

**Climate 'to be bigger threat than terror'**

Climate change, not terrorism, will be the main security issue of the century, with potential to cause death and destruction on an unprecedented scale, Australia's top policeman believes. In a surprise foray into the politics of global warming, Australian Federal Police commissioner Mick Keelty described how climate refugees "in their millions" could create a national security emergency for Australia. His provocative comments, made in a speech in Adelaide last night, are likely to be diplomatically sensitive after he described a scenario in which China was unable to feed its vast population. Law enforcement agencies would struggle to cope with global warming's "potential to wreak havoc, cause more deaths and pose national security issues like we've never seen before", Mr Keelty said. "It is anticipated the world will experience severe extremes in weather patterns, from rising global temperatures to rising sea levels," he warned. "We could see a catastrophic decline in the availability of fresh water. Crops could fail, disease could be rampant and flooding might be so frequent that people, en masse, would be on the move. "Even if only some and not all of this occurs, climate change is going to be the security issue of the 21st century." Mr Keelty said the implications for China were especially alarming. By 2040, with global temperatures surging towards a predicted 3C rise, and sea levels up 50cm, the land available in China to grow grain and rice could be reduced by 30 per cent. "The mass displacement of people, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, could create a great deal of social uncertainty and unrest in the region. "In their millions, people will look for new land and they'll cross borders to do it." While the security implications should not be underestimated, Mr Keelty said the science on global warming's effects was not settled. John Howard's office refused to enter the debate last night.

A spokesman for Peter Garrett, the Opposition's climate change spokesman, said he wanted to read the text of Mr Keelty's speech before responding. Delivering the inaugural Ray Whitrod address, posthumously honouring the former Queensland police commissioner who resigned in 1976 in protest at corruption in the state force, Mr Keelty said police would need to be involved in regulating moves to cut greenhouse emissions through carbon trading. He equated the potential for corruption in carbon trading to the billion-dollar Barings Bank fraud, which brought down Britain's oldest merchant bank 12 years ago.

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**Brisbane businesses to feel water pinch**

Level six restrictions in south-east Queensland will come down hard on businesses, Queensland Water Commissioner Elizabeth Nosworthy said today. Residents will not face tougher restrictions under the level six conditions that will come into force in mid-November, as long as they stay under the 140 litres per person daily target. Ms Nosworthy outlined level six restrictions for the region in Brisbane today, saying it would crack down on water wasting businesses. The focus is on the region's 1,300 big businesses that use 10 mega litres a year or more.

Under the new restrictions, businesses must cut use by 25 per cent by November 2008, and install meters on equipment, or face a rising scale of fines. Council officers can impose spot fines ranging from \$750 to \$3750 to businesses under level six. Businesses also face fines of up to \$124,875 for failing to comply with the Water Efficiency Plan (WEMP) process. "One of the problems that we are seeing at the moment is that while the residential community has done a fantastic job, many in the business community aren't doing their fair share," Ms Nosworthy said. "For example, if you take the period from around November '06, when we introduced level four, until now, over that period businesses made savings of only eight per cent, and residential communities made double that. "That really shows us that something more has to be done." She said further measures would not be linked to dam levels and was confident she would not have to introduce level seven restrictions. "I think everyone knows that we either stick with Target 140, or outdoor watering ban comes in," she said. Ms Nosworthy did not expect dam levels to drop below 10 per cent of capacity before the new Southeast Queensland Water Grid is completed late next year. She urged residents to maintain Target 140 until the end of 2008, when the water grid is up and running. But she stressed that the water saving measures for businesses under level six would be permanent. Existing outdoor watering with buckets and hand held hosing exemptions will not change under level six. But heavy users face fines and an outdoor water ban for a first offence. Repeat offenders will have flow restricters installed for 30 days. The level six package was put together after consultation with councils and peak industry groups.

**FarmOnLine**

**Drought: NSW ditches rural financial counselling funding**

With a heightening awareness of the impact of the worsening drought, the NSW Government has left itself open for criticism after terminating its funding commitment to rural financial counsellors. Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Sussan Ley, has hit out at NSW Primary Industries Minister, Ian Macdonald, for the decision to withdraw funding for the Rural Financial Counselling Service as of July 2008. In May this year the Federal

Government committed more than \$44 million for the continuation of the RFCS Programme through until 2011 in recognition of the support provided by the service to rural producers and small businesses.

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"For the NSW Labor Government to withdraw their support for this program from next year - when our farmers continue to manage the impacts of the worst drought on record - is a slap in the face for all our struggling rural and regional communities," Ms Ley said. "While the Australian Government currently provides over 80pc of the RFCS Programme costs in NSW, it is still disappointing that the State Government will no longer contribute to the delivery of this fundamental programme that provides free and impartial assistance to farmers to help them manage change and better position themselves for the future. "It is clear to the Australian Government that our farming communities will continue to need rural financial counselling support until the drought breaks and beyond, so farmers have an opportunity to get back on their feet." The Federal Government's \$714m expansion in drought assistance this week included funding for up to an additional 13 rural financial counsellors.

SOURCE: National rural news updated daily by *FarmOnline*.

#### **Drought: Prepare for food shortages, PM warns**

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SOURCE: National rural news updated daily by *FarmOnline*.

#### **Vic, NSW at odds over river restrictions**

The Victorian Government has defended a decision to relax water restrictions along the parched Murray River, as NSW warned border communities they only have six weeks water supply left. Four Victorian urban water authorities bordering the Murray will ease stage four restrictions from Monday to allow minimal garden watering and exemptions for some council sports grounds. Victorian Premier John Brumby announced the changes during a visit to the State's border towns yesterday. He said the new restrictions - similar to Melbourne's 3a level bans - would keep rural communities strong throughout the drought. But the assurance came at the same time as authorities on the other side of the Murray River warned border communities were in a heightened crisis. NSW Climate Change, Environment and Water Minister, Phil Koperberg, said communities in the Murray Valley only had six weeks supply of water left because of the record drought. The crisis has forced the NSW Government to consider alternative sources of water for the region. "We're now facing an unprecedented crisis in regard to water availability across the Murray-Darling Basin," Mr Koperberg said. "Large parts of NSW including the Murray Valley are still in the grip of the worst drought in recorded history." But a spokesman for Victorian Water Minister, Tim Holding, said water was not at risk of running dry in six weeks on his side of the Murray. "Each state has its own water management plan and allocates water accordingly," spokesman Luke Enright said. "We can't account for why NSW has got itself into this situation but in Victoria we have a very conservative approach to water allocations and management. "This has enabled some towns along the Murray to ease stage four water restrictions slightly, just as they have done recently in NSW." Mr Brumby said providing a small amount of extra water to border towns would make a significant difference to drought stricken communities. "Assuming that it remains relatively dry, the biggest challenge is going to be ... keeping communities positive and resilient, and one of the great ways of doing that is sport," he said. Towns affected by the changes include Wodonga, Echuca, Swan Hill and Mildura. SOURCE: AAP

#### **Drought: SA Govt response slammed by farmers**

The South Australian Government's latest drought assistance efforts have been slammed by the South Australian Farmers' Federation, which has suggested it should follow the Federal Government's lead. A political stoush between the Rann Government and the farming lobby group is brewing, with SAFF awaiting the return of Agriculture Minister Rory McEwen from sick leave, saying "no-one in charge is thinking clearly". It also criticised Premier Mike Rann's trip to the Eyre Peninsula earlier this week when he failed to inform local drought taskforces, development boards, most media or farming communities. SAFF president Wayne Cornish said the Government

was "shamed into going" to the EP after declining an invitation from SAFF to join its EP Drought Information Tour next week. Mr Rann's announcement of extended drought assistance on Tuesday – following his EP visit – was

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overshadowed by the Federal Government's \$714 million package. Mr Cornish has challenged the State Government to introduce appropriate immediate means of assisting farmers, such as decreased taxation, particularly stamp duty, and introduction of freight subsidies. Mr Rann's offer included extending the Planning for Recovery initiative, implementing a Young Farmers Package, committing to the Farming Systems Project, developing expanded off-farm employment and training options, facilitating discussions with mining companies, appointing an EP drought coordinator and meeting with banks and traders to advocate on behalf of farmers. SOURCE: *Stock Journal*, SA's weekly rural newspaper, posting updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

#### **Vic Govt pledges to fill in the gaps on drought relief**

Victorian Premier John Brumby says he will look for gaps in the Federal Government's drought funding to determine what further help the State should give struggling farmers. Mr Brumby welcomed this week's Federal drought funding announcement. But he said the State would look at additional measures. "In a sense, what we need to do as a State is not duplicate what the Federal Government is doing, but it's to really look at the gaps in support," he said during a community cabinet meeting at Kerang. "Some of those will be in things like rural counsellors. "Some of those will be in areas of providing the best financial advice to farmers so they can make the best possible decisions. "And, obviously, we're also looking at the proposals as we've been discussing today, of major investment in water infrastructure to provide more water security." While in Birchip yesterday, Premier John Brumby announced the State Government will provide \$1.16m to help drought-affected communities via the VicRelief + Foodbank program.

The funding will include:

- \$500,000 for a range of targeted relief initiatives dealing with necessities;
- \$300,000 for the drought 'back to school' program;
- \$300,000 in 2007-08 for a full-time drought coordinator and part-time drought agency relations officers in the Barwon-South West, Hume, Grampians, Gippsland and Loddon Mallee regions, as well as project support and training; and
- \$50,000 for relief coordination in 2007-08.

SOURCE: *FarmOnline* and *Sunraysia Daily*, Mildura, Vic, a Rural Press publication.

#### **Tas wines on the rise despite frosts and drought**

Despite the detrimental effect of frost and drought on this year's Tasmanian grape harvest, new statistics show things are looking up for the industry, with prices on the rise and more buyers in the market. The figures from the Department of Primary Industry and Water show the yield of 5039 tonnes was almost 500t down from last year, and almost 1800t lower than the peak year of 2004, but the bearing area increased from 997ha in 2006 to 1186ha in 2007. DPIW Wine Industry Development horticulturist, Duncan Farquhar, says these factors have been offset by the price rises for sparkly fruit in particular this season. "The weighted average price for still pinot noir was \$2794 per tonne, up a little, but sparkling pinot noir \$2642/t, up just under \$300," Mr Farquhar said. "Given that the quality of the vintage was, in general, very good, there is much to encourage investors in the industry."

Mr Farquhar says the figures show an increasing focus by Tasmanian producers on pinot noir, which is the best in Australia. "[That's] not just because we have a good environment for it, but because we have a culture of quality among the growers," he said. Besides the success of the pinot noir variety, which accounted for 46pc of the yield, another interesting factor was the rise of white varieties other than chardonnay. Production of Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer all increased markedly. The Tamar Valley dramatically increased its standing as the most productive region in the State, with 46pc of the crush coming from there, compared with 38pc last year.

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

**NEWS.com.au**

#### **Drought could reproduce 'World War II food shortages'**

The drought could produce some of the worst food shortages since World War II. Chairman of Australian Vegetable and Potato Growers Federation Michael Badcock does not believe rationing will be needed, but he says some products will be difficult to find if the drought continues. "It will get tighter and some products may be difficult to buy," he said yesterday. Federal Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran warned that Australia's food industry might have to "reprioritise" to meet domestic demand. He agreed that Australian consumers would experience shortages and would be paying "significantly higher prices". "Global shortages and rising world prices are also contributing to price increases," he said. "It is difficult to predict the extent of the effects of the drought, but reduced food availability and higher prices are already emerging and will worsen as the drought continues." Mr Badcock said it was not just the drought that was a problem, and that available food in storage around the world was the least it had been since World War II, a matter of a few weeks' supply. With failed crops in Australia, importers were "finding it quite difficult to top up their shelves with imported product". Mr Badcock said extreme weather was causing problems around the world. "In Europe, they had an extremely dry spring, then rain and floods

in summer, so they had a poor season for growth and then problems at harvest time." Adding to the problem was the diversion of crops to produce biofuels.

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He said there would be a lot of fluctuation, with prices for some products rising three or fourfold. Quality could also be affected in coming months, with blemished vegetables appearing on the shelves. "It's perfectly safe... to eat and we may have to have that (lower-quality product) so we can maintain vegetables on consumers' plates." He said many vegetable farmers would not plant a crop this summer. "Water's scarce around Bundaberg and the Lockyer Valley in Queensland. Then in the Murray-Darling there'll be nil production. "Tasmania produces 70 per cent of Australia's processed vegetables, but there's not enough water in storage there to put a crop in," he said.

#### **AdelaideNow.com**

#### **Drought goes on and on**

Adelaide has endured one of its driest Septembers on record. The Bureau of Meteorology recorded 22.2mm for the month, 10mm less than last year and 40.7mm below the 62.9mm September average. Adelaide has recorded 373.4mm for the first nine months of 2007, about 80mm below average. Senior forecaster Matt Collopy said no significant rainfalls were in sight with only one or two showers likely this week. A return to level three water restrictions today means watering with drippers and hand-held hoses fitted with a trigger nozzle will be allowed at even numbered houses between 6am to 9am or 5pm to 8pm on Saturdays. Odd numbered houses can water their gardens between 6am and 9am or 5pm to 8pm on Sundays.

