budget papers report that in the last five months, the number of farmers accessing exceptional circumstances support increased by almost 74 per cent.

The government has also recognised the heightened mental health needs of people in drought-affected communities, announcing an extra \$20.6 million in this year's budget to be spent over four years to expand mental health services in rural areas.

This initiative will provide additional mental health services by allied and mental health nursing professionals in drought-affected communities.

Funding of \$10.1 million is also being provided over two years to support communities in drought-declared areas for psychological services.

This will enable additional crisis counselling services for distressed people in rural towns and well as training for doctors.

It will also go towards raising awareness of mental health issues and the services available.

SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

BUDGET '07: NFF welcomes budget

The Federal Government's plans to pay farmers to manage high value conservation areas have been hailed by the National Farmers Federation as a "generational change in thinking" on environmental stewardship.

NFF president, David Crombie, said NFF welcomes the 2007 budget, particularly in the core areas of transport, national heritage trust and Landcare.

"We also welcome investment in new programs in water security, in climate change, and also a

generational change in thinking in environmental stewardship," Mr Crombie said.

"It's a paradigm shift.

"It's moving from short term planning to long term planning and it's engaging farmers in the process."

Mr Crombie would not comment on whether the \$50 million funding announced by the government was enough, insisting instead that the importance of the announcement was the concept.

"Environmental planning is a long term exercise and what we're looking at doing is engaging with farmers in partnership with the community for the delivery of community outcomes."

SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

BUDGET '07: Rural health "forgotten"

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia says rural health has been "dropped like a hot potato" in this year's federal budget.

The association says there is very little in the budget to increase the number of rural doctors or improve access to healthcare services in rural and remote Australia.

RDAA President, Dr Peter Rischbieth, said there was very little for rural health in last year's budget.

"We are very concerned that the Government is ignoring our call for a Rural Health Obligation to be adopted by the federal and State governments," Dr Rischbieth said.

"We are the first to acknowledge that during its time in office the Government has introduced some welcome rural health initiatives, but against the enormity of what is required to turn the rural health crisis around, most of these measures have really only been tinkering at the edges."

He said the Federal Government must get serious about ensuring a sustainable future for hospitals, health services and the medical workforce in country Australia.

SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

Vic farmers hold out on water deal, despite reports

THE Victorian Farmers Federation has not given the all clear for its State Government to sign up to the Federal Government's \$10 billion water plan, despite media reports and a statement from the National Farmers Federation suggesting farmers had finally agreed to the proposal.

News Limited papers have reported NFF chief executive, Ben Fargher, as saying Victorian Farmers "signed up" to the plan after a meeting with Federal Minister for Water, Malcolm Turnbull.

However VFF president, Simon Ramsay, has told Rural Press that while the lobby group had agreed "in principle" to the plan, that agreement was given when it was first announced in January and

Victorian opposition to the proposal, and mainly its lack of detail, had not changed.

"We realise there has to be some sort of Commonwealth intervention to manage the basin," Mr Ramsay said.

"We also agree there has to be some referral of power or some capacity for the Commonwealth to make sure the State's meet their obligations under any such plan.

33

"But apart from that we haven't agreed to anything."

Mr Ramsay said their outstanding position had not changed "one iota".

"We're continuing discussions with the government and seeking further detail.

"We're engaged in the process of seeking more detail, which has always been our position from the start.

"We are not yet ready to say to the State Government we are now happy with the detail and we believe the State should sign the agreement and we continue to say the State Government should be in there negotiating a good outcome for Victoria, which is what they're doing now."

Mr Ramsay said the \$10 billion was a pretty small deal spent over 10 years and divided between four States, and more money was needed for the basin and infrastructure projects.

Mr Ramsay said he was still waiting to see more detail in relation to the draft legislation, trading arrangements and bulk water entitlements.

"There's blank pages right through the draft, we still don't know what powers the Commonwealth are seeking to manage the basin, we still don't know the arrangements for water trading or what the CSIRO report will say in relation to bulk water entitlements.

"There's a lot of detail to be gone through to understand what it is exactly that the Commonwealth is seeking..."

"Our view has always been that Victoria is not in a position where it needs to be in a grab for cash.

"We want to know more about the detail and what powers the minister is requiring, and that's been our message through this whole long, lengthy tiresome debate."

SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

News.com.au

Warming hysteria misplaced

We're told so many mad scare stories about global warming, why shouldn't Art Bell believe this one,

too?

And so the radio host and best-selling author last weekend read out to his audience on Coast to Coast, one of America's most listened-to shows, this latest report he'd picked about our warming horror:

"Shocking reports from the Kremlin today are showing that the Government of Australia has entered into secret negotiations with the United States and their Commonwealth allies for the proposed evacuation of upwards of 11 million of its 20 million citizens."

On he went, telling millions of Americans that our drought was so bad - curse you, global warming! - that the Howard Government might soon hire cruise ships to send us somewhere cooler, once it figured who'd take us.

To Bell, this was the last straw.

"I wonder when the climate sceptics are going to finally catch on," he raged.

"Will it take something like this? Like evacuating half a nation, before we wake up and realise that it is actually happening?"

Oh, I've caught on all right to what's happening, Art. Caught on to you, for a start.

You might think the moral of this farce is not to trust even million-hit websites such as WorldNetDaily, which ran the story Bell read out so credulously, or the news site run by the New-Age nutter who actually dreamed up this hoax, a blogger posing as Russian scientist "Sorcha Faal".

But the real moral is that global warming fear-mongering is now so shameless and grotesque that otherwise sane people are prepared to believe half our nation is about to head for the boats.

You might also think Bell must be on his nutty lonesome to fall for a story so wild. But don't admire global warming cultists say things just as extreme, to huge applause?

Why wouldn't Bell think we'd be evacuating in our millions, when Professor Tim Flannery, our Alarmist of the Year, warns that global warming may soon force us to flee our parched cities?

"I think there is a fair chance Perth will be the 21st century's first ghost metropolis," Flannery has blithely claimed. Indeed, he added the other day, "some time in the next 30 years, we face significant destabilisation, rapidly rising sea levels, maybe up to 6m and hundreds of millions of refugees, because there are whole cities going under".

Why wouldn't Bell think we'd need to resettle the populations of coastal Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, given that ABC Science Show host Robyn Williams recently told me on air we could face seas this century 100m higher?

Why wouldn't Bell think we'd all be on the move to Alaska or Norway, given that Professor James Lovelock, creator of the Gaia theory, last year told the ABC Late Night Live show, hosted

by an approving Phillip Adams, that the rest of

the world would soon be uninhabitable?

As Lovelock so often puts it: "Before this century is over, billions of us will die and the few breeding pairs of people that survive will be in the Arctic."

Good gosh. If that's what even our most admired "experts" tell us, as approved by the ABC, what's so crazy about Bell believing 11 million Australians will soon board ships as global warming refugees?

34

How else does Flannery think we'll pull out of Perth or drowned Sydney?

Apologies. I should now calm you because it's only too easy to be spooked by scares as crazy as these if enough people tell you often enough. And they sure do, in this all-but-unchallenged trillion-dollar racket that is global warming.

So, take comfort that even the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the influential United Nations scientists who do most to promote global warming, admit such scares are bogus.

As its latest report concedes, its models predict the seas will rise this century at worst by 59cm, not 100m. Antarctica, home of 90 per cent of land-based ice that could drown us, is cooling, not warming, and gaining ice, not losing it.

What's more, a minority of other scientists, some from the Russian Academy of Sciences, say this recent warming may well be caused not by humans but a change in solar activity that has changed again, and we instead face global cooling.

Heart stopped racing?

But, if the truth isn't really so scary, how did we get to believe stories this freaky?

Let's rejoin the babbling Art Bell.

Bell is also famous in a small way for co-authoring a New York Times bestseller, *The Coming Global Superstorm*, which claimed global warming would monster us with worse storms (not proved) and fast-rising seas (not true), and may soon shut down the warm Gulf Stream (untrue, says the IPCC) sending cities like New York into an ice age (not this century, pal).

This is the hyperventilating book that became the smash movie *The Day After Tomorrow*, which helped to whip up the warming panic.

It didn't matter that scientists dismissed the film as another warming beat-up.

There were only too many cause-pushers badly wanting to believe it -- or wanting the gullible masses, at least, to believe enough of it to be scared into submission to their new apocalyptic faith.

Even now we get Nonie Sharp, publications editor of the Leftist Australian magazine *Arena*, fervently declaring: "The first half hour of *The Day After Tomorrow* was a time of awakening for me."

Note Sharp's born-again tone -- so typical of a faith that's taken over the cry of so many past prophets: "Repent, for the end of the world is nigh."

For that message to work well, of course, you must first persuade likely converts that the end of the world really is nigh -- that we really will be down to a few breeding pairs in the Arctic, as the winds wail through the ghost cities of Australia.

Get us believing that, and you'll even get some - like Bell - to believe we'll soon have to sail somewhere cooler. In fact, we're losing our reason so fast it won't take long before people will want to reserve tickets for the evacuation.

I see a win-win opportunity here. So let me help the feeble-minded, so eager to trust a Flannery, a Lovelock, a Williams.

Book your seat on the SS *Evacuate Australia* right now. Book today with Tim Flannery and avoid the rush as our cities drown in rising seas of hype, or get swallowed by hot clouds of bulldust.

We sceptics will be at the docks to wave you off on your voyage to Nirvana. I can't tell you how sorry we'll be to see you go. I honestly can't.

The Australian

A cold shoulder for global warming

The much-vaunted green budget has ended up being a clear statement of disintent (*writes Matthew Warren*). The Howard Government has put the environment well down the dispatch list of economic priorities.

The priority of last night's environment budget was a return to traditional environmental issues. It deliberately makes as its centrepiece the management of the bush, trees and water, ahead of the hot topic of climate change.

Climate change gets more of a cursory nod than a warm embrace. Until now, Kevin Rudd has tried to talk it up as a key point of difference by restating Labor's commitment to big targets for emissions cuts by 2050. This budget does not counter Labor on climate change. It ignores it.

The Government's message is that climate change is important, but other issues inside and outside the environment are more important. It seeks to deflect political debate on the issue by refusing to engage, rather than by upping the stakes. At least for now.

The Prime Minister's task group on emissions trading reports at the end of the month and will trigger the Government's next key political move.

The biggest new announcement is \$2 billion over five years for a third National Heritage Trust to

invest in reducing land and water degradation in regional Australia.

There is money for rainwater tanks in schools and for other community organisations, on top of the already-announced \$10 billion water plan for the Murray-Darling Basin and \$200million to reforest developing economies.

35

There are modest tax breaks for forestry that captures greenhouse gases and rebates for solar cells for a tiny fraction of Australian households. And almost nothing on energy efficiency, and no new investment in low-emission technologies.

In this respect the solar cell rebate is the most bewildering. Rooftop solar cells are an interesting technology, but are still expensive to install. Two years ago, the Government was looking at shutting this scheme down. Now it has doubled the rebate.

At \$150 million, it will help about 20,000 households into solar cells - about one in 500. Don't expect any noticeable cut in Australia's emissions as a result.

It's surprisingly hypocritical for a Government so keen to point out Labor's symbolism on climate change policy. It also suggests a Government that is keeping its powder dry until closer to the election later this year.

Aussie scientists agree to listen to rainmakers

After fiercely opposing cloud seeding for years, critics from CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology have agreed to sit down with the world's best scientific rainmakers.

The intellectual detente comes as experts gather in Melbourne for a three-day symposium to review scientific advances in weather modification technology and consider projects in Australia.

University, CSIRO and BOM scientists are meeting with hands-on cloud seeding experts from Hydro Tasmania and Snowy River Hydro, Israel, the US and Japan.

Cloud seeding boosts rainfall by dispersing small amounts of chemicals, like silver iodide, into clouds to help form rain drops and increase precipitation.

Scientists like Daniel Rosenfeld - a cloud physicist at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who will attend the symposium - have enhanced the effectiveness of cloud seeding with real-time remote sensing techniques.

"I'm delighted that there's finally a will to advance the subject," said Nationals MP John Forrest, the driving force behind the meeting.

He said he hopes the meeting will recommend trials in Australia.

The civil engineer and member for the drought-ravaged Mallee in northwest Victoria has long-advocated rigorous seeding trials as part of a suite of measures to tackle problems of water

shortage.

But Mr Forrest faced strong opposition from prominent CSIRO and BOM scientists whom he alleged had provided politicians and policymakers with misleading advice on the effectiveness of cloud seeding.

"They're standing in the way of political action," Mr Forrest told *The Australian* last July.

He blamed their stance on personal jealousy and competing for funding.

Undeterred, Mr Forrest obtained private funding for this week's symposium which was matched by the Federal Environment Department.

"The meeting provides an opportunity to hear about the latest science in this field and to see whether there are opportunities to make more use of this technology," said assistant environment and water minister, John Cobb.

He asked Mr Forrest to represent him at the symposium, hosted by the BOM.

According to the bureau's chief scientist Neville Smith, while the BOM is not directly involved in weather modification it does conduct cloud physics research.

Dr Smith welcomed the opportunity to meet with experts like Professor Rosenfeld and Deon Terblanche, head of South Africa's Weather Service and chair of the World Meteorological Organization's weather modification group.

Mr Forrest said that he was encouraged that the assembled scientists acknowledge the link between weather modification, cloud physics and climate change research. "They've tweaked to the connection, he claimed.

Hi-tech cloud seeding operations are under way in Israel, Thailand, France, South Africa and the US states of California, Utah and Texas.

In Australia, only Hydro Tasmania incorporates seeding into its water-management system. It has used light aircraft to seed clouds over catchment areas since 1964.

Mr Forrest recently obtained \$4 million to enable Snowy Hydro to document its ground-based seeding trial.

He also supported moves by the Labor Beattie government to fund cloud seeding studies for southeast Queensland.

"I'm kicking goals," said a delighted Mr Forrest.

Global warming gives toads the jump

Global warming is allowing cane toads to penetrate inland Australia for the first time, and experts believe their march south towards Sydney is unstoppable.

Cane toads have crossed the Great Dividing Range in southern and central Queensland and are spreading to inland areas that were previously too cold for the amphibian pests.

The toads have crossed the Clarence River in northern NSW, which had prevented their spread south.

Queensland Natural Resources Department researcher Peter Cremasco said quolls had disappeared from places such as Goomburra and the Canarvon Gorge, on the western slopes of the Great Divide, which had been colonised by the toads.

36

Quolls and other native animals that eat cane toads are killed by poison in sacs on the amphibians' heads. Experts said they were not surprised by the spread of the toads across the Northern Territory in recent years, because the tropical climate suits the animals, but their move inland in Queensland was unexpected.

Wildlife consultant Craig Eddie said cane toads were in the Darling Downs and further west in southern Queensland.

"Eventually, they will be established across a very large area inland and there is nothing we can do about it," he said.

Wetland Care Australia's Alan Sabilia said toads had reached towns such as McLean. "The river was the last big obstacle and they breached it," he said. "They'll certainly keep moving south."

Wetland Care project officer Tatiana Velasco said northern NSW residents were slowing the toads' move south with traps. "This is the front line. We have to do what we can to control them."

NSW Environment Department officer Susan Crocetti said the trial of a sniffer dog to locate the nocturnal toads during the day had proved successful.

Queensland introduced cane toads in the 1930s to control cane beetles.

Adelaide Advertiser

Banking water for not-so rainy day

Donations of water or money to buy water for environmental projects along the River Murray in this State can now be made online at www.water-find.org.au The web based system is the first of its kind in Australia and possibly the World, says Waterfind Environment Fund chief executive Dr. Mark Siebentritt.

Crop yields to double

Victorian scientists have developed a technology that could double crop yields by delaying the aging process of leaves.

Years of rain needed

A leading scientist says there's potential for drought relieving rain over winter, but a break in the drought is "a long way off".

10th

FarmOnLine

BUDGET '07: Cole costs more than \$25m

The Government will spend more than \$25 million making legislative changes and pursuing criminal action in the wake of recommendations from the Cole Inquiry.

Expense measures listed in the budget papers for the Attorney General's department reveal \$4.6 million will be spent over four years to implement and address recommendations made from the Cole Inquiry report into the oil for food program.

The funding will enable the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to incorporate United Nations and bilateral sanction regimes into Australian law and provide for the laws' compliance.

An expected \$400,000 will be spent on a new office fit out in 2007-2008 and development of new software.

A further \$20.7m will be spent over three years (including \$4.6m in 2006-2007) to investigate and prosecute possible criminal offences following the completion of the Cole Inquiry.

Up to \$500,000 of that funding is also designated for IT, communications equipment and an accommodation fit-out. The costs come on top of the final bill the Attorney General's Department had to foot for administering and running the inquiry last year, which blew out to almost \$10 million.

SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

BUDGET 07: \$10m for rural mental health

The \$10.1 million announced in the Federal Budget for rural mental health services has been described as a windfall for struggling farming communities.

The funding came as a result of extensive lobbying by GPs, members of the Divisions Network and the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN).

AGPN chairman, Dr Tony Hobbs, said he was delighted the Prime Minister, Treasurer and Minister for Health and Ageing have recognised this desperately needed assistance in what he described as a fair and equitable budget.

"Rural Australia is struggling with the social effects of the drought. Suicide is all too common. It is excellent to see drought assistance extended to mental health services.

"Rural GPs like me are seeing more and more seriously depressed farmers and others in our communities," Dr Hobbs said.

The funding under the Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities initiative will allow 39 divisions of general practice funding to employ specialist mental health workers and provide training and counselling in the communities that need them most.

"The funding will improve awareness of help services available, and provide education for clinicians and business leaders to recognise the signs of conditions such as depression.

37

"This funding will allow the Divisions Network to employ specialists in the field such as psychologists in areas of need. The network already has an excellent track record in recruiting and retaining these professionals.

"With the effects of this one in 1000 year drought practical solutions on the ground will without a doubt save lives and help communities stay connected," Dr Hobbs said.

AGPN worked closely with beyond blue to develop a three-pronged approach to improve mental health circumstances in rural and regional Australia.

Research holds key to tackling climate change

A record spell of un-seasonally high May temperatures acted as the backdrop for an open day at Queensland's Hermitage Research Station near Warwick where crop scientists were keen to underscore how they are combating the effects of climate change.

But there's no disguising the impact of the drought which last week saw Queensland's Primary Industries and Fisheries Minister, Tim Mulherin, concede the State's gross value of production already has been wound back from \$11 billion, associated with an earlier forecast, to \$10.62 billion this financial year.

And with almost 62 per cent of Queensland's land mass now drought-declared, it's hardly surprising to hear that the Qld Government has now processed 20,900 claims for its drought-support programs, to the value of \$38.16m, since January 1, 2002.

But the pace is accelerating. Some 4361 claims, worth \$8.6m, have been processed since July 1, 2006, with southern Queensland badly impacted, according to Mr Mulherin.

"So while it's pretty grim, people have adapted and as we come out of drought they will be better equipped to deal with the challenges posed by climate variability," he said.

"All this really hammers home how important research stations like Hermitage are as they focus on developing new varieties that can deal with water scarcity."

SOURCE: Extract from *Queensland Country Life*, May 10 edition.

Old water visionary slams government inaction

Noted Brookstead producer and champion of the visionary project to pump Brisbane's waste water to

the Lockyer Valley and the Darling Downs, Phil Jauncey, believes south east Queensland's water crisis could have been averted if his pipeline proposal had been given priority status when it was unveiled 10 years ago.

Speaking in the aftermath of the Federal Government earmarking \$408 million towards the construction of the \$1.7b Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme - a move aimed at drought-proofing Brisbane as well as provide recycled water to the parched Lockyer Valley - his frustration at both Federal and Queensland Government inaction over infrastructure projects was clearly evident.

"The prospect of an Australian capital city running out of water is a bit like a rabbit getting mugged by a turtle," Mr Jauncey said.

"If you couldn't have seen it (the water crisis) coming from a long way off, you'd have to be pretty stupid."

Nevertheless, he said his NuWater lobby Group was refusing to "be bitter and twisted" about the present adoption of the first stages of its decade-old iconic plan which first mooted the idea of dealing with Brisbane City's wastewater by pumping it to the parched Downs.

"The only thing we are a bit angry about is that nobody could be bothered to give us a phone call - to tell us what they were going to do - because they definitely are starting to build our project," Mr Jauncey said.

NuWater has been at pains to satisfy a raft of inter-departmental bureaucrats, successfully hurdling most obstacles placed in its path as it sought to "tick-off" each box bar one - co-operation between State and Federal governments.

"After sitting on their hands and doing nothing, suddenly all hell breaks loose with the announcement of a project that's five times more expensive than the one we proposed all those years ago," Mr Jauncey said.

Conceding that the western corridor project was "a step in the right direction", Mr Jauncey said that both Downs producers and Toowoomba district probably were "pretty disappointed" at the outcome to date - especially as NuWater met last year's June 30 cut-off date for submission proposals.

While both State and Federal governments continue to "thrash around", Mr Jauncey said there was no getting away from the fact that had NuWater been warning about the region's filing water infrastructure needs for the past 20 years, to little avail.

Despite the early foresight shown by NuWater's grand plan to help put agriculture on an even keel across the State's south east, Mr Jauncey said he remained to be convinced strategies were in place once it rained again and Brisbane's Wivenhoe Dam filled up.

"What are they going to do with it then - put it back in the river," he said.

"Over the years we've stuck our necks out, done all the hard work, done all the lobbying for what still is a 'cracker' of an idea - now it's time for to see what they (the politicians) can do," Mr Jauncey said.

Footnote: The State Government maintains it is on track to meet Prime Minister John Howard's request for disclosure of the project's full financial position of his funding proposal for the Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme, due later this month.

38

Roger Stone urges caution on rain outlook

The nation's best-known climatologist says he has been misquoted in the city media over claims that drought-breaking rains are on the horizon.

The University of Southern Queensland's Professor Roger Stone, recently appointed as the university's Research Chair in Climatology and Water Resources, and Director of the Australian Centre for Sustainable Catchments, is cautious about short-term seasonal prospects.

"The El Nino seems to have fizzled out so that gives us slight optimism for some relief rain this coming winter," he said.

"But suggesting that's the end of the drought - that's a different issue altogether," Professor Stone said.

Previously employed at the Department of Natural Resources and Water (DNR) in the Climate and Systems Technology Unit, the noted climatologist says the nation's water supply deficits remain huge.

"We are just moving back to a slightly improved situation, which is a bit better news than we've had for some time," he said.

Fellow climatologists around Australia will have a far better understanding of the situation by the end of May, he said. All eyes then will be on how present weather patterns unfold when, hopefully, prospects for winter rains will become a lot clearer.

On cloud seeding technology, Professor Stone said the science had progressed during the past 20 years.

"Importantly, the radars are far better at detecting where the benefits might be so there's interest, nationally, in reinvestigating the science," he said.

"The big improvement is in the CP2 radars which allow much better interrogation of the clouds - so you can better target them."

Cattle Council of Australia welcomes Federal Budget

The Cattle Council of Australia (CCA) has welcomed the increased funding for land transport, biosecurity and environmental stewardship announced in last night's Federal Budget.

Cattle Council Acting President Greg Brown said that the Budget has delivered funding that supports further growth of Australia's beef cattle industry.

“We are an industry that is heavily reliant on land transport and on environmental initiatives that will sustain our industry into the future”, Mr Brown said.

The Federal Government’s \$22.3 billion funding of Auslink II represents a 41% increase in expenditure for the program in 2009-2014.

“As Australia’s number one rural exporter, the beef industry has a great deal to gain out of this investment into better roads and an enhanced national network of road and rail.”

“The \$250 million commitment to strategic regional transport projects this year, with a further \$300 million allocated over the next five years recognises the importance of improved infrastructure throughout rural Australia.”

Mr Brown said the Cattle Council has also welcomed the \$12.7 million funding allocated to prepare Australia for national animal disease emergency.

“This is a critical step toward protecting biosecurity of Australia’s beef industry. An increase in the resources for assessing and managing risk allows us to build robust structures which ensure the rigour of Australia’s quarantine system by improving the Import Risk Analysis process.”

Mr Brown said that the Environmental Stewardship Program would allow farmers to be recognised and supported for going above and beyond their normal duty of care in safeguarding the environment.

“Beef producers manage 48 per cent of Australia’s landmass, and this program will give farmers the recognition they deserve when it comes to delivering tangible benefits to the environment,” he said.

“The beef industry is committed to appropriate natural resource management and use, and has made a tremendous contribution to environmental management. We welcome the environmental stewardship initiatives that will help us to improve that position.”

Adelaide Advertiser

Murdoch goes carbon neutral

Rupert Murdoch has pledged to make News Corporation carbon-neutral by 2010 and foreshadowed plans to "weave" green messages into the company's film, print and online content.

Announcing his global energy initiative in New York early today, the News chairman and chief executive said he wanted to "change the way people think" about climate change.

"I am no scientist but I do know how to assess a risk and this one is clear," Mr Murdoch said. "Climate change poses clear, catastrophic threats. We may not agree on the extent, but we certainly can't afford the risk of inaction."

Mr Murdoch's plan represents a challenge to global business to follow suit and arguably marks a defining moment in the life of the 76-year-old media mogul who is engaged in a tougher-than-expected battle for control of the Dow Jones empire, which owns The Wall Street Journal.

Mr Murdoch said audience reach meant News was uniquely positioned to take up the fight against climate change. "We can do something that's unique, different from just about any other company," he said. "We can set an example, and we can reach our audiences. Our audience's carbon footprint is 10,000 times bigger than ours. That's the carbon footprint we want to conquer.

"We cannot do it with gimmicks. We need to reach them in a sustained way, to weave this issue into our content, make it dramatic, make it vivid, even sometimes make it fun. We want to inspire people to change their behaviour.

"And when so many of the solutions make sense for us as a business, it is clear that we should take action not only as a matter of public responsibility, but because we stand to benefit.

"As many companies have already learned, acting on this issue is simply good business. For us, as a media company, this is a chance to deepen our relationships with our viewers, readers, and web users."

Mr Murdoch said he had recently bought a hybrid car as part of personal commitment to a cleaner environment and said News, which owns The Australian, was looking at providing incentives for employees prepared to do the same.

He said the company had calculated its carbon footprint at 641,150 tons, a figure that includes all electricity used in the company's global operations and any fuels burned.

The strategy now was to reduce energy use as much as possible, then switch to renewable sources of power where it made economic sense and finally, over time and as a last resort, offset the emissions that cannot be avoided. Mr Murdoch said News had entered into an agreement to begin purchasing carbon offsets this year from projects that provide wind power in India.

"We could make a difference just by holding our emissions steady as our businesses continue to grow," he said. "But that doesn't seem to be enough: we want to go all the way to zero."

He said the key to addressing climate change was to "revolutionise the message". "We need to do what our company does best: make this issue exciting. Tell the story in a new way."

Budget 2007

Water

Increasing forestry to solve carbon emissions reduces the amount of water available for the River Murray system.

11th

FarmOnLine

Irrigators urge compromise

Southern irrigators are urging the Federal Government to secure stock and domestic water supplies by allowing water trade after the Prime Minister's contingency plan is implemented on July 1.

Murray Valley irrigators say the plan will suspend off-take water from canals and cut water supplies to properties on channels not directly linked to the Murray River.

The Federal Government's contingency plan, which is separate from the \$10 billion plan, was announced last month and aims to secure town and city water supplies in the southern Murray-Darling Basin.

It suspends the basin's water-sharing plan and will only allow water for human consumption which means water for domestic use will be supplied by bottle only. Southern Riverina Irrigators chairman, Ted Hatty, said as soon as critical water supplies could be met it was vital to return to the system's normal water-sharing plan to give landholders the chance to secure stock and domestic water.

"We have been dealing with the water market for some years and the potential that once critical supplies are met water will continue to be allocated to various industries on a perceived-need basis," Mr Hatty said.

He said industries such as the dairy industry and sectors with permanent plantings needed to access water on top of basic supply to maintain their business.

"If we don't do something like this there will be the risk that high-security water will be purchased and some people will be allocated more water than they needed," he said.

"It is better if the market is brought back in and water can be used where it is most valuable."

Mr Hatty was among regional leaders' group, local government and irrigators at a meeting with Federal Water Minister, Malcolm Turnbull in Deniliquin last week.

The meeting urged the minister to consider the effect of the region if channels were left without water supply.

Mr Turnbull told irrigators he understood the critical situation facing the region, but he could not guarantee water unless it rained.

SOURCE: Extract from full story published in *The Land*, Thursday, May 10, 2007.

Groundwater tax impasse

NSW Irrigators Council chief executive, Doug Miell, met staff of the Prime Minister, and other government ministers and MPs from irrigation areas in Canberra yesterday in a bid to resolve the impasse over the taxation treatment of long-delayed payments to irrigators under the \$100 million Achieving Sustainable Groundwater Entitlements (ASGE) scheme.

Although the Australian Taxation Office has ruled the payments won't be taxed as income, it has

raised the possibility they could be subject to high capital gains tax.

The money is intended to compensate irrigators in seven groundwater regions of NSW for drastic cuts to their water entitlements but the fund is effectively frozen.

NSW Govt issues 'take it or leave it' water offer

The possibility of a class action against the NSW Government has been raised following a government offer of a take-it or leave-it \$100 per megalitre "ex gratia" payment to Murrumbidgee and Murray valleys irrigators.

Those irrigators had their access to normally safe carryover water severely cut back well into the 2006-07 irrigation season, because of the dire state of water supplies in the valleys.

Finley law firm, Taylor and Whitty Solicitors, which is already representing irrigator groups taking action against the government over cuts in groundwater entitlements, has urged farmers dissatisfied with the carryover water offer to contact it.

Letters sent to irrigators by the NSW Rural Assistance Authority on behalf of the former Department of Natural Resources, say for farmers to get the \$100/ML payment they must sign a deed of release that prevents them making any further claims against the government for losses and damage caused by the cutbacks.

Chair of the NSW Farmers Association's conservation and resource management committee, Louise Burge, said in many cases the \$100/ML payment would not offset the losses farmers had incurred.

SOURCE: Extract from *The Land*, NSW, May 10 edition.

The Australian

Coal industry to spend \$1bn on climate

Under political pressure over climate change, the coal industry has vowed to raise at least \$1 billion to develop technology to curb greenhouse gases.

The announcement increases by \$700 million the funds producers have committed to clean coal technology.

Both the federal government and Labor have put much store in the technology as a way of reducing emissions.

The Australian Coal Association said the \$1 billion would be raised over 10 years by extending the \$300 million COAL21 Fund.

All black coal companies will contribute equally to the fund through a voluntary levy, which will continue indefinitely.

"This should leave no doubt about the coal industry's intention to partner with state and federal governments on nationally significant clean coal projects," ACA executive director Mark O'Neill said.

Mr O'Neill called on power generators and other industries to share the costs of technological change.

Queensland Premier Peter Beattie this week threatened to increase mining royalties, claiming the state's industry had reneged on a deal to invest in clean coal.

Queensland Resources Council chief executive Michael Roche said \$300 million of the industry technology fund would support a near-zero emissions project in his state.

He did not specify if that would be Mr Beattie's flagship ZeroGen project near Rockhampton in central Queensland.

The ZeroGen project involves the capture and storage of carbon emissions from coal to generate low emission electricity.

Federal Industry and Resources Minister Ian McFarlane said today's announcement was an embarrassment for Mr Beattie.

"Peter Beattie must learn that where taxpayers' funds are involved, bully-boy tactics put at risk confidence in clean coal projects," Mr McFarlane said.

Federal Labor welcomed the clean coal fund, saying it showed the sector was serious about tackling climate change.

"Australia has an abundance of coal and it is in our nation's interest to find ways of using this resource in an environmentally sustainable way," Labor spokesmen Chris Evans and Peter Garrett said in a statement.

Even the Australian Greens, whose leader Bob Brown has called for the industry's abolition within three years, backed the clean coal fund so government money could be spent developing renewable energy.

"While it remains to be seen whether burying coal's pollution can be demonstrated to be safe, sustainable and economically viable, we welcome the move by coal corporations to invest a proportion of their own profits into this research," climate change spokeswoman Christine Milne said.

Not all her colleagues agreed.

"Clean coal technology is a dangerous pipe dream," Green senator Kerry Nettle told reporters.

Meanwhile, Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd was criticised by the business community today for failing to flesh out Labor's global warming policies in his budget reply.

"Given the emphasis by the ALP on the climate change issue it is ... disappointing that the ALP has still yet to articulate a clear policy on exactly how it will implement policies to reach its emission targets," Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry chief executive Peter Hendy said.

Plan to save water by fixing old pipes

Thousands of litres of water lost every year through leaky pipes and crumbling infrastructure will be targeted under Kevin Rudd's water plan.

The Labor leader last night used his budget-in-reply speech to unveil a \$250 million national water plan to reduce waste.

It follows criticism that John Howard's \$10 billion water plan, unveiled in January, did little to tackle water issues in the nation's major cities.

"Across Australia, we have about 175,000km of water mains. Leaks from these pipes remain a major impediment to future water security," Mr Rudd told parliament. "According to the National Water Commission, in some towns up to 30 per cent of water is lost from leaky pipes and burst water mains. More than 155,000 megalitres goes down the drain in our capital cities each year.

"Water is too precious to waste. Tonight I announce that if elected, we will begin by establishing a modest national fund to start plugging the leaks in the water pipes of our towns and cities."

Mr Rudd said if Labor was elected he would work with state and local governments to take action on water infrastructure.

"We will provide matching funds for practical projects that can identify relevant projects and take action," he said.

"It is a modest, practical program - but one we believe represents an important foundation on which we can later build.

"The national Government cannot simply sit on its hands and do nothing about the water crisis affecting so many of our towns and cities."

Mr Rudd's speech highlighted climate change, criticising the Howard Government's failure to tackle the problem earlier.

"The science is in. Climate change is a reality. It's happening now. And its affecting our future supply of water," he said.

"The second core reality is that the economic cost to Australia of not acting will be far greater than the cost of taking early and responsible action."

Mr Rudd reiterated the ALP's previously released 10-point plan on climate change, which includes ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2050, establishing a \$500 million national clean coal fund and boosting the use of renewable energy "by enabling Australians to access low-interest loans to help energy-efficient measures such as solar panels".

The Labor leader said an ALP government would fund the Gold Fields Superpipe delivering water to Bendigo and Ballarat, the Geelong Shell Refinery water recycling project and others.

In the budget, Peter Costello pledged to deliver \$200 million over the next six years to help pay for the installation of water tanks and other water-saving devices.

The Government predicted the measures would save 50,000 megalitres of water by 2011.

The Government allocated \$17.7 million to Scouts Australia to help halls and activity centres install water-saving devices.

To further assist farmers recover from the drought, the Government pledged an extra \$314 million over three years in exceptional circumstances funding, including \$273 million for primary producers and more than \$40 million for small businesses.

Call for industry to help fund research

The Carpenter Government will establish an office of climate change and ask industry to match its contributions to research into new technology for large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

A \$36.5 million Low Emission Energy Development Fund, part of yesterday's West Australian budget, will support research towards technology breakthroughs and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

The Labor Government's seventh budget included an announcement that it would seek matching contributions to the fund from industry and the commonwealth Government.

A panel of government-appointedees will call for expressions of interest from proponents of initiatives including hot rocks, geosequestration and clean coal.

Premier Alan Carpenter hopes the fund will help reduce Western Australia's greenhouse gas emissions in keeping with federal Labor's plan to cut emissions by 60 per cent of 2000 levels by 2050.

Mr Carpenter has already announced plans to compel new home builders to install solar or five-star gas hot water systems, water-efficient shower heads and tap fittings in all sinks and basins, water efficient dual-flush toilets and pool blankets for new pools to reduce evaporation rates.

From next year, new home owners must install plumbing for a future alternative water supply and drainage for grey water.

The Department of Environment's new climate change office was part of a \$100 million commitment over five years to sustainability.

42

Householders will be rewarded with rebates for using waterwise products in a \$9 million scheme.

The Government will also spend \$19.5 million over the next five years to secure 20 per cent of its departmental and ministerial electricity requirements from accredited renewable energy sources.

CarbonShift chief executive Michael Molitor, a consultant on the reduction of carbon emissions, said the Five Star Plus building initiative being adopted by the Carpenter Government for new housing was excellent.

But Dr Molitor said the amount of the Government's research fund seemed small.

However, he said industry contributions could make a difference and companies were now more motivated to address the issue. "Climate change is a business risk like any other business risk," Dr Molitor said.

"Companies are getting hit by their customers on this issue, and investors are saying: 'We see risk around your greenhouse gas emissions'."

[\\$750m plan a source of anxiety over tapping aquifer for Perth](#)

Budget funding of \$750 million for new, unidentified water sources has actually been set aside to tap an aquifer in a move that would ride roughshod over local opposition, the West Australian Liberals

claimed yesterday. Treasurer Eric Ripper went to great lengths yesterday to deny any decision had been made on what new sources would be funded.

But Opposition water resources spokesman John Day said there was no question the people of the state's southwest were being "softened up" in preparation for the announcement that water would be sourced from the Yarragadee aquifer, 1000 times the capacity of Sydney Harbour, to supply Perth's growing demand.

"Our preference is that they use water from the Wellington Dam (south of Perth), mixed with water from other dams," Mr Day said.

The Water Corporation has proposed that 45 gigalitres of water a year could be drawn from the aquifer but the plan has received widespread community opposition because of concerns it would benefit only Perth residents.

The new water sources funding, to be delivered over three years from 2008-09, is additional to \$755million given yesterday to the Water Corporation to be spent on water, wastewater and drainage projects throughout Western Australia.

Of this, more than \$150million will be spent on a new wastewater treatment plant in Perth's northern suburbs while \$77million will be invested in upgrading wastewater plants at Mandurah and Kwinana, south of Perth.

And in Rockingham, \$20million has been allocated to purchase land for a wastewater treatment plant.

"The major works north and south of Perth highlight the unprecedented growth in these corridors," Water Resources Minister John Kobelke said.

He said the Kwinana treatment plant upgrade, in Perth's southern suburbs, was necessary to meet the spiralling residential growth due to construction of the \$1.6billion southern suburbs rail line. A groundwater replenishment trial will also go ahead at Alkimos in Perth's northern suburbs, costing \$11million.

"The four-year, \$37million trial, of which \$3million will be spent in 2006-07, will be based on the use of highly treated wastewater from the Beenyup treatment plant," Mr Kobelke said.

"The project has been flagged as a potential forerunner of a large-scale water source for the future."

Water distribution systems across the state have been allocated expenditure of \$107million, including \$11million for pump station upgrades along the Goldfields water pipeline and \$12.5million on the Northampton to Geraldton pipeline in the state's midwest.

"The extent of the Water Corporation's capital works program demonstrates the Government's determination and commitment to responding to the challenges of the drying climate, to ensure that our water and wastewater infrastructure needs match our booming development," Mr Kobelke said.

[Pressure builds for official carbon credit scheme](#)

More forestry plantations and stemming deforestation at home and abroad could create a market for carbon credits under an inevitable Australian carbon emissions trading system.

The need for schemes to earn carbon credits is intensifying as companies press ahead with plans to become carbon neutral, such as News Corporation, which yesterday announced a target of no net emissions by 2010.

It is understood the Howard Government is toying with creating a de facto carbon credit arrangement to form part of a trading system likely to be recommended by the Prime Minister's Task Group on emissions due this month.

The budget recognised the growing importance of climate change with an extra \$741 million on measures including help for home owners to install solar panels and schools to buy water tanks. Total funding, including money for the Australian Greenhouse office, was \$2.8 billion.

An emissions trading system will involve some extra spending for administration but can be largely self-funding.

Peter Costello has signalled that the system would be designed to reduce harm to the poor from rising energy costs but has not specified what form that would take. A one-off \$500 payment to pensioners in the budget cost \$1.3 billion. The Government still has more than \$8 billion in unallocated surplus funds to rely on when it determines its response to the task force report.

43

Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull has an in-principle approval from Indonesia to co-operate in a \$200 million fund to tackle deforestation. Almost 20 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions come from clearing the world's forests, second only to emissions from burning fossil fuels to produce electricity.

The carbon-neutral announcement by News Corporation chairman and chief executive Rupert Murdoch won the approval of the Government, Labor and the Greens yesterday.

"Its initiative has the potential to promote broader awareness of the commercial merits of energy efficiency, carbon neutrality and environmental sustainability," Mr Turnbull said.

"The Australian Government through our Greenhouse Challenge Plus program has, for over 10 years, been working with companies to reduce emissions through energy efficiency and assisting companies and organisations to go carbon neutral."

Opposition environment spokesman Peter Garrett said News had "risen above the pack" in setting an ambitious target.

"Labor will work with News Corporation and other leading businesses to build a national consensus on climate change," he said. "Targets are important. They provide clear direction for the future of companies and nations. If News Corporation can set an ambitious target, so can the Howard Government."

Labor has a goal of reducing emissions by 60 per cent by 2050. Greens leader Bob Brown congratulated Mr Murdoch: "I'm not in the habit of being a eulogiser of Rupert Murdoch, but credit where it's due, and that's a great move."

Adelaide Advertiser

Leaders laud New Corp's green goal

World leaders yesterday combines to applaud News Corporation's groundbreaking plan to become carbon neutral by 2010.

Rebate causes a solar stampede

Installing solar panels has never been cheaper in Adelaide, with the Federal Government's expanded solar rebate scheme cutting the cost to almost one third.

Riverland tallies cost of drought

An ongoing drought in the Riverland could cost the State up to \$700 million a year in the next four years, a new report has forecast.

12th

Adelaide Advertiser

\$1b vow to clean up coal industry

The coal industry has pledged to raise as least \$1 billion to develop technology to help to curb greenhouse gasses and counter political pressure over 'climate change.'

Treated sewage plan for Murray

Adelaide residents could soon be drinking treated sewage from the River Murray, under a local government plan in New South Wales.

Albury City Council has flagged the possibility of diverting treated wastewater from its \$33 million Waterview facility into the Murray to increase flows.

While politicians and environmental experts have expressed concern about possible health risks from the move, they have not dismissed the idea because the River Murray is in such a "dire situation".

Albury council is adamant the water is treated to a "drinkable" standard and meets World Health Organisation requirements. It proposes injecting four megalitres a day into the river system.

The wastewater facility was opened in 1999 and the water is now used for irrigation around the city and also to flush toilets.

Greens MLC Mark Parnell said there would always be the "yuck factor" when people thought about

drinking treated wastewater. "The question would have to be how is the water treated and to what level," he said.

"If it was to a drinkable standard we wouldn't be against the idea." Council environmental team leader Adam Carty said treated water at the Waterview facility was not used for drinking in the city, which is about 900km east of Adelaide.

"(The idea) is something someone brought to the table and that's as far as it's gone," he said. "The water quality is to a drinkable standard and it does meet World Health Organisation requirements."

Mr Carty said treated water from the Waterview facility was a "better standard" than the River Murray water.

An environmental consultant and former chairman of NSW Water, Daryl McGregor, said water from the Albury facility was "second to none" in terms of treated water.

Adelaide residents could soon be drinking treated sewage from the River Murray, under a Local Government plan in New South Wales.

'Last resort' for drinking

Recycled wastewater should be drunk only as a last resort, Professor Peter Collignon an infectious diseases expert and director of infectious and microbiology at ACT Pathology says.

44

13th

The Australian

Water promise runs dry

The Howard Government's central water policy promise in the 2004 election is running 12 months behind schedule and will be underspent by more than half next financial year as the Coalition hoards cash for further election promises. The main plank of the \$2billion Australian Water Fund - the WaterSmart program - will secure only \$224 million worth of infrastructure and other projects in 2007-08 compared with the election promise of \$500million.

Figures seen by The Weekend Australian reveal that this setback will take the total amount underspent so far to almost \$500 million.

This week's budget papers also reveal that the much-trumpeted \$10 billion, 10-year federal takeover of the Murray-Darling river system will receive only \$500 million worth of funds in total for the first two years - raising doubts about whether the full amount will ever be delivered.

The Government appears to be hoarding cash earmarked for critical water infrastructure as part of its re-election campaign. Labor fears the \$12billion from the water fund and the Murray-Darling plan is

being deliberately underspent with a view to making big-bang promises closer to the election.

However, water issues could hurt the Government in an unexpected way in the run-in to the election, with electricity companies this week warning soaring power bills, caused by a shortage of water for generators, could fuel inflation.

Acting Victorian Premier John Thwaites said yesterday Canberra was "still sitting on the majority of the \$2billion" from the 2004 water fund.

The state was waiting for an answer on 17 projects submitted last year, worth \$1.3billion. They include recycling in Geelong and the Ballarat super water pipe. Victoria is asking the federal Government to kick in \$397million to facilitate all 17 projects.

"Despite a lot of talk about wanting to address water issues, not one extra cent was allocated in the budget to these projects," Mr Thwaites said.

The National Farmers Federation criticised the pace of change for the national water initiative, signed in 2004. "The implementation has been extremely slow, and that has been a real frustration for us," NFF chief executive officer Ben Fargher said.

He said the NFF had given its conditional support to the \$10billion Murray-Darling takeover on the assumption it would accelerate the national water initiative. Farmers were less worried about the spending on the Murray-Darling, because it was important that the detail be correct. The NFF's main concern on money was with the \$2billion water fund.

It was only last month that John Howard warned that irrigators along the Murray-Darling Basin could run out of water this winter and called on Australians "to pray for rain".

The \$2billion water fund was meant to run for five years. The WaterSmart program is the largest component, with \$1.6billion promised at the last election. Two smaller funds, WaterWise Communities and National Water Standards, make up the remaining \$400million.

The first three years of the water fund had \$1billion set aside, with \$750million supposed to come from WaterSmart. It is understood only \$800million of the \$1billion earmarked was spent in the first three years.

The Government expects to "substantially" spend the \$1.2billion still owing "over the next three years" - 12 months later than originally promised at the 2004 election.

Government sources reject the charges of hoarding and tardiness, and argue the problem rests with the states and local authorities who have responsibility for developing the projects. Sources said the commonwealth had no intention of handing over cheques until it was satisfied that all the requirements were being met.

"Actual expenditure under the AWF reflects the progress of the projects, the subject of the grants," one source said.

"This is influenced by the quality of the proposals on offer and proponents' abilities to execute the

expenditure profile under the contract. The Government follows a rigorous process in making grants, with actual spends dependent on the speed of a proponent to get a contract in place, to spend money according to specified milestones and then to sign off on actual work. This is a Government that will only spend program funding responsibly. We are not about simply pushing money out of the door."

This week's budget is littered with examples of under-spending. Treasury said \$3.1 billion in expenditure would now not be required in 2007-08 because programs were either running behind schedule, or fewer people were claiming benefits.

Drought powers threat to mortgages

Soaring electricity prices could push inflation into the Reserve Bank's danger zone if the drought continues.

Wholesale prices have soared by between 50 and 100 per cent in the past six weeks and are already being passed on to some industrial consumers.

45

State regulators, who set the prices for household consumers, are under pressure to pass on the cost increase.

The Energy Users Association, representing major businesses, believes inflation could rise by between 0.5 and 1.5 per cent if the drought does not break and the prices are passed on to retail consumers. Centre for International Economics director Andrew Stoeckel said the combination of higher retail prices, and higher business costs could easily add 0.5 per cent to inflation. This could push inflation to the top of the Reserve Bank's 3 per cent target band.

"When the wholesale price doubles, it feeds through not only to retail prices, which are regulated, but also to manufacturing costs which are passed on to consumers," Dr Stoeckel said.

He said demand for electricity did not fall when prices rise so they will remain high until additional electricity supplies become available. The immediate cause of the surge in power prices is the drought, which has forced two power stations in Queensland to cut back their production, and has dried up the supply of hydro-electricity from Snowy Hydro and other suppliers in southeast Australia and Tasmania.

In Victoria, two power stations have used up nearly all of their bulk water entitlement and are scrambling to keep going on the basis of water purchased on commercial markets.

Water reserves at Mt Piper and Wallerawang power stations in NSW are down to 20 per cent.

National Generators Forum executive director John Boshier said that because autumn was traditionally a quiet time, a lot of scheduled maintenance was taking generators out of commission.

The Energy Users Association believes there is also some manipulation of the market by generators.

In a letter sent to the Prime Minister, premiers and energy ministers, its executive director Roman

Domanski, said: "The prices we are seeing are so far removed from the underlying cost of producing power in Australia, that we are not fully satisfied that these are the only causes."

Mr Domanski said industry believed the generating companies were changing the way they intervened in the market, pushing prices higher.

He called for energy ministers to launch an immediate investigation, and act on any evidence that lax rules for generators bidding into the national electricity market were contributing to the high prices.

Federal Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane said yesterday he had noted the energy association's claims. He said there were many reasons for higher electricity prices, including higher coal and gas prices, but the main reason was drought.

"The market is expecting the lack of water to continue to constrain output from power stations, particularly from hydro-generators," Mr Macfarlane said.

He said he would discuss a report from the National Electricity Market Management Company on the electricity market at a meeting with state ministers on May 25.

Mr Macfarlane said the impact of higher electricity prices reinforced the need for comprehensive energy market reform.

"State Labor governments which don't understand economics and have resisted this reform should remove themselves from the ownership of energy assets and allow the free market to operate."

14th

FarmOnLine

NSW Govt issues 'take it or leave it' water offer

The possibility of a class action against the NSW Government has been raised following a government offer of a take-it or leave-it \$100 per megalitre "ex gratia" payment to Murrumbidgee and Murray valleys irrigators.

Those irrigators had their access to normally safe carryover water severely cut back well into the 2006-07 irrigation season, because of the dire state of water supplies in the valleys.

Finley law firm, Taylor and Whitty Solicitors, which is already representing irrigator groups taking action against the government over cuts in groundwater entitlements, has urged farmers dissatisfied with the carryover water offer to contact it.

Letters sent to irrigators by the NSW Rural Assistance Authority on behalf of the former Department of Natural Resources, say for farmers to get the \$100/ML payment they must sign a deed of release that prevents them making any further claims against the government for losses and damage caused by the cutbacks.

Chair of the NSW Farmers Association's conservation and resource management committee, Louise

Burge, said in many cases the \$100/ML payment would not offset the losses farmers had incurred.

SOURCE: Extract from *The Land*, NSW, May 10 edition.

NSW Govt creates new water taskforce

NSW Climate Change, Environment and Water Minister, Phil Koperberg, has announced the creation of a new high-level taskforce to help Murray-Darling Basin communities cope with severe drought and zero water allocations. Called the NSW Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Advisory Council, it will include representatives from the irrigation industry, agriculture, business, banking, tourism, local communities and an environmental expert. Mr Koperberg said the council would report directly to him and provide advice on ways to assist communities affected by the crisis, in particular on how to prioritise water allocations.

46

"Unless significant rain falls over coming weeks, townships, irrigators and businesses across the Murray-Darling are facing the worst case scenario," he said.

Mr Koperberg has already visited Deniliquin and Albury to meet affected communities.

There would be a series of meetings in central valleys to develop contingency plans to deal with the critical water shortage.

SOURCE: *The Land*, NSW, weekly rural newspaper, posting news updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

Water tax anger erupts in WA

WA Farmers has slammed State Water Resources Minister John Kobelke for his "arrogance" in justifying proposed water licensing administration fees.

Mr Kobelke has been pushing forward the Western Australian Government's agenda to charge a licence fee to irrigation dam owners, despite public disapproval of its plan.

WA Farmers water resources spokesman, Steve Dilley, said Mr Kobelke had demonstrated a lack of understanding of the realities of irrigated agriculture and the consultative process on water reform undertaken.

"Farmers are not opposed to any licence administration fee, just the inequitable and unjustified scale of fees he wants to ram through," Mr Dilley said.

"Farmers are also not opposed to licence application fees because there is genuine justification to recover costs for a first time assessment or renewal, but there is no justification to slug farm irrigation dam owners \$600, \$1200 and \$1800 every year for 10-year licences."

Mr Dilley said the Minister and his department appeared to be suffering from the illusion that a farm dam's volumetric capacity was directly related to the profitability of the enterprise and its ability to

pay any rate of fees.

"If only that were true," Mr Dilley said.

"Farmers are price takers.

"Increases in costs cannot be passed on and have to be absorbed in the farm budget.

"Every new cost impacts on a farmer's viability and international competitiveness.

"The minister seems incapable of understanding this basic economic concept."

SOURCE: *Farm Weekly*, WA's leading rural newspaper, posting updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

The Australian

Weather forecasts too predictable

Seasonal rain forecasts by the Bureau of Meteorology were overly conservative and provided "very limited" assistance for Australia's drought-ravaged farmers.

A Melbourne academic will make the claim at an annual veterinary science conference in Victoria tomorrow, saying existing forecasting systems were not doing much to assist farmers in southeastern Australia in planning ahead for the all-important autumn rains.

"A forecasting system has to have certain attributes to be of use and what we'd love to hear is a forecast such as there's a 90 per cent chance of it being dry or a 95 per cent chance or a 5 per cent chance," said Andrew Vizard, who specialises in veterinary epidemiology at Melbourne University.

Seasonal or three-monthly weather forecasts made by the weather bureau were too conservative and failed to deliver a degree of certainty for farmers and other end users.

"They consistently say 'there is a 50 per cent chance of above average rainfall' which is not helpful," Professor Vizard said. "It would be really great if they said there was a 90 per cent chance of it being dry or a 10 per cent chance of it being dry but they have never delivered such forecasts."

Understanding if the autumn rains would come was a priority for farmers in southeastern Australia, who must make decisions on feeding costs during times of drought.

"A lot of people make mistakes at the start of droughts by selling up all their sheep and what they do by doing that is to convert a one-year drought into a six-year drought because they've got no sheep on their property for the next five years," he said.