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#### **FarmOnLine**

#### **Record dry puts heat on fire season**

The bushfire season starts in the ACT and NSW today with a warning the absence of the drying El Nino weather pattern this year should be no cause for complacency. Forest areas burnt out in the 2003 bushfires in the ACT are also carrying regrowth, leading authorities to focus their attentions on locations previously regarded as safe. It comes on the back of Canberra's driest September in 13 years, recording less than a quarter of the historical average rainfall. Less than 15mm of rain were recorded at Canberra Airport last month, well below the long-term average of 53mm. The ACT Emergency Services Agency and NSW Rural Fire Service have urged householders to use the start of the season as a trigger to make their properties fire-ready and review their bushfire plans. While previous bushfire seasons have been accompanied by the warming and drying effects of an El Nino weather pattern, the Bureau of Meteorology is predicting a La Nina pattern for the rest of the year, which typically means better prospects for rain. NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner, Shane Fitzsimmons, said while the weather outlook was more favourable, it was no comfort. He said the landscape was still very dry, despite many areas receiving autumn and winter rain. "We think we're going to be in potentially for a difficult or troublesome season if we see some hot, drying conditions emerge over the next few months," he said. "It's not going to take very much for that vegetation to dry out and be susceptible to fire." ACT Emergency Services Agency deputy commissioner Brian Parry, who is responsible for the Rural Fire Service, Fire Brigade and State Emergency Service, was concerned about regrowth in areas burnt-out in 2003. He said grasslands could produce fast-running fires and mitigation work including hazard reduction works was vital. "The challenges are, environmentally, you don't want to burn it all, but strategically you have to ensure you have enough protection in place for the people with rural properties and those on the urban fringe," he said. Mr Parry said there was no indication yet this would be an exceptional bushfire season. "Yes, it might be a hot summer but at the moment the grass growth is not as prolific as we've seen in previous years," he said. "That, of course, could change so quickly if we did happen to get rain." The bushfire season is due to continue in the ACT and NSW until March 31 but can be varied according to the weather conditions. SOURCE: *The Canberra Times*, a Rural Press publication.

#### **Flooding proposal should go down the drain**

The NSW Farmers' Association is urging farmers and community members in the southern region to make a submission to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council with concerns about the impact the council's latest recommendations. NSW Farmers' Association conservation and resource management committee chair, Louise Burge, says the latest environmental report to the Victorian Government would have significant ramifications now and in the future, for both sides of the border. "VEAC is seeking to establish new national parks and reserve systems along the Victorian side of the Murray River," Mrs Burge said. "In conjunction with establishing a large National park, VEAC wants 4000 gegalitres to be piggy backed on spring flow events to create overbank-flooding situations. "While flooding may be currently hard to visualise, it was only in the 1990s that this region experiencing a series of major flood events. "VEAC is proposing that flood events be increased to inundate more areas, but the group has not factored in flood damage, where the water will come from and who will pay for the infrastructure and private land damage that will occur."

#### **Reclaimed water produces the right bouquet in SA vines**

People may turn up their noses at the thought of using reclaimed water, but a study by the South Australian Research and Development Institute has found that it is not just an alternative source of water for crops, but may be

more beneficial than mains water. Dr Belinda Rawnsley, who led the three-year \$350,000 study funded by the Grape and Wine Research Development Corporation, says the results are good news for vignerons and

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horticulturists looking for sustainable irrigation. "I think this is the way of the future, particularly for the viticulture industry, which is desperate for alternative water supplies," Dr Rawnsley said. Her work has focussed on a vineyard at McLaren Vale, which was established when reclaimed water first became available in the Willunga Basin region through the Willunga Basin Water Company in 1999.

"This vineyard has used reclaimed water, from day one, in a trial specifically set up to compare mains and reclaimed water for irrigation of vines," she said. Earlier and on-going studies by SARDI's Mike McCarthy have shown there is no difference in yield between vines irrigated with reclaimed or mains water. "My study was the first to look at the effect of using reclaimed water, if any, on soil biology," Dr Rawnsley said. "I fully expected to find that there would be more soil borne pathogens or diseases and higher levels of microbial activity. "However, there were actually less pathogens in the soil which is good, and there were indeed higher levels of microbial activity. "This is also a great finding because the higher levels of microbes improve nutrient transfer to the vine." The Willunga Basin Water Company takes treated water from SA Water's Christies Beach Wastewater Treatment Plant, 10 kilometres north of the Willunga Basin, and pumps it via 70km of pipeline to more than 90 users whose properties cover more than 1500 hectares. The Christies Beach plant treats about 10,000 megalitres of wastewater a year and about a third of that is being used by the WBWC for irrigators. The remaining treated wastewater is pumped out to sea. The WBWC will eventually have the capacity to take most of the wastewater from the plant.

**NEWS.com.au**

### **Australians taking climate action**

#### **Survey finds nation facing up to climate change 71 per cent taking action, despite some scepticism**

An overwhelming majority of Australians are taking steps in their daily lives to help the environment but still believe Governments should lead the way in tackling climate change. While four out of every 10 respondents to a *NEWS.com.au* / CoreData survey said they either don't believe or have doubts that humans were the cause of the problem, 71 per cent said that they were doing things to prevent climate change. More than 52 per cent of respondents said the Government was the most responsible to tackle the problem, ahead of individuals (24.6 per cent) and businesses (13 per cent). Just 11 per cent of respondents said the nation was on the right track to deal with climate change, while 54.3 per cent said further immediate action was needed. There were 3230 respondents to the survey, conducted last month on *NEWS.com.au*. Chris Riedy from the UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures said people see the government as the only institution that could lead the fight against climate change. "I think the reason for that is that it's such a big problem and that it really requires everybody to be working together, and the government is really the only place where there's a potential to make people all act together," Dr Riedy said. Dr Riedy said that the high number of respondents who said they were taking personal action came as no surprise to him. "I'm not surprised because certainly, there's a lot of awareness out there now about climate change and about the actions that people can take," he said. An overwhelming number of Greens voters surveyed believed their party had the best approach to climate change (78.3%), and nearly 35 per cent of Labor voters agreed with them. Only 31.7 per cent of Labor-voting respondents said that the Opposition had the best approach. Just under half of respondents said that climate change was an issue that was important enough to determine how they voted, while 38.3 per cent said it was unimportant. The most common measures taken by respondents to combat climate change were: always switching off lights that were not in use (56.6 per cent), using energy efficient light bulbs (56.6 per cent) and not leaving appliances on standby (44.9 per cent). But Dr Riedy said that more needs to be done by individuals, as current levels of action "aren't of the scale of action that we need to really address climate change". "Carpooling certainly is something that people can do a lot more of, and there's related options like the car-share systems that are now available," Dr Riedy said. Seven out of 10 respondents said they paid close or very close attention to the issue, but nearly a third of the 3230 surveyed said that Australians were over reacting over the problem.

### **Old allies in climate change battle**

As I've travelled around your beautiful country, I've met many Australians who are worried about how climate change will affect their lives. Many Americans share this concern and the US is moving forward to address the interrelated challenges of energy security and climate change. Last week, in Washington, the US hosted the Major Economies Meeting on Energy Security and Climate Change. This is an initiative based on the fundamental premise that climate change is a generational challenge requiring a global response. This meeting was the first in a series that will include 17 of the world's major economies, developed and developing, as well as the United Nations. Australia is a key member of this group. The participating countries represent about 85 per cent of the global economy and 80 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions. This new international initiative was endorsed by G8 leaders in June and by the 21 Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) Leaders in Sydney. The significant step forward at APEC shows what the US, Australia and others can do when we think big and work together towards pragmatic solutions to important issues. The Major Economies Meetings process supports United

Nations climate talks by bringing together major economies to develop consensus on key elements of a new framework on climate change. Agreement among the major economies will benefit all nations and contribute to a

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new global agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change by 2009. There is already international agreement that addressing climate change requires a combination of actions that protect the environment, encourage economic growth and ensure energy security. Likewise, there is common recognition among nations that climate change is a complex and long-term challenge. Nations around the world are already working in partnership to find the technological solutions that hold the key to reducing greenhouse gases in our atmosphere. Last week's meeting launched a process by which the major economies will agree on key elements of a post-2012 framework, including a long-term global goal and nationally defined mid-term goals. US President George W. Bush announced that by next summer, the US will convene a meeting of heads of state to finalise the goal and other elements of this approach, including a strong and transparent system for measuring progress towards meeting the goal we set. Only by doing the necessary work this year will it be possible to reach a global consensus at the UN in 2009. Private sector and non-governmental organisations participated in the meeting. Explaining the challenges they face, they also discussed the technologies available to them, technologies in development, and how to address funding challenges. Because clean-energy technologies must be deployed widely in order to be most effective, Mr Bush called for creating an international clean-energy technology fund to finance clean-energy projects in the developing world. He also called for global free trade in energy technology by eliminating trade barriers on clean-energy goods and services. Recognising the important role of forests in storing carbon dioxide, Mr Bush committed to further support global efforts to reduce deforestation. A post-2012 framework should meaningfully engage all countries and recognise the diversity of solutions and approaches that nations will take, based on their needs and resources, to combat climate change. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, we are advocating flexibility, innovation and teamwork on a global scale. If the world's major economies can agree on a way forward, that consensus could accelerate the prospects of broader agreement through the United Nations and on the kind of sustained global commitment it will take, from developed and developing nations, to protect and manage the planet's fragile balance for this generation and for generations to come. Australia and the US have faced many tough challenges together. Addressing the dual challenges of climate change and energy security will be a long and difficult process. But I have no doubt that the initiative and innovation that the citizens of our two countries will bring to bear on these problems make a real contribution to their solution. By Robert McCallum, US ambassador to Australia.

### **Scientists see dramatic drop in Arctic sea ice**

Arctic sea ice declined this year to the lowest levels registered since satellite assessments started in the 1970s, extending a trend fuelled by human-caused global warming, scientists said today. Sea ice declined by so much this year that the typically ice-clogged Northwest Passage, allowing vessels to sail from the Atlantic to the Pacific, completely opened for the first time anyone can recall, the researchers said. Scientists at the US National Snow and Ice Data Centre, part of the University of Colorado at Boulder, measure Arctic sea ice during the annual melt season beginning in March and ending in September. The average sea ice extent for September, when ice is at its lowest quantities, slipped to 4.28 million square km, breaking by nearly a quarter the previous record low for the month set two years ago, the scientists said. "Overall there's been a steep and significant downward trend since we've been getting good satellite data starting in 1979," said Walt Meier, one of the scientists studying Arctic sea ice for the data centre. "We've got the final numbers now for this September, and it's a really dramatic record low. It didn't just break the record, it shattered the record. This year just obliterated everything else." Sea ice last month was 39 per cent below the long-term average from 1979 to 2000, the scientists said. Meanwhile, a NASA-led study documented a 23 per cent loss during the past two winters in the extent of the Arctic's thick, year-round sea ice cover. The reduction of perennial winter sea ice is the primary cause of this summer's fastest-ever sea ice retreat on record and subsequent smallest-ever extent of total Arctic coverage, the scientists said. Their findings appeared in the journal *Geophysical Research Letters*. Mr Meier said it would not be surprising that in the next 25 years - far sooner than previously predicted - that there might be an ice-free Arctic during the summer. "I don't think you can get this kind of situation if you didn't have warming temperatures," Mr Meier said, pointing to man-made emissions of carbon dioxide and other so-called greenhouse gases. Mark Serreze, another researcher at the National Snow and Ice Data Centre, said in a statement, "Computer projections have consistently shown that as global temperatures rise, the sea ice cover will begin to shrink. "While a number of natural factors have certainly contributed to the overall decline in sea ice, the effects of greenhouse warming are now coming through loud and clear," Serreze said. Mr Meier said satellite imagery showed no ice for several weeks in August and September along the Northwest Passage, which would enable vessels other than modern icebreakers to get through. "The channels there were basically completely open," Mr Meier said.