\$750m plan a source of anxiety over tapping aquifer for Perth

Budget funding of \$750 million for new, unidentified water sources has actually been set aside to tap an aquifer in a move that would ride roughshod over local opposition, the West Australian Liberals claimed yesterday. Treasurer Eric Ripper went to great lengths yesterday to deny any decision had been made on what new sources would be funded.

But Opposition water resources spokesman John Day said there was no question the people of the state's southwest were being "softened up" in preparation for the announcement that water would be sourced from the Yarragadee aquifer, 1000 times the capacity of Sydney Harbour, to supply Perth's growing demand.

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47

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Of this, more than \$150million will be spent on a new wastewater treatment plant in Perth's northern suburbs while \$77million will be invested in upgrading wastewater plants at Mandurah and Kwinana, south of Perth.

And in Rockingham, \$20million has been allocated to purchase land for a wastewater treatment plant.

"The major works north and south of Perth highlight the unprecedented growth in these corridors," Water Resources Minister John Kobelke said.

He said the Kwinana treatment plant upgrade, in Perth's southern suburbs, was necessary to meet the spiralling residential growth due to construction of the \$1.6billion southern suburbs rail line. A groundwater replenishment trial will also go ahead at Alkimos in Perth's northern suburbs, costing \$11million.

"The four-year, \$37million trial, of which \$3million will be spent in 2006-07, will be based on the use of highly treated wastewater from the Beenyup treatment plant," Mr Kobelke said.

"The project has been flagged as a potential forerunner of a large-scale water source for the future."

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"The extent of the Water Corporation's capital works program demonstrates the Government's

determination and commitment to responding to the challenges of the drying climate, to ensure that our water and wastewater infrastructure needs match our booming development," Mr Kobelke said.

smh.com.au

14th May 2007

Polar bears turn cannibal

Polar bears in the southern Beaufort Sea may be turning to cannibalism because longer seasons without ice keep them from getting to their natural food, a new study by American and Canadian scientists has found.

The study reviewed three examples of polar bears preying on each other from January to April 2004 north of Alaska and western Canada, including the first-ever reported killing of a female in a den shortly after it gave birth.

Polar bears feed primarily on ringed seals and use sea ice for feeding, mating and giving birth.

Polar bears kill each other for population regulation, dominance, and reproductive advantage, the study said.

Killing for food seems to be less common, said the study's principal author, Steven Amstrup of the US Geological Survey Alaska Science Centre.

"During 24 years of research on polar bears in the southern Beaufort Sea region of northern Alaska and 34 years in northwestern Canada, we have not seen other incidents of polar bears stalking, killing, and eating other polar bears," the scientists said.

Environmentalists contend shrinking polar ice due to global warming may lead to the disappearance of polar bears before the end of the century.

The Centre for Biological Diversity of Joshua Tree, California, in February 2005 petitioned the federal government to list polar bears as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Cannibalism demonstrates the effect on bears, said Kassie Siegal, lead author of the petition.

"It's very important new information," she said. "It shows in a really graphic way how severe the problem of global warming is for polar bears."

Deborah Williams of Alaska Conservation Solutions, a group aimed at pursuing solutions for climate change, said the study represented the "bloody fingerprints" of global warming.

"This is not a Coca-Cola commercial," she said, referring to animated polar bears used in advertising for the soft drink giant.

"This represents the brutal downside of global warming."

The predation study was published in an online version of the journal *Polar Biology* on April 27. Amstrup said print publication would follow.

Researchers in the northern spring of 2004 found more bears in the eastern portion of the Alaska Beaufort Sea

to be in poorer condition than bears in areas to the west and north.

Researchers discovered the first kill in January 2004. A male bear had pounced on a den, killed a female and dragged it 75 metres away, where it ate part of the carcass.

Females are about half the size of males.

"In the face of the den's outer wall were deep impressions of where the predatory bear had pounded its forepaws to collapse the den roof, just as polar bears collapse the snow over ringed seal lairs," the paper said.

"From the tracks, it appeared that the predatory bear broke through the roof of the den, held the female in place while inflicting multiple bites to the head and neck. When the den collapsed, two cubs were buried, and suffocated, in the snow rubble."

48

In April 2004, while following bear footprints on sea ice near Herschel Island, Yukon Territory, scientists discovered the partially eaten carcass of an adult female.

Footprints indicated it had been with a cub.

The male did not follow the cub, indicating it had killed for food instead of breeding.

A few days later, Canadian researchers found the remains of a yearling that had been stalked and killed by a predatory bear, the scientists said. **AP**

USGS to publish results relating polar bear denning to sea ice changes

USGS Alaska Science Center researchers Anthony Fischbach, Steven C. Amstrup and David C. Douglas will publish results of a 20-year satellite telemetry study of northern Alaskan polar bear den distribution in a soon-to-be-published volume of *Polar Biology*. In the paper entitled, "Landward and eastward shift of Alaskan polar bear denning associated with recent sea ice changes," they evaluate changes in the distribution of polar bear maternal dens between 1985 and 2005 using satellite telemetry. Discussion includes the trends in proportion and distribution of dens on pack ice in the Beaufort Sea from 1985 to 2004, and the ramifications of predicted continuing declines in Arctic sea ice on denning and reproductive success of this population of Beaufort Sea polar bears.

Results of western Hudson Bay study may predict other polar bear populations' response to sea ice

change

USGS Alaska Science Center researchers Eric V. Regehr and Steven C. Amstrup collaborated with Canadian Wildlife Service biologists Nicholas J. Lunn and Ian Stirling in a study "Survival and population size for polar bears in western Hudson Bay in relation to earlier sea ice break-up" about to be published in the *Journal of Wildlife Management*. The results document the change in size of the western Hudson Bay subpopulation and the relationship between earlier sea ice break-up in the spring with changes in survival rates for the juvenile, subadult, and senescent-adult polar bears between 1984 and 2004. Because western Hudson Bay is near the southern limit of the species' range, the results of this study may foreshadow how more northerly polar bear populations will respond to the continued warming that is projected for many parts of the Arctic.

Adelaide Advertiser

Hardware giant joins fight on admissions

Home improvements giant Bunnings will be carbon neutral by 2015 and has announced additional water saving measures, including rain and stormwater harvesting for 130 stores across Australia.

The Australian

One billion displaced by 2050

At least one billion people may have to flee their homes over the next four decades because of conflicts and natural disasters that will worsen with global warming, a relief agency has warned.

In a report, British-based Christian Aid said countries worldwide, especially the poorest, were facing the greatest forced migration ever - one that would dwarf those displaced by World War II.

In what at the time amounted to "the largest population displacement in modern history", 66 million people were displaced across Europe by May 1945, as well as the many millions more in China, it said.

Today there were an estimated 163 million people worldwide displaced by factors like conflict, drought and flooding as well as economic development projects like dams, logging and grain plantations, it said.

"We believe that forced migration is now the most urgent threat facing poor people in the developing world," said John Davison, author of *Human Tide: the real migration crisis*.

While the figure was already "staggeringly high", the report warned that "in future, climate change will push it even higher.

"We estimate that over the years between now and 2050, a total of one billion people will be displaced from their homes," the 52-page report said.

The figures include 645 million who will migrate because of development projects, and 250 million because of phenomena linked to global warming like floods, droughts and famine, it said.

It said the conflict in western Sudan's Darfur region, which has displaced more than two million people, was not just driven by political forces but also by competition for increasingly scarce water and land to graze animals.

"Security experts fear that this new migration will fuel existing conflicts and generate new ones in the areas of the world - the poorest - where resources are most scarce," said a statement accompanying the report.

"A world of many more Darfurs is the increasingly likely nightmare," it said.

The problem is all the more alarming as those displaced in their own countries have no rights under international law and no official voice, it said.

The report also cited case studies in Colombia, Mali and Burma as major causes for concern.

With millions having fled a civil war between paramilitary groups and guerrillas in the last 20 years, Colombians were now seeing land taken by paramilitaries-turned businessmen setting up palm oil and other plantations.

In Burma, ethnic minority groups like the Karen had suffered decades of violence, displacement and persecution only to see the military rulers now use the freed space for dams, logging and palm oil

plantations.

Climate change would drive the growth of grain-producing plantations as rich countries would raise demand for bio-fuels over crude oil in a bid to reduce carbon emissions into the atmosphere.

"In Mali, the threat from climate change is more immediate," it said.

Crop yields had fallen sharply with erratic and declining rainfall levels, forcing farmers to move to feed their families. Christian Aid, which was created to help refugees from World War II, published the report to mark the 50th door-to-door fundraising in Britain. *AFP*

15th

FarmOnline

NSW agribusinesses resilient despite drought

Drought conditions continue to exert pressure on New South Wales agribusinesses, yet the sector is showing promising signs of resilience.

Some 61pc of farmers are confident about the year ahead, according to the second quarterly Westpac & Charles Sturt University Agribusiness Index.

The results of the March quarter Westpac and CSU Agribusiness Index, which provide agribusinesses with detailed national and state-based overviews of business performance, show a 5pc decrease in business confidence in NSW since the December quarter.

This is said to be due to less than satisfactory weather improvements, while capital expenditure remains steady.

NSW coastal areas recorded a positive economic performance, suggesting that recent rains have enabled agribusinesses to get back on track.

Moving into the June quarter, capital expenditure for coastal regions remains positive with good indications for renewed investment prospects.

SOURCE: *The Land*, weekly rural newspaper, posting updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

Roger Stone to lead national cloud seeding research

Leading Australian climatologist and University of Southern Queensland academic, Professor Roger Stone, has been appointed chair of the new National Task Group for Precipitation Enhancement Research.

Dr Stone was appointed to run and coordinate the cutting-edge national research program while attending the Australian Cloud Seeding Research Symposium in Melbourne last week.

Dr Stone is the Director of the Australian Centre for Sustainable Catchments at USQ and said the creation of the research group was an important development in the area of cloud-seeding science.

"The development of this important group has been driven by aspects of climate change and our

enormous shortfall in water availability in many parts of Australia," Dr Stone said.

"We need to move quickly on making sure we have some practical science in this controversial area."

Over the next four years the task group will implement and research warm cloud precipitation enhancement science, focussing on the South East Queensland region.

USQ senior lecturer in physics, Dr Jeff Sabburg, also attended the symposium and will be involved in the task group, especially relating to cloud physics.

He said while research had previously been done into the technique in Australia, never before had it been explored on such a large scale.

"Australia broke the ground in cloud seeding science many years ago," Dr Sabburg said.

"Now the water shortage crisis and the development of technology means we need to re-evaluate the science.

"Never before has this type of collaborative project occurred in Australia, and I think it's probably the biggest thing nationally to come out of the ACSC.

"The development of the task group brings the whole science community involved in precipitation enhancement research together for the first time."

USQ will collaborate with Hydro Tasmania, Snowy Mountain Hydro, the Bureau of Meteorology Research Centre, the CSIRO and Monash University on the task group.

News.com.au

Increased water restrictions for NSW

ALL towns and cities along the Murray-Darling system in south-western NSW will be forced to move to level four water restrictions by July 1, the NSW Government said.

NSW Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water Phil Koperberg said all towns in the Murray and Murrumbidgee valleys should start preparing for the restrictions.

"We're facing a very dire situation if significant rain does not fall in the next few weeks and levels in our water storages don't increase," Mr Koperberg said.

"While the situation is grim, the upside is the sooner restrictions are adopted the better-placed local communities will be to deal with the impact on industry."

50

The restrictions have been introduced to avoid the closure of industries if zero water allocations are implemented in July and August, as predicted by Prime Minister John Howard, Mr Koperberg said.

Level four water restrictions will generally mean no outside hosing, no use of sprinklers and no filling of swimming pools.

Mr Koperberg has established the NSW Water Ministerial Advisory Council to advise him on the impacts of reduced water availability.

The Australian

River control funds threat

The federal Government has threatened to cut funding for a proposed \$417 million national water measuring and monitoring network if management of the Murray-Darling Basin is not handed to it. The project, which is part of the Government's \$10 billion national water policy announced earlier this year, has prompted intense interest among water technology developers.

Private industry and research organisations, including the CSIRO and National ICT Australia (NICTA), have signalled interest in the \$417.2 million water resource information system project headed by the Bureau of Meteorology.

The fate of the project, including a \$24.9 million capital investment during the 2008 financial year, now rests on whether the Victorian Government agrees to cede control of the Murray-Darling Basin to the federal government.

"The Government will provide \$417.2 million over 10 years to the Bureau of Meteorology to improve the detail and scope of nationally available water information, which will allow the bureau to forecast, analyse and publicly report on water resource usage," the Government said in budget papers issued last week.

"This funding is conditional on the governance arrangements for the Murray-Darling Basin being placed on a national footing."

The federal Government called on the states and territories to hand over management of the Murray-Darling basin to the Commonwealth when it launched its \$10 billion water plan in January.

Victoria is the only state yet to agree to the proposal because of concerns about effects of the takeover on the state's irrigators.

The funding threat solidifies concerns among irrigation and water management specialists, including National Water Commission chief scientist Dr Colin Chartres, that political wrangling could sink the planned information system.

Scientists from the NWC, CSIRO and NICTA have all said a national water measuring and monitoring system is essential if Australia is to solve its water crisis.

Bureau of Meteorology hydrology chief scientist Rob Vertessy said the agency had begun planning for the network in anticipation of a political agreement being reached.

Dr Vertessy, who was appointed to head the water information system project last month, said it was

likely to be some time before major procurement would commence, should an agreement be reached.

"We envision engaging with all kinds of organisations to provide services: private sector, public sector, research and development agencies," he said. "The design of that is a bit of a way off. The first few years will be very development-intensive."

To meet project goals the Bureau of Meteorology would aim to recruit about 110 staff to its nascent water information division, Dr Vertessy said.

Staff would be located in capital cities around the country.

Some technology upgrades were slated to begin in the 2008 financial year.

A \$24.9 million 2007-08 Bureau of Meteorology capital works program, disclosed in last week's budget, will upgrade the organization's computer infrastructure, imagery and data satellite receiving stations, and a radar rainfall network.

More than half of the \$417.2 million in bureau funding for the water information system will not be delivered until after the 2011 financial year.

Water reform to suit location

By the end of the next decade, Sydney could expect to have at least one desalination plant operating, while Melbourne residents would be drinking recycled sewage, a water expert predicted yesterday.

Speaking at the Future Summit, Uniwater director John Langford said the rise of recycling and desalination was an inevitable diversification of urban water supply.

"We need a diverse portfolio," Professor Langford said. "We can no longer rely on rain-fed systems, and the modelling for southeastern Australia is that it is going to get drier. Desalination and indirect potable (recycling) are the only sources that can achieve that."

Although desalination was more cost-effective in Sydney, Melbourne's geography heavily favoured the introduction of indirect recycling of sewage into dams and streams.

As a result, Professor Langford said it would be timely to begin an education and information process for the community, to ensure a smooth transition and to avoid the risk of community backlash.

"Each solution has got to be tailor-made for the city," he said.

Professor Langford said this type of major infrastructure was part of the solution, but some of the most important reforms were "quite boring", such as reforms to urban water pricing, tighter reporting

and accounting and improved understanding of the ecology.

“Snippets Plus”

May 2007 - B

14th Edition

Compiled by collating information sourced from printed media from all Australian States, the **Australian Water Association** Weekly News, **FarmOnLine** Daily News, **Murray Darling Association**, via the Internet and various other sources that are available. My comments for what

they are worth are in **red**.

Compiled by Peter R. Smith OAM

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A large amount of data from FarmOnLine & various other sources 14th to 23rd May was lost.

Biggest water users are in the bush

City slickers use less water than their bush cousins, while people in towns that rely on the parched Murray-Darling Basin for supplies are some of the highest consumers of water.

The revelations are in National Water Commission figures released yesterday.

Those towns are facing bans on all outside watering, likely to be imposed before July if there is not significant rain. But some local authorities have been criticised for failing to impose tough restrictions earlier.

Ross Young, of the Water Services Association of Australia, which represents urban water utilities, said the commission's figures dispelled the myth that rural users placed a higher value on water than those in the city.

"The non-major town suppliers charge less for water, the per capita consumption is generally higher, and the levels of investment in infrastructure are usually very low," Mr Young said.

Retired farmer Stan Peltz, from Murray Bridge, in South Australia, said water users around Australia needed to be more conscious of their consumption. Murray Bridge, east of Adelaide, relies on the Murray River for its water - but statistics on the town's water consumption were not provided in the report.

Mr Peltz, 72, waters his garden for about two hours every four days.

He also uses a fish compound, organic spray and sheep manure to keep the soil moist.

"We are a wasteful country," Mr Peltz said. "There is so much water wasted in cities. It is a real lesson that nature is telling us we have been wasteful."

Average annual residential water consumption per property in cities in 2005-06 was 213 kilolitres, compared with 263kL per property in rural and regional Australia. Of the capitals, only Darwin stood out as a city of major water users, with annual consumption per property in 2005-06 of 443kL. Brisbane had the lowest at 185kL.

Lower Murray Water, which services 14 Victorian towns along the Murray River, has annual per property consumption figures of 552kL. Some of that water is used for irrigation.

Albury, which takes all its water from the Murray, had an average consumption per property of 302kL in 2005-06.

Riverina Water, which supplies Wagga Wagga, Holbrook, Lockhart and Henty with Murrumbidgee River water, released 363kL per property in that year.

Of those three authorities, the highest charge for water per kilolitre was 70c.

In Sydney, water is priced at \$1.20 a kilolitre.

"There is a common view that rural-based people place a higher value on water, but if you look at the consumption trends, you have to seriously question that," Mr Young said.

He said much of the data on non-major urban water suppliers was patchy.

The increase in data expected next year could provide a clearer picture of city versus country water use.

National Water Commission chief executive Ken Matthews said governments should consider more aggregation of smaller water service providers, as it was difficult for each small utility to carry out all of the work required to create efficiencies. Lack of papers 'proves river plan was rushed'

THE Victorian Government has seized on a Freedom of Information request that revealed a scarcity of paperwork on the commonwealth's planned \$10 billion takeover of the Murray-Darling Basin as proof it was right to hold out on signing up to the deal.

The FOI request, lodged by the Seven Network, for documents created by the federal Government in the lead-up to the Prime Minister's water announcement in January, was denied.

But what the process did reveal was that there were only 26 documents in existence relating to the plan.

Federal Water Minister Malcolm Turnbull rejected the suggestion from Victorian Water Minister John Thwaites yesterday that the small number of documents proved the policy was a "back of the envelope" affair.

And Peter Costello claimed yesterday all the documents sought in the FOI request had already been publicly released.

2

Mr Thwaites said yesterday he would like to see the documents refused under the FOI request.

"We've always said that this takeover of the Murray-Darling Basin by the federal Government was not properly prepared," Mr Thwaites said.

"The whole thing was really the back of an envelope ... prepared without any input from federal Treasury, federal cabinet, the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, the states or indeed the experts."

Mr Turnbull said yesterday the Prime Minister had given ample detail of the Government's plans for the Murray-Darling Basin when the policy was released.

"The proposition that there's no detail on the table is ridiculous," he told ABC radio. "There is a mass of detail out there."

Drought could leave Tasmania powerless

Tasmania may face crippling power shortages by the end of the year if the drought intensifies.

National Electricity Market Management Company sources said widespread blackouts in Tasmania were inevitable if the rest of the year was as dry as it had been in parts of the mainland.

Tasmania is expected to need 8000 gigawatt hours of power between now and December, but NEMMCO said supplies would fall short if rainfall was scant.

Tasmania has three main sources of power. Hydro Tasmania has capacity of 2600GWh in its dams, which are at near-record low levels of 18per cent.

Tasmania will be able to use 1500GWh from the gas-fired Bell Bay power station over the rest of this year, and can import 2500GWh from the Basslink Interconnector, the power cable linking the island to Victoria.

But the issue is complicated by Tasmania importing 1400GWh from Basslink in the 12 months to April - the cable's first year of operation. NEMMCO sources said Tasmania exported 500GWh to Basslink over the same period, a move that offset the cost of imports but prevented the state from importing an additional 800GWh under Basslink's complicated marketing arrangements. Without the exports, the capacity of the hydro dams would be 50 per cent higher. The drought has cost Hydro Tasmania dearly, with the authority already forced to pay \$75million over the past 12 months on Basslink imports and gas.

Hydro Tasmania communications manager Andrew Catchpole said at least 6000GWh would be generated from dams following winter and spring rains.

"In a worst-case scenario, provided we have access to Basslink for the rest of the year, we will have more than enough electricity," he said. "We would run out only if it did not rain. I do not believe it will not rain."

University of Tasmania power expert Ronlyn Duncan said no power should have been exported when hydro dams were so low.

"Fixing bank balances should not be the priority of power providers at this time of water shortages," she said. "It's amazing that Hydro Tasmania insists there is no problem. If the dams run dry because we don't get enough rain, we are stuffed."

Southern Ocean 'soaking up less emissions'

Antarctica's Southern Ocean is losing the capacity to soak up rising man-made carbon emissions, leading scientists to warn yesterday of an expectedly rapid rise in global warming.

Researchers have found that the Southern Ocean, one of the world's most important absorbers of carbon dioxide, is absorbing an ever-decreasing proportion of CO₂ in the atmosphere.

The excess carbon will remain in the atmosphere and accelerate global warming, they said.

The reduced ability to absorb carbon is thought to be a result of high winds acting on ocean currents bringing deeper waters that already contain high levels of carbon to the surface.

The higher winds are themselves believed to have been caused by climate change due to a combination of changes in the ozone layer and carbon emissions.

The international team of scientists behind the study, published in the journal *Science*, said their findings marked the first time that one of the world's natural "carbon sinks" had been shown to be weakened by man's own actions.

While a reduction in absorption rates by carbon sinks has long been forecast, the discovery that the Southern Ocean is mopping up less of man's carbon emissions has come at least two decades earlier than expected.

The Southern Ocean is the world's biggest marine carbon sink and accounts for 15 per cent of all the carbon taken out of the atmosphere.

Temperatures are already predicted to rise by almost 1.5C by the middle of the century, without taking into account any further emissions caused, for example, by the rapid construction of fossil fuel power plants in China and India.

The weakening of the Southern Ocean's absorption rates – which could be in the range of 5 to 30 per cent – is likely to result in an increase in the rate at which temperatures rise, scientists say.

"This is serious," said Corinne Le Quéré, of the University of East Anglia (UEA) and the British Antarctic Survey (BAS), two of the world's leading environmental research centres.

"This is the first time that we've been able to say that climate change itself is responsible for the saturation of the Southern Ocean sink.

"With the Southern Ocean reaching its saturation point more CO₂ will stay in our atmosphere. Since the early 1980s the carbon sink hasn't changed. In the same period the emissions have gone up by 43 per cent."

Dr Le Quéré led a team measuring atmospheric carbon dioxide, which found that, despite this rise in emissions since 1981, the quantity absorbed by the ocean was static.

Since the industrial revolution an estimated 500 giga-tonnes of carbon dioxide has been released into the atmosphere through the use of fossil fuels, cement manufacture and changes in land use.

About a quarter of this has been absorbed by the oceans and a further quarter taken up by vegetation.

The research, published in *Science*, identified changes in wind patterns caused by climate change as being the direct cause of the weakened ability to absorb carbon dioxide.

While able to pinpoint the hole in the ozone layer and carbon emissions as the man-made causes of the increased winds, the researchers were unable to identify which of them had the greater effect.

The net quantity of carbon dioxide absorbed by the Southern Ocean remained at 0.3 billion tonnes a year from

1981 to 2004, according to calculations by the research team.

In 1981 it absorbed 0.6 billion tonnes from the atmosphere but emitted 0.3 billion tonnes back into it. In 2004 it absorbed 0.8 billion tonnes but emitted 0.5 billion tonnes. In the report they said that climate models project more intense Southern Ocean winds if CO2 levels continue to increase over the next century.

The researchers accepted there were limits to the data available from the Southern Ocean and that "the magnitude of the CO2 sink is heavily disputed".

Professor Chris Rapley, director of BAS, said uncertainties remained, but the findings were "a serious concern".

He said the reduced efficiency of the ocean to act as a carbon sink would make it harder to reduce emissions to levels that were low enough to limit temperature rises to 2C.

States hose down water funding attack

State premiers have denied they are failing to invest in water infrastructure following the release of figures showing they had been stripping the profits of publicly owned water companies and spending the money in unrelated areas.

John Howard yesterday described the states' practice of failing to reinvest profits from water utilities as an outrage.

The Prime Minister welcomed the heavy rain in parts of NSW and Victoria, but launched a scathing attack on the states.

"The other not-so-good story about water is confirmation state governments around the country have forced their water utilities to pay their earnings to state treasuries to be spent on things unrelated to water at a time when the country is metaphorically dying of thirst," Mr Howard said.

"That is an outrage."

NSW Premier Morris Iemma said the energy federal politicians spent blaming the states for the country's water woes should be focused on fixing the problem.

Mr Iemma, whose state has potentially most to gain from the Howard Government's \$10billion water plan, called on Mr Howard to focus on persuading Victoria to sign the agreement.

The states defended their spending on water projects after The Australian revealed governments stripped almost \$1billion in dividends from their water providers in 2005-06.

The states said dividends that were not spent on water helped strengthen resources in other critical areas such as health and education, and accused Mr Howard of playing political games.

The ACT will spend \$450million on water projects in the next three years. Capital expenditure was "lumpy", and focusing on one year, when the ACT cut spending by 50 per cent, was unfair, the head of the territory's water supplier said yesterday.

Queensland, whose utilities also cut expenditure on water projects in 2005-06, plans to spend about \$6.5billion over the next four years on projects in the state's southeast.

Western Australia, which increased spending on water by 124per cent last financial year, is about to start a second desalination plant costing \$955million.

In Victoria, a spokesman for Environment Minister John Thwaites said that in the eight years Labor had been in power it had invested \$1.7billion in water programs, on top of \$3billion invested by the water authorities.

And the current level of dividends to government was lower than under the previous Liberal government.

The Victorian Government is the only state not to have signed up to Mr Howard's \$10 billion plan to reform irrigation districts and address over-allocation. A spokesman said the Bracks Government was waiting to see a second, more detailed, draft of the associated legislation before it could make a decision.

And NSW Water Utilities Minister Nathan Rees questioned the relevance of the National Water Commission's utility performance report, which detailed the dividend payments, saying it was flawed and used out-of-date

statistics.

Sydney Water would spend \$645million this year on water projects, as part of \$3.4billion in spending over the next four years, a spokesman for Mr Iemma said.

Federal Labor water spokesman Anthony Albanese defended the states, and criticised the Howard Government for complaining but doing little to fix urban water problems.

Regional carbon trade plan

Australia is developing a regional carbon emissions trading scheme that would include China and the US and could form the basis of a "Sydney declaration" at this year's APEC summit.

As the host of the September APEC gathering, Australia is moving rapidly towards adopting an emissions trading scheme that places a price on carbon and adopts a target for greenhouse gas emissions.

The scheme would use as its bedrock the existing Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate -- which brings together the so-called AP6 nations of Australia, China, the US, Japan, South Korea and India.

It could also be expanded to include other regional partners.

The possibility of using the AP6, which was created to tackle climate change by promoting cleaner technologies, is the first sign the US is considering an international emissions trading scheme and represents a big shift in the Australian Government's position.

The proposed emissions trading scheme would be based on finding "a mechanism" to set a target for greenhouse gas emissions. Polluters who could not meet their emissions cap would be able to use the trading scheme to buy credits to emit extra greenhouse gases.

The APEC agenda will be framed by John Howard's carbon trading emissions taskforce report, which is due at the end of this month.

It is expected to recommend a carbon trading system that will indirectly raise the price of carbon fuels -- such as coal -- but not set a formal target for reductions.

The ALP has adopted a target of cutting greenhouse emissions by 60 per cent of 2000 levels by 2050 and joining the Kyoto trading principles. The party has not set an interim emissions target.

The Prime Minister has previously refused to set a greenhouse emissions reduction target or join any emissions trading group.

But it now appears likely the Howard Government will adopt a target based on a price mechanism recommended in the emissions trading taskforce report.

Mr Howard has accused Labor of arbitrarily adopting a greenhouse emissions target without proper analysis of whether it would devastate an Australian economy so reliant on fuel exports.

Mr Howard has rejected the Labor premiers' plan for a national emissions trading scheme but is now leaning towards an AP6-plus scheme building on regional relationships and bilateral climate change agreements.

Three weeks ago, Mr Howard announced the \$200 million global initiative to combat deforestation, especially in Indonesia, which the British Stern report into the impact of climate change identified as one of the greatest contributors to global warming.

It is expected that other regional countries will eventually become involved in the new emissions trading scheme, with the possibility of some European nations getting involved.

Gordon Brown, the British Chancellor and successor to Prime Minister Tony Blair, yesterday praised Australia's position on climate change and said he looked forward to working with Australia.

"Let me say I applaud what is being discussed in Australia at the moment," Mr Brown said in London.

Mr Brown said the key to climate change -- "and what has eluded us" -- is an agreement that all countries are

prepared to sign, "America and China particularly".

The US and China are both founding members of the six-nation AP6 and will be in Sydney for the APEC meeting, along with Russia.

Mr Howard wrote to APEC leaders in March putting climate change on the agenda and aligning it with the AP6 philosophy of using technical transfer, such as clean coal technology, to limit greenhouse gas emissions without hurting developing economies.

APEC members are responsible for 60 per cent of the world's energy consumption. Demand for energy in the Asia-Pacific region is expected to double in 20 years.

Although Mr Howard has never ruled out some kind of target for greenhouse emissions he has resisted pressure to nominate even a long-term figure.

Mr Howard is still not expected to produce a unilateral target and will insist any pricing mechanism and trading scheme does not damage the economy or put Australia at a trading disadvantage.

It also signals an end to the argument that Australia should wait until all countries are in a trading scheme.

The AP6 plan would mean that China, India and the US -- among the world's biggest polluters -- would be involved.

5

The Prime Minister's emissions trading taskforce is due to report on May 31 and is expected to back an emissions-trading scheme as the best way to put a price on carbon and thus reduce emissions.

But rather than recommend greenhouse emissions targets for 2015 and 2050, the taskforce is expected to produce a mechanism that would allow Australia and other countries to work out suitable targets.

Words twisted in anti-recycling propaganda

Scientists say they have been seriously misrepresented in material prepared for a campaign to undermine the Beattie Government's recycled sewage plan.

Brisbane will become the first capital to use recycled sewage for drinking by the end of next year, with recycled water to be pumped to the Wivenhoe Dam through the \$1.7 billion western corridor pipeline, the biggest project of its kind in Australia.

Opponents of the plan have vowed to stop it. More than 500,000 copies of a glossy 20-page booklet -- called "Think Before You Agree to Drink" and costing \$200,000 -- have been distributed in Brisbane in recent weeks.

The publication claims that liquid waste from morgues and hospitals, paints and solvents would be part of a "horrendous toxic cocktail" in the sewage to be recycled for drinking.

It claims that a large proportion of male fish changed sex through exposure to sewage pollutants, and that male lambs fed sewage sludge pellets behaved like females.

The booklet refers to what it describes as scientific studies that support the case against drinking recycled water.

However, four experts quoted in the publication have told *The Australian* that they in fact support the use of recycled sewage as drinking water. Melbourne Water scientist John Poon is quoted as expressing concern about "longer-term health impacts from contaminants".

Mr Poon said the quote was taken from a long article, which indicated it was safe to drink recycled water. "They have misrepresented me by taking that comment totally out of context," he said.

University of Queensland biologist Peter Koopman is quoted as blaming pollutants for a 50 per cent drop in male fertility rates over the past 50 years.

Professor Koopman said his comment had nothing to do with recycled water, which was not even available over those 50 years. "The implied link is nonsense," he said.

University of Wollongong engineer Long Duc Nghiem and CSIRO scientist Colin Creighton, who are also quoted in the brochure, said they were not opposed to drinking recycled water.

The publication was funded in part by John Dowson, a semi-retired land developer in the Darling Downs city of Toowoomba, where a referendum last June to introduce recycled water was defeated.

The campaign Mr Dowson funds is organised by Toowoomba councillor Snow Manners, who conceded that some experts quoted in the brochure may have been misrepresented. "They are all direct quotes but some may have been taken out of context," Mr Manners said.

"That is a reasonable thing to do. It is crucial that people realise recycled water is not a solution, no matter how desperate the water situation is."

Although Toowoomba residents voted against drinking recycled sewage by a large margin, they will be forced to do so anyway when the city is connected to the southeast Queensland water grid.

Turnbull bids for 'new Kyoto'

Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull says Australia is working towards a "new Kyoto" pact among major industrialised countries in the Asia Pacific region. But he has played down the prospects of a regional carbon emissions trading scheme emerging from this year's APEC summit in Sydney, saying he was keen to keep expectations of a breakthrough low.

The Weekend Australian revealed on Saturday that the Government was pushing a regional carbon trading scheme built on the so-called AP6 -- the clean technology pact that brings together the US, India, China, South Korea, Japan and Australia.

"We are working for ... a new Kyoto if you like, a new international arrangement which will be environmentally effective and the basic building blocks of that are already there in the AP6, which Australia led the way in setting up some time ago," Mr Turnbull told the Nine Network's *Sunday* program.

"The AP6 is the major industrial countries, in the Asia Pacific, collectively representing about 50 per cent of global emissions.

"(But) carbon trading -- I think it's unlikely that a regional carbon trading scheme would spring out of the APEC meeting ... but certainly the pathway to get there, is something that we have to focus on.

"I think, everyone recognises that for emissions trading to be globally effective, it has to be a global scheme and we need to focus on the largest emitting countries ... so we work very closely with China, and with the United States through AP6 but also bilaterally."

Mr Turnbull maintains the key to delivering big emission cuts by mid century is new technology to allow countries to produce more electricity through low-emission or zero-emission means.

6

However, Kevin Rudd said yesterday John Howard's reputation as a climate change sceptic would undermine his attempts to broker a global agreement on climate change.

Polar bears at risk from global warming

Time may be running out for polar bears as global warming melts the ice beneath their paws.

Restrictions or bans on hunting in recent decades have helped protect many populations of the iconic Arctic carnivore, but many experts say the long-term outlook is bleak.

An estimated 20,000-25,000 bears live around the Arctic - in Canada, Russia, Alaska, Greenland and Norway - and countries are struggling to work out ways to protect them amid forecasts of an accelerating thaw.

"There will be big reductions in numbers if the ice melts," Jon Aars, a polar bear expert at the

Norwegian Polar Institute, said by the fjord in Longyearbyen on the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard, about 1,000 km from the North Pole.

Unusually for this time of year, the fjord is ice free.

Many restaurants and shops in Longyearbyen, a settlement of 1,800 people, have a stuffed polar bear or pelt - often shot before a hunting ban from the early 1970s. Self-defence is now the only excuse for killing a bear.

Many scientific studies project that warming, widely blamed on emissions of greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels, could melt the polar ice cap in summer, with estimates of the break-up ranging from decades to sometime beyond 2100.

Bears' favorite hunting ground is the edge of the ice where they use white fur as camouflage to catch seals.

"If there's no ice, there's no way they can catch the seal," said Sarah James of the Gwich'in Council International who lives in Alaska. "Gwich'in" means "people of the caribou", which is the main source of food for about 7,000 indigenous people in Alaska and Canada.

US President George W. Bush's administration is due to decide in January next year whether to list polar bears as "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act.

That would bar the Government from taking any action jeopardising the animals' existence and environmentalists say it would spur debate about tougher US measures to curb industrial emissions. The World Conservation Union last year listed the polar bear as "vulnerable" and said the population might fall by 30 per cent over the next 45 years. Bears also suffer from chemical contaminants that lodge in their fat.

Some indigenous peoples, who rely on hunts, say many bear populations seem robust.

"The Russians thought there's more polar bears that they're seeing in their communities, so they felt that it's not an endangered species," said Megan Alvanna-Stimpfle, chair of the Inuit Circumpolar Youth Council, of an area of Arctic Russia.

"But if we're talking about the future and there's no ice, then they are," she said.

And some reports say the melt may be quickening.

"Arctic sea ice is melting at a significantly faster rate than projected by most computer models," the US National Snow and Ice Data Center said in a report on April 30.

It said it could thaw earlier than projected by the UN climate panel, whose scenarios say the Arctic Ocean could be ice-free in summers any time between about 2050 to well beyond 2100.

An eight-nation report by 250 experts in 2004 said "polar bears are unlikely to survive as a species if there is an almost complete loss of summer sea-ice cover."

Paal Prestrud, head of the Center for International Climate and Environmental Research in Oslo who was a vice-chair of that study, said there was no Arctic-wide sign of a fall in numbers.

But there were declines in population and reduced weights among females in the Western Hudson Bay area in Canada, at the southern end of the bears' range where summer ice has been breaking up earlier.

Mitchell Taylor, manager of wildlife research at the Inuit-sponsored environmental research department in Nunavut, Canada, said some bears in region had simply moved north.

"Hunters in many regions say they are seeing increases," he said. "It's clear that the ice is changing but it's not at all clear that the trend will continue."

Prestrud said the fate of polar bears may hinge on whether they adapt to survive longer on land in summers. In the Hudson Bay, bears often go for months without food, scavenging on birds' eggs or even on berries and roots.

"Otherwise they will end up in zoos," he said.

Aars, however, said the bears had survived temperature swings in the past: "I hear far too often that within 100 years polar bears could be extinct," he told a group of climate students in Longyearbyen.

"You will still have bays with ice for many months a year where polar bears can live," he said.

On Svalbard, bears may have become less scared of people since the hunting ban, and are more likely to see them as a meal. Aars' recommendation: don't show you are scared.

"You start shouting, or use flare shots to make a noise. Most polar bears get scared if you behave in the right way. But you have to act from the start. If you show weakness you are in trouble." *Reuters*

7

Arctic takes brunt in dirty fight over oil

The world's largest untapped oil reserves - in the Canadian Arctic - have become the new front line in the battle between environmentalists and the energy industry.

Shell, a self-styled "green" energy company, is to invest billions of dollars in exploiting the Athabasca tar sands.

Environmentalists say the tar sands are the world's dirtiest oil deposits and that refining them generates three to four times more carbon dioxide than normal oil extraction.

However, Clive Mather, chief executive of Shell Canada, said rising demand and surging oil prices could not be resisted.

"The deposits are huge, potentially even greater than in Saudi Arabia," he said. "The time is right to exploit them."

The Athabasca tar sands are named after the river that runs through them. They contain about 1.7 trillion barrels of oil, of which 175 billion can be reached with existing technologies and another 135 billion could be tapped with technologies under development.

The total of 310 billion barrels would give Canada the world's largest oil reserves - bigger than Saudi Arabia's 264 billion barrels.

For Western countries, especially the US, Canada's oil is a chance to cut dependence on the Middle East but the environmental costs could be huge.

This is because tar sands comprise viscous bitumen and sand, a mixture that can currently be extracted only by digging it out, destroying the overlying forests. The Athabasca region has already been scarred with huge pits, some hundreds of feet deep. Alongside them lie vast ponds that hold the contaminated sands and other residues left after the oil is removed.

Shell, along with Suncor and Syncrude, the other main oil companies in the area, are developing a second extraction method, whereby superheated steam is pumped into the ground to melt the oil so that it can be sucked out as a liquid.

However, both processes, and the subsequent refining, require huge amounts of energy - equivalent to up to 30 per cent of the energy contained in the extracted oil.

Shell and its partners are extracting about 150,000 barrels of oil a day but now want a five-fold expansion to 770,000 barrels. Suncor and Syncrude are each planning similar expansions to about 500,000 barrels a day.

This will require so much energy that the oil firms want to lay a pipeline across 1300km of forest to tap into gas reserves in the Mackenzie River basin in Canada's far north. There are also proposals to build a nuclear power station near the tar sands.

Such plans are causing alarm among environmental groups such as Britain's WWF. It has set up an office in Edmonton, the capital of Alberta, to campaign for improved monitoring and restraints on development.

"Tar sands are the worst kind of source for oil," said James Leaton, WWF's policy adviser on gas and oil. "Extracting oil takes huge amounts of energy and devastates the local environment by destroying the forest and polluting rivers, lakes and the air." Leaton and other environmentalists contrast Shell's operations in Canada with the firm's public relations, which portray it as the greenest of oil companies.

Privately, however, Shell executives make clear that they are simply doing what oil companies are meant to

do: extract oil. They say it is the job of governments to regulate the pace.

In Alberta, little interference is likely from a provincial government with a powerful dislike of regulation. Rob Renner, Alberta's Conservative Environment Minister, said: "We believe the speed of development is best left to the free market."

Under Mr Renner, the monitoring of industrial pollutants from the tar sands has largely been handed over to the oil companies. One result is that the Athabasca river, and Lake Athabasca, into which it flows, are widely believed to be heavily polluted.

Medical staff at Fort Chipewyan, on the shores of the lake, have reported a surge in rare cancers.

The decision to exploit such oils is provoking a political backlash, with Arnold Schwarzenegger, the Governor of California, effectively banning them. He has issued a fuel standard, demanding a cut in "carbon intensity", a measure of the CO₂ generated in producing and using the oils.

Scientists to fight global warming with plankton

One of the Earth's major natural barriers to global warming could be strengthened by the first commercial venture to grow vast plankton blooms.

US eco-restoration firm Planktos intends to drop tonnes of powdered iron into the Pacific in a two-year project which aims to induce the growth of plankton.

Some scientists believe the iron seeding technique will help reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere after research published on Friday showed that atmospheric carbon dioxide is no longer being absorbed by the Southern Ocean at the rate it used to be.

"The ocean's rising acidity and surface water temperatures and most of all the dwindling wind-borne supply of vital iron micronutrients have literally decimated the marine plankton plants which generate half the planet's oxygen, remove half its CO₂ and feed every higher form of ocean life," said Planktos CEO Russ George.

"However, public concern with the climate change issue may finally highlight and help reverse this crisis as more people recognise that simply restoring these plankton back to known 1980 levels can remove 3-4 billion tonnes of atmospheric CO₂ or approximately half of our global warming surplus today.

"We are trying to demonstrate that this restoration is not only achievable and affordable with targeted iron dust replenishment, it is absolutely necessary to rehabilitate the ocean's health."

Each decade since 1981, the ocean has soaked up between 5 per cent and 30 per cent less of the greenhouse gas than experts had predicted and has unloaded more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, the international team led by Dr Corinne Le Quere, from the University of East Anglia and British Antarctic Survey, said.

Like the rainforests, the Southern Ocean is one of the most important carbon "sinks" that together remove half of all man-made emissions of carbon dioxide. It acts like a huge sponge, trapping carbon from the atmosphere.

"We (Planktos) are now launching a two-year series of commercial-scale pilot projects that will seed and track six large forest-sized plankton blooms in various ocean regions," George said.

"Based on the science derived from 10 earlier international research trials, each of these blooms should regenerate tens of millions of tons of plankton life and deep ocean sequester 3-5 million tons of CO₂. Most importantly this work can dramatise that humanity can make a hugely significant climate difference with a safe, simple and very green natural technology."

Planktos plans to pour 100 tonnes of iron into the Pacific in a bid to reverse this trend, despite concerns in the scientific community.

The powdered iron provides a crucial nutrient for plankton growth that is missing or in short supply in up to 70 per cent of the world's oceans.

Phytoplankton, the plant form of plankton, struggle to grow if there is little iron - but the extra supplies could mean that as the phytoplankton grow they will photosynthesise and absorb carbon that, when they die and sink, will be trapped on the seabed, where it will be out of the system.

The project will take place in international waters 500km west of the Galapagos Islands and Planktos hopes to create a bloom of 50-60 million tonnes of which, it estimates, up to 20 per cent will sink and take 3-5 million tonnes of carbon with it.

If it is a success, it could open up iron seeding to the carbon offsetting industry, giving companies an alternative to planting trees to compensate for carbon emissions blamed for global warming.

But experiments on a much smaller scale have already been carried out and their findings cast doubt on the likely success of bigger carbon-removal projects.

Global warming fight up to rich nations: China

Rich Nations must do more to fight global warming and allow poorer countries to pursue sustainable economic development, one of China's top diplomats said in comments published today.

China is willing to play its role in tackling climate change but the onus rests on the developed world to tackle the problem, State Councillor Tang Jiaxuan told a visiting United Nations envoy on global warming yesterday.

“Tang demanded that developed nations take a lead on greenhouse gas emission reduction and provide assistance to developing countries in terms of technology transfer and capital,” the official Xinhua news agency reported.

Developing countries, such as China, should in the meantime be allowed to pursue “sustainable development,” Tang told envoy Han Seung-soo.

Xinhua reported that Tang was making his comments in the context of rising international pressure on China, which is the second biggest emitter of climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions, to do more to fight global warming.

“(But) the developed nations have both the responsibility and capability to contribute more to (fighting) climate change,” Xinhua quoted Tang as saying.

Tang highlighted China's efforts to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, and said the Asian nation was committed to working with the rest of the world.

“Only when developed and developing nations join hands can climate change be solved fundamentally,” he said.

British Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett yesterday added her voice to the growing chorus of international leaders urging China to step up its efforts on climate change, although she acknowledged the nation's commitment on the issue.

“They really have made some quite remarkable progress, but of course they want to, and we all need them to, make still more progress,” Beckett told a news conference in Hong Kong as she wrapped up a six-day tour of China.

Climate exhibit 'altered' for US

Washington: The Smithsonian Institution toned down an exhibit on climate change in the Arctic for fear of angering Congress and the Bush administration, a former administrator at the US museum said yesterday.

The admission came as the Bush administration stepped up pressure on the Group of Eight to abandon its push for urgent talks on a new deal to fight global warming after the Kyoto Protocol lapses in 2012.

Robert Sullivan, former associate director in charge of exhibitions at the Smithsonian's National Museum of

Natural History, said the official text of last year's exhibit was rewritten to minimise and inject more uncertainty into the relationship between global warming and humans.

Officials also omitted scientists' interpretation of some research and altered graphs to let visitors draw their own conclusions from the data, he said.

"It just became tooth-pulling to get solid science out without toning it down," said Mr Sullivan, who resigned last year after 16 years at the museum.

The exhibit, Arctic: A Friend Acting Strangely, based partly on a report by federal scientists, opened in April 2006 - six months late, because of the Smithsonian's review - and closed in November.

Smithsonian officials denied that political concerns influenced the exhibit, saying the changes were made for reasons of objectivity.

Mr Sullivan said that to his knowledge, no one in the Bush administration pressured the Smithsonian, whose \$US1.1 billion (\$1.33 billion) budget is mostly taxpayer-funded.

But he added: "The obsession with getting the next allocation and appropriation was so intense that anything that might upset the Congress or the White House was being looked at very carefully."

In recent months, the White House has been accused of trying to muzzle scientists researching global warming at NASA and other agencies.

Yesterday it became involved in a fresh climate stoush.

Washington is calling for references to the urgency of the climate crisis - and the need for a UN conference in December on a new global deal - to be removed from the final communique for next month's G8 summit in Germany.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has put climate change high on the agenda for the June meeting of leaders from the US, Britain, Russia, Canada, Japan, Germany and Italy.

But the US, which rejected Kyoto in 2001, has mounted a concerted campaign to water down the tone and content of the G8 summit declaration.

Most references in the draft to targets and timetables to cut climate warming carbon emissions have met with objections from Washington.

It objects to efforts by G8 president Germany to get rich nations to agree to cut energy consumption by 20 per cent by 2020 and raise energy efficiency in transport and power generation by the same amount over the same period.

AP, Reuters

Bracks rejects river handover to Canberra

Victoria won't hand over responsibility for the Murray- Darling basin to the commonwealth under Howard Government-drafted laws it says are flawed.

Steve Bracks wrote personally to John Howard late yesterday to rule out Victoria's involvement in a \$10 billion plan, leaving it as the only hold-out among the states.

"I remain very concerned about the tenor of the draft legislation," Mr Bracks wrote.

"The content of the draft bill is still extremely broad and could potentially allow the commonwealth to intervene in almost every activity within the Murray-Darling basin."

"(This) is unacceptable and beyond the terms of any discussions to date," Mr Bracks wrote.

He said Victoria would therefore "not be in a position to consider the referral of any powers" by June 20, the planned date for the introduction of the laws.

Last month there appeared to be hope for compromise between the Bracks and Howard governments, with Federal Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull saying he was prepared to specify the planned

commonwealth powers in the legislation rather than assume all powers.

Last week Mr Turnbull was still confident the Victorian Government, along with the Victorian Farmers Federation which is yet to be convinced of the deal, would come on board once they saw the legislation.

But Victoria's position hardened after seeing the draft laws, which they claimed continue to give the commonwealth total control of rivers including responsibility for planning and water allocations.

Mr Turnbull was unmoved last night.

"We have provided the legislation to all the states including Victoria," he said.

"There will be a meeting on Thursday of officials to go through the legislation at which time the states can put forward proposals to amend or refine the bill."

10

"If Mr Bracks was genuinely interested in advancing this vital national project he would send his officials to make a constructive contribution," Mr Turnbull said.

The Howard Government's \$10 billion proposal includes a \$6 billion commitment to making irrigation more efficient through the use of pipes rather than channels to cut evaporation, and a further \$3 billion to buy out already allocated water entitlements.

Biggest water users are in the bush

City slickers use less water than their bush cousins, while people in towns that rely on the parched Murray-Darling Basin for supplies are some of the highest consumers of water.

The revelations are in National Water Commission figures released yesterday.

Those towns are facing bans on all outside watering, likely to be imposed before July if there is not significant rain. But some local authorities have been criticised for failing to impose tough restrictions earlier.

Ross Young, of the Water Services Association of Australia, which represents urban water utilities, said the commission's figures dispelled the myth that rural users placed a higher value on water than those in the city.

"The non-major town suppliers charge less for water, the per capita consumption is generally higher, and the levels of investment in infrastructure are usually very low," Mr Young said.

Retired farmer Stan Peltz, from Murray Bridge, in South Australia, said water users around Australia needed to be more conscious of their consumption.

Murray Bridge, east of Adelaide, relies on the Murray River for its water - but statistics on the town's water consumption were not provided in the report.

Mr Peltz, 72, waters his garden for about two hours every four days.

He also uses a fish compound, organic spray and sheep manure to keep the soil moist.

"We are a wasteful country," Mr Peltz said. "There is so much water wasted in cities. It is a real lesson that nature is telling us we have been wasteful."

Average annual residential water consumption per property in cities in 2005-06 was 213 kilolitres, compared with 263kL per property in rural and regional Australia.

Of the capitals, only Darwin stood out as a city of major water users, with annual consumption per property in 2005-06 of 443kL. Brisbane had the lowest at 185kL.

Lower Murray Water, which services 14 Victorian towns along the Murray River, has annual per property consumption figures of 552kL. Some of that water is used for irrigation.

Albury, which takes all its water from the Murray, had an average consumption per property of 302kL in 2005-06.

Riverina Water, which supplies Wagga Wagga, Holbrook, Lockhart and Henty with Murrumbidgee River

water, released 363kL per property in that year.

Of those three authorities, the highest charge for water per kilolitre was 70c.

In Sydney, water is priced at \$1.20 a kilolitre.

"There is a common view that rural-based people place a higher value on water, but if you look at the consumption trends, you have to seriously question that," Mr Young said.

He said much of the data on non-major urban water suppliers was patchy.

The increase in data expected next year could provide a clearer picture of city versus country water use.

National Water Commission chief executive Ken Matthews said governments should consider more aggregation of smaller water service providers, as it was difficult for each small utility to carry out all of the work required to create efficiencies.

AWA

The Federal Budget confirmed the \$10 billion plan for the Murray Darling Basin, additional support to assist irrigators deal with water shortages and a welcome \$2.8 billion over four years to CSIRO to continue their research with the National Flagship Programs (including climate change) getting special mention.

The community water grants programme has been extended for another 6 years under the Federal Budget, and \$17.7m has been promised for the installation of water tanks at Scout Halls around the Nation.

The WA State Budget has set aside \$750 million to develop new sources of water in the state and is part of a \$21.6 billion capital works program over the next four years. For the 2007-08 State Budget, Water Corporation is to invest \$755 million to deliver a range of water, wastewater and drainage projects.

Murray Darling Association General Manager, Ray Najar, has mixed feelings about funds being promised for water resource management under the Federal Budget, when it represents less than 1 percent of Australia's gross domestic product. In his interview with H2OTODAY, he mentions desalination and cloud-seeding trials forming the solution to the water crisis.

URS Australia Pty Ltd has received up to \$500 000 from the Raising National Water Standards programme to develop a project that will establish an interactive website to assist gardeners on plant selection, garden design and watering schedules, to make it easier for gardeners to cope with water restrictions. ([Website](#))

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has released a report Domestic Water & Energy Use, New South Wales, Catalogue No. 4621.1, summarising the results of a survey conducted in October 2006. It presents information on household use of selected water appliances, showers, swimming pools and outdoor spas.

April water use under Stage 3a water restrictions was 13 % lower than April 2006, despite Melbourne experiencing a higher average maximum temperature for the month (22.0 vs 19.30) and lower rainfall (22.8 mm vs 44.8mm). Demand for water in Melbourne reduced by more than 4.5 billion litres in April 2007, down from 34 billion litres last year to 29.5 billion litres.

Elizabeth Nosworthy, Chair of the Queensland Water Commission, has urged Councils on the Sunshine Coast to implement voluntary water restrictions, even though the region has escaped the worst of the drought.

Noosa and Caloundra Councils are considering bans, while Maroochy is waiting for the Commission to take responsibility for setting restrictions.

AWA member Steve Posselt will start his kayak expedition, KAYAK4EARTH, from Brisbane to Adelaide via the inland river system on Sunday 27th May. Brisbane Lord Mayor Campbell Newman will officially send Steve off, with a flotilla of kayaks, from the West End Boat Ramp. Steve aims to provide a forum about global warming and its effect on water resources.