**Irrigators face zero allocation**

Struggling South Australian River Murray irrigators are facing the prospect of zero water allocations from July 1. The latest River Murray Water Resources Report from the Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation Department says even median inflows into the Dartmouth and Hume dams over the next eight months would only bring total

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storage at the end of May to 1050GL, 11 per cent of capacity. The report says "this highlights the possibility of no irrigation water being available at the beginning of 2008-09". SA Murray Irrigators executive officer Ian Zadow said the outlook was dire. "Looking forward, if you're game to do that sort of thing these days, it's going to be an absolute disaster for the industry," he said. "We're running out of time." Last April, Prime Minister John Howard suggested there may be no water for irrigation in the 2007-08 water year, but the outlook improved slightly and South Australian irrigators started out the water year with 4 per cent allocations. They are now at 16 per cent, but Mr Zadow said even that would make for "a horrendous season". "I think this is where the Government has to really decide, do we want a food industry? I'm sure the answer is yes," he said. His comments follow a meeting held between officials from Victoria's Sustainability and the Environment Department and their South Australian and federal counterparts on Friday, after which Victorian Premier John Brumby said there was no critical need to deliver more Murray water to SA. Mr Brumby had refused to give up water for an SA water quality reserve, despite a plea from Prime Minister John Howard to do so. "I understand that there was a meeting of officials in Canberra on Friday and my understanding is those officials have agreed there is no critical shortage of water in South Australia at this point in time," Mr Brumby said. "The view that I've taken, with the Prime Minister and with the South Australian Premier, is exactly the right position." He said Victoria stood ready to provide water for Adelaide's drinking supply if needed in the future. The River Murray Water Resources Assessment Report is a fortnightly update of information about water resource conditions in South Australia and interstate, including information on irrigation allocations and probability of improvement.

**AWA**

\*Far North Queensland Draft Regional Water Supply Strategy, involving construction of two major dams and the introduction of recycled water, has been announced by the state government to cope with anticipated 40% population increase by 2050. Feasibility studies on dams on the Walsh River at Nullinga and Upper Herbert region plus using recycled water for industrial use and on parks and gardens in Cairns is mooted.

\*The CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology have released the report 'climate change in Australia' which provides a comprehensive look to date at the likely extent of climate change in Australia up until 2070. The report provides projections of about 30 climate variables plus information on how to use projections in risk assessments. ([Website](#))

\*The Queensland Water Commission announced draft level 6 water restrictions on September 30 with resident's spared and able to water their gardens but businesses forced to meet stricter criteria

\*The Tasmanian Natural Resource Management (NRM) Framework is being reviewed five years after it was established.

\*The Essential Services Commission (Vic) is currently completing its review of the 2005-06 regulatory accounts submitted by 15 Victorian urban and regional water businesses. It is proposing to amend the code to address a number of issues identified during the review.

\*As part of ENVIRO 08, AWA will be convening a specialist Operations stream, hosted by AWA's Specialist Network. Themes and topics to be covered range from operations of recycled water systems, cogeneration or hydro systems, to quality systems and emergency risk management.

\*A total of 8000 ML of unallocated water in the Warrego River catchment will be reserved for future use by the Queensland Government after the proposed auction of the water was delayed earlier this month following numerous earnest pleas.

\*SA Premier Rann is expressing disappointment at Victoria's refusal to release critical water flows into the Murray. The Murray-Darling Basin contingency planning report released last week called for the establishment of a special Water Reserve for critical needs but Victoria disagrees that this is needed.

\*A number of commercial MONOLAYERS (ultra-thin liquid coatings) have been evaluated by scientists in Queensland and New South Wales, to limit the escape of water lost from water reservoirs. Initial results from CRC for Irrigation Futures show the technology is cost-effective compared to other evaporation control methods.

\*A study conducted by the South Australian Research and Development Institute on a McLaren Vale vineyard has shown that the use of reclaimed water has found positive results on soil biology, with less pathogens and more microbial activity. This is good news for grape growers in the Willunga Basin who have year round supply of reclaimed water from SA Water's Christies Beach WWTP.

\*AROMATRIX Australia has won a \$1.41M contract to provide two large odour control facilities for the Sunset Coast Water Alliance (WA) at Halls Head and Gordon Rd WWTPs. The technology involves the use of bacteria for treatment of the waste gas and will bring to 13 the number of environmentally sustainable treatment facilities constructed by them in Australia over the past 4 years.

\*Steve Posselt's Kayak4Earth adventure to raise awareness of river health and climate change concluded last week, after covering 3,250km of the inland river system, both paddling and walking. \*OFWAT, the UK water regulator, is imposing penalties in excess of £1 million on Thames Water for failure to accurately monitor water quality and other benchmarks required to meet performance requirements under the GSS (guaranteed standards scheme) regulations.

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\*The UK Environment Agency is to consider the way it grants licenses to companies which extract water from rivers or groundwater in an effort to conserve supplies and protect local ecosystems. Such licenses have existed for decades. Old agreements were made without current environmental knowledge.

\*A Euro 5.8 billion spending package has been announced by the Irish government to improve water quality. The Water Services Investment Programme will include > 950 individual infrastructure schemes.

\*Wastewater re-use is now accepted as a reliable alternative source of water. The FP5 research project "Integrated Concepts for Reuse of Upgraded Wastewater", supported by the European Commission under the Key Action "Sustainable Management and Quality of Water" was completed in 2006 with a focus on adequate management and safe reuse for adoption, particularly in areas suffering water shortages.

\*Premier Anna Bligh is pressuring businesses to become water smart as southeast Queensland residents are given a reprieve from tougher restrictions as long as they stick to a target amid claims that they are scapegoats for a State Government-created crisis as level 6 restrictions begin.

\*Water restrictions in Victorian towns along the Murray have been eased despite low rainfall levels in the catchment area to give local communities some respite from level 4 restrictions.

\*Tasmanian farmers are taking the Department of Primary Industries and Water to court over practices allowed under the local Catchment Management Plan. Stock and Land, Sept 27.

\*The algae bloom currently covering a substantial surface area of Warragamba Dam, a main supplier of Sydney's water, is expected to remain for much of the summer.

\*Victoria and South Australia are at loggerheads about who should gain priority in access to River Murray water - irrigators who have contract rights (V) or Adelaide residents for drinking purposes.

#### **AdelaideNow.com**

#### **Bushfire bans brought forward**

South Australia's fire danger season has been brought forward by four weeks, with a permit required to light a fire in large areas of the state from October 15. Emergency Services Minister Carmel Zollo announced the change this afternoon, saying it had been prompted by the very dry conditions. The fire danger season has been declared from October 15 for: North West Pastoral, North East Pastoral, Flinders Ranges, West Coast, Eastern Eyre Peninsula, Lower Eyre Peninsula, Riverland, Murrayland, Yorke Peninsula and Mid North. From November 1: Upper South East, Kangaroo Island, Mt Lofty Ranges, Adelaide metropolitan area From November 15: Lower South East.

CFS: Official bushfire site

#### **Climate chaos warning**

Predictions temperatures could climb one degree celsius across Australia by 2030 should be a wake-up call to act swiftly on climate change, the Greens say. The latest Climate Change in Australia report, produced by the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO, indicates the probability of warming exceeding one degree is 10 to 20 per cent for coastal areas of Australia, and more than 50 per cent for inland regions. Rainfall is also expected to decrease in parts of Australia, particularly in south-western Australia, according to the report. Greens climate change spokeswoman Senator Christine Milne said the alarming predictions should prompt the major parties to take the issue of climate change seriously. "When will the government and opposition wake up to the threat and take real action to tackle the biggest issue of our time?" she said. "The underlying message has not changed for well over a decade: we need to act fast to reduce emissions if we are to have any chance of avoiding runaway climate change." Senator Milne urged the major parties to stop supporting major greenhouse gas emitters like the coal and aluminium industries. "Clearly, the problem is nothing about science, but about political will and the power of major industrial emitters," she said. "Both the government and opposition are desperately trying to protect these major emitters - primarily the coal, forestry and aluminium sectors - while leaving Australia's agriculture and tourism, not to mention our health and infrastructure, to dry up, bleach and melt away." Senator Milne said steps must be taken to slash emissions by 30 per cent by 2020 and 80 per cent by 2050 to avoid the CSIRO's predictions eventuating. Dr Whetton said the Climate Change in Australia report was the latest and most comprehensive assessment of information on observed climate change over Australia. The report, which was released as part of the Greenhouse 2007 Conference, provides updated projections of changes in temperature and rainfall which can be expected in coming decades due to continued global greenhouse gas emissions. "Some climate change for Australia is certainly inevitable, so we're going to need to adapt to its impact," she said. "However, for later on in the century if we're able to reduce our global levels of greenhouse gas emissions we'll be able to reduce the risks of some of those higher rates of warming," Dr Whetton told reporters. The report confirms a pattern of rainfall change leading to drought - which the CSIRO had earlier identified, Dr Whetton said. She said the amount by which rainfall would



decrease could reach up to 10 per cent by 2030, 20 per cent by 2070 under low level emissions, or 30 per cent under a high emissions scenario. "These decreases in rainfall are also likely to mean more drought as we know drought today," she said. "However, this doesn't mean that the drought that some areas are suffering now will continue. "There will still be wet years in the future but dry conditions will occur more frequently." Results from the report indicate that some areas of Australia will experience heavy rainfall events, days of higher fire danger,

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more intense tropical cyclones affecting northern parts of Australia, and more coastal flooding caused by seas associated with storms.

#### **NEWS.com.au**

##### **Senator warns of Asian invasion**

Australia's North faces a future threat of invasion by Asian refugees who have run out of water because of climate change, outspoken Liberal Senator Bill Heffernan has warned. In a *Bulletin* article to be published tomorrow, Senator Heffernan says that underpopulated northern Australia has to be developed and settled to avoid such a fate. "Without being alarmist, it would be better for us to do it than letting someone else," he told the magazine. "We're not talking tomorrow, but in 50 to 80 years time. If there are 400 million people who have run out of water – Bangladesh or Indonesia – well, you've got to have a plan." Senator Heffernan said northern Australia was a soft entry point in security terms. He said he shared federal police commissioner Mick Keelty's concerns that millions of Asians could seek new homes because of global warming. "I can assure you, parts of the country (in the north) would appeal to people who had nothing else. "If we go to the level of climate change that science is predicting, where you're going to have 50 per cent of the world's population water-poor and you're going to have the Arctic melt and rising seas, it will be a very attractive proposition." An ally of Prime Minister John Howard, Senator Heffernan chairs the Government task force studying development of water and land resources in the north. He has courted controversy in the past by calling deputy Labor leader Julia Gillard "deliberately barren" and accusing a High Court judge of misusing his Comcar entitlements and of trawling for young boys for sex.

##### **CSIRO warns of climate chaos**

###### **CSIRO study predicts catastrophic impact**

Australians have been warned to brace for catastrophic heatwaves, bushfires, drought and severe water shortages as climate change causes widespread havoc. Rising temperatures, lower rainfall and more searing hot days are predicted in a major report released by the CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology today. The grim global warming forecast for coming decades further highlights the water crisis gripping the nation and the need to curb greenhouse gas emissions. It cautions treasures such as the Great Barrier Reef could be wiped out because of rising ocean temperatures and coral bleaching. Coastal towns and areas such as East Gippsland in Victoria will be under siege from storm surges and more floods because of rising sea levels. Ski fields and Kakadu's wetlands will also be threatened under the environmental upheaval. The extent of long-term damage will depend on efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions in coming decades, scientists say. The Climate Change in Australia report also warns of: A SPIKE in temperatures nationwide of at least 1C by 2030, and up to 5C by 2070.

DROUGHTS dragging on for up to 80 per cent longer.

LESS spring and winter rainfall, with drops of up to 40 per cent in some southern parts of Australia by 2070.

FEWER frosts.

LESS snow.

Report author Dr Penny Whetton, of the CSIRO, said drastic action was needed to try to limit the impact of global warming on the environment. "We expect significant decreases in water supplies in the areas where decreases in rainfall occur," Dr Whetton said. "If we want to stop some of these larger changes occurring we do need to stop emissions quickly. "We will see decreases in rainfall in south and eastern Australia over winter and spring. "These decreases are likely to amount to more drought... drought conditions will occur more frequently. "We will see increases in high fire danger days and more coastal flooding by the sea associated with storms."