Premier Beattie has announced a \$619 000 Smart State Innovation Projects grant to University of Queensland to help commercialise solid waste management research - part of ongoing study into managing Biosolids Wastes - and involving building a new specialised treatment plant, part of a total project of more than \$1.8 million invested funds.

A further \$2 million from the Innovation Projects Fund was assigned to Griffith University to research the economic, environmental and social management of Queensland's Tropical Rivers to determine how they can sustain agriculture, mining and fisheries in the region.

The Dead Sea, the lowest dry place on earth and renowned for its high salt content, has shrunk by one third since the end of 19th century exposing mudflats that are ugly and dangerous. A 160km canal to bring water from the Gulf of Aqaba to recharge the shrinking Dead Sea is proposed but experiments suggest that introducing water only a 10th as salty would lead to unsightly, smelly algal and bacterial blooms.

The Scottish EPA (Sepa) says continuing dry spells could cause problems for both farmers and wildlife. Sepa will start to monitor a pilot area on the east coast, chosen for its already low river levels and concerns that farmers will soon have to depend on irrigated water only for crops.

The Almiros River on Crete is awash in pollution after illegal dumping on 4 May. Water samples show either chemicals or wastewater from pressing olives but it is likely to have major effects on tourism.

Water woes could spell doom for huge open cut mines, with the proposed Anvil mine in NSW's Hunter Valley a key concern.

Unions have threatened to get the NSW state government to ban building company John Holland from winning the construction tender for Sydney's \$1.9m desalination plant because the firm has signed up the Commonwealth Comcare workers' compensation scheme.

Thousands of litres of water lost every year through leaky pipes and crumbling infrastructure will be targeted under Kevin Rudd's water plan.

The slow rate of spending under the \$10 billion national water plan despite the urgency of demands in the Murray Basin has been explained by the difficulties of meeting the concerns of Victorian farmers and irrigators unwilling to agree.

Seasonal rain forecasts by the Bureau of Meteorology were overly conservative and provided "very limited" assistance for Australia's drought-ravaged farmers.

12

Water resources figures for Murray-Darling Basin are said to have been over-estimated by up to 40% due to misunderstanding of how groundwater should be accounted for; with the result that there will be less water available to irrigators.

WA Premier Carpenter has announced a second seawater desalination plant with a 45GL/yr capacity and potential to increase to 100 GL/yr, at the Water Corporation wastewater facility at Binningup, adjacent to a disused limestone quarry: estimated cost of \$640m.

The Australian National University's policy brief "DRY WATER", which includes three opinion pieces by researchers, evaluates the economic impacts of the National Plan for Water Security; assesses the trade of water between water use and environmental flows; and assesses the often neglected issue of social impacts of water policy.

ACTEW is undertaking a community consultation process seeking community views on the proposed Water2WATER project, which will supplement the ACT's water supply with purified water. For more information on the project, visit The Independent Expert Panel on Health website, which provides information to facilitate community understanding and informs public discussion.

Sydney Water's board has selected a consortium to build the pipeline from the Kurnell Desalination Plant to link to the city's main water network, but the outcome has not been released yet.

West Australia's Water Resources Minister Kobelke has released State Water Plan 2007 which

outlines current water resources availability, use and forecasts demand scenarios for all major sectors (agriculture, mining and households) through to 2030, with more than 100 actions to guide water resources management in WA over the next 5 years.

Coinciding with the release of the State Water Plan 2007 and recent announcement on the next major water source for Perth, AWA's WA Branch has organised a water industry lunch with the Hon John Kobelke MLA on Wednesday 6th June, in Perth to hear about this document and new legislation.

ACTEW has announced it is preparing to introduce Stage 4 Water Restrictions - the highest level of our current water restrictions scheme. Managing Director, Michael Costello, said the ACT's water situation is becoming critical, with dam levels currently at 31.2%.

The Malaysian Water Association's conference in Kuala Lumpur attracted about 500 delegates. Australian speakers included Sydney Water's Dr Judi Hansen and AWA's Chris Davis. Malaysia has nationalised aspects of water services which were previously in the purview of States.

New National Water Commission figures from across Australia indicate that Melbourne uses less water per household than any other capital city, its capital expenditure is among the highest but residential water and sewerage bills are ~ 25% lower than any other city.

In a report released last week by the Australian Council for Education Research, Professor Tytler from Deakin University argues that the current School Science Curricula need to change in line with the discipline to reflect contemporary science practices and applications. The focus should now be on problem solving, communication and analytical skills

The Queensland Government will allocate an extra \$5m over the next two years in the upcoming budget to the Department of Public Works Water Smart Buildings Program, to ensure water use in publicly owned commercial buildings, facilities and parks meets Level 5 water restrictions.

The Advanced Membrane Technologies for Water Treatment Research Cluster, a research partnership, facilitated through CSIRO and led by Victoria University has been launched. It will provide funding over three years to accelerate research into the reliability and efficiency of membrane technologies.

Melbourne has notched up its driest year on record. Just 316.4mm of rainfall over the past 365 days; breaking a 40-year record (average annual rainfall is 638.8mm) according to the Bureau of Meteorology.

The UK House of Commons Public Accounts Committee has fiercely criticised the economic regulator OFWAT as 'weak' for not using sanctions against companies that underperform, instancing

the decision not to impose a fine on Thames Water for persistently failing to meet leakage targets.

13

Due to stricter regulation of the handling and use of Chlorine gas, rationalisation in the UK chlorine market, improvements to the proprietary systems used to generate hypochlorite on site, and many other changes, WRc is currently working with six UK water companies on a collaborative project that will provide guidance to those planning investment in chlorination systems.

Ben Selinger, emeritus professor of chemistry at the ANU, says that public acceptability of recycled water is dependent on trust in the technology, how easily a technology can be understood, the degree of control felt by the community, and how great the perceived direct benefit is to the individual.

State governments have defied calls for more spending on the nation's dilapidated water infrastructure, instead stripping \$1 billion from the profits of their publicly owned water bodies.

Communities in rural Victoria and western NSW have been receiving drenching rain which has raised hopes for more to come.

Shadow Infrastructure Minister Anthony Abannese told delegates at an AWA breakfast function, organised by the Queensland Branch, last week that there were clear links between addressing climate change and security in water supply.

Despite a dire stress on town supplies, Orange City Council NSW has voted to supply 450 ML/yr of water to Cadia goldmine from its own drinking stores, after a heated council meeting in front of a packed gallery.

All towns along the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers could be forced to level 4 water restrictions as the NSW Government prepares to take the unprecedented step of overriding local councils and water utilities.

Steve Posselt, engineer and AWA member, continues to gain public interest and media attention as he prepares for his journey from Brisbane to Adelaide by kayak via the inland river system, a trip to raise awareness of climate change and drought.

23rd

The Australian

Rudd calls for end to water stand-off

Federal Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd has called on the federal and Victorian governments to resolve the stand-off over the state's refusal to sign the \$10 billion Murray-Darling water agreement. Victorian Premier Steve Bracks is holding out against referring control of the river system to the commonwealth, despite Queensland, NSW and South Australia agreeing to the deal. Mr Rudd said he understood Victoria's position, but urged both sides to reach an agreement. "Victoria's reservations ... go to the commonwealth, as it is argued

by Victoria, now seeking to have reach over the wider gamut of land use planning beyond the actual river system itself,” he told reporters today.

“If that is the case ... then that is a matter which needs to be resolved.

“But I remain supportive of the thrust of what the prime minister is seeking to do - bring about a national solution for this, our major river system.”

Despite his support for the Murray-Darling reforms, Mr Rudd said he was disappointed about the detail, particularly the “negligible” level of analysis the policy received from Finance and Treasury.

“Nonetheless, as I said in the budget reply, we're still prepared to offer the prime minister the offer of bipartisan support in bringing that to a successful conclusion,” he said.

Mr Bracks has said ceding control of water in the Murray River system to the commonwealth would amount to creating a separate state north of the Great Dividing Range.

“Land management, water prices, water entitlements, anything you want to construct or do in that area would now become the province of the federal government ... it's really like creating another state in Australia,” he told ABC Radio today. - AAP

Bracks stands firm on \$10bn water plan

Victoria is still refusing to sign up to the federal government's \$10 billion water plan for the Murray Darling Basin after seeing the second draft of the proposal. Victorian Premier Steve Bracks is now planning to ask Prime Minister John Howard to intervene.

“I'll be writing to the prime minister today, indicating to the prime minister that the current draft is not acceptable,” Mr Bracks told ABC Radio today.

“Effectively, this project is not going to proceed with Victorian government support unless there is proper negotiation around a limited set of referred powers.”

Mr Bracks said Victoria's concerns had been ignored as the federal government was still planning to take over the state's control of water.

14

“This came as a bit of a shock, I think,” Mr Bracks said.

“Mostly, we expected that there would be an accommodation to deal with the federal government's involvements in caps and over-entitlements of water in the Murray Darling Basin system.”

But, he said, the government's plan goes much further than that.

“It gives planning, water rights, water pricing responsibility totally to the federal government in a significant takeover which will not serve the country well.”

Mr Bracks said it was now up to Mr Howard to change the plan otherwise Victoria would not be part of it.

“It's not irretrievable, it is able to be dealt with through intervention from the prime minister to seek to have a limited and targeted referral of powers,” Mr Bracks said.

“But in relation to this legislation, if it was to go unchanged into the federal parliament, from our point of view, it is dead in the water and we would not support it.” – AAP

24th

The Australian

Water costs to rise under Beattie plan

South-East Queensland residents face water bill increases of about \$25 a year under a new infrastructure regime, but the Beattie Government will consider allowing private companies to provide competition to keep prices down after 2010.

Premier Peter Beattie today followed through with his threat to seize council water infrastructure, backing a Queensland Water Commission recommendation that the region's assets be consolidated

and simplified.

Under the proposed regime, two state-controlled entities will take control of councils' bulk water assets, including dams, and the new desalination plant and recycled water pipeline being built by the Government.

Councils - who will be compensated for the loss of money-making bulk water assets - will maintain responsibility for distribution and will decide how three new retail entities should be established.

Wholesale and retail water prices will initially be set by the Government, and while councils will receive some revenue from the retail side, Brisbane Lord Mayor Campbell Newman has questioned whether the compensation will be enough to prevent rate rises.

Mr Beattie initially suggested \$1-\$2 billion in compensation for councils - most likely in the form of the state taking over their debts - but later conceded that was only a "ballpark" figure.

Financial calculations and the implementation of the new regime will take more than a year.

PM's \$10bn water plan collapsing

John Howard's \$10 billion water plan is unravelling, with Victoria warning the deal is "dead in the water" and environment groups considering withdrawing support for the landmark deal.

The Government faces fresh accusations that it has reneged on the original deal, which was thrashed out with all of the Labor states bar Victoria. One source close to the negotiations said the draft legislation, circulated to the states this week, involved an even greater shift in power to the commonwealth than had been feared.

The latest setback came as it emerged the federal Government's attempts to buy back water from farmers - a precursor to the Prime Minister's bigger Murray Darling plan - had failed, with farmers demanding more than Canberra was prepared to pay.

The Government achieved only a fraction of its buyback target as part of the Living Murray Initiative, raising the spectre that it would have to pursue forced buybacks.

This would present a serious danger to a Government facing an election within months.

The \$10 billion plan, announced in January, sits at the centre of the Prime Minister's re-election bid. The details will be thrashed out at a water ministers meeting in Canberra today.

It is designed to improve flows in the water-starved Murray-Darling Basin by fixing dilapidated irrigation infrastructure and dealing with the over-allocation of water.

A draft of the legislation delivering the policy was circulated to state governments and interested parties early this week.

It has provoked anger among many participants, with Victorian Premier Steve Bracks accusing the commonwealth of using the legislation as cover for a power grab. One source close to the negotiations said other states would also be disappointed, backing Mr Bracks's claims that the legislation did not deliver on promises. The powers taken by the commonwealth in the bill are so broad, according to one person who has read the draft, it would effectively "create a new state of the Murray-Darling Basin".

Environmental groups, which will release a statement today, warned last night the legislation did not reflect in-principle agreements made earlier this year and would not deliver the promised increases in environmental flows.

"We are concerned the intention of the Prime Minister's national plan to confront over-allocation head-on is being lost in a mad rush to pass legislation in a federal election year," said Australian

Conservation Foundation spokeswoman Arlene Buchan.

15

And WWF spokesman Stuart Blanch said the commonwealth needed to "take a deep breath, slow down and conduct proper consultation".

Mr Bracks said last night Victoria was "shocked" by the latest federal proposals.

"Land management, water prices, water entitlements, anything you want to construct or do in that area would now become the province of the federal Government," Mr Bracks said.

The Prime Minister should intervene to wind back the proposals, he said. "In relation to this legislation, if it was to go unchanged into the federal parliament, from our point of view, it is dead in the water and we would not support it," Mr Bracks said. Environment and Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull insisted the legislation was consistent with all the material put out since the original announcement and that the plan would protect the environment.

"The Victorians should come back with detailed comments to put before the states rather than generalised statements in the media," he said.

"This is not a take-it-or-leave-it approach, we are working with the states on the material."

Doubts over the workability of the Howard plan were further complicated by news of the disastrous collapse of a buyback scheme associated with the Living Murray Initiative - the \$2 billion precursor to the January announcement.

In a tender announced last year, Mr Turnbull called for interested farmers to sell water gained through efficiencies in irrigation back to the Government. It was an attempt to find up to 200 billion litres of water to put back into the ailing Murray by 2009 without upsetting Nationals colleagues, who want buybacks of water licences as a last resort.

Up to \$200 million was on offer for the water. But late on Tuesday it was revealed just 454 million litres of water had been purchased from three irrigators. The other 46 irrigators had asked for too much money per megalitre for their water to be accepted.

Mr Turnbull said it was "entirely expected" that the tender would generate little interest because it had been designed to test the market and was superseded by the \$10 billion plan.

The plan was an "entirely different beast", where water would be bought on the market, not based on efficiencies.

But irrigators, the Opposition, scientists and environmentalists said the scheme had put a ridiculously low price on the water - well under market value - and the tender process was overly complex. They warned Mr Howard's \$10 billion National Plan for Water Security could also fail unless lessons were learned.

"The whole Living Murray tender thing got tangled up in a malaise of administrative and legal bullshit," Murray Irrigation general manager George Warne said. "I hope they will learn from this about how not to go about a water recovery program, but I am not confident - we could end up with another messy water recovery program where we don't get any water savings."

The secretary of the Bondi Group of Irrigators, Coleambally Irrigation chief executive Murray Smith, urged the Government to consult more widely on the \$10 billion plan than it had on the Living Murray tender. "If there is a closed shop, don't expect a lot of co-operation from us - it will be back to the trenches and it could get ugly," Mr Smith said.

NSW Irrigators Council head Doug Miell said \$6 billion of the \$10 billion was supposed to go

towards water efficiencies and over-allocation and, if that was not done properly, it would be an astounding waste of money.

"We need to share the lessons from this tender program otherwise the \$10 billion plan will have a bad start," he said.

Wentworth Group scientist Peter Cullen said the lesson from the failed tender was to provide simple buyback options in future.

"The lesson in moving forward with the Prime Minister's plan is to avoid hefty conditions - make it a simple tender so willing sellers can sell their water," he said.

Labor water spokesman Anthony Albanese said the program had failed dismally. "Although the Prime Minister warned on January 25 about the danger of not taking decisive action to address over-allocated water licences, the Government is not delivering on its commitments."

Bracks threat to sink deal

Victoria has declared the Murray-Darling Basin deal "dead in the water" unless the Howard Government abandons plans to unilaterally seize control of pricing, entitlements and land management.

In a bid to bypass Water Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Premier Steve Bracks yesterday wrote to John Howard declaring the latest version of the federal water legislation unacceptable and warning it would virtually create another state under commonwealth control.

Furious Victorian officials, having examined the second tranche of the draft Murray-Darling agreement, last night accused Mr Turnbull of covertly attempting to seize control of water pricing, land management and water entitlements in the basin.

16

Victoria said if Mr Turnbull succeeded, there was nothing to stop the commonwealth assuming total control of water pricing across Australia.

Mr Bracks is also deeply concerned the bill allows the commonwealth to change the legislation if just three parties to the deal agree, raising the prospect of the Howard Government being able to bypass three Murray-Darling states - Victoria, NSW and Queensland - if it gets support from the ACT and South Australia.

Mr Bracks said Victoria was "shocked" by the latest federal proposals and he would only consider signing up if the Prime Minister intervened to block the sweeping power grab by Mr Turnbull.

"Land management, water prices, water entitlements, anything you want to construct or do in that area would now become the province of the federal Government," Mr Bracks said.

Ahead of a meeting of water ministers today, Mr Bracks said although the negotiations were not irretrievable, the only prospect of a deal was if Mr Howard wound back the federal proposals and offered "a limited and targeted referral of powers".

"In relation to this legislation, if it was to go unchanged into the federal parliament, from our point of view, it is dead in the water and we would not support it," he said.

"So I've written to the Prime Minister. I've indicated that we do not support the legislation currently and we will not be a party to that legislation, and the only way it can be re-negotiated is if the Prime Minister intervenes and seeks to negotiate on limited referral of power. If he does that, yes, we'll have discussions."

The Victorian Farmers Federation also hit out at Mr Turnbull, declaring the federal proposals for pricing and planning were not in the initial draft proposal.

"The bad news is there appears to be little consistency in what we've been telling the commonwealth and what they've been telling us," VFF president Simon Ramsay said.

Victoria remains the only state holding out after Queensland, South Australia and NSW signed up to the commonwealth's plan to take control of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Beattie's pipedream to move water

Peter Beattie is determined to find out if tropical north Queensland might provide an answer to southern water woes and has hired consultants to develop plans for a 1200km pipeline.

With a commonwealth-appointed taskforce giving only limited consideration to the Queensland Premier's idea of revisiting the Bradfield Scheme, Mr Beattie is looking at other ways to drought-proof the state.

He told parliament yesterday that the engineering consultancy firm GHD would be paid \$350,000 to develop concept plans for a pipeline from the Burdekin Falls Dam, near Townsville, to Brisbane, effectively creating a state water grid.

The scheme was first devised by JC Bradfield, builder of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and resurrected by Mr Beattie in February as he staked a claim on the Prime Minister's \$10billion Murray-Darling package. Under the scheme, the Burdekin and other major rivers in the north would divert some of their flow to inland waterways, feeding central and southern Queensland and eventually the Murray-Darling.

The northern Australia taskforce, headed by Liberal senator Bill Heffernan, which will use \$20million in commonwealth funding to examine whether irrigated agriculture should be shifted to the tropics, is considering aspects of that scheme.

But the project now under consideration by the Beattie Government is more technologically and financially ambitious and would need the support of commercial users - irrigators, miners, major industries and towns - to be viable.

GHD will report later this year on the financial and environmental cost of pumping water such long distances, potential routes, water availability and how much southeast Queensland might need if the drought endures.

Mr Beattie agreed to consider the pipeline a year ago - influenced by a climate change conference and a proposal from Cairns Lord Mayor Kevin Byrne - and committed \$2 million in funding for a study to be conducted by the State's Co-ordinator-General.

The GHD work is part of that study, and Mr Beattie said further work would be needed to determine whether the project might be viable.

While originally suggesting such a project might be undertaken in 50-100 years, Mr Beattie said yesterday the cost, and the extent of the drought, would ultimately determine the timing.

"Clearly, its going to have to be shorter than that," Mr Beattie told reporters, later suggesting a 20-year time frame was "a lot more realistic".

GHD has also been asked to consider whether the pipeline should go both ways in the event that climate patterns change and north Queensland finds itself in drought.

Adelaidenow.com

Saving the Murray is the first priority

Apart from National security there is a no more pressing issue in Australia than the health and viability of the Murray-Darling river system.

Yet the states, headed by Victoria, continue to procrastinate over the detail of a \$10 billion Federal Government plan to revive and invigorate the river basin.

Victorian Premier Steve Bracks has refused to sign a new draft of the water plan which needs the assent and co-operation of the Federal Government, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory to work satisfactorily. While the other Labor administrations have signed, Mr Bracks says specific concerns raised by Victoria have been ignored. The Victorian decision raises the suspicion that delaying the plan - a major pre-election initiative by the Federal Government - is motivated more by politics than genuine concerns about national water security.

However harsh and unfair this allegation may be, it is one which Victoria - and by implication the other Labor states - always faced by not endorsing the scheme.

Federal Water Minister Malcolm Turnbull says he is not clear as to why Victoria has refused to sign. Perhaps the specific concerns and a possible resolution will emerge at a meeting today between Mr Turnbull and state and territory ministers.

While it is understandable that the states are reluctant to give up their traditional control over the river system, clearly the current fragmented system is not working.

A single authority administered and largely financed by the Federal Government is clearly the best option to protect and revive the fragile river system.

But time is running out. Because of drought and over-use by various agricultural and industrial interests, the Murray-Darling system is in a deplorable condition.

The impasse must be rectified before it is too late.

NEWS.com.au

More talks for water deal

Prime Minister John Howard has moved to save his national water plan by inviting Victorian Premier Steve Bracks to Canberra for talks.

The invitation to talks, accepted by Mr Bracks, follows the Victorian Premier's declaration that the plan in its current form is "dead in the water".

Mr Howard's move pre-empts a meeting of federal and state water ministers in Adelaide tomorrow to discuss the scheme.

Victoria is the only Murray-Darling Basin state yet to join Mr Howard's \$10 billion bid to save the ailing river system.

Mr Bracks, in a letter to the Prime Minister, objected to the extent of powers to be given up to the

commonwealth under the latest draft of the legislation.

Mr Howard said there was insufficient detail in the letter.

"I frankly confess to utter puzzlement as to what the Victorian Premier is getting at," he told federal Parliament today.

"I've written back to him today. If he's willing to provide me with more detail of his concerns I invited him to come and see me in Canberra next week so that we can personally discuss the issue."

Mr Howard said the latest draft contained no greater federal powers than a commonwealth-state communique issued in February.

Mr Bracks said he and Water Minister John Thwaites would go to Canberra next week "in good faith" and again state their opposition to the handover of powers sought by Canberra.

But added: "I think the Prime Minister said he was puzzled. I'm not sure why he'd be puzzled.

"I could not make it clearer ... what we want is a targeted, limited referral of power."

South Australian Premier Mike Rann said he expected arguments to continue for some time.

"The fact is that the Victorian position as of today is identical to what it was three months ago," Mr Rann said.

"There is still a lot of argy bargy to do, there's people sitting around the table. Victoria is still part of the negotiations and hopefully we'll see the best possible outcome for the River Murray."

Further doubts about the plan have arisen over its proposed purchase of about \$3 billion in water allocations after an earlier scheme attracted only three sellers. After budgeting \$200 million to purchase 200 gigalitres from irrigators, three tenders worth \$765,000 for 454 megalitres of water came in under the benchmark price.

Federal Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull conceded the price was too low.

"The reality is, water is becoming more valuable and the cost of acquiring water is more likely to rise than fall," Mr Turnbull told ABC Radio.

18

Labor's water resources spokesman Anthony Albanese said: "The Government's tender process that it put out has been a dismal failure indeed."

Meanwhile, a coalition of conservation groups accused the Federal Government of toning down the water plan.

"We are concerned the intention of the prime minister's national plan, to confront over-allocation head on, is being lost in a mad rush to pass legislation in a federal election year," said Arlene Buchan of the Australian Conservation Foundation.

The groups want state governments to ensure an environmental water manager is appointed, time lines and targets for water recovery are set, and binding provisions made for river health and biodiversity.

25th

FarmOnLine

Class action haults as cash dries up

Drought pressures and dwindling bank balances have stopped hundreds of southern irrigators joining

the fight for compensation after drastic water cuts to groundwater and carry over allocations last year.

Irrigators say financial pressures are forcing them to pull out of plans to launch class actions against the State Government's water cuts, despite their anger at Maquarie Street's water-cutting precedent.

Instead, continuing dry conditions, high livestock feed costs and uncertainty about the cost and length of legal action has forced many producers to accept the NSW Government's offer of assistance of \$100 a megalitre, just a fraction of the potential production value of lost allocations.

Last month a landmark class action by Murrumbidgee groundwater irrigators was abandoned due to grower apathy and a lack of funds.

Producers had hoped to sue the Government over its sudden decision last year to drop allocations from 18 per cent to 10 per cent mid-season.

While 150 irrigators initially supported legal action, numbers dwindled and the legal costs would be too much for the remaining growers to bear.

Initial interest has also subsided from Murray Valley irrigators looking to launch the class action against the NSW Government for carry over water cuts made without warning late last year.

The cuts resulted in summer crops being abandoned, permanent plantings lost, livestock sold off, feed bought in, and two irrigation companies shutting down channels early.

SOURCE: *The Land*, NSW.

Burdekin to Brisbane pipeline study announced

The Queensland Government has announced a scoping study for the Burdekin to Brisbane pipeline has begun.

The State's Premier, Peter Beattie, said the construction of a Statewide Water Grid would be an engineering and economic challenge.

"But we owe it to future generations to test the science and the technology," Mr Beattie said.

"Engineering consultants GHD Pty Ltd have been appointed to prepare the concept plan for the pipeline from the Burdekin to Brisbane."

Mr Beattie said the plan will investigate whether a pipeline linking key water infrastructure over the 1200 kilometres between the Burdekin and South East Queensland is feasible and what other centres would potentially benefit by linking the regions.

The Premier said this year there has been extensive flooding of North Queensland rivers while South East Queensland continues to be gripped by drought.

"Although it may not be feasible to pipe water from the State's north to the south east in 2007, population growth and climate change may make it necessary in coming decades," Mr Beattie said.

The Queensland Government says Burdekin Falls Dam has an annual inflow of more than 5 million megalitres and it has sufficient unallocated water to supply other regions without jeopardising the water security of the Burdekin region.

SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*

Adelaidenow.

Howard plan 'won't save the Murray'

A Coalition of leading environmental groups has issued a joint statement expressing alarm at the

Federal Government's draft water Bill.

The group said yesterday it was concerned the Bill was "vague" and would not succeed in protecting the River Murray.

Australian Conservation Foundation executive director Don Henry said the main concerns were that the Bill did not tackle the over-allocation of water, did not set targets and had only a limited role for an independent authority.

"If we want to make sure the Murray is returned to health and Adelaide's drinking water is supplied we need timelines and targets," he said.

19

The World Wildlife Fund wants more consultation.

"The Commonwealth needs to take a deep breath, slow down and conduct proper consultation," WWF water spokesman Stuart Blanch said.

Meanwhile, Victorian Premier Steve Bracks has reaffirmed his state's opposition to handing over control of the Murray-Darling Basin to the Commonwealth under the \$10 billion plan thrashed out earlier in the year by the Council of Australian Governments.

Prime Minister John Howard has invited Mr Bracks to Canberra to discuss his concerns in a bid to save his water plan.

State and federal water ministers will meet in Adelaide today for further talks.

Premier Mike Rann said there was "a lot of argy bargy to go" over the scheme.

"I hope we will be able to sort out the problems," he said yesterday.

One metre: Restrictions likely to stay

South Australians can expect prolonged water restrictions if the upper catchments of the Murray-Darling Basin do not receive one metre of rain in the next year.

Murray-Darling Basin Commission chief executive Wendy Craik said 1000mm of rain only would bring water storage in depleted River Murray reservoirs back to "reasonable levels".

The areas average only 600mm of rain.

If inflows do not increase substantially, it is inevitable at least Level 4 water restrictions will continue for domestic users in the next year. Reductions in allocations for irrigators also are likely.

While significant rains have fallen in the Basin this month, injecting more than 30GL into the river system, Dr Craik did not expect "much of a change" to the record low inflows for each of the past 11 months.

"The rains have been wetting the upper catchment, but in terms of inflows they have been reasonably low," Dr Craik said.

Disconnecting wetlands along the Murray, including Lake Bonney in the Riverland, is part of the commission's contingency plan to maintain flows throughout the river.

Counselling: Extra \$7.7m for families hit by drought

A new \$7.7 million drought assistance package will include help for farming families to pay school fees and rural employers to retain apprentices.

There will also be subsidies for River Murray irrigators and personal and family counselling.

Agriculture Minister Rory McEwen said the package would also include maintaining existing school bus routes in drought-affected areas and funds for research into drought-tolerant crops.

He said the latest assistance brought to \$60 million the State Government's response to the drought.

"While recent rains have been welcome, the impacts of several adverse seasonal circumstances over the past five years have put significant strain on the natural resilience of our farming communities," Mr McEwen said.

Under the new package, there will be \$1 million to provide six drought relief counsellors and all their support services to be based in rural communities to focus on personal and family counselling.

Up to \$1.2 million will be set aside to help families in drought-affected areas meet the costs of education expenses such as camps and excursions.

Approved School Card students attending Government schools in those areas will receive additional funding.

Mr McEwen said \$2.1 million would be used to help River Murray irrigators pay up to 50 per cent of their water levies in 2007-08.

He said further levy relief would be considered as circumstances emerged.

"There will be \$1.5 million for an apprenticeship retention program," Mr McEwen said.

"Employers in rural communities will be able to apply for payments of \$750 per apprentice or trainee retained for each of two six-month periods.

"This measure will focus on . . . rural qualifications and in mechanical and electrical automotive trades that support agricultural production."

The Australian

Japan unveils Son of Kyoto

Tokyo: Japan last night called for the world to halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, proposing a successor to the Kyoto Protocol it hopes will win over the top offenders, the US and China.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, unveiling the proposal before the Group of Eight summit in Germany, pledged to bring all nations onboard in the fight against global warming by making the post-Kyoto framework non-binding.

The Howard Government favours using technology to tackle climate change rather than emissions caps, such as those under the Kyoto Protocol. The Opposition has committed to a 60 per cent reduction on 2000 levels by 2050.

Mr Abe also called for Japan and other nations to direct foreign aid to help poor nations embrace low-emission technology, including nuclear power.

20

"Now is the time we must act," Mr Abe said at a forum of Asian leaders in Tokyo.

"Otherwise how could we hold ourselves accountable to our future generations? Japan will vigorously call on countries around the world to reach an international consensus on the long-term goal of halving emissions by 2050 and the steps for achieving it."

The Kyoto Protocol, the world's first treaty mandating emission cuts, expires in 2012. The US and Australia have refused to take part in the treaty, arguing it is unfair as it makes no demands of fast-growing emerging economies such as China, which is set to overtake the US as the top emitter.

In the latest initiative, which Mr Abe dubbed "Cool Earth 50", all nations would commit in general terms to the broad goal of 50 per cent cuts by 2050 through technology and social change.

Japan has tried to take a high profile in the fight against climate change. The Kyoto Protocol is named after Japan's ancient capital, where it was negotiated in 1997.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, host of the June 6-8 G8 summit in the resort of Heiligendamm, has also pushed for action against global warming but questioned the US commitment.

"As the G8 we must come to a common understanding on how we can fight climate change," Ms Merkel said. "But as I stand here today, I am not sure that we will manage this in Heiligendamm."

Japanese officials acknowledged their proposal was similar to one already on the table from Germany. *AFP*

NEWS.com.au

Desalination project partner named

The NSW Government has named the Connect Alliance consortium as designer and builder of the water delivery pipeline for Sydney's desalination plant.

NSW Water Minister Nathan Rees today said the group, which includes Bovis Lend Lease and McConnell Dowell, would work with Sydney Water on the project.

The pipeline will take the water from the plant at Kurnell in Sydney's south to the city's water grid. Mr Rees said the 18km pipeline would cross Botany Bay and pass through Kyeemagh, Tempe, St Peters, Alexandria and Erskineville.

"It will only affect about two kilometres of residential streets but we want to make sure that disruption is kept to a minimum for the local community," he said.

Mr Rees said measures would be put in place to reduce noise in suburban streets during the construction, including the use of noise barriers.

Sydney Water and Connect Alliance will now develop a price and finalise construction details for the pipeline.

Turnbull prepared to 'tinker' with \$10bn water plan

The Federal Government said today it would alter aspects its \$10 billion Murray-Darling Basin rescue plan after more states today joined Victoria in expressing concern about the proposal.

Victoria remained steadfast in its rejection of the plan after a meeting of water ministers from basin states and the Federal Government in Adelaide today.

South Australia and Queensland, while remaining supportive of the federal plan, voiced concern at aspects to rejuvenate the ailing basin.

Federal Water Minister Malcolm Turnbull said Canberra was willing to tinker with the plan's legislation.

"We are seeking input and we are making changes to the legislation all the time," Mr Turnbull said.

"We recognise that we are not the sole repository of wisdom on water, nobody is.

"We all benefit from input from others and we are seeking that input, receiving it, and where there is a consensus that it can make an improvement, we are applying it."

Mr Turnbull did not specify what changes would be made, ahead of further discussions between the Commonwealth and Victoria next week.

"We are seeking wherever we can to ensure that we can find a middle ground," he said.

Victorian Water Minister John Thwaites reaffirmed his state wouldn't accept the plan in its current format.

"Victoria is prepared to talk and negotiate with the Commonwealth to ensure that we protect the basin," Mr Thwaites said. "What Victoria is not prepared to accept is total constitutional hand over of all powers. The powers in this legislation are much more extensive than certainly Victoria is prepared to accept."

SA Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald said SA had concerns about some details of the legislation but was "100 per cent committed".

Queensland Natural Resources and Water Minister Craig Wallace said the Commonwealth must alter the legislation for it to win approval from the states.

"The states have joined as one in saying to the Commonwealth that we want to work with them. We need to have some forward movement from the Commonwealth though.

"We don't want to walk away from the deal, we don't want the Commonwealth to walk away from the deal, but we need some movement there from the Commonwealth themselves."

21

Mr Turnbull remained confident a deal could be brokered to win Victoria's support for the plan, which has the backing of South Australia, NSW, ACT and Queensland.

"We are seeking wherever we can to ensure that we can find a middle ground," Mr Turnbull said.

"What we are endeavouring to do, from the Commonwealth's perspective, is approach this in a very open minded and constructive way."

Prime Minister John Howard has invited Victorian Premier Steve Bracks to Canberra for talks next week after the premier declared the water plan "dead in the water" in its current form.

The Daily Telegraph

Water stash to 'keep lights on'

The danger that electricity supplies across the national grid could be threatened as early as next year has prompted NSW to quarantine water supplies to make sure its power stations can operate.

State and federal energy ministers meeting in Melbourne today will receive a disturbing report from the national electricity regulator, NEMMCO, modelling the impact on power generation of a continuation of little or no rain.

The Australian has learned the report identifies the "potential for a loss of generating capacity" as soon as the end of next year under a low-rainfall scenario.

The report has caused NSW Premier Morris Iemma to launch pre-emptive action by quarantining 40 gigalitres of water that had been earmarked for environmental flows in the Hunter Valley.

If the drought holds, the water will be diverted to power stations.

"We're acting now to create the strategic reserve to make sure we can keep the lights on in NSW," Mr Iemma said last night.

Power stations require large volumes of water as they use coal-fired furnaces to generate steam to drive turbines.

In NSW, power stations are already implementing a range of measures to reduce their draw on water. ACT electricity provider ACTEW has warned that there may be rolling blackouts next summer in Canberra if the drought limits the supply of water that is needed to create steam to run power plants.

The National Generators Forum has urged governments to encourage people to use less electricity in the coming year to take pressure off the system.

The Snowy Mountains Hydro Authority has only 8 per cent capacity in its reserves, which are dedicated to running the backup power for the national grid.

Federal Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane played down concerns of an electricity supply crisis.

He conceded that drought was putting pressure on prices but said there were other supply issues, such as commissioning new generators, that were affecting the market.

Mr Macfarlane said Energy Users Association executive director Roman Domanski had suggested that unusual maintenance by state governments, particularly in NSW, might be contributing to the rise in contract and spot electricity prices.

"Can I say that it was a very productive meeting (with Mr Domanski)," Mr Macfarlane said. "At no stage during that meeting did he suggest there was anything untoward going on in the electricity market."

Mr Macfarlane said any shortfall would be tempered by the Kogan Creek generator in Queensland coming on-stream.

"We've already lost in excess of Kogan Creek's generating capacity in Queensland, as a result of the shutdown of Swanbank and the partial shutdown of Toowong," he said.

"But it's my understanding that NEMMCO are not predicting any blackouts as a result of the drought in the next 12 months."

The Australian reported earlier this month that panic had developed over the Sydney Futures Exchange electricity futures contract as major consumers tried to protect themselves from soaring prices while generators sought to profit.

Weekly turnover has leapt fourfold as the price of electricity for delivery next year has jumped from \$40 a megawatt hour to \$70 in the past six weeks.

Herald Sun

PM's river plan still opposed

Victoria was steadfast in its opposition to the Federal Government's \$10 billion rescue plan for the Murray-Darling Basin.

State's Water Minister John Thwaites said today he and other state water ministers met federal counterpart Malcolm Turnbull in Adelaide today but failed to agree on the Commonwealth's rescue plan.

Mr Thwaites and Mr Turnbull said they were willing to continue negotiations over the plan, which would effectively hand control of the basin from the states to Canberra.

But Mr Thwaites said Victoria remained opposed to the proposal in its current form.

"What Victoria is not prepared to accept is total constitutional handover of all powers.

22

"The powers in this legislation are much more extensive than certainly Victoria is prepared to accept."

Mr Turnbull remained confident a deal could be brokered to win Victoria's support for the plan, which has the backing of South Australia, NSW, ACT and Queensland.

"We are seeking wherever we can to ensure that we can find a middle ground," Mr Turnbull said.

"What we are endeavouring to do, from the Commonwealth's perspective, is approach this in a very open minded and constructive way."

Face-off over PM's plan

John Howard has forced a showdown with Victoria in a bid to save his \$10 billion Murray-Darling water plan.

The Prime Minister has called a meeting for next week with Premier Steve Bracks to try to end months of fighting over the control of the nation's key waterways.

Mr Howard said he was bemused at Victoria's latest concerns at the extent of the planned Commonwealth takeover.

"I frankly confess to utter puzzlement as to what the Victorian Premier is getting at," Mr Howard told Parliament yesterday.

Mr Howard said he had written to Mr Bracks to further discuss the matter but that the Federal Government's position had been made clear at the start of the year.

Mr Bracks is concerned that the planned takeover of the basin would strip too much power from the states.

The Premier claims draft federal legislation pointed to the prospect of the Commonwealth taking over land management, water pricing and entitlements in the basin.

The Premier said: "I'm not sure why he'd be puzzled.

"I could not make it clearer . . . what we want is a targeted, limited referral of power."

Mr Howard has promised to spend \$10 billion over 10 years to save the ailing waterways using a plan involving modernisation of irrigation methods and buying back water allocation rights.

The plan includes \$6 billion to improve irrigation efficiency and \$3 billion to buy back water entitlements.

Victoria fears too much money will be spent on the other states.

Victoria is considered to have done more on water reform than NSW.

It was originally thought Victoria must sign the plan -- along with South Australia, NSW, Queensland and the ACT -- before the federal strategy could be implemented.

However Victoria believes just the Federal Government and two other states or a state and a territory are now needed.

Mr Bracks said he would take Water Minister John Thwaites to the meeting with Mr Howard.

He has left open the option of signing the plan, but only on his terms.

"We will not sign up unless the Commonwealth redraws this legislation to have a limited and targeted referral of powers," Mr Bracks said.

"If it doesn't, Victoria will not be part of it."

Federal Labor leader Kevin Rudd has backed the Howard plan, calling on both parties to resolve their differences.

Mr Bracks yesterday locked horns with Mr Rudd. "I disagree with Kevin Rudd's position on this," he said.

Adelaidenow

Murray-Darling Basin: New SA water fears

The Federal Government will alter aspects of its \$10 billion Murray-Darling Basin rescue plan after South Australia today joined Victoria in expressing concern about the proposal.

Victoria remained steadfast in its rejection of the plan after a meeting of water ministers from basin

states and the federal government in Adelaide today.

South Australia and Queensland, while remaining supportive of the federal plan, voiced concern at aspects to rejuvenate the ailing basin.

Federal Water Minister Malcolm Turnbull said Canberra was willing to tinker with the plan's legislation.

"We are seeking input and we are making changes to the legislation all the time," Mr Turnbull said.

"We recognise that we are not the sole repository of wisdom on water, nobody is.

"We all benefit from input from others and we are seeking that input, receiving it, and where there is a consensus that it can make an improvement, we are applying it."

Mr Turnbull did not specify what changes would be made, ahead of further discussions between the commonwealth and Victoria next week.

"We are seeking wherever we can to ensure that we can find a middle ground," he said.

SA Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald said SA had concerns about some details of the legislation.

"We are still 100 per cent committed to the national plan," Ms Maywald said.

"There are concerns about some of the detail in the legislation that need to be worked through, we are working through that.

23

"I don't think anyone is being unreasonable ... Victoria has some concerns that they would like resolved, they are working with the commonwealth on that, we have got some issues with some of the detail and we are working with the commonwealth on that.

"There is a lot of detail and it's too complex to go into."

Victorian Water Minister John Thwaites reaffirmed his state wouldn't accept the plan in its current format.

"Victoria is prepared to talk and negotiate with the commonwealth to ensure that we protect the basin," Mr Thwaites said.

"What Victoria is not prepared to accept is total constitutional hand over of all powers.

"The powers in this legislation are much more extensive than certainly Victoria is prepared to accept."

Queensland Natural Resources and Water Minister Craig Wallace said the commonwealth must alter the legislation for it to win approval from the states.

"We know that there has got to be some movement from the commonwealth in terms of getting the agreement up," Mr Wallace said.

"The states have joined as one in saying to the commonwealth that we want to work with them.

"We need to have some forward movement from the commonwealth though.

"We don't want to walk away from the deal, we don't want the commonwealth to walk away from the deal, but we need some movement there from the commonwealth themselves."

NSW Water Minister Phil Koperberg was unavailable for comment.

26th

News.com.au

Farmer's \$1m for doing nothing

Meet Queensland's first carbon farmer.

Peter Allen, pictured, a third-generation farmer from Moura, has signed a \$1 million deal for doing nothing at all.

In a historic transaction, mining company Rio Tinto bought the rights to carbon dioxide stored in 3500ha of Mr Allen's heavily vegetated property, 575km northwest of Brisbane.

Instead of clearing the land to run cattle, Mr Allen will preserve the trees for 120 years to ensure they soak up carbon dioxide. When you hear talk of carbon offsets, this is where the money goes.

Many of the state's farmers stand to reap multimillion-dollar incomes from selling carbon rights to large corporations or individuals wishing to become carbon neutral.

"It's not like I have won the lotto or that I'm a tree-hugger. It was a purely financial decision," Mr Allen said.

"We looked at the return on developing that land for grazing, compared to the return from the carbon rights.

"We had to think hard before we decided to lock that land up for the next 120 years.

"If it had been any less money, we wouldn't have done it."

This time last year, Mr Allen had eight bulldozers ready to knock down a swathe of trees on an investment property just outside Charleville.

Under the State Government's moratorium on land clearing, farmers were given until December last year to enact one final clearing permit.

Rio Tinto stepped in, offering Mr Allen and five other farmers money in exchange for their inaction.

A total of 12,060ha was spared, the carbon rights secured under a legally binding contract.

It is believed to be Australia's biggest carbon-trading deal.

The carbon industry is expected to boom after the Prime Minister's Task Group on Emissions Trading hands down its blueprint next Thursday.

But as the carbon industry gears up, questions have been raised about the lack of regulation over the voluntary offset market - the system through which airline passengers, rock festival patrons and motorists can pay for their pollution.

Green watchdogs say the voluntary market is open to exploitation, with no controls on who can sell carbon and no checks on the work carried out.

Further questions have been raised about the effect of tree-planting, the popular method used by most carbon offsetters.

Gore takes aim at 'trivial' celebrity gossip

Former US vice president Al Gore has criticised the "trivialities and nonsense" of celebrity gossip in the media and called on people to focus instead on issues like Iraq and climate change.

Mr Gore, who is promoting his new book *The Assault on Reason*, made the comments at a book signing in New York, where he was treated to a rock star reception by more than 1300 cheering and

screaming fans.

"What is it about our collective decision-making process that has led us to this state of affairs where we spend much more time in the public forum talking about - or receiving information about - Britney Spears shaving her head or Paris Hilton going to jail?" Mr Gore said.

24

He lamented what he described as the "destruction of the boundary between news and entertainment" and said the United States was "vulnerable as a democracy to mass and continuing distraction".

His new book draws parallels between the US Government's approaches to climate change and the war in Iraq.

"Just like the facts available before the invasion of Iraq, these facts about the climate crisis have been repeatedly brushed aside and ignored as inconvenient," he said.

"In both cases the facts were ignored."

Since losing the US presidential election in 2000, Mr Gore has become a full-time global warming campaigner - a path he says he intends to continue treading despite speculation that he could run for the White House in 2008.

Mr Gore was recently nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for his work in drawing attention to climate change, while the film he helped make of his best-selling global warming book *An Inconvenient Truth* earlier this year won an Oscar.

The Australian

Feds prepared to bend on Murray draft

Water Minister Malcolm Turnbull has appealed to the states to remain at the negotiating table over the federal Government's \$10billion Murray-Darling rescue package, despite Victoria's refusal to agree.

Speaking after the Murray-Darling Basin Ministerial Council meeting in Adelaide, Mr Turnbull yesterday said the Government was prepared to make changes to its draft legislation.

"We are approaching it in a very open-minded and constructive way, we are seeking input and we are making changes to the legislation all the time," Mr Turnbull said.

"We are seeking to improve it. We recognise that we aren't the sole repository of wisdom on water, nobody is."

But Victorian Water Minister John Thwaites reaffirmed he would not accept the draft legislation in its present form.

"What Victoria is not prepared to accept is total constitutional handover of all powers," Mr Thwaites said. "The powers in this legislation are much more extensive than certainly Victoria is prepared to accept."

Victorian Premier Steve Bracks will meet John Howard next week to discuss the management of the Murray-Darling basin.

"We are certainly going to this meeting in good faith and we do want to sit down with the commonwealth and the other states and get the result that's going to be in the interest of the basin," Mr Thwaites said.

South Australia's Minister for the Murray River, Karlene Maywald, said her state was "100 per cent

committed" to the national plan, despite some concerns with details of the legislation.

"I don't think anyone is being unreasonable ... Victoria has some concerns that they would like resolved, they are working with the commonwealth on that, we have got some issues with some of the detail and we are working with the commonwealth on that," Ms Maywald said.

Mr Turnbull denied South Australia and NSW were preparing to back away from the plan to side with Victoria.

He said the \$10billion rescue plan was "not something we should be playing politics with".

Queensland Water Minister Craig Wallace called on the federal Government to alter its draft legislation.

"We don't want to walk away from the deal, we don't want the commonwealth to walk away from the deal, but we need some movement there from the commonwealth," Mr Wallace said.

A spokesman for NSW Water Minister Phil Koperberg said his state was working with all parties involved because it supported a national approach.

"We encourage the commonwealth to negotiate co-operatively with the states to resolve outstanding issues -- ultimately the ball is in the commonwealth's court to ensure the proposal succeeds."

The ministerial council revealed that once again NSW exceeded its cap on diversions from the Murray-Darling system. In 2005-06, the cumulative cap deficit increased by 6GL (6 billion litres) to 143GL.

Blocked by the free flowing of rhetoric

It took four decades of blind enthusiasm, state rivalries, political pork-barrelling and serial mismanagement of the Murray-Darling Basin to get the nation's mightiest river into its present parlous state. Negotiations on a \$10 billion reform plan to finally fix it have been going for four months. All things considered, it's probably running on schedule.

The nation's food bowl is bone dry. Beyond empty. The Prime Minister last month made the pointed observation that there may be no water for irrigation this summer unless it rains mightily from now until the Melbourne Cup and federal election day. Under direction from his higher authority, even atheist irrigators are praying for rain.

A cashed-up national plan to intervene in this flawed system and spend its way out of this mess seems, on the face of it, a good idea, even if it was announced on the political run in January without any sign of the policy detail and consultation needed.

Now, with the policy process in reverse, the retrofitted draft commonwealth legislation underpinning the reform has been drafted and released.

25

But Victorian Premier Steve Bracks and his peak farm body remain unconvinced.

There was more than a hint of politics in Bracks's rhetoric this week when he claimed the plan was "dead in the water" in its present guise. More insightful is the attitude of Victorian Farmers Federation president Simon Ramsay, who says he wants the plan to proceed with the right changes and has distanced himself from the political stoush that has emerged.

"I am worried that the state Government might see this as a political opportunity to delay the signing of the national water plan to make the federal Government look silly. We can't allow that," he tells Inquirer.

"The VFF will play a pivotal role in progressing Victoria's interests in the water plan if the Victorian Government continues to use this as a political opportunity."

Victorian irrigators and water experts want reform to the way the basin is managed and think the commonwealth is the right body to do it. They point to the need to better integrate groundwater into the system and for proper and effective sanctions on state governments that flout the system by handing out too much water. "In the past, when a state has ignored the cap and gone over, all they do is get a note at the annual report saying how naughty they've been," one expert says.

Their concerns date back to the way in which water licences were handed out and managed from the 1950s.

As in the parable of the prodigal son, NSW governments have been wasteful with what they have been given, overgenerous in issuing water licences and encouraging growth in farm businesses throughout the state's hot and arid interior. Short-term political influence pushed things along nicely: the NSW Nationals built a power base in these regions while Labor also has interests to protect.

Subsequently irrigation became so demanding on available water that the security of the water entitlements began to fall. That suited many NSW irrigators, who planted highly profitable annual crops such as cotton and rice, and were quite content to cut back production in dryer seasons.

By contrast Victorian governments and their irrigators took a more risk-averse approach, under-allocating rather than over-allocating their stocks of water. This was as much by necessity as austerity: their climate and soils suited irrigated pasture supporting dairy and permanent plantings, farm businesses that depend on high security of water supply each year, even when it's dry.

By the mid-'90s it became apparent the amount of water being handed out exceeded what was coming in and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission imposed a cap on further allocations of water in 1997. But the damage had been done. With most of the over-allocation occurring in NSW it is likely most of the \$3billion water buy-back flagged in the national reform plan will occur there, too. From the outside, it seems the reward for mismanagement is the lion's share of investment.

The revelation in Senate estimates this week that a highly conditional commonwealth tender to buy back water issued last year had been a complete failure has led to speculation that a buyback on a larger scale may be similarly doomed or, at worst, a lot more expensive than \$3 billion.

The 40-page tender document included onerous conditions for the installation of expensive water efficiency measures to ostensibly create water that could be sold back, reflecting the innate hostility of the Nationals to any open-market buyback. Wentworth Group scientist Peter Cullen says these constraints meant its failure was hardly surprising.

"The tender has got to be a clear and open tender where the sellers can sell their water if they want," Cullen says. "Not with all these side conditions.

"There is so much restructuring about to happen in Australian agriculture that people should be allowed to capitalise on their asset as they retreat or get out of agriculture. Now is a great time. They are crying out for money. Agriculture is going to change. Why not let them capitalise when water is very valuable?"

A more useful indicator may be the NSW Government's highly successful Riverbank scheme, which in its first year bought back \$15million worth of general security water from across the state as part of a five-year buyback plan. "We have got more people wanting to sell than we can afford to buy from," says Simon Smith from the NSW Department of Environment and Conservation. "Some people are buying land that comes with water and they have got other plans or they may want to scale back on their irrigation activities. There are some people who just want to exit and other people

who do efficiency measures and the cash flow would help if they don't need that licence."

The commission is made up of 25 representatives from the four states and the commonwealth and decides on the bulk water entitlements that can be allocated for each state. As the winter rains start flowing through the system in July, allocations are determined on almost a monthly basis. State governments then determine how the water will be divided through each of their systems.

Ramsay says the commission's size and consensus approach makes it a toothless tiger in urgent need of reform.

"The 25 commissioners couldn't agree whether to put milk in their tea, and that's why it's such a farce," he tells Inquirer.

26

There are other issues to be resolved. Money promised by the commonwealth for investment in infrastructure and efficiency systems will find its way across all states, but the recent federal budget revealed most of it will not come through until the end of the decade.

Victorian irrigators support the basic principle that the commonwealth should take control of the overall system and allocation of bulk water to the states but fail to see any benefit in allowing them to control the detailed micro-management of catchment plans, flood plain management plans and land use agreements. This is the "referral of power" problem. They feel their existing arrangements have been hard fought and carefully planned in Victoria. Surrendering this level of control seems risky and unnecessary.

"We've agreed in principle to support the national plan," Ramsay says.

"But there are still no powers for the commission to pull the states in line to meet the national water initiative objectives. They just seem to merrily go along flouting the agreement. To us that is unacceptable."

There are concerns a single national authority may move to rebalance water from under-allocated Victoria to over-allocated NSW. Director of Uniwater John Langford says these fears may be allayed by the creation of an independent regulator that protects the value of existing water entitlements.

"There needs to be stronger and more independent arrangements to protect everybody's water entitlements from any future monopoly supplier," Langford says.

Bracks has written to the Prime Minister to detail his concerns and has agreed to meet with him next week. The VFF is already in talks with federal Environment and Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull and Howard. But time is running out to get the detail of the draft legislation agreed and through parliament in the June or August sessions.

Mike Young, from the University of Adelaide, says Victorian fears about the detail are justified but could be resolved by working through the details of the transition and "keeping everybody confident about what is happening".

"It's about making sure we don't end up with something that is worse," Young says. "We're in the middle of a very severe drought and we could spend a lot of time focusing on trying to rewrite plans rather than managing out of where we are. There isn't a lot of time to fiddle while Rome is burning."

Just swap weather for terrorism

Global warming alarmists actually make a great deal of sense. That is, once you imagine that every time they open their mouths they're talking not about the environment but about Islamic terrorism.

Put that particular informational adjustment in place and suddenly even Tim Flannery begins sounding wise.

Bob Brown? You'd vote for him in a heartbeat.