##### **Climate change inevitable, says CSIRO**

Temperatures across Australia are likely to rise by 1C by 2030, but could rise by up to 5C in some places by 2070, climate experts say. Penny Whetton, the co-author of a new Climate Change in Australia report produced by the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO, said the probability of warming exceeding 1C was 10-20 per cent for coastal areas of Australia, and more than 50 per cent for inland regions. "Australia is likely to be about 1C warmer by 2030 compared to the temperatures of recent decades and this amount of warming isn't much affected by what we do about greenhouse gas emissions," Dr Whetton, of the CSIRO, said at today's launch of the report. "However, later in the century, it is much more impacted by what we do with global levels of greenhouse gas emissions. "If you allow for ... variation, there's something like a 20 to 30 per cent chance the warming in 2070 in inland areas will exceed 4C and may even reach 5C by that time." Dr Whetton said the modelling done in the report showed rainfall was also expected to decrease in parts of Australia, particularly in southwestern Australia. "Decreases in rainfall are likely for southern Australia, particularly through the winter, and in southern and eastern parts of Australia through the winter and the spring." Dr Whetton said the Climate Change in Australia report was the latest

and most comprehensive assessment of information on observed climate change over Australia. The report, which was released as part of the Greenhouse 2007 Conference, provides updated projections of changes in temperature and rainfall which can be expected in coming decades due to continued global greenhouse gas emissions. "Some climate change for Australia is certainly inevitable, so we're going to need to adapt to its impact," she said. "However, for later on in the century if we're able to reduce our global levels of greenhouse gas emissions we'll be

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able to reduce the risks of some of those higher rates of warming," Dr Whetton told reporters. The report confirms a pattern of rainfall change leading to drought - which the CSIRO had earlier identified, Dr Whetton said. She said the amount by which rainfall would decrease could reach up to 10 per cent by 2030, 20 per cent by 2070 under low level emissions, or 30 per cent under a high emissions scenario. "These decreases in rainfall are also likely to mean more drought as we know drought today," she said. "However, this doesn't mean that the drought that some areas are suffering now will continue. "There will still be wet years in the future but dry conditions will occur more frequently." Results from the report indicate that some areas of Australia will experience heavy rainfall events, days of higher fire danger, more intense tropical cyclones affecting northern parts of Australia, and more coastal flooding caused by seas associated with storms. AAP

### **The Australian**

#### **Australia in climate crisis: Garrett**

Australia is in "climate crisis" following fresh scientific warnings about temperature increases over the next fifty years, Peter Garrett says. Labor's environment spokesman said today that the CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology findings, together with projections of rising Australian emissions, spelled "dilemma and doom" for the farm sector. Mr Garrett said that while the natural cycle of weather meant we would see rain again across desperately dry regions, in the long term the continent would be punished by rising overall temperatures. "All in and all it is really, really big exclamation mark around what we have already known about climate change," he said. "I think we are now in climate crisis in terms of what this report tells us "And certainly the impact it could and will have if the report is advocated over time on the agricultural sector is pretty significant and pretty worrying." Mr Garrett said the stresses on the West Australian wheat crop and the shortages of water in the Murray-Darling Basin showed that Australia's farming sector was already "precariously balanced". Adding to the danger were projections that Australia's net greenhouse gas emissions would increase by 27 per cent over the coming two decades. "These figures, feeding into this report, form absolute dilemma and doom for the agricultural sector and produce extremely difficult to manage likely impacts for us," he said. Environment minister Malcolm Turnbull said the report was a valuable resource in planning for dealing with climate change. Mr Turnbull said the work was part of \$40 million of funding under the Australian Climate Change Science programme. He said the report emphasised the need for global action. "This was highlighted at the recent APEC meeting where Australia reached agreement with APEC nations on the need for an overall global goal for emissions reductions - a very significant step towards a truly comprehensive climate change framework," he said in a statement. "I have also returned from a meeting of major economies in Washington where we saw strengthening international commitment to setting and meeting a global goal for reducing emissions under the UN framework. "There is now growing global momentum for strong action on climate change in the lead-up to the UN discussions in Bali in December."

I would venture to say the science is in and we must take note and begin to act yesterday and we must all pay! This is no longer someone else's problem and we must not lay blame our legacy will be what we leave behind for our grandchildren and their children - lets face it - it is too late for us and our children!

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### **FarmOnLine**

#### **Climate change report 'a wake up call'**

Predictions that temperatures could climb one degree Celsius across Australia by 2030 should be a wake-up call to the major parties to act swiftly on climate change, the Australian Greens say. The latest Climate Change in Australia report, produced by the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO, indicates the probability of warming exceeding one degree is 10 to 20pc for coastal areas of Australia, and more than 50pc for inland regions. Rainfall is also expected to decrease in parts of Australia, particularly in southwestern Australia, according to the report. Greens climate change spokeswoman, Senator Christine Milne, said the alarming predictions should prompt the major parties to take the issue of climate change seriously. "When will the government and opposition wake up to the threat and take real action to tackle the biggest issue of our time?" she said. "The underlying message has not changed for well over a decade. "We need to act fast to reduce emissions if we are to have any chance of avoiding runaway climate change." Senator Milne urged the major parties to stop supporting major greenhouse gas emitters like the coal and aluminium industries. "Clearly, the problem is nothing about science, but about political will and the power of major industrial emitters," she said. "Both the government and opposition are desperately trying to protect these major emitters - primarily the coal, forestry and aluminium sectors - while leaving Australia's agriculture and tourism, not to mention our health and infrastructure, to dry up, bleach and melt away."

Senator Milne said steps must be taken to slash emissions by 30pc by 2020 and 80pc by 2050 to avoid the CSIRO's predictions eventuating. Labor's environment spokesman, Peter Garrett, says agricultural communities and water supplies in southern Australian cities will be severely affected by climate change. Mr Garrett said the Howard government had gone backwards in addressing the need to cut global greenhouse gas emissions. "What I'm seeing in today's report is the likelihood that we will have seriously hot days in much of the continent, including in

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Darwin, but also in the southern parts of the continent which will inevitably impact very, very grievously on agricultural communities and on the water supplies on cities in the south," Mr Garrett told reporters. "I'm also seeing that the suggestion that scientists have made in the past, that global warming means we're likely to have more intense drought, are now actually confirmed." Every country had a responsibility to get its emissions under control, Mr Garrett said. "It's only by getting our emissions under control and showing that we're serious about the task, can we hope to persuade and work with other countries to do the same," he said. SOURCE: AAP

#### **Climate research plan to put agriculture on the front foot**

Australia's primary industries will be better placed to cope with climate change through the development of a new national research strategy. According to the head of the National Climate Change Research Strategy for Primary Industries Joint Task Force, Dr Michael Robinson, the strategy will help agricultural industries reduce the risks and maximise opportunities presented by climate change during the next 30 years. The strategy will also present a guide for primary industries to make the most of limited research funding.

The strategy will:

- Map existing research, development and extension activities
- Identify key information gaps.
- Identify potential areas for collaboration.
- Identify successful communication and adoption strategies.

The final research strategy and recommendations are due to be completed in March 2008.

"An industry-driven, coordinated approach will move Australian primary industries a step ahead in their understanding of and response to climate change," Dr Robinson, executive director of Land & Water Australia, said. "We are inviting comment from all stakeholders on the development of the research strategy.

"This will cover issues related to:

- Adaptation to climate change.
- Greenhouse gas mitigation.
- Emissions accounting and trading.
- The consequences for primary industries and rural communities.

"This national strategy will ensure that people involved in agriculture

- Have the information and tools to cope with the big climate change issues
- Respond to the impacts and opportunities, and
- Address the risks associated with climate change."

The development of the strategy is being supported by the Australian, state and territory governments, the CSIRO and the Rural Research and Development Corporations. The first phase of the consultation will focus on identifying the range of issues that primary industries may face though climate change. Contributions are being invited from: Agriculture, fishery and forestry producers, industry groups, associated businesses and consultants, research funders and providers, and related community organisations;

Australian, state and territory government departments and agencies; Regional natural resources management organisations, eg. CMAs, CMBs; and Other interested individuals, groups and organisations.

SOURCE: Rural Press national rural news, updated daily by *FarmOnline*.

#### **Climate change to spread weed menace**

Many of the 3,000 foreign plants species now established as weeds in Australia could explode into new areas as current climatic limits on them are lifted, scientists from CSIRO and the Weeds CRC said today. In a statement issued at the opening of the Greenhouse 2007 conference in Sydney today, CEO of the Cooperative Research Centre for Australian Weed Management, Dr Rachel McFadyen, says that climate change was likely to be a 'big win for weeds'. CSIRO's Dr Darren Kriticos reports that climate modelling has progressed sufficiently for weed scientists around the world to start using these models to predict how known weeds might expand their range in response to climate change.

Increased temperatures will allow:

- Northern weeds to move south, such as the frost-intolerant species rubbervine and Siam weed.
- Lowland weeds will do better at higher altitudes where conditions have previously been too cold for them.
- Some plants that are present in Australia but have not yet behaved as weeds, the so-called 'sleepers', could burst onto the weeds scene and cost millions to control.

- Areas experiencing more intense rainfall events are also likely to see weeds spread as their seeds are dispersed by large floods.

This is how athel pine suddenly spread in central Australia in the 1970s, and many other weed species can benefit in the same way. Using four weeds as examples, namely prickly acacia (*Acacia nilotica*), Siam weed (*Chromolaena odorata*), Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*) and buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*), researchers have mapped the possible extent of the weeds in the year 2080. Prickly acacia is predicted to expand its range south into NSW, and Siam weed would also expand south into coastal NSW as well as further inland in mid-southern Queensland. However,

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the area suitable for buddleia and Scotch broom appeared likely to contract southwards as temperatures increased, although this would still bring them into conflict with some of Australia's most productive agricultural systems. According to the researchers, increasing levels of CO<sub>2</sub> will also directly affect plants, apart from any advantage or disadvantage caused by rising temperatures. Dr McFadyen explained that there is more than one way that plants generate energy from sunlight, and that plants with the 'C3' energy system, such as the northern weed parthenium, will do better under higher CO<sub>2</sub> levels. "Parthenium is one of Australia's 20 worst weeds, and with repeated exposure causes very unpleasant allergic reactions in most people," Dr McFadyen said. "It will be even more competitive in the raised CO<sub>2</sub> environment." SOURCE: CSIRO and the Weeds CRC

### **Cotton growers face planting dilemma**

Traditional cotton irrigators are in the midst of making the tough decisions for planting - cotton or grain.

Cotton planting is scheduled to kick off later this month, but NSW cotton consultant, Mar Morton, says there is a change in the air this spring, as growers calculate their options. In a special report in next week's *Australian Cotton Outlook*, Mr Morton says that irrigators are no longer restricted to just cotton for the best return per megalitre – and thus are not restricted to the high costs associated with the crop. "The cost of producing cotton has reached a point where growers are saying it is too expensive," he said. "They are saying they can run a different business and grow food and energy for a better return." And while the cotton prices have strengthened in recent weeks, its gains have been eclipsed by record prices in the grain markets.

Mr Morton sees cotton's new dilemma as a function of four factors:

- The increasing cost of production, with costs running in the order of \$3,200/hectare or higher.
- The fundamental shift in the market, with Australia no longer a player able to influence the world market with its production.
- World population growth, particularly in China and India, placing pressure on grain prices and stock to use ratios.
- Restricted water, and competing returns per megalitre for various crops.

"The way I see it, even if we had full water, things are shifting.

"Growers have had to put up with an increase in the cost of production of about 4pc every year on average for the last 10-12 years. "We need to start reversing that. "To put another perspective, productivity improvements for the same period have averaged approx 1.8pc a year." SOURCE: Extract from survey in *Australian Cotton Outlook's* October edition.

### **The Australian**

#### **Scientists rein in climate forecasts**

New climate change projections for Australia have lowered worst-case forecasts of temperature rises by 1 degree Celsius but are more certain of temperature increases causing more droughts and bushfires this century. The CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology warn Australia is almost certain to be 1C warmer by 2030 and will warm by between 1C and 5C, depending on the amount of greenhouse gases emitted. This is a narrowing of projections six years ago. In 2001, those predictions were for warming of up to 6C. The CSIRO report updates projections for the Australian climate for the rest of the century, incorporating material from the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change assessment report, released in February. They project the impact of different greenhouse gas scenarios, predicting a 1C rise in temperature in Australia in 2030, compared with 1990, with the inland warming more than the coast. Under a low-emissions scenario, the report projects warming of between 1C and 2.5C by 2070, which could increase to more than 3.4C with high levels of greenhouse gases. There will also be changes in temperature extremes, with fewer frosts and substantially more days over 35C. The number of drought months is expected to increase by 20 per cent by 2030, 40 per cent in eastern Australia by 2070, and up to 80 per cent in southwestern Australia by 2070. Yesterday, Britain's Chief Scientist, in Australia for a national greenhouse conference, said a global deal to cut greenhouse emissions would need to be brokered by meetings of world leaders rather than forums such as the UN, although these would still be needed to formalise a deal. Attending the conference in Sydney yesterday, Britain's Chief Scientist, David King, said he was less hopeful of an international climate agreement being brokered by the UN at a meeting in Bali in December. "My feeling is the critical meetings are meetings of heads of state. They're the real decision-makers," he told *The Australian*. Sir David said the likelihood of some kind of deal by 2009 had improved following a "substantial" policy shift by the Bush administration. "President Bush can open the way for his successor by taking the Republicans towards an agreement but leaving whoever becomes president to run it through," he said. "They have removed the questions of doubt in saying the science is now clear,

there is still talk about technology providing the solution and of course we all agree, but we must have fiscal drivers and processes for dealing with adaptation for countries that can't afford it." Penny Whetton, from the CSIRO, said the projected temperature increase would depend on the rate of greenhouse gases accumulating in the atmosphere. "Decreases in rainfall are likely for southern Australia, particularly through the winter and in southern and eastern Australia through the winter and the spring," Dr Whetton said. She said those decreases would mean more drought. The flipside would be an increase in downpours. "Even if average rainfall declines, heavy downpours will be more intense." That will result in more flooding.