And Al Gore's hard-hitting documentary about the Islamist threat - *An Inconvenient Faith* - might face the occasional bombing attack, but would otherwise be crucial viewing for those wishing to be informed on the great menace of our age.

Let's work through several typical greenoid statements to see this process at work, whereby formerly irrational and fear-mongering comments on global warming (confirmed kills: exactly zero) become entirely reasonable and defensible when framed as statements on Islamist terror (confirmed kills: many thousands and counting):

"It doesn't make sense for us to sit back and wait for others to act. The fate of the planet that our children and grandchildren will inherit is in our hands, and it is our responsibility to do something about this crisis." - former US president Bill Clinton

Climate-wise, there is very little we can do to make things more cosy for our children and grandchildren. I mean, please; should we give credit for yesterday's fine Sydney weather to some 19th-century blacksmiths?

Do we thank the Country Women's Association of Penrith's 1958 yard-tidying drive for this year's abundant early snow?

News flash: people can't change weather. Try stopping the rain some time.

But there's one guaranteed way to make things uncomfortably warm for our children (or at least our girl children). Require them to wear burqas every time they set foot outside.

You don't want that future for your kids? Well, quit worrying about big CO2 and be concerned instead about big Mo.

"One person can make a difference." - actress Mimi Rogers

Unlikely, Mimi, in environmental terms. Why, you can take the whole of Australia out of the greenhouse equation and the production of alleged global warming gases would decline by only 1.5 per cent or so.

Each Australian represents just 1/20,000,000th of that 1.5 per cent. By contrast, individuals have a fine record of combating terrorism.

British shoe bomber Richard Reid's plan to blow a Boeing 767 out of the sky was brought undone when a single flight attendant noticed the scent of matches Reid was using in a bid to ignite his unusual footwear.

Other individuals subsequently doused the fellow with water and restrained him until the plane landed. Individual actions in that case saved many lives.

Also, recall Todd Beamer's words as he led the charge to wrest control of United Airlines flight 93 from terrorists on September 11, 2001: "Let's roll!"

The individuals who backed Beamer gave their lives to prevent an attack on Washington DC. "Let's roll!" isn't usually the sort of thing you hear from someone setting out to buy low-energy lightbulbs.

"There is no reason why (climate change) should be a left-right issue." - *The Melbourne Age's* Tim Colebatch

There are plenty of reasons why climate changelings overwhelmingly emerge from the left. The main one would be that, having failed to constrain capitalism by any other means, the left now seeks to impose barriers in the name of science (well, almost science; it more closely resembles a type of liberation theology).

There are plenty more reasons why left and right should not be divided over the West's response to terrorism.

In fact, the left stands to lose far more, given extreme Islam's hatred of their pet causes (feminism, gay rights, art, tolerance, music, diversity, everything).

Yet many on the left seem ill-inclined to do anything that might offend even extreme Islamists, much less directly confront them.

"It's likely to be too late for the polar bear." - Tim Flannery

Only if the polar bear in question is a guide polar bear trying to get a cab with his blind Sydney owner. Revelations this week that Islamic cabbies are rejecting fares if a guide dog is involved point to the cultural battle being played out far below the level of bullets and bombs, but also crucial to the eventual outcome.

All depends on your priorities, of course. Blind folk being left on the street might not be as important to you as, I don't know, new cycle lanes. And the deaths of thousands - with more to come - may not interest you to the same extent as curbing plastic bag availability in supermarkets.

US stand-up comedienne Julia Gorin first identified the environmental left's fondness for terror motifs in a column last year.

"Tough language is borrowed from the war on terror and applied to the war on weather," Gorin wrote - presciently, since at that point the trend was nowhere near as obvious as it is now. "Freud called it displacement. People fixate on the environment when they can't deal with real threats."

You wonder how these people would cope were they ever themselves to face the real threat of terrorism.

As their hijacked jet banked for a final charge into the skyscraper, would they worry about the environmental impact?

Herald Sun

Ministers remain landlocked

Victoria is standing firm in its opposition to the Federal Government's \$10 billion Murray-Darling takeover proposal.

Concerns were also raised by South Australia and Queensland over details of the plan at a meeting with Federal Water Minister Malcolm Turnbull in Adelaide yesterday.

Victorian Water Minister John Thwaites had a private five-minute discussion with Mr Turnbull before the meeting began.

Mr Thwaites declared Victoria would still not cede full control of the river system.

"The legislation that the Commonwealth has put forward is a huge grab for power and we just don't accept that," he said.

Globe's Al warming

Think Al Gore is likely to run again for the presidency of the United States.

So, I broached the subject with someone who usually knows what is likely to happen there before it happens.

"No one that fat could win the presidency of the US," said this Deep Throat.

He said it was what Big Al was putting down his throat that ruled him out.

"I was near him and someone that fat couldn't even think of being president."

Well, this week Al is staring from the cover of *Time* magazine with a look that would freeze global warming.

He has travelled far since he turned his car around on his way to claim the presidency in 2000 and went home.

It was all the fault of the voting machines in Florida, where George W. Bush's brother, Jeb, was governor.

Remember the hanging chads and the pregnant chads and all the other little chads?

They were pieces of paper that were supposed to be punched out when people pulled the lever.

They were not arrivals from Chad, as many Florida residents thought. Florida retirees are used to boatloads of Haitians arriving on their beaches.

Those Haitians seeking a better life are now to be sent on to Australia under our latest arrangements with America.

Al won the popular vote but lost the election and seemed to disappear, which is not easy for a man so obscenely fat as to be thought unfit for office.

28

Who is the Deep Throat who told me this, you want to know? I can't tell. It was one of those off-the-record conversations before he flew back to America.

Al might have been gross when Deep Throat saw him annihilating food at a Washington banquet, but the former vice-president has been on a diet and is working out heavily.

The *Time* magazine cover shows him in emperor-like profile, as if stamped on a Roman coin.

What decided Al to stop digging his political grave with his teeth? It seems he was taking too long climbing out of the political car crash back in 2000. His wife, Tipper, started steering him back to believing in himself.

There is no trace now of hanging-chins or pregnant jowls and he has the aura of a messiah.

The *Time* cover piece is headed 'The Last Temptation of Al Gore'. This was the guy they crucified as the Wooden Indian. He was the false prophet who claimed to have invented the miracle of the internet.

Now, Al is bringing in the believers like some Bible-belt preacher. Men and women come to Al at his global-warming slide show "silently weeping".

One girl asked him to run again for the presidency and went down on one knee, bowing her head. "I'll vote for you!" she cried and the crowd roared like a rocket launcher, wrote the *Time* reporter.

It lasted for 30 seconds, all but drowning out Al's five-word response: "I'm not planning to run."

Of course, Al's global-warming message will translate into a political campaign quicker than your next carbon emission.

Al and Tipper have been putting solar panels in the roof of their antebellum mansion in Nashville since their electricity bill was discovered to be 10 times the local average.

It's better that he stays down there. In New York, he might be tempted by more than the presidency.

I was disgusted to read that 'deviled eggs' come with 'deep-fried pork jowl' at a Belgian restaurant the *New York Times* says is proving a gastronomic hit.

More likely a cholesterol hit, but if they live long enough even the Republican carnivores will vote for Al if he runs, and run he will. I'll bet all my pork-belly futures on that.

Adelaidenow

Rescue plan: SA not ready to sign on Murray

Concerns have been raised by South Australia and Queensland about the Federal Government's \$10 billion rescue plan for the Murray-Darling Basin as the Victorian Government demands "major" changes before agreeing to it.

Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald said the State Government remained committed to the plan but would need to further negotiate with the Commonwealth before approving the proposal.

Ms Maywald and other state ministers met federal Water Minister Malcolm Turnbull for the Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council meeting in Adelaide yesterday. "We are still 100 per cent committed to the national plan," Ms Maywald said.

"There are some concerns about some of the detail in the legislation that need to be worked out and we are working through that."

On two separate occasions Ms Maywald refused to outline what her concerns were, drawing heavy criticism from state Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith.

"It sounds very much like an act of political cowardice not to be honest and frank with the people . . . and what is required is some political courage on water," he said.

Victorian Water Minister John Thwaites had a private five-minute discussion with Mr Turnbull before the meeting began yesterday.

He also will meet Prime Minister John Howard next week but declared his state would not cede full control of the river system to the Commonwealth.

"There does need to be a major revamp of the legislation if Victoria is going to accept it," he said.

Mr Turnbull said: "We are negotiating on everything but what we can't do is let down the Australian people . . . and let pass this historic opportunity to get right what has been wrong for so long."

"We have had some constructive discussions today and it really is a question of going through the detail."

Promotion: PM's next ad target - the climate

Labor has accused Prime Minister John Howard of planning to spend \$23 million of taxpayers' money promoting climate change policies, despite years of denial and scepticism on the issue.

The Federal Government is believed to be planning an advertising blitz after Mr Howard unveils his

strategy on a carbon emissions trading scheme next month.

Mr Howard told Parliament yesterday he was yet to approve the mail-out of a brochure about climate change to all Australian homes. The Government has already committed \$176,000 to researching and market-testing the proposed brochure, a Senate committee was told this week.

While this month's Budget committed \$52.8 million to giving households energy saving tips, a briefing note sent to advertising companies speaks of a campaign emphasising the Government's "leadership role" on climate change.

29

"Yesterday in Parliament, Mr Howard denied all knowledge of (the) Government having signed any contracts for any new advertising campaign on climate change or the environment," Labor leader Kevin Rudd told reporters yesterday.

"Suddenly, mysteriously, today we have a \$23 million campaign about to burst on to our television sets and into our letterboxes . . . funny that."

Labor water spokesman Anthony Albanese said: "You can't have . . . 11 years of climate change inaction - and, indeed, denial and scepticism - and then spend tens of millions of dollars of taxpayers' funds in the lead-up to the election to gain credibility on climate change and water."

Mr Howard said the Government would be making constructive comments on addressing climate change in the weeks and months ahead.

He will unveil his strategy after his emissions trading taskforce makes its recommendations next week.

"I can understand why some people say we are not doing enough about climate change because we are not wildly setting targets without knowing the consequences," he said.

Saving the Murray is the first priority

Apart from national security there is a no more pressing issue in Australia than the health and viability of the Murray-Darling river system.

Yet the states, headed by Victoria, continue to procrastinate over the detail of a \$10 billion Federal Government plan to revive and invigorate the river basin.

Victorian Premier Steve Bracks has refused to sign a new draft of the water plan which needs the assent and co-operation of the Federal Government, Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory to work satisfactorily. While the other Labor administrations have signed, Mr Bracks says specific concerns raised by Victoria have been ignored. The Victorian decision raises the suspicion that delaying the plan - a major pre-election initiative by the Federal Government - is motivated more by politics than genuine concerns about national water security.

However harsh and unfair this allegation may be, it is one which Victoria - and by implication the other Labor states - always faced by not endorsing the scheme.

Federal Water Minister Malcolm Turnbull says he is not clear as to why Victoria has refused to sign. Perhaps the specific concerns and a possible resolution will emerge at a meeting today between Mr Turnbull and state and territory ministers.

While it is understandable that the states are reluctant to give up their traditional control over the river system, clearly the current fragmented system is not working.

A single authority administered and largely financed by the Federal Government is clearly the best option to protect and revive the fragile river system.

But time is running out. Because of drought and over-use by various agricultural and industrial interests, the Murray-Darling system is in a deplorable condition. The impasse must be rectified before it is too late.

28th

FarmOnline

Just three willing sellers for Murray water buyback

Further doubts about the Federal Government's water planning have arisen after its scheme to buy water back from irrigators, who have saved significant volumes through efficiency gains, attracted just three sellers.

After budgeting \$200 million to purchase 200 gigalitres from irrigators, three tenders worth \$765,000 for 454 megalitres of water came in under the benchmark price.

Federal Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull conceded the price was too low.

"The reality is, water is becoming more valuable and the cost of acquiring water is more likely to rise than fall," Mr Turnbull said.

Labor's water resources spokesman Anthony Albanese said: "The government's tender process that it put out has been a dismal failure indeed."

SOURCE: AAP and *FarmOnline*.

PM should sack Turnbull for incompetence: Windsor

Prime Minister John Howard should sack Water Resources Minister Malcolm Turnbull and replace him with someone who has a grasp of water issues and the capacity to articulate solutions, according to the Independent Member for New England Tony Windsor.

Mr Windsor, who chaired the joint Commonwealth/NSW Namoi Valley Groundwater Taskforce, cited a growing list of Mr Turnbull's decisions on water policy to argue that he lacks the ability to make any meaningful comments that water users in the Murray Darling Basin could understand.

"Yesterday Mr Turnbull spoke of the recent rain as being not enough to cause run off into the river systems because it was becoming part of the groundwater system," Mr Windsor said.

30

"Anyone with any basic knowledge would know that the meagre amount of rainfall that has fallen recently would obviously be falling on the ground but definitely would not be entering the groundwater aquifers.

"Any farmer would know that an inch of rain equates to about six inches of soil moisture with most groundwater aquifers found between 50m and 150m below the surface and recharged by groundwater recharge areas, not through an inch of rain falling on the land.

"Mr Turnbull's confusion about the relationship between the connectivity of groundwater systems and surface water systems again shows his lack of understanding of the issue."

Mr Windsor believes that Mr Turnbull's role in the detail of the \$10B water plan demonstrates once again his incompetence and has created great concern in water users in the Murray Darling Basin.

"Merely presenting 'bribes' to irrigators to surrender their water licences to a government slush fund

is an insult to those who have invested and developed inland Australia when there is still great uncertainty about the science," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor also pointed to Mr Turnbull's inability to fix the taxation issue relating to the joint NSW/Commonwealth Achieving Sustainable Groundwater Entitlements (ASGE) Program as another example of Mr Turnbull's "incompetency".

"In June 2005, \$100m was made available to groundwater users jointly by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments as compensation for the loss of water entitlements only to see in the fine print of the program that the Commonwealth would be able to steal up to 47pc back as income tax," Mr Windsor said.

"It is now nearly two years on and there is still an impasse on this issue with groundwater users still unable to access the much needed funding to help them to provide for their families."

SOURCE: *The Land*, NSW's weekly rural newspaper, posting updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

Farmers dig-in over SA drains

Excavation has begun on a controversial drain development in South Australia in full view of about 90 protesting farmers, despite an injunction reportedly being issued in the Adelaide Supreme Court.

It comes after an eventful week in which the South Australian Opposition joined the fight for the South East drains to be subject to an independent environmental audit, following a recent rally by nearly 130 farmers and conservationists at Marcollat.

Earthworks on the 30-kilometre Didicoolum Extension Drain, part of the Upper South East Dryland Salinity and Flood Management Program, were due to start on Monday.

But instead of the roar of excavators, the only sounds were from farmers protesting with banners such as 'No Go Gago' and 'Rann Scandal Wetlands Vandal'.

The drain is one of the final stages of a \$78 million project funded by landowners, the State and Federal Governments. But the controversial development has divided the Marcollat community and protestors are claiming water must be valued as an asset, not a liability.

A double line of more than 60 vehicles was parked along the alignment of the proposed drain, on the northern boundary of Marcollat property Kyeema, within 50 metres of the existing drain, and a core group is maintaining a round-the-clock vigil, with protestors expected to return if work starts.

Liberal leader in the Legislative Council David Ridgway said the Opposition decision to subject the SE drain system to an independent environmental audit by the CSIRO or an independent expert panel, was not a backflip.

The Opposition was still a strong supporter of the drainage scheme, but at the 11th hour it was opportune to delay the drain extension for a few months and ensure the projects original aims were still being met without damaging the current environment.

Mr Ridgway said the review should be conducted by a combination of scientists put forward by opponents of the drain and those from government, but both parties needed to understand the "umpire's decision was final".

Padthaway Irrigators strongly oppose the drain, believing the existing Wongawilli drain has already carried away groundwater threatening their \$100m grape and seed industry.

Out in force during the protests, they face a 40pc cut in irrigation water allocations with the water table falling to its lowest level in 40 years, and believe the project needs a licence to remove

groundwater from the already over-allocated Padthaway Prescribed Wells Area.

SOURCE: Extract from the May 24 issue of *Stock Journal*, SA's weekly rural newspaper.

PM invites Bracks to end water impasse

Prime Minister John Howard has moved to save his \$10 billion national water plan by inviting Victorian Premier Steve Bracks to Canberra for talks.

The invitation to talks, which has been accepted by Mr Bracks, follows the Victorian Premier's declaration that the plan in its current form is "dead in the water".

Mr Howard's move pre-empts a meeting of Federal and State water ministers in Adelaide today to discuss the scheme.

31

Victoria is the only Murray-Darling Basin State yet to join Mr Howard's \$10B bid to save the ailing river system.

Mr Bracks, in a letter to the Prime Minister, objected to the extent of powers to be given up to the Commonwealth under the latest draft of the legislation.

Mr Howard said there was insufficient detail in the letter.

"I frankly, Mr Speaker, confess to utter puzzlement as to what the Victorian premier is getting at," he told Federal Parliament yesterday.

"If he's willing to provide me with more detail of his concerns, I invited him to come and see me in Canberra next week so that we can personally discuss the issue."

Mr Howard said the latest draft contained no greater Federal powers than a Commonwealth-State communique issued in February.

Mr Bracks said he and Water Minister John Thwaites would go to Canberra next week "in good faith" and again state their opposition to the handover of powers sought by Canberra.

"I could not make it clearer ... what we want is a targeted, limited referral of power," Mr Bracks said.

South Australian Premier Mike Rann said he expected arguments to continue for some time.

"The fact is that the Victorian position as of today is identical to what it was three months ago," Mr Rann said.

"There is still a lot of argy bargy to do; there's people sitting around the table.

"Victoria is still part of the negotiations and hopefully we'll see the best possible outcome for the River Murray."

SOURCE: AAP and *FarmOnline*.

29th

FarmOnLine

\$1B in drought aid for irrigators being negotiated

A new billion dollar drought assistance package could be on the cards to help irrigators cope with the expected 'zero allocation' they are likely to receive in July.

The Federal Government has established a committee within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to handle contingency plans in the event of further irrigation cutbacks.

It is looking at a new round of financial aid, with the NSW Irrigators Council having already held preliminary discussions with Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran.

"There could be people suffering for five to six years if their orchards die and they are not currently catered for under existing exceptional circumstances support," NSW Irrigators chief executive Doug Miell said.

Mr McGauran said the amount and type of drought relief on offer from the Federal Government was under constant review.

The Government is currently spending \$17m a week in drought relief to farmers, after eligibility criteria were relaxed last year to include more irrigation communities and rural small businesses.

SOURCE: *Australian Financial Review*.

More drought money to CWA

The Federal Government will provide an extra \$8 million to the Country Women's Association to distribute emergency grants to farming families struggling through the worst drought on record.

Minister for Agriculture, Peter McGauran, announced on Friday that the new funding would allow the CWA to continue supporting rural families and community organisations.

"In the last six months the CWA has provided outstanding support to the Government and drought affected communities by delivering this vital emergency drought aid," Mr McGauran said.

"This new funding is recognition of the ongoing need of those families suffering from this severe and extended drought and the hard work of the CWA.

"The assistance being provided through the CWA has been very well received and demand remains high for grants to help meet families' household expenses.

"Individual grants will still be available for families, but more than ever, we need to support our communities."

Families can access emergency grants of up to \$2000, while community groups can apply for up to \$3000 to arrange gatherings and excursions to help boost morale in the towns hit hardest by the drought.

The new funding will be available from 1 July 2007.

SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

Inuit left skating on thin ice

Global warming has made life more dangerous for Inuit in the Arctic as they increasingly fall to their deaths through thinning ice sheets while hunting seals and polar bears.

Delegates at a climate change conference in Belize said today that many Inuit had died in recent years because their snowmobiles and sleds crash through the ice during hunts.

"My people have been hunting on the ice for 5000 years but now you risk death around every turn," said Nicodemus Illauq, from the Inuit town of Clyde River in Canada said at the conference in Central America.

Patricia Cochran, the head of an international Inuit council, said every Inuit in Alaska knew someone who had died by falling through the ice and drowning, although exact figures were hard to come by.

A report by the UN climate panel in April said warming was happening faster in the Arctic than

elsewhere. Dark ground or sea, once uncovered, soaks up far more heat than reflective ice or snow. Arctic peoples and tropical islanders are trying to strengthen an unusual alliance at the May 27-30 Belize meeting by seeking ways to cope with melting ice and rising seas.

Inuit hunters and a Sami reindeer herder from Norway are among those meeting local community leaders and other experts from French Polynesia, Fiji and the Caribbean at the talks.

Scientists say both the Arctic and small, low-lying islands are among the most vulnerable to global warming, which is widely blamed on human use of fossil fuels.

The Belize meeting of 40 delegates, led by an Oslo-based climate research group among others, is the first of its kind since a "Many Strong Voices" plan for Arctic peoples and island states was launched at UN talks in Montreal in 2005.

Its goal is to draft a five year plan for the states most at risk to address rising sea levels, stronger and more frequent hurricanes and melting glaciers.

The Australian

Warmer oceans linked to global warming

Scientists in Tasmania have positively linked increased temperatures in the Indian Ocean to global warming.

Commercial "ships of opportunity" have taken measurements to a depth of 800m over the past 40 years, which has helped the CSIRO research rainfall fluctuations in southern and southeast Australia.

The data has provided information on atmospheric and oceanic conditions which influence rainfall and climate.

The key findings are a two-degrees celsius warming of the Indian Ocean in sub-tropical latitudes between 40-50 degrees south, and a cooling of waters separating Australia and Indonesia.

CSIRO scientist Gael Alory said the change in atmospheric conditions affecting ocean temperatures was mostly attributed to humans, including the production of aerosols, ozone depletion and greenhouse gases.

He said the combination has weakened Pacific Ocean trade winds, and strengthened westerly winds in the sub tropics.

"These oceanic changes are almost certainly linked to changes in the heat structure of the atmosphere and have led to a rise in water temperatures in the sub-tropical Indian Ocean of about two degrees celsius," Dr Alory said.

"At the same time, we are seeing changes in ocean circulation in the tropical regions as a result of a long-term weakening of the Pacific Ocean trade winds.

"This affects sea surface temperature in regions relevant to the source and distribution of rainfall across southern Australia."

Meanwhile, the CSIRO has today announced a \$2 million upgrade and expansion of its research facilities in Hobart.

"For the past 20 years Hobart has served as the main base for the CSIRO's world-class research in temperature in marine science and Southern Ocean climate science," CSIRO marine and atmospheric research deputy chief Tim Moltmann said.

He said the CSIRO was reaffirming its commitment to Tasmania with the investment.

AAP

ALP exposes carbon ad campaign

John Howard's denial that voters faced a multi-million-dollar environmental advertising blitz was

looking shabby yesterday after Labor exposed the name of the campaign and described scenes from a television script.

Mr Howard again insisted yesterday that no decision to run the advertising campaign had been taken, the same defence he ran after revelations in the Senate last week of money being spent developing the campaign.

The Prime Minister remains adamant that a final decision to launch another taxpayer-funded government information blitz had not been taken.

But asked by Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd to confirm the campaign title "Climate Clever", Mr Howard laughed and said: "I can assure the Leader of the Opposition that it won't be called 'double standards out of hypocrisy'."

Mr Rudd said: "He now confirmed that a taxpayer-funded television advertising campaign on climate change does exist."

Labor says the television advertisement includes "real people" talking about climate change, including an older woman stating that she did not know much about geothermal technology but did know that she should turn off the kettle as soon as it boils.

As well as a mailout of a glossy brochure, including a planned foreword from Mr Howard, there will be radio spots, a link to a website and a "carbon calculator", which allows householders to calculate their own contribution to emissions.

33

Labor was also able to reveal the contact person in the Prime Minister's office.

Opposition spokesman on water Anthony Albanese said that after years of denying the existence of climate change, Mr Howard was now moving to a new form of denial. "What Australia needs on climate change is a government that will lead, not one that will mislead," he said. "On climate change, the Government has been in denial for 11 years; it needs to stop being in denial about the climate change advertising campaign."

Mr Howard acknowledged in a speech to the Business Council of Australia in Canberra last night he had not moved as fast on climate change as some people wanted. But he pledged he would move quickly after his hand-picked emissions trading task force handed down its report on Thursday. Mr Howard said the Government's policy would be uniquely Australian in a way that preserved the economy.

He said setting a long-term emissions reduction target for Australia was the most important economic decision to be taken in the next decade.

Earlier in parliament, Opposition environment spokesman Peter Garrett tried to move a motion calling on the Government to sign the Kyoto protocol, but it was defeated on party lines.

Mr Rudd also committed \$50 million from his proposed \$500 million Clean Coal Fund for a scientific project mapping sites for carbon capture and infrastructure.

A further \$20million would be spent assessing sites for burying carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases underground - known as geosequestration - and \$40 million on a CSIRO project to capture carbon emissions from coal-powered stations.

Twist in recycled sewage

Small concentrations of antibiotics have the ability to pass through conventional wastewater treatment plants, according to a new study that will reignite the debate over the use of recycled

sewage.

An article this month in the international journal Water Research found small concentrations of antibiotics passed through advanced wastewater treatment using microfiltration and reverse osmosis.

The National Research Centre for Environmental Toxicology, the Co-operative Research Centre for Water Quality and Treatment and the National Measurement Institute assessed the removal of 28 human and veterinary antibiotics.

With the Beattie Government hoping to pump recycled sewage into Wivenhoe Dam before Brisbane's main water supply runs dry - in late 2008 or early 2009 - the Queensland Water Commission has gone to great lengths to emphasise the safety of the end product. A panel of experts is guiding its regulatory processes, even as protest groups - angry at being denied a referendum on the use of recycled sewage - distribute leaflets warning of potential health risks.

Lead researcher Andrew Watkinson said last night the additional process in Brisbane's recycled water pipeline project, advanced oxidation, would almost certainly remove the remaining concentrations.

Mr Watkinson said the research had shown concentrations of antibiotics in many Brisbane rivers and waterways, flowing from conventional treatment plants. Although there appeared little risk to human and animal health, further work was needed to determine whether the concentrations might contribute to bacterial resistance to the drugs.

Regional emissions agreement rejected

Tentative attempts by industry leaders to encourage the 21 member countries of the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation forum to consider a regional emissions trading scheme appear to have failed.

This is despite efforts from major energy industry leaders in Australia to secure from APEC some certainty on carbon pricing that would encourage investment in future greenhouse gas abatement technologies in a world where energy demand is set to double in about 20 years.

US deputy energy secretary Clay Sell said in Darwin yesterday emissions trading schemes were a matter for individual countries to decide. The US was struggling to craft a response that worked for its own economy, he said.

He was speaking during a discussion at the APEC Energy Business Forum in Darwin, which was designed to encourage APEC energy ministers to adopt strategies that might give business more certainty in investments.

Mr Sell said there were technological challenges surrounding concepts such as carbon capture and storage and no working CCS project in the US despite the FutureGen project in which Australian companies have invested.