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The Bureau of Meteorology's Scott Power said there had already been a substantial decline in rainfall across most of eastern and southwestern Australia. "At the moment what we are seeing is a combination of human-induced climate change and a huge amount of natural variability, and it is very likely the temperature change is due to human intervention," Dr Power said. "The rainfall decline in west Australia is most likely human and natural variability, but beyond that, you really need to know the relative contributions and we are not able to do that with any accuracy." Rainfall declines in the southwest had resulted in annual inflows into Perth's dams decreasing from 338 gigalitres between 1911 and 1974, to 114GL between 1997 and 2005. Dr Power said Victoria was set to experience 11 years in a row of below-average rainfall. The report said one of the major impacts of rainfall decline was a reduction in inflows into streams and dams. The yearly inflow into Victoria's Eildon Dam had fallen from a pre-1997 average of 1533GL to a post-1997 average of 956GL. Dr Power said the increase in greenhouse gases was "likely to have contributed to the drying in the southwest and is a major suspect in the east". He said temperatures in the Murray-Darling Basin for the period January to September were a record, as was the temperature over southern Australia. "The warming is consistent with climate change," he said.

**News.com.au**

### **We're willing to pay more to fight climate change**

More than two thirds of Australians would be willing to pay an extra \$3 a week for their electricity to help meet renewable energy targets, a survey has found. The Newspoll research, released today by the Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) and the Australian Medical Association (AMA), found 64 per cent of people would spend the extra money to meet a renewable energy target of 25 per cent by 2020. ACF executive director Don Henry said the cost was equivalent to a cup of coffee and would pay for the uptake of solar and wind power. "We could have a strong renewable energy target, 25 per cent by 2020, in place right now and it's going to cost us no more than a cup of coffee a week, probably much less," Mr Henry said. "We'll be doing a great job to save the planet." Mr Henry called on all political parties to commit to a strong mandatory renewable energy target, ratify the Kyoto Protocol and improve the energy efficiency of appliances, vehicles and buildings. The survey of 1200 adults was conducted last month. AMA public health committee spokeswoman Dr Alex Markwell said climate change posed increased health threats such as the spread of tropical diseases like dengue fever and Ross River virus. Increased flooding could also bring about cholera while soaring temperatures could trigger more food-poisoning cases, she said. "The health of the population is ultimately linked to the planet," Dr Markwell said. "And this sort of research shows that society is really ready to take a serious look at renewable energy and look at climate change as a significant issue for human health."

### **Sacrifices today will stop a barren future**

My niece is 3 1/2 years old. I hope that by the year 2070 she is still alive and healthy and reading books to her grandchildren. I thought of my niece yesterday when the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) told Australia what it could expect from climate change this century. This is what they told us: when my niece is 66, this already dry and dusty continent could be 5C hotter in some places than it is now. Let me give you a mental image of what the planet could look like if the global average temperature rose by over 5C:

- \* IT could be ice-free;
- \* THE Himalayan glaciers that feed rivers and sustain millions could be a dim memory;
- \* MONSOON floods in India and Bangladesh could threaten millions of lives;
- \* THERE would be weather chaos;
- \* WORLD food supplies would plummet; and
- \* TENS of millions of people could be fleeing to Scandinavia and Britain to escape fierce weather and heat.

This future world sounds entirely fanciful - like something out of a really bad Hollywood blockbuster you watch just for the special effects. Sure, they're at the extreme end of what could happen to the Earth but these predictions are not out of the realm of scientific plausibility. Mark Lynas, a British journalist and environmentalist, gathered the available evidence and detailed the possibilities in his recent book Six Degrees. I write about this stuff for a living and I still can't quite believe that this could be the future we face. But yesterday, some of the country's top scientists - drawing on decades of research and technological advancements - said it was possible. It's hard to ignore. It's harder to imagine that a surge in severe drought frequency and intensity, bushfire risk and heatwaves could be fixed if I replaced my light globes with energy-efficient ones, used a water-saving shower head or started a compost heap on my apartment balcony. Or that if I and all my friends bought an electric-hybrid car more

extreme cyclones and hailstorms and climbing sea levels - which are expected to affect Australia more than the rest of the world - could be evaded. The problem is so large, the solution has to match it in size. The only hope I found in yesterday's CSIRO and BOM report into Australia's climate future is that scientists are confident if the world cuts the greenhouse emissions contributing to global warming, we could avoid the grimmest climate scenarios. A 5C increase in temperature in Australia - which would be accompanied by thousands of heatwave deaths, incredible strain on the public health system, diminishing food stocks and destroyed livelihoods - could be stopped.

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But in the past three months, two massive new coal mines have been approved in NSW. The burning of fossil fuels is the biggest contributor to the man-made increase in atmospheric greenhouse gases. The industry and governments are doing their utmost to find a way to make the coal industry viable, but reduce its impact by burying the carbon dioxide by-product and cleaning up the processing. This technology is still some way off and our electricity consumption is still growing. We're still talking about the climate change problem and how we might fix it, when we need to be doing something. At APEC, we agreed to non-binding, aspirational targets to reduce our emissions. At Kyoto, we negotiated an increase in emissions and we're still not likely to meet our target and will not be punished for doing so. And Australia won't have an emissions trading scheme for another three years, which would go some way to encouraging a reduction in emissions. The CSIRO scientists have told us finally and definitively - in their polite, public service way - that we cannot wait anymore. "If we're able to reduce our global levels of greenhouse gas emissions we'll be able to reduce the risks of some of those higher rates of warming," one of the CSIRO report authors said yesterday. I'm in the unlikely position of agreeing with that climate change poster boy Al Gore - even if he does struggle to practise what he preaches. We have got to the point where a drastic future requires very drastic and immediate action. The former US vice-president would replace all income tax with pollution taxes if he could. This sounds like cloud cuckoo land - as impossible as Australian of the Year Tim Flannery's earlier calls for an end to all coal mining in Australia. But when I think of my niece, who will one day get married and have her own children. Those ideas aren't sounding so loony after all.

### Neighbours water dobbing dilemma

#### **To DOB or not to dob?**

That's the question weighing on the minds of many Queenslanders (who are battling to keep within the 140 litres a person daily limit) as they observe some of their neighbours shamelessly flout increasingly tough water restrictions to preserve their lawns and gardens. Many Queenslanders are taking the "I don't want to be involved approach" in order to not risk disrupting neighbourhood harmony. But equally prevalent are rule worshippers who speed-dial the local council the moment a neighbour's lawn gets a tinge of green. The situation is complicated by the fact that Queenslanders have no legal duty to report even the most heinous crimes, let alone the odd watering indulgence. Nor can dobbing be justified on the grounds that not to dob is to condone the illegality. Usually there is a world of difference between breaking the law and not reporting a breach of the law. That's why we are not fined for failing to report people who zoom past us on the highways. The dobbing dilemma isn't as simple as rule violators deserving to be punished. They often do but that doesn't mean anyone has a responsibility to dob them in. That's a personal choice. There is no clear framework to guide us through the dobbing dilemma. Yet, ethics can lead us in the right direction. The bad news for doblers is that their lack of commitment to the task makes us question their real motivation. The police switchboard rarely lights up as a result of motorists who park illegally or pedestrians who run the traffic gauntlet and cross against the lights. Even the most fanatical of rule worshippers normally lets such acts slide under their radar. However, they normally can't resist calling the dob-in line in relation to acts that potentially inconvenience them. What so irks many water doblers is that their neighbours' over-indulgence could lead to their own water supply being reduced down the track. Thus dobbing is often motivated by self-interest, rather than having anything to do with a wider sense of moral or civic duty. Still, the motivation behind an act is rarely decisive of its moral status. In the end, consequences matter most and there is little doubt that rule-obsessed neighbours promote greater observance of the law. Empirical studies have demonstrated that the greatest deterrent to crime is not the size of the penalty but the perceived risk of detection if a law is broken. Watchful neighbours are, in effect, a civilian police force and assist in reducing the frequency of breaches of the law. Even if they are doing it for themselves, there is no doubt that it is a good thing that more and more people are observing water restrictions and keeping the reservoir levels in the functional range. Yet, not dobbing also has its upside. It is a concession to human frailty and contribution to community spirit. Human relationships function most efficiently and effectively in situations of trust and acceptance. This requires a degree of understanding and behavioural latitude. None of us are perfect yet we get it right most of the time. This even applies to water wasters. Most of them are still good people and want us to treat them well because invariably they are the same people who donate to charities, save stray animals, treat others with concern and respect and allow enough road space to enable drivers to merge. And like most people they resent being held to account for every minor norm violation. Moreover, it is human nature to expect better treatment from those who know us than strangers. While we don't pick our neighbours this principle extends into the streetscape. A shared geography underlies an intractable

interconnectedness and dependence. It is our neighbours who are best placed to empty our letter box and feed our pets while we are on holidays, they can often do a spot of child-minding at a moment's notice and are the first to hear our house alarm when it is activated. These bonds of co-operation are diminished when neighbours feel that they don't accept or understand each other. People act on the basis of reciprocity. A sense that one has not been treated well or betrayed evokes resentment. Dobbing can erode any sense of loyalty, which is at the core of all relationships and requires an acceptance of people beyond their immediate instrumental benefit to oneself. Sometimes it requires us to overlook the minor mistakes of others. The upside is that it will encourage others to do

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likewise when we slip up. This acceptance, tolerance and behavioral latitude is at the core of community spirit. In the end, each individual is the winner. Of course, some acts are so serious that they are beyond neighbourly redemption. Most serious crimes belong in this category. Every community is best off without people who engage in such conduct and it is morally remiss to not report such activities. Given that domestic water use accounts for only a fraction of the overall water consumption, unless your neighbour has the sprinklers on day and night, water dobbing is normally an act of community wrecking rather than social heroism. Moreover, casting neighbourhood blame for water infractions deflects responsibility for the water shortage from the real culprits. The State Government has done nothing to increase water supply over the past decade despite a massive increase in Queensland's population and a foreseeable change in weather patterns. The State Government is the only true water cheat in this state. In relation to them, no amount of finger pointing is enough. **Dr Mirko Bagaric is a lawyer and author.**

### **The Advertiser**

#### **Heat threat to soar**

Deadly heatwaves will become twice as common in South Australia by 2070, according to a report that predicts higher temperatures will threaten water supplies, infrastructure and lives. A landmark joint assessment by the nation's peak scientific bodies, the CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology, has revealed that the number of days over 35C in this state will more than double in six decades if global warming is not curbed. Scientists predict that an increase in the number of over-35C days from the average now of 17 a year to 47 will dry up water supplies, buckle infrastructure and cost lives among the elderly. CSIRO principal research scientist Kevin Hennessy said bureau data on daily temperatures had been combined with CSIRO modelling to reveal the "striking" results. "A small change in average temperature will have a large effect on extreme temperatures," he said. "We expect fewer frosts and more heatwaves. "In Adelaide there are currently 17 days per year over 35 degrees on average, this could increase to between 21 and 26 days by the year 2030 and 24 to 47 days by the year 2070." He said that would create "a greater risk in heat-related deaths, particularly in elderly people". Electricity supplies would be drained by demand for airconditioning and refrigeration. There would be an "increased risk of bushfires, increased risk of buckling of railway lines and increased demand for water, as evaporation rises". The 35C measure was used as it was the temperature at which "old people start dying", the Climate Institute's Erwin Jackson said. The institute is a non-partisan, independent group established in 2005 to raise public awareness and motivate positive action to prevent dangerous climate change. It commissioned a CSIRO report on bushfires and delivered a briefing on heatwaves, which already are said to contribute to the deaths of more than 1000 people, aged more than 65, each year in Australia. "The good news is that with lower levels of emissions you get lower levels of climate change," Mr Jackson said. "This should be a strong signal to our political leaders to announce plans that reverse Australia's rising greenhouse gas levels by making the switch to green energy." He said the latest report from CSIRO was far more advanced than the one published in 2001, because the bureau was more involved and the improved computer models delivered a clearer picture. Regional projections were given for low, mid-range and high greenhouse gas emissions scenarios. Those scenarios were developed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Mr Hennessy said the low emission scenario assumed low population growth globally and a shift to more renewable resources. The high emission scenario assumed higher population growth and a continued dependence on fossil fuels. "We are tracking the higher rate for carbon dioxide, global temperatures and sea level," he said. Mr Hennessy said it was the first time CSIRO had looked beyond just temperature and rainfall to other climate variables. The Climate Change in Australia report found South Australia also would suffer from:

**RAINFALL DECLINE:** By 2070, we can expect 10 to 15 per cent less rainfall under a high emission scenario.

**FEWER RAINY DAYS:** Although individual falls actually may be more intense.

**MORE DROUGHTS:** An increase in the number of drought months of up to 20 per cent by the year 2030.

**DECREASE** in humidity and an increase in sunshine, associated with the reduction in rainfall.

**WARMER** nights and fewer frosts.

**RISING** sea levels, with implications for coastal inundation, particularly in parts of Adelaide where some subsidence already is occurring for other reasons.

**DECLINE** in grape quality in the Barossa Valley, due to warmer conditions.

Scientists are particularly concerned that if the temperature rises more than 2C above average, the risk of dangerous climate change and more extreme weather events is far greater. CSIRO researcher Dr Penny Whetton said that

"some climate change for Australia is certainly inevitable, so we're going to need to adapt to its impact". "However, for later on in the century, if we're able to reduce our global levels of greenhouse gas emissions, we'll be able to reduce the risks of some of those higher rates of warming," she said. For South Australia, the chance of a 1C rise in 2030 is about 20-50 per cent in the south of the state and 50-60 per cent in the north, rising to more than 90 per cent by 2070, for both the low and high emissions scenarios. For a 2C warming, however, there is a 1-20 per cent chance in the south and a 30-40 per cent chance in the north for a low emission case. For a high emissions case the chance of a 2C warming is 80-90 per cent in the south and more than 90 per cent elsewhere.

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### **First hand look at the impact**

South Australian Farmers Federation officials and politicians will tour drought-ravaged Eyre Peninsula this week. Last night the touring party, which includes State Opposition Agriculture spokesman Mitch Williams, met farmers in Ceduna and the group will meet producers at Wurrulla and Darke Peak today. Tomorrow they will visit farms in Kimba and meet producers in Cleve and Tumby Bay. Federal Opposition Agriculture spokesman Senator Kerry O'Brien will also attend part of the tour. Last month, Premier Mike Rann visited the region after he and acting Agriculture Minister Pat Conlon earlier knocked back an invitation from SAFF, who have criticised their decision. Mr Williams said many crops in the region were suffering, however, there were some which still had the potential to generate some income. "Someone west of Ceduna hopes to get a reasonable crop this year, and while it would be down on average, they still think they will do OK," he said. "In saying that, however, it's going to be really tough for a lot of people and there are other areas where it is going to be disastrous." SAFF president Wayne Cornish said "this trip is a genuine fact finding mission, its not some high flying, breeze in breeze out, make a few announcements, feel good media spin circus". "It is appalling that they (Mr Rann and Mr Conlon) are content to sit back in Adelaide simply waiting to receive the pleas and tears of South Australians relayed through the eyes of bureaucrats. "South Australia is facing a potential crisis never seen before. We need strategies in place now. "Metropolitan Adelaide will not be able to escape the disastrous effects of the rural crisis. "Arguments about buckets and drippers will fade into the ether when basic food prices soar and the state economy really begins to slow. It is an issue that affects the whole of our state." Mr Conlon said "the only people seeking to politicise this devastation have indeed been SAFF, and their political affiliations are very well known and even more long standing." "We had very fruitful and informative discussions with large number of affected farmers and people in affected businesses, and we will continue to do so," he said.

### **Drought claims 10000 dairy cows**

An estimated 10,000 dairy cows this year will be lost to the SA dairy industry as farmers leave the industry or reduce production due to the drought. SA Dairy Farmers Association president David Basham said the impact was worst in the Lower Lakes where 12 of 15 farms were expected to shut in the next few months. The reduction of dairy cows, close to 10 per cent of the state total, is expected to force milk production down with a range of consequences. Farmers have booked their cows into the local Murray Bridge abattoir two weeks in advance. Mr Basham said the Lower Lakes region was hardest hit, but a few farmers further along the River Murray were also expected to close, either short or long-term. The downturn has seen milk production plummeting with an 8.1 per cent decline in SA and 9.1 per cent nationally in the early stages of this season. In an indication of future trends for the \$3.3 billion national industry, the drought cut national butter production by 25 per cent and cheese output by 14 per cent in the first month of the new season. Export volume also fell by 23 per cent and the value by 8.4 per cent in July. Declining milk production has also raised the prospect that local factories might be affected next year. But the association's chief executive Ken Lyons said: "There will be plenty of milk for the domestic market, but there will be an impact on exports."

### **Editorial**

#### **A warning we must heed**

The CSIRO has for the first time joined forces with the Bureau of Meteorology to predict the future of our climate. The outlook is predictably alarming - but not alarmist. The report graphically outlines exactly how climate change will affect South Australians. There will be more bushfires, enormous demand for water and power and - most disturbing of all - increased heat-related deaths. This only underlines the need for immediate and long-term action to help the environment. Those who decry the threat of climate change cannot be allowed to continually block positive action.

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### **FarmOnline**

#### **Farm Poll: Farmers want Howard, but ready for Rudd**

Despite being two of the hottest agricultural issues in Canberra this year, wheat marketing and climate change rank among the least important issues for farmers at this year's Federal election, according to a Rural Press poll. The special farmer-only poll reveals they also believe Kevin Rudd will be the next Prime Minister of Australia, even though most said they will vote for the Coalition. The survey, conducted by Rural Press Marketing Services, polled farmers exclusively, and did not extend to rural towns or the broader agri-business community. More than



50pc of the respondents are older than 55, with cattle, sheep and cropping the predominant enterprises. Labor will win the election, according to 44pc of farmers, while 34.7pc believe the Coalition will be returned. However 21.4pc are still unsure what the result will be. Typically the most traditional and dependable conservative voters, 79.9pc of farmers have said they will not be changing their vote this year, while 11.5pc said they will vote differently at the next election, and 8.6pc are undecided. The poll reveals many farmers voting for Labor could be doing so for the first time, with the majority qualifying their support is because "it's time for a change". More than 15pc of farmers say they will vote Labor this year, yet close to 10pc of farmers still have not decided who they will vote for at this

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election. Combined support for the Coalition was 71.2pc, with 47.3 per cent of farmers indicating they will vote Liberal at the coming election, and a further 23.9pc will vote for The Nationals. Independent support is 1.2pc, and support for the Greens is 1.8pc. But while there is overwhelming support for the current government to be reinstated, exactly one third of farmers said current political representation at a Federal level is "poor" or "very poor". Health, water and drought top the list of the most important election issues for farmers, while trade reform was considered of little importance. SOURCE: Extract from special report in this week's rural weeklies *The Land*, NSW, *Queensland Country Life*, Farm Weekly, WA, *Stock Journal*, SA, *Stock and Land*, Vic.

#### **Adelaide Advertiser**

#### **Drought is tearing at roots of family**

Images of drought are a vivid and indelible part of the Willcox family's history. Thirty years ago, a drought blew sand in mounds against the fences, obliterated tracks and covered vegetation. Jane and Greg Willcox, however, do not want to be around to see it like that again. With no income this year, they are making plans to leave the place the family calls Emeego - home to five generations since 1963. With no subsoil moisture, there's every chance the place could resemble the Sahara again. Since 1987, when they took over Emeego from Greg's parents, there have been more bad years than good. In the early 1990s, the bank took away their cheque book and they were given two weeks to get off their land. They dug in their heels and bought a lease in the newly-developing oyster industry at Smoky Bay, 8km from their farm. Many others walked off. For 10 years, they clawed away at their debt by feeding, picking and packing oysters while still running the farm. They emerged from that experience exhausted but debt-free in 2002. The bad years, however, continued and they no longer have as much fire in their bellies to take on outside work. "We want to see the other side of life now," Jane says. Their debt is manageable now but after Christmas and if they borrow to plant next year's crop, they would again be in trouble - and may have to walk off with nothing. Their options are to sell in a market where land prices are starting to fall; shut the gate and see what work they can pick up on the way; or battle on, hope for a few good years and then sell. They are not considering the last option. They are relieved Greg's parents, Coral and Don Willcox, are not sentimental. That does not mean Jane, 49, and Greg, 51, do not feel guilty. "You don't really want to give the farm up, because mum and dad worked so hard in the '70s to keep it going," Greg says.

#### **NEWS.com.au**

#### **Mill go-ahead 'a win for science'**

Tamar Valley locals have vowed to maintain the fight against a \$2bn pulp mill in northern Tasmania after federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull today gave the project the go-ahead. And Liberal backbencher Michael Ferguson, whose electorate is split over the controversial project, admitted the decision would affect his chance of hanging on to his marginal seat of Bass at the looming federal election. But Tasmanian Premier Paul Lennon hailed the commonwealth approval as a win for science and pledged to heal the rifts in the community caused by the Gunns proposal. Mr Lennon hit out at Mr Turnbull, accusing him of looking for any excuse to knock back the mill to save his own political skin. "There is no doubt in my mind that Mr Turnbull was looking for a way to stop this project from going ahead, believing that it had become very problematic for him in his own (Sydney-based) seat of Wentworth," Mr Lennon said. He praised chief scientist Jim Peacock for ignoring political pressure and standing up for science by recommending the mill's approval. "Today I want to thank Jim Peacock very much for resisting what must have been enormous political pressure upon him to make a decision different to that which he has done today." Mr Turnbull ended weeks of mounting political pressure by approving the mill, subject to 24 additional conditions which takes the total to 48. The project had already been passed by State Parliament and only needed Mr Turnbull's approval to go ahead. Tasmanians Against the Pulp mill (TAP) spokesman Bob McMahon said the decision was not a surprise but added the campaign against the mill would continue. TAP plans to stage a protest rally on Sunday to maintain political pressure in the lead-up to the federal election. "What we intend to do is flex our muscle and show the people what they may be in for in the unlikely (unlikely) event the mill goes ahead," Mr McMahon said. "There is still actually no protection for people as far as odour and particulate emissions goes, no protection for people on the road, no protection for our water, no protection for our farmland which is going under plantations to feed a prospective pulp mill." The Wilderness Society also refused to rule out further legal action to challenge the decision. Its appeal against the mill's federal environmental assessment will be heard in Hobart next week. Mr Ferguson, who won Bass from Labor in 2004 by fewer than 3300 votes on the back of former ALP leader Mark Latham's unpopular forests policy, said Mr Turnbull's decision was never going to please everyone. "It is one

of those situations where it is not going to be a win-win," he said to ABC Radio before the decision was announced. "I don't want to be a commentator on my electoral prospects but, facing facts, this issue is of such dimension that a political scientist would say that it could cost me my career." After the announcement, Mr Ferguson urged the community to work on healing the divisions. "While I think this is a good decision for Tasmania, we as a community are faced with the problem of mending the tremendous rifts that have developed," he said. Labor candidate for Bass, Jodie Campbell, said the ALP would respect Mr Turnbull's decision. The Tasmanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and timber industry groups today welcomed the news.

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### **The Australian**

#### **Forests could capture and store gases**

Up to two-thirds of Australia's greenhouse emissions could be captured and stored in a nation-building campaign to plant millions of native trees and shrubs over the next 50 years, according to the chief scientist. Jim Peacock yesterday revealed his vision for a campaign promoting planting from school yards to vast tracks of savannah across northern Australia to help cut greenhouse emissions. Speaking at the Greenhouse 07 conference in Sydney, Dr Peacock said there was the capacity to store up to 20 billion tonnes of greenhouse gases in specially planted forests and ground cover across grazing land, although about 5 per cent of this was a more realistic initial target. "The Snowy Mountains was a nation-building moment for Australia and everyone in our country knew it was important for Australia," he said. "I'm hoping the potential to biosequester carbon dioxide will also fire up the national imagination." "If we look at the rainfall zones which have potential new forest and savannah areas (above a rainfall of 300mm a year), that area could absorb 20 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide over the next 50 years, or 400 million tonnes a year. "If we could have access to just 5 per cent of it, then we would be capable of storing an additional 20 million tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, which is almost 10 per cent of current electricity emissions." Dr Peacock said financial incentives could create market opportunities for remote communities. He said clean coal, gas and nuclear power were still the only technologies capable of delivering low-emission supplies of electricity, with renewable technologies requiring more development to make them cost-competitive. Energy from biomass and biofuels was only likely to play a local role in energy supply because of the scarcity of highly productive land in Australia needed to produce energy crops.

#### **PM still a climate sceptic**

For John Howard, it's not climate change, it's only climate shift. His comments were heavily qualified with the words probably, perhaps and maybe, but John Howard demonstrated to a hall full of Liberal Party supporters yesterday that he is still a climate change sceptic when it comes to the nation's prolonged drought. Speaking to a crowd of about 500 mainly elderly people at a gathering organised by the party in Beenleigh, south of Brisbane, Mr Howard said he believed the nation was heading into a dry period similar to that of the first half of the 20th century. "I think we have to have a sense of perspective about the current drought," Mr Howard told residents of neighbouring Liberal seats, Forde and Fadden. "There's a tendency to think that it is never going to end. "Virtually every day people are talking about climate change and so forth. I think we have to talk a bit more about climate shift." "I think if you examine what is occurring in this country you will find that we are probably, perhaps, maybe returning to the rainfall patterns Australia enjoyed between Federation and the 1950s." The second half of the 20th century was "particularly wet", he said, while the years between Federation and the early 1950s were "much drier". "You will all know and I can remember as a child growing up in the 50s the very severe flooding that occurred in many parts of New South Wales and Queensland in the 1950s." Speaking while fielding questions from the crowd, Mr Howard said he had "just thrown in" his theory on the drought "because every paper you pick up has got another story (about climate change) and some people would have you believe that it will never rain again anywhere, and that farming is finished and the world is coming to an end tomorrow." Leading climate scientist Amanda Lynch of Monash University agreed with Mr Howard's assertion that the second half of the 20th century was much wetter than the first half. But she said there was "no basis" for his contention that Australia was heading into another 50-year dry cycle. Professor Lynch said temperatures were hotter now than they were during the droughts of the first half of the 20th century. She said the higher temperatures could be directly attributed to climate change. But she was reluctant to blame the prolonged drought on climate change because Australian rainfall was too unpredictable.