The big challenge was the deployment of technology in less developed countries and shaping the market to receive its product. Federal Resources Minister Ian Macfarlane said APEC was an ideal forum in which to consider climate change as every country accepted that CCS was essential if a carbon trading scheme were to be adopted. But he later said later none of the APEC ministers with whom he had spoken had raised the possibility of a regional emissions trading system.

Premier urges PM to spell out water objectives

Victorian Premier Steve Bracks has laid out a series of demands to John Howard ahead of talks aimed at resolving the impasse over a national water plan.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr Bracks warns the talks will only be productive if the commonwealth reveals its long-term intentions behind the Murray-Darling Basin takeover.

Mr Bracks has demanded "a legislated guarantee that the commonwealth would protect Victorian irrigators and the environment from any impacts on Victorian water entitlements and or loss of production" caused by the commonwealth's proposal.

He has asked that the commonwealth give a guarantee that it would not use national legislation dealing with the Murray-Darling Basin to override Victoria's land use management or control "broader economic development" in the state.

Victoria is the only state yet to agree to sign up to the commonwealth's \$10 billion takeover of the Murray-Darling Basin.

Mr Bracks last week demanded a meeting with Mr Howard after receiving draft legislation on the plan, which he said granted the commonwealth total constitutional powers over water in the Murray-Darling Basin.

Federal Water Minister Malcolm Turnbull indicated last week after a national meeting of water ministers in Adelaide that the Government was prepared to work to "ensure that we can find a middle ground".

He said the legislation would be amended in consultation with the states.

The Victorian Government has refused to sign up to the national water plan unless the federal Government provides a targeted, limited referral of powers in the draft legislation. In the letter, sent to Mr Howard's office late on Friday, Mr Bracks has also demanded a "clear statement of the commonwealth's policy objectives" behind the takeover.

"Having now received two draft tranches of the water bill, it is very clear that the range of powers being sought by the commonwealth is exceptionally broad and still lacking clear definition," Mr Bracks writes.

"Victorian officials continue in good faith to represent Victoria's views in discussion with commonwealth officials. We have presented very specific details about our concerns."

Mr Bracks says in the letter he would like to see a division-by-division breakdown of the policy objectives behind the bill.

A spokesman for Mr Howard said the Prime Minister would respond to the letter "as appropriate". Mr Howard and Mr Bracks will discuss the water plan next Monday.

Emissions trading hot topic at APEC

Australia will press members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum to consider working towards an emissions trading scheme, at a meeting of APEC energy ministers in Darwin this week.

The wording of the move will be broad in the context of the ministers' talks on energy sustainability and the environment, allowing for the wide divergence of views among the 21 APEC member countries.

It will be an important recognition that APEC cannot stand aside from the growing world concern over climate change.

The meeting's host, federal resources minister Ian Macfarlane, has made it clear a formal emissions trading scheme is not being discussed or even proposed but that the APEC ministers will be taking the first steps towards a unified view of how climate change might be handled.

A business forum to be held today ahead of the formal ministerial meeting will concentrate on the

question of high energy prices and climate change.

The aim is to present APEC's political leaders with a comprehensive and up-to-date view of the climate change debate as business sees it, and consider some sort of program for the year ahead.

Executives such as Russell Caplan from Shell, Charlie Lenegan from Rio Tinto, Rod Eddington representing JP Morgan, Gerry Hueston from BP and Denny Mooney from GM-H will lead sessions in the forum.

Business observers say APEC is an ideal group to take the climate change debate forward. It is estimated that APEC economies will have to invest about \$US6 trillion (\$7.3 trillion) in the energy sector between now and 2030 to meet rapid growth in demand.

According to the APEC secretariat, coal will continue to be the major energy resource contributing to electricity generation, with its share increasing from 44 per cent in 2002 to 53 per cent in 2030.

The expected absence of US energy secretary Samuel Bodman is being remarked on, as the US is the most adamant opponent of mandatory caps on emissions.

The US, Australia and Canada are the main proponents of technology solutions to climate change problems.

That's what the business forum will be encouraging the APEC energy ministers to adopt as the underlying platform for an APEC-wide move on emissions abatement. Mr Macfarlane said last week energy security issues would be high among discussion topics, particularly relating to rapidly increasing demand for primary energy from countries such as China, India and South Korea.

All three countries are key targets of the Australian liquefied natural gas industry, which is aiming to become the world's second largest supplier by the end of next decade.

It is also expected that South American countries such as Chile will become involved in discussions on LNG and possibly on uranium.

35

ABC.NEWSONLINE

Fly less to reduce carbon emissions: think tank

The Australia Institute think tank says Australians need to fly less if the country has any hope of meeting future greenhouse gas reduction targets.

The Institute wants a \$30 greenhouse levy to be added to the ticket prices for all domestic flights in a move to curb demand. A study by the Canberra-based think tank projects that if Australia adopts a 60 per cent reduction target, aviation will account for more than half of all emissions by 2050.

Study author Andrew Macintosh says that is not practical.

"The basic message is that we have to fly less," he said. "Unfortunately for aviation, there are no technological options that will allow us to drastically reduce aviation emissions."

He says if the Federal Government is serious about climate change, it must introduce a greenhouse gas fee on all domestic flights and include aviation in any emissions trading scheme.

The Institute for Sustainable Futures supports the call for Australians to fly less, with director Professor Stuart White saying it is dangerous not to include the sector in greenhouse calculations.

"Offsets will ultimately be required. We need to reduce first, we need to look at alternatives," he said. "We need to try to stem the growth."

"It's not a question of people not using air travel any more, that's obviously unrealistic, but we do need to make sure the growth is not as great as it's been."

But aviation analyst Ben Sandilands says encouraging people to use alternative forms of travel would not necessarily reduce greenhouse emissions.

He says a person driving interstate would use four or five times as much fuel as if they flew the same distance on a fully-booked flight.

"Full planes are very fuel-efficient and most of the flights around Australia are full," he said.

"It's in fact quite difficult to book a flight. So I'm not adding to the pollution problem or the greenhouse gas emission problem by flying, I'm reducing it."

30th

FarmOnLine

Carbon trading report to Howard on Thursday

A framework for establishing a carbon emissions trading scheme will most likely be among key recommendations in a blueprint to be delivered to the Federal Government today (Thursday).

The taskforce, handpicked by Prime Minister John Howard, will deliver key recommendations for the Government to tackle greenhouse emissions but has been criticised for being stacked with representatives from the mining sector.

Farmers have been angry that they were left out of the taskforce, and the National Farmers Federation says it's important the agricultural sector is fully engaged and consulted on any new scheme.

The Prime Minister told a Coalition party meeting in Canberra this week the Government will have a sensible, balanced plan to go forward and help maintain the country's competitive advantage.

Colin Austin to address NSW water forums

Colin Austin, an internationally recognised innovator on water issues, will offer solutions to Australia's water problems during forums in the NSW country centres of Orange, Mudgee and Cessnock in mid-June.

"We are all saturated with doom and gloom stories about the water crisis," he said.

"Solutions start with defining the problem. The soil in our catchments form a dry crust which has to be wetted before there is any run-off into our dams.

"Not only is rainfall dropping but we are catching less and less of the water that falls. The solution is better ways of harvesting the rain that falls," he said.

He will describe three basic solutions at the NSW forums- anticipatory irrigation, wicking beds and micro harvesting.

Fifteen years ago he said people thought he was crazy spending millions of private money on speculative research to find solutions to the water crisis.

"But times are changing and there is a growing willingness to look at innovative ideas."

Mr Austin, an engineer who made his name when he introduced computers as an aid to injection moulding of plastics in the 1970s, has travelled widely in America, the Middle East, China and India looking for ideas but probably the most influential was his experiences in Africa where people's lives

literally depend on effective water harvesting.

SA Government drought response now \$60m

A new \$7.76 million package to further help farming communities tackle the drought and aid economic and social recovery in the bush has been announced by the South Australian Government.

36

SA's Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, Rory McEwen, said the new package, which built on the existing drought response, provided for:

- * Additional drought relief for personal and family counselling and mental health support for farming communities;
- * Financial relief for irrigators;
- * Additional funding to assist families whose income has been significantly affected by the drought to meet educational expenses such as school camps and excursions;
- * Maintaining existing school bus routes in drought-affected areas for the 2007 school year;
- * Incentives to businesses in rural communities to keep on apprentices in key skills areas (focussed on rural, mechanical and automotive trades that support agricultural production);
- * Further research into "drought tolerant" crops and pastures and the development of strategies that minimise impact of low water application on permanent horticulture.

"The State Government has steadily built its drought response since September last year as drought impacts have emerged and has focused on delivering timely support to rural families, their finances and their farms," Mr McEwen said.

"While recent rains have been welcome, the impacts of several adverse seasonal circumstances during the past five years have put a significant strain on the natural resilience of our farming communities.

"The total assistance now available through State and Federal Government measures provides a strong platform for economic and social recovery."

The latest contribution brings the SA Government's drought response commitment to \$60 million.

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Earth's Natural Defences against Climate Change 'Beginning to Fail'

by Michael McCarthy

As a result, atmospheric CO₂ levels may rise faster and bring about rising temperatures more quickly than previously anticipated. Stabilizing the CO₂ level, which must be done to bring the warming under control, is likely to become much more difficult, even if the world community agrees to do it.

The news may give added urgency to the meeting in three weeks' time between the G8 group of rich nations and the leading developing countries led by China, at Heiligendamm in Germany, when an attempt will be made to put together the framework of a new world climate treaty to succeed the current Kyoto protocol.

"This is a timely warning in advance of Heiligendamm and the G8 that the climate clock is beginning to tick faster," said the leading environmentalist Tom Burke, visiting professor at Imperial College London.

"The shift that has been detected in a four-year study by researchers from the University of East

Anglia, the British Antarctic Survey and the Max-Planck Institute for Biogeochemistry, published in the journal *Science*, is one of the most ominous in the development of climate change. It implies a breach in the planet's own defenses against global warming.

Human society has hugely benefited from the earth's natural carbon absorption facility, which means oceans and forests take up roughly half of the CO₂ pumped into the atmosphere, in the so-called carbon cycle. What is left in the atmosphere is known as the "airborne fraction".

If sinks weakened, the airborne fraction would be likely to get bigger. Although supercomputer models of the climate have for some time predicted the weakening of the ocean and terrestrial sinks, no example of it happening has actually been detected - until now.

Now the research team has found the vast Southern Ocean, which is the earth's biggest carbon sink, accounting for about 15 per cent of the total absorption potential, has become effectively CO₂-saturated.

The level of the gas it is absorbing has remained static since 1981 - but in that time the amount emitted has grown by 40 per cent, so it has stopped keeping pace and much more CO₂ is left over to trap the sun's heat.

The effect - revealed by scrutinizing observations of atmospheric CO₂ from 40 stations around the world, is thought to have been caused by an increase in ocean wind speeds. Stormier weather and stronger waves are churning up the sea and bringing natural CO₂ stored there closer to the surface - which reduces the ability of the surface to absorb the gas from the air.

The increased winds are believed to be caused by altered atmospheric temperature regimes produced by two separate processes - the depletion of the ozone layer over Antarctica by chlorofluorocarbon gases from aerosol spray cans (now phased out), and global warming.

It is thus a positive feedback - an effect of climate change which itself makes climate change worse. Some researchers fear that feedbacks may make global warming happen much faster, and harder to control, than generally appreciated. The pessimism of scientists such as James Lovelock is largely based on the fact that most feedbacks in the earth's system are likely to work against us.

"This is the first unequivocal detection of a carbon sink weakening because of recent climate change," said the lead author of the study, Corinne Le Quéré, of the University of East Anglia.

37

"This is serious. Whenever the world has greatly warmed in the past, the weakening of CO₂ sinks has contributed to it."

Professor Chris Rapley, director of the British Antarctic Survey, said: "Since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution the world's oceans have absorbed about a quarter of the 500 gigatons [millions of tons] of carbon emitted by humans. The possibility that in a warmer world the Southern Ocean is weakening is a cause for concern."

The Government's chief scientific adviser, Sir David King, said: "We have quite a large number of positive feedbacks to worry about, and this appears to be another one. But the seriousness of it would depend on if it was affecting the whole ocean, or merely the Southern Ocean."

In recent years it has become clear that the rate at which CO₂ was accumulating is itself increasing. The level currently stands at about 382 parts per million by volume (ppm), up from 315 ppm in 1958.

In the past decade the rate has jumped from about 1.6ppm annually to well above 2ppm - a fact which, as *The Independent* reported in October 2004, may well signal that the earth's absorption

ability is shrinking.

Asked if this rate increase could now be linked to weakening sinks, Dr Le Quéré said: “I think we are just at the border of detecting that.” She added: “All the carbon cycle experts have their eyes on it.”

Saturations of the Southern Ocean CO₂ sink due to recent climate change, Le Quéré et al, published this week in Science.

CSIRO

CO₂ emissions increasing faster than expected

Carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels – the principal driver of climate change – have accelerated globally at a far greater rate than expected over recent years, according to a paper published this week in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

The paper explains that the average growth rate of carbon dioxide emissions increased from 1.1 per cent a year in the 1990s to a three per cent increase per year in the 2000s.

Lead author of the paper, Dr Mike Raupach from CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research and the Global Carbon Project, says that nearly eight billion tonnes of carbon were emitted globally into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide in 2005, compared with just six billion tonnes in 1995.

“A major driver of the accelerating growth rate in emissions is that, globally, we’re burning more carbon per dollar of wealth created,” Dr Raupach says. In the last few years, the global usage of fossil fuels has actually become less efficient. This adds to pressures from increasing population and wealth.”

“As countries undergo industrial development, they move through a period of intensive, and often inefficient, use of fossil fuel. Efficiencies improve along this development trajectory, but eventually tend to level off. Industrialised countries such as Australia and the US are at the levelling-off stage, while developing countries such as China are at the intensive-development stage. Both factors are decreasing the global efficiency of fossil fuel use.”

He says that China’s emissions per person are still below the global average. “On average, each person in Australia and the US now emits more than five tonnes of carbon per year, while in China the figure is only one tonne per year. Since the start of the industrial revolution, the US and Europe account for more than 50 per cent of the total, accumulated global emissions over two centuries, while China accounts for less than eight per cent. The 50 least developed countries have together contributed less than 0.5 per cent of global cumulative emissions over 200 years.”

Dr Raupach says that Australia, with 0.32 per cent of the global population, contributes 1.43 per cent of the world’s carbon emissions.

He says recent efforts globally to reduce emissions have had little impact on emissions growth.

“Recent emissions seem to be near the high end of the fossil fuel use scenarios used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Our results add to previous findings that carbon dioxide concentrations, global temperatures and sea level rise are all near the high end of IPCC projections.”

Dr Raupach led an international team of carbon-cycle experts, emissions experts and economists, brought together by the Global Carbon Project, to quantify global carbon emissions and their drivers.

“In addition to reinforcing the urgency of the need to reduce emissions, an important outcome of this work is to show that carbon emissions have history. We have to take both present and past emissions trajectories into account in negotiating global emissions reductions. To be effective, emissions

reductions have to be both workable and equitable," he says..

Background: Australia's CO₂ emissions in the global context.

Australia, with 0.32 per cent of the world population, contributes 1.43 per cent of CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels. In a global context, and particularly in comparison with other developed regions (the USA, European Union and Japan), these emissions rank as follows:

38

Australia's per capita emissions in 2004 were 4.5 times the global average, just below the value for the USA.

Australia's carbon intensity of energy (amount of carbon burned as fossil fuel per unit of energy) is 20 per cent higher than the world average, and 25 to 30 per cent higher than values for the USA, Europe and Japan. Therefore, the energy efficiency of fossil fuel use is significantly lower in Australia than in these other developed countries. Australia's carbon intensity of GDP (amount of carbon burned as fossil fuel per dollar of wealth created) is 25 per cent higher than the world average. It is a little higher than the USA and nearly double that of Europe and Japan. Therefore, the overall carbon efficiency of the economy, per unit of fossil fuel used, is about half that for Europe and Japan.

Over the last 25 years, the average growth rate of Australian emissions was approximately twice the growth rate for world as a whole, twice the growth rate for the USA and Japan, and five times the growth rate for Europe.

The rate of improvement (decline) in the carbon intensity of GDP for Australia is lower than in the USA and Europe.

31st

FarmOnLine

No \$1 billion package but Murray drought aid on agenda

The Federal Government is examining what further drought aid can be provided to farmers in the lower reaches of the Murray Darling Basin, particularly if a ban on irrigation is triggered on July 1 as a result of a historically low rainfall.

Federal Agriculture Minister , Peter McGauran, has denied news reports suggesting a \$1 billion package for farmers and business owners is being negotiated but did confirm consideration would have to be given to expand drought assistance specifically for those farmers affected by the contingency plan.

Mr McGauran said the government was "on-guard" against a worse case-scenario being declared for the basin (south of Menindee Lakes, NSW) and was considering the scale of the problems which could lie ahead.

Mr McGauran said if the ban on irrigation was triggered, there could be room for a special package in response to the "continuing hardship" in that part of the basin that would probably not be available to other regions.

While cautious to point out nothing had been committed, Mr McGauran said possible aid could include a relaxing of the eligibility criteria for farmers and rural businesses in the area and help with fixed water charges.

"It's still early days," Mr McGauran said. "We will continue to look at the situation in the next few

weeks but continuing drought in the basin will require particular attention from the Government."

Mr McGauran said any intervention in the future would be "incredibly expensive" because of the size of the irrigated industries and related businesses.

He said "at this stage" the government would separate any future assistance for the basin from any structural adjustment measures in the government's \$10 billion plan for water security.

NSW Irrigators Council chairman, Col Thomson, said his council had been meeting for some time with the government to try and secure specific assistance for irrigators facing no allocations.

Mr Thomson said those measures would need to consider assistance to farmers who cannot irrigate permanent plantings and should not only be confined necessarily to the southern basin because irrigators throughout the Murray Darling system who have been without water for many years.

The Australian

Howard warms to greenhouse gas targets

John Howard last night signalled the Coalition was prepared to accept a long-term target for cutting greenhouse gases.

On the eve of receiving the report from his task group on emissions trading, the Prime Minister gave his strongest indication yet that the Government was prepared to adopt a target to cut emissions.

However, in his address to the Mineral Council of Australia last night, Mr Howard said he would protect the "powerhouse of the Australian economy" if he did accept a long-term target. "We do not intend to embrace a target plucked out of thin air," he said.

The Coalition has long resisted setting targets for cutting greenhouse gases, criticising Labor for adopting its target of a 60 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050 without detailed analysis of its likely effect on the economy.

Labor attempted to trump Mr Howard before he receives the emissions trading taskforce report today, with Kevin Rudd yesterday announcing a Labor government would if elected create an emissions trading system by 2010, foster an Asia-Pacific carbon credit scheme to stop deforestation, and direct commonwealth departments to buy clean energy. The Opposition Leader has also ordered his own hybrid car, which runs on a combination of electricity and petrol.

The Prime Minister, armed with recommendations from his taskforce report, is likely to commit Australia to an emissions trading scheme to cut greenhouse gases but had been expected to defer any decision on a long-term emissions target.

39

Australia's top 100 companies yesterday released a report saying a credible long-term emissions reduction target was at least a year away because it would require detailed analysis of the costs and benefits before being implemented.

Mr Howard's signal that he was now prepared to adopt a longer-term emissions target came only hours after playing down the prospect in parliament. He said he was "preaching to the converted" at the annual dinner of Australia's mining companies, and would not impose a greenhouse policy that damaged the economy or the mining industry.

But Mr Rudd last night told Canberra's Belconnen Labor Club that the Coalition had squandered the opportunity to act on the climate change issue since 1997 and could no longer be trusted. "The challenge of climate change requires a fundamental shift in our political thinking - it demands a

response premised entirely on the future but with steps taken now to get there," Mr Rudd said.

While the Howard Government has allocated \$200 million to help develop a strategy to stop clearing forests, primarily with Indonesia, and will make deforestation a central part of the APEC discussions, Mr Rudd said more should be done to have the issue at the centre of the post-Kyoto global climate change agenda.

He said the World Bank had estimated \$25 billion was needed to reduce global deforestation - responsible for a quarter of all emissions - by 10 to 20 per cent.

"But \$200 million won't be enough to establish a global initiative - particularly with just one member: Australia," Mr Rudd said. "If deforestation is included as an activity that can create offset credits, there are immediate incentives to halt deforestation."

The emissions trading report is expected to suggest an emissions trading system could be up and running by 2011. It is also expected to say revenue from the sale of emission permits to polluters should be used to assist low-income households with higher power bills as well as to accelerate development of new low-emission technologies.

Treasury is expected to be given the job of co-ordinating the detailed design work for the trading scheme, with enabling legislation to be ready by 2009, trials and permit allocations in 2010 and a notional 2012 start date to coincide with the start of any post-Kyoto agreement.

The task group includes representatives of big companies such as BHP Billiton, Xstrata, Qantas, Alumina and National Australia Bank. They are members of the BCA, which is strongly pushing for a "cap-and-trade" system.

The cap-and-trade system allows business to emit a certain amount of carbon without cost, but it has to pay or earn credits for any emissions above that. The approach is seen as crucial to limiting the immediate economic harm of any emissions trading system.

Mr Rudd last night released five principles for any emissions trading system. He said a cap-and-trade system must be internationally consistent, economically responsible, fair, it must reduce emissions and recognise the need for immediate action.

A Labor government would lead by example by using its purchasing power to "provide a market for new efficient technologies", he said.

As part of the push, Mr Rudd announced the creation of a \$50million Australian Solar Institute in the heart of coalmining territory, Newcastle in NSW, and the same amount to study sourcing power from the planet's internal heat, known as geothermal drilling.

Despite his promises on a trading scheme, the BCA produced a report directly at odds with Labor's target of a 60per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The report paves the way for a deferred target and signals the start of a protracted debate by different industries and interest groups over the detailed design and development of the seemingly inevitable creation of an emissions trading market in Australia.

The likely auctioning of a significant tranche of emission permits will generate a multi-billion-dollar income stream for government, which could trigger debate about reform of the existing tax system in Australia.

The BCA report says Australia should introduce a three-tiered regime of emissions targets set by a new Reserve Bank-styled emissions agency, which would set fixed five- to 10-year targets, further interim gateway emissions targets and then a long-term target of at least 30 years in the future.

The targets would need to be reviewed and changed according to changes in the climate science, technology or international policy settings.

The report, by Port Jackson Partners, says a trading scheme should replace specific renewable energy targets, but still allow schemes that directly address market failures, including research and development into new technologies such as solar and clean coal and assistance for energy efficiency.

In parliament yesterday, Mr Howard called for a pragmatic international pact on climate change to succeed the "deeply flawed" and "Euro-centric" Kyoto Protocol.

40

John Gava: Cut gases or cop the cold shoulder

The debate over global warming in Australia is not so much phony as unreal. It may hurt our egos to say it but nothing that Australia does, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or to increase them, will matter much in the context of worldwide emissions.

If we want to have a fruitful debate that leads to useful action, we will have to accept that Australia's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and to efforts to reduce them can be only relatively insignificant.

This doesn't mean that we don't have to take action. However, it does mean that we should think carefully about why we should act.

It is proper and wise for much of the debate about the mechanics of global warming and of the costs and benefits of greenhouse gas abatement to be conducted by experts.

But it doesn't require any expertise to recognise that Australia's economy is so small and our production of greenhouse gases is so minuscule compared with the rest of the world that our actions will have little effect on global warming. Australia's National Greenhouse Gas Inventory for 2005 reports on data obtained from the International Energy Agency and the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change that Australia's share of world greenhouse gas emissions that year was 1 per cent.

Just think about that. If we radically reduced greenhouse gases and if the US, Europe, Japan, China, India and Brazil did not, we would not have done much to reduce global warming. Similarly if we did nothing, but those countries savagely cut greenhouse gas emissions, our failure to act would not affect their actions much.

However much it hurts our national pride, we must accept we are too small to matter when it comes to global warming. Does this mean we can avoid action? Does it mean we should make a killing by producing cheap energy that avoids costs imposed by carbon taxes or expensive greenhouse gas reduction targets?

I think that would be the wrong (and dumb) thing to do for three reasons. First, we should do the right thing. Let's just not get unreal about what impact that will have.

Second, if, as seems likely, a large part of the world moves to significant greenhouse gas reductions, we may miss out on good business opportunities if we don't move in the same direction.

Third, and I suspect, most significant, although nothing we do will have much influence on whether the world gets warmer or on how quickly this happens, we are open to retaliatory action from more powerful countries that may not be impressed by cynical inaction on our part.

In other words, if other countries or the consumers in other countries were to be annoyed by our lack of action to the threat of global warming, we could be very quickly damaged.

Just imagine it. What would a boycott of Australian wine by American or British wine drinkers do to our wine industry? What if Japanese or Chinese power companies refused to buy Australian coal because we failed to do our (little) bit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? It would take little for the rest of the world to think that a free-riding Australia should be penalised for avoiding the tough and costly measures that everyone else is undertaking.

The debate over global warming in Australia is unreal because it assumes that what we do matters when the reality is that global warming is out of our hands. But the perception that the rest of the world has of us may matter very much indeed.

I suspect that we will need to be at the forefront of efforts to control greenhouse gas emissions not because our efforts will count but because we will suffer if we are not seen to do our bit (however irrelevant that may be).

The reality about global warming is that we can't do much about it but that the rest of the world can damage us so very easily if we are seen to be taking a free ride.

John Gava is an associate professor of law at the University of Adelaide.

The Herald Sun

BCA's carbon target

Key businesses have urged the Federal Government to adopt a system by which emission targets move up and down as part of a low carbon regime.

The Business Council of Australia wants a three-tiered system to determine credible carbon reduction targets for industry sectors that would not damage the economy and create investment certainty.

The BCA model for pollution targets was revealed on the eve of the Prime Ministerial Task Group on Emissions Trading handing down its report on the shape of a carbon credits market.

Westpac Bank's climate change chief Noel Purcell yesterday welcomed the BCA report, saying it "was a positive step that showed the council had come a long way to addressing the need for carbon reduction".

However, he noted some business leaders would feel it did not go far enough in promoting investment in renewable energy as an interim measure to wind back emissions ahead of a carbon market being established.

The framework for the BCA's recommendations was devised by consulting firm Port Jackson Partners.

BCA president Michael Chaney said critical to an effective emissions trading scheme were long-term carbon reduction goals.

41

"But Australia must first undertake extensive national economic modelling . . . and develop a detailed knowledge of the likely climate change policies and targets of other countries, particularly those that we trade and compete with," Mr Chaney said.

In the report titled "Setting Achievable Emissions Targets for Australia", the BCA calls for:

FREE carbon permits to be issued to organisations at the start of a trading mechanism.

A TRADING scheme that can be linked globally.

A LONG-TERM scheme to operate for at least 30 years, and for yearly targets to be set covering a majority of sectors.

OFFSET the commercial impact on vulnerable industries for as long as necessary.

ESTABLISH a secondary market to provide hedging.

CAP the price of permits.

"Australia needs three sets of targets," the report says.

The three-tier system would be adjusted up or down as circumstances changed over time.