### **MDA**

#### **Murray Darling Association Inc**

#### **RIVER RED GUM REVIEW HAS WASTED OPPORTUNITIES**

The review of river red gum forests along the Murray River by Victoria's Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) has wasted opportunities and created anger in some of Victoria's most vulnerable and smallest rural communities. The Murray Darling Association said today that it was not only disappointed with VEAC's Draft Proposals Paper but the paper had created anger and uncertainty amongst many communities along the Murray River. The Association said that draft VEAC recommendations were also in danger of creating 'winners and losers' and an environment of conflict, rather than a cooperative and partnership approach to managing what everyone

agrees are some of Victoria's most important assets. Spokesman for the Murray Darling Association, Mr Adrian Wells, said today that this was particularly important in the current environment. "At a time when small rural communities in the study area are affected by prolonged drought, water shortages, depression, withdrawal of services and uncertainty, the draft recommendations are creating unwelcome tensions amongst small river communities". "This has not been helped by the report itself that acknowledges that the main beneficiaries of VEAC's draft recommendations would be people outside the study area (mainly in Melbourne), while the costs would be largely borne within the study area", Mr Wells said. "It is inconceivable that any government could

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accept a report that anticipates employment losses, financial hardship, poverty, reduced work opportunities, strains in family relationships and intergenerational welfare dependency in some small rural communities", Mr Wells said. "Sadly, the Draft Proposals Paper reflects what a number of people and groups have been saying for some time, that the draft recommendations reflect the views, values and wishes of metropolitan communities and are being imposed upon very vulnerable and already stressed Victorian rural communities", Mr Wells said. Mr Wells said that the VEAC consultative process had missed opportunities to try and bring together different points of view to explore where people agree and work forward from there. "Sadly, the report is in danger of creating conflict that could cause a great deal of harm in some of these small communities along the Murray River", Mr Wells said. Mr Wells said that it was clear from discussions with stakeholders that there was some common ground and opportunities to negotiate positive outcomes for the forests. "It is the Association's view that this would have been a better process than simply making recommendations and leaving rural communities to bear the brunt of the outcomes as outlined in the report", Mr Wells said. "Consideration should be given to develop a better and more-effective community engagement process that brings together and mediates community-driven solutions and directions, while still drawing on the information and broader directions contained in the VEAC study. While the Murray Darling Association acknowledges that there are problems with the management of riverine forests, the solutions outlined in the draft recommendations should be developed through a partnership approach on a case-by-case basis. "Most river communities, especially along the Victorian and NSW border, have come to expect partnership approaches to address natural resource management issues and that these approaches will involve communities and governments", Mr Wells said. "The Draft Proposals Report and its recommendations seem to ignore cross-border and partnership approaches and reflect a 'Victoria only' approach. "There is also danger of this VEAC investigation responding to, and making recommendations on the forests in a time of severe drought and stress by river red gum forests", Mr Wells said. The Murray Darling Association says that a major concern in the draft report centres on the proposed 4,000GL of water for environmental watering. While the community recognises the need for improved forest watering, the community is also wondering where the water will be found, managed and used. "While river communities believe that red gum health has to be improved and that watering is a key to this, there are too many unanswered questions in the draft paper about the proposed 4,000GL required to adequately flood the forests. "It is not only a massive amount of water but VEAC admits that some of the details are still to be worked out", Mr Wells said. "How can the community properly respond to the draft recommendations when VEAC has not fully worked out the details of the water, Mr Well said. "With all of the work done to research and model watering red gum forests at Barmah, Gunbower, Hattah and Lindsay Walpolla for *The Living Murray* program, surely VEAC would have found enough data to allow it to develop more accurate figures", Mr Wells said. The Murray Darling Association has welcomed the Victorian Premier's comments that he would not be supporting any of VEAC's recommendations in relation to water as envisaged in the draft report. Mr Brumby also commented that if the recommendations were in the final report, the Government would not be supporting them, as the water is not available. Mr Wells said despite the Association's responses to previous VEAC discussion papers and responses from some of the Association's member councils along the Murray River, the Draft Proposals paper still has little mention of Local Government. "Local Government municipalities have a number of roles in relation to red gum forests such as planning, tourism, recreation, support for Landcare and community groups as well as emerging roles in natural resource management. Local Government also has responsibilities to build and maintain roads, bridges and other infrastructure that provides access to riverine forests", Mr Wells said. "The future management of Victoria's riverine red gum forests is a very significant issue for Local Government and the ongoing economic, social and environmental sustainability of northern Victoria. It is therefore important that the final recommendations recognise and reflect the balance required to achieve outcomes that do mainly benefit people from outside the study area", Mr Wells said.

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### **FarmOnline**

#### **Climate change forecasts don't get any better**

Hotter, drier and inevitable: the most comprehensive investigation yet of climate change's effects on Australia doesn't make encouraging reading for a nation already weary of climatic extremes. "Climate Change in Australia", a joint report by the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO released at the Greenhouse 2007 conference in Sydney this week, forecasts a 1°C rise in average temperatures across Australia by 2030, climbing to nearly 2°C by 2070.

While the temperature rises appear relatively minor, the associated declines in rainfall predicted by the report are not. Under a "low emission" scenario, which presumes that humanity significantly lessens its current rate of greenhouse gas emissions, rainfall across southern Australia could decline by up to 20 per cent by 2070 in certain areas. Under a high emissions scenario, which presumes that emissions continue to climb, southern Australia's rainfall could drop by up to 30 per cent in a climate where average temperatures are more than 4°C warmer than they are today. "An increase in the number of dry days is expected across the country," said one of the report's authors, Dr Penny Whetton at CSIRO. "However, when it does rain, it is likely to be more intense."

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The report's authors, led by Dr Whetton and Dr Scott Power at BoM, say their "best estimates" have more than 50 per cent probability of occurring in Australia's inland, falling to 10-20 per cent probability along coastal areas. Old hands who say the current weather patterns are not like they were several decades ago can find some agreement with Dr Power, who said average temperatures have already warmed since the 1950s, as have the oceans surrounding Australia. "Since 1950, most of eastern Australia and south-west Australia have also experienced substantial rainfall declines," Dr Power said. "Attributing causes to rainfall changes is more difficult but the increase in greenhouse gases is likely to have contributed to the drying in the south-west and is a major suspect in the east." Greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide, are placed squarely in the frame by the report's authors. Dr Whetton said that drastically cutting emissions was the best bet to stall the climate changes that will affect future generations. "The message is that global warming is real, humans are very likely to be causing it and that it is very likely that there will be changes in the global climate system in the centuries to come larger than those seen in the recent past," the report said. SOURCE: Rural Press national environmental news, updated daily on FarmOnline.

### **Dollar-for-dollar funding wanted to prepare for drought**

The Government must commit to an new approach for dealing with future droughts, according to the National Farmers Federation. As part of its election wish list, NFF wants a new "dollar-for-dollar" drought preparedness scheme, where the government partners with farmers to prepare, manage and recover from drought. NFF president, David Crombie, said to meet the challenges of a changing climate, farmers need "a visionary new approach" in the way Australia deals with drought. He said the Federal Government and broader community have responded "magnificently to the current crisis". "But beyond the here-and-now, both sides of politics must show leadership and commit to a long-term willingness to work with farmers in safeguarding productive farm lands and the agricultural economy. "So much hinges on our farmers' ability to meet climate challenges. "We are proposing a new targeted 'mutual obligation' system to partner with farmers in investing in drought preparation, planning and recovery. "That is, for every dollar the Government invests in drought preparedness, participating farmers must match it, either dollar-for-dollar or in-kind." NFF says, to be effective, climate management strategies must be available to all farmers who pass eligibility criteria; have a drought management plan, or a business plan that incorporates drought management strategies, to counter a changing climate; and have already implemented drought mitigation activities. "If the full benefits of effective drought preparedness and management measures are to be realised, they must be available to all farmers so they can prepare for, and mitigate against, the impact of climate change 'before' they are in the midst of drought." SOURCE: NFF and FarmOnline.

### **FARM POLL: Climate change not on ag election radar**

The major political parties have drawn their battle lines over who has the greenest credentials and will best address climate change and global warming, but in the bush, climate change is of little interest as an election issue. According to a poll by Rural Press, only 5.1 per cent of farmers say climate change is the one issue they consider most important at the next Federal election, despite concern over water and drought ranking second and third respectively as the big issues for farmers. But the majority of farmers (59.6pc) do believe the threat of climate change and global warming is real, however most argued climate change and global warming are two different things. Still, more than a quarter of farmers don't think the threat of climate change is real, while close to 15pc are undecided. With critical water shortages, particularly in the Murray Darling Basin, it comes as no surprise that water is the most pressing issue at this election for 16.8pc of farmers – second only to health. Of the farmers who listed water as an issue of importance, 62.7 listed it as an issue of greatest importance. In South Australia/ Northern Territory, that figure is as high as 71.9pc. Again the longevity of drought is evident in NSW, where 65.5pc of the State's farmers who consider it an election issue put it on the top of their list of concerns.

### **Drought begins to bite at the checkout**

Drought will cause "significant increases" in the cost of food, including meat, milk, eggs and bakery goods, Australia's biggest retail boss, Woolworths chief executive Michael Luscombe, has warned. Strong demand for Australian produce from Indian and Chinese consumers will also add to price pressures, Mr Luscombe said. Retail sales figures released yesterday showed a 10 per cent increase in food sales over the year to August, with economists attributing some of the rise to higher prices. Describing drought as a "dry cancer" on the economy, Mr Luscombe said consumers were yet to fully appreciate the effect it would have on prices. "Each and every day we are hearing from suppliers who are seeking increases in prices, adjustments to contracts, as the drought wipes out

production or pushes up key input costs like grain," Mr Luscombe said. Families could also face further pressure from higher interest rates, with the retail figures from the Bureau of Statistics indicating consumers shrugged off the latest attempt by the Reserve Bank to cool the economy. Consumer spending grew a solid 0.7 per cent in August, despite the Reserve Bank pushing mortgage rates to they're highest in a decade at the start of the month. Household items such as furniture, appliances and hardware walked out the door, with spending up 2.4 per cent in the month. The Reserve Bank yesterday left interest rates on hold, but economists warned the strength of spending would add to the case for another interest rate rise. "With the Reserve Bank abandoning its convention of not raising rates during an election campaign, this points to some risk of a rate rise in November," an economist at

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ABN Amro, Kieran Davies, said. Inflation figures due on October 24 are expected to make or break the case. Financial market bets on the likelihood of an interest rate rise before Christmas put it at a better than even chance. Mr Luscombe said interest rates could have been even higher today had Woolworths not absorbed the rising cost of groceries into its profit margins. SOURCE: *Sydney Morning Herald*, a Fairfax Media publication.

#### **Producers check water levels from the laptop**

Pastoralists in northern Australia have begun adopting a new remote management system which involves a homestead based monitoring system for bores, pumps, tanks and troughs that is set to save them time, money and water. From Australian company Observant, the remote management system utilises new technology to provide safety, management and environmental benefits for pastoralists. Observant chairman, Simon Holmes à Court, said the remote management system shows how large pastoralist properties and farms can operate more efficiently now and in the future. "It is an excellent example of how new technology can make a big difference to farmers and pastoralists," Mr Holmes à Court said. Northern Territory Cattleman's Association president and pastoralist, Roy Chisholm installed the Observant system on his 5542 sq km property, Napperby Station, and recently completed a virtual 'bore run' and checked water levels on his property while travelling for business in Brazil. "This is a breakthrough for pastoralists who were previously tied to their properties or forced to rely on second hand reports on the status of their station," Mr Holmes à Court said. "More importantly however, the technology is able to reduce both station operating costs and the carbon footprint of the property by decreasing the need for bore visits which can involve significant amounts of travel." On a 'typical' pastoral operation a boreman will check every stock water point two to three times a week to ensure cattle have sufficient water. This requires a boreman to drive 50 hours each week over rough station tracks, in many cases just to confirm there are no problems at the water points. Fuel prices, vehicle costs, labour costs and labour availability have all continued to move against the pastoralist, increasing the costs of this essential task. The safety aspect of staff making unnecessary trips is also an area of concern. SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*.

NEWS.com.au

#### **Pulp mill brawl 'just beginning'**

Tasmania faces the most divisive environmental battle since the Franklin Dam dispute after Gunns said it would build its \$2 billion Tamar Valley pulp mill following approval yesterday from the Federal Government. Company executive chairman John Gay advised Premier Paul Lennon the controversial project could proceed, despite 48 conditions imposed by federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull. Labor environment spokesman Peter Garrett also promised to support the mill based on the new conditions. But opponents of the mill vowed that the real fight had just begun, with plans for mass protests, legal challenges and a campaign targeting the project's financial backers, including ANZ Bank. ANZ last night said it was yet to commit to the project and that it would first have to clear its own technical, social and environmental reviews. There may also be serious political consequences, with Liberal MP Michael Ferguson, who holds Bass by 2.7 per cent, conceding he could lose the mill seat in a growing backlash. And there is speculation a Liberal candidate for marginal Lyons, Ben Quin, will quit in disgust at Mr Turnbull's decision, most likely to stand as an independent Liberal. However, for the timber industry Mr Turnbull's decision brings closer than ever their holy grail, 18 years after the last pulp mill debate ending in acrimony and defeat for the industry. "Despite the misinformation, dishonesty and indeed threats from the project's opponents, Mr Turnbull has upheld due process," Mr Gay said. "The mill as proposed simply represents the best technology available." Also triumphant was the pro-mill Mr Lennon, who hailed it as potentially delivering his state economic security "for decades to come", but who in a conciliatory gesture offered a process to address the concerns of the wine and tourism industries. Mr Turnbull, who faces a potential backlash of his own in his marginal Sydney seat of Wentworth, insisted he had made a decision "based on science and science alone". "These are the toughest environmental conditions ever imposed on a pulp mill, anywhere in the world," he said. His decision was endorsed by Chief Scientist Jim Peacock and six other scientists on an expert advisory panel, as reflecting their independent recommendations. "If the conditions are met in their entirety, we feel there is a very strong prospect that the mill will operate with an environmentally neutral footprint," Dr Peacock said. However, Tamar tourism, fisheries and wine businesses and conservationist were scathing of Mr Turnbull's failure to examine the impact of the mill on their industries, as well as on native forests, which will initially provide 80 per cent of mill feed-stock. ANZ said under the Equator Principles - environmental and social benchmarks agreed by the

international banking sector - it signed up to last year, it must be satisfied there has been a "comprehensive social and environmental impact assessment" of the mill. Mill opponents, including businessman Geoffrey Cousins, plan to target ANZ to persuade it such an assessment has not been done. Mr Turnbull's assessment was limited to two issues - commonwealth waters and threatened and migratory species - while the state assessment featured an economic "net benefits study". Mr Turnbull said he had set dioxin limits for the mill's effluent at four times below a former national benchmark. However, the levels are unchanged from those in his draft decision in August. The mill shut-down level for chlorate pollution has actually been increased substantially on the draft decision, from 1.9mg/L to 3.7mg/L. The Wilderness Society accused Mr Turnbull of an illogical and potentially illegal decision to allow

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construction of the mill before modelling is done to give a clearer picture of the risk posed by dioxins. Mr Turnbull said the mill would not be cleared for operation until this work had been done, but society campaigner Geoff Law said it beggared belief any minister would not allow a \$2 billion plant to operate once constructed. There are clear "triggers" set out in the federal decision, under which the exceeding of pollution levels would demand an immediate response, followed by higher levels necessitating a shutdown. While the Gunns board is yet to meet to endorse the project, Mr Lennon said Mr Gay had informed him the mill would proceed. Mr Lennon said Mr Turnbull's decision was a triumph of "common sense over marginal-seat election politics". However, he announced a community consultative committee to ease divisions and concerns about "potential impacts" on existing industries. "This is a very big project for Tasmania - it has the potential to give us economic security for decades to come - but I don't want that to (cause) division within our community." Federal Labor, which had refused to take any definitive position on the mill until Dr Peacock's report was released, fell in behind Mr Turnbull's decision, seeking to neutralise it as a poll issue. "A Rudd Labor government would not seek to overturn or amend the decision by Mr Turnbull," Mr Garrett said. The organisation of which Mr Garrett was formerly president, the Australian Conservation Foundation, was less sanguine. "The conditions do not stop Tasmania's old-growth forests being logged to feed the mill, with the accompanying destruction of biodiversity and the release of around 20million tonnes of greenhouse gas polluting carbon dioxide each year," ACF campaigner Lindsay Hesketh said. Mr Cousins, a former adviser to John Howard, said people should not think "for one minute" the mill was now likely to be built. "The best analogy is the Franklin Dam - there is no dam there - and I am hoping there is not going to be any mill built in the Tamar Valley," he said. The Franklin Dam hydroelectricity project, proposed for Tasmania's Gordon River sparked fierce protests culminating in activists occupying the site in December 1982. The matter became a federal issue and helped bring down the government of Malcolm Fraser in 1983. Mr Gay said Gunns was determined to build a mill that would add \$6.7 billion a year, or 2.5 per cent, to the Tasmanian economy, creating thousands of construction and 290 permanent jobs.

**Adelaidenow.com**

### **Splitting SA Water 'would end crisis'**

SA Water would be split up and operated like a private company under infrastructure reforms proposed by the nation's peak business body. The Business Council of Australia has unveiled an infrastructure plan calling for major spending on transport, energy and water infrastructure over the next decade. On water, the report says the key step is to change the ownership and structure of the urban water industry so there can be no repeat of the performance of the past 20 years. It says the changes would mean water restrictions would be "rare events" in the future. "The key role of governments in the future should be to regulate, not to be responsible for supply," it says. "Water shortages have curtailed rural, electricity and even industrial production. With urban water there has been no new significant supply-side investment in 20 years." The council calls for competition in water supply and the removal of politics from water as much as possible. This includes:

SPLITTING water corporations into two bodies - pipes and supply and retail components.

INTRODUCING national regulation of water.

ENSURING all water prices are usage-based and ending cross-subsidies for water so that prices are averaged across a state or region.

REMOVING all impediments to water recycling.

A spokeswoman for Acting Water Security Minister John Hill said the Government would not consider splitting SA Water nor would it consider turning the corporation over to private ownership.

### **Costello's resume for PM**

Treasurer Peter Costello yesterday presented his prime ministerial resume, listing education, **water infrastructure and climate change** as top priorities for his government if he is handed the nation's top job. In Brisbane at a lunch to launch the Coalition's joint Senate ticket, he was making good on his promise to play a bigger role in the looming election campaign as he attempts to convince voters he should become prime minister. Prime Minister John Howard has pledged to hand over the reins to Mr Costello during the next term if the Government is re-elected. He has said he would campaign across Australia and speak out on all major issues, not just on the economy. The Treasurer said he was particularly passionate about the education system as he had once worked in it and his father was a teacher. "We need . . . a first-class technical school system in this country, training people for

trades." He also warned water was going to be a key issue. "We have to manage our water better, we have to invest in water better, we have to harness water better, we have to price water better," he said.

### **Opponents take up positions for battle to save valley**

The fight to stop the Tamar Valley pulp mill has just begun, according to an alliance of mill opponents that includes vignerons, tourism operators, surfers, fishermen, conservationists, doctors and wealthy businessmen. Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull's approval for the \$2 billion mill planned for Tasmania's north was hailed as an economic breakthrough by the timber industry, which finally has its holy grail within reach. "Timber families have been waiting four long years to hear this final tick of approval for the mill," said Timber Communities

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Australia state manager Barry Chipman. Premier Paul Lennon - who was told yesterday by Gunns executive chairman John Gay that the project would now proceed - said Mr Turnbull's decision was a "victory for science and a victory for common sense over marginal-seat election politics". But opponents labelled it a "cop-out" that failed to adequately address the impact of the mill on the valley's existing industries, Tasmania's forests and climate change. They are already working out the next lines of attack in what threatens to become the biggest environmental battle in the state since the Franklin Dam dispute of 1982-83. Anti-mill campaigner, businessman Geoffrey Cousins, said people should not think "for one minute" the mill was now likely to be built. "I don't concede that for one minute - the best analogy is the Franklin Dam," Mr Cousins told The Australian. "There is no dam there and I am hoping there is not going to be any mill built in the Tamar Valley." Mr Cousins said Mr Turnbull was now a "lost cause" and that his focus would shift to persuading ANZ Bank, thought to be lead financier for the project, to withhold its support. "ANZ, as the proposed lead financiers, have a very clear environmental statement," he said. "They indicate they won't provide funding for projects that could have adverse environmental impacts and that they will get an independent assessment of those issues. "I'm sure that's not just a piece of tokenism. So that would hopefully mean that all of the issues the Tasmanian Government buried from assessment - the impact on local businesses such as wineries, the impact on native forests - would be included in any such assessment." Politically, the fight is also far from over. In Bass, the marginal electorate where the mill is to be built, the sitting Liberal MP, Michael Ferguson, conceded he might lose the seat over his and his party's support for the project. Labor will also be aware its chances in Bass may be damaged by its support for Mr Turnbull's decision. It faces a tough fight if a popular anti-mill candidate stands and exchanges preferences with the Greens. Tamar Valley vigneron and Surf Rider activist Peter Whish-Wilson is considering standing in Bass as an independent. He felt bitterly disappointed that Mr Turnbull's decision had "completely glossed over" the potentially devastating impact of the mill's emissions, odours and log-truck movements on his business.

### **Energy offset to keep mill neutral**

Operation of the Gunns pulp mill may end up being carbon neutral because its emissions will be offset by renewable energy generated from its waste. Ministerial advice provided by the Australian Greenhouse Office, and obtained by The Australian, says claims that timber harvesting will increase as a result of the mill is "speculative", with woodchips that would have been exported instead diverted to the mill to be processed into paper. Waste from the mill will be used in a generator to produce electricity, which will be sold into the power grid. The departmental advice contradicts speculation that the mill will increase Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by 2 per cent, or 10 million tonnes, a year, although the value of the energy produced from the waste may be downgraded because it will in part replace clean hydro-electricity. "On this basis, it is more likely the mill will be either carbon neutral or have a low-emissions profile rather than achieving a net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions," the advice says. Gunns had claimed the mill would save about 1.3 million tonnes in greenhouse emissions a year by reducing the number of ship movements required to move woodchips to processing facilities in Japan. Environmental conditions placed on the mill yesterday by Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull primarily address emissions of hazardous materials. The other areas are the impact on forestry practices, air pollution and greenhouse emissions, but are beyond the jurisdiction of the federal Government. The regime of 48 conditions, described by Mr Turnbull as the most stringent in the world, will force the mill to halt operations if it breaches thresholds for the release of dioxins and other pollutants into the ocean. The thresholds are below international standards and those set by the Tasmanian Government. "If you are an operator of a pulp mill, you want as much room to move as is possible," Mr Turnbull said. "What we have done is, rather than leaving that wriggle room, we have brought the limit right down. "You (Gunns) say this is going to be the cleanest, greenest pulp mill in the world; we will hold you to that promise." Mr Turnbull said that although he recognised there were wider environmental implications from the mill, he was constrained by limited commonwealth powers, as the states held primary jurisdiction over environmental management. "There are other issues that are of grave interest and they cannot be part of this decision," he said. Pulp and paper manager for the Australian paper and plantation industry Miles Prosser said the mill would simply transfer processing from Japan to Australia, with a new mill expected to be able to comply with the tougher environmental standards. "That's what I would have expected Gunns to come up with anyway, because with a new mill you put in the latest technology and that technology is lower emissions," he said. Australian Conservation Foundation forests campaigner Lindsay Hesketh said Mr Turnbull could have blocked the mill unless it switched to

cleaner chlorine-free bleaching technology, which emits no persistent organic pollutants or other hazardous materials. "They're just going to convert it into pulp and export it and leave all the dioxins and the furans in Bass Strait rather than the Japanese copping them," Mr Hesketh said. He said the mill was going to need about 4 million tonnes of timber a year, inevitably placing pressure on natural forests beyond the terms negotiated. "Once this pulp mill is built, there will be strong demand to start converting natural forests to plantations once again," he said.

**Adelaide Advertiser**  
**Growers despair on grain deals**

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Two hundred Eyre Peninsula grain growers, who will default on forward-sold grain delivery contracts, yesterday met grain traders at Tumby Bay. There was little good news, however, from ABB, Elders and AWB representatives. The drought-hit farmers cannot afford to "wash out" or pay back any grain shortfall. Some producers' washout costs are up to \$1 million for grain bought at current prices to fulfil the tonnages promised. Others, who were able to reap some grain, have got off relatively lightly at \$20,000. Grain industry analyst and adviser Malcolm Bartholomaeus said that because many of the farmers at the meeting had never forward-sold grain they had not fully understood the risks involved. ABB grain trader Steve Howells said any growers who could not pay out their contracts within 30 days could apply for rural finance at 11.5 per cent with interest deferred until January, 2009. ABB would charge interest on defaulting washout payments at 12.85 per cent. Growers said the high take-up of forward contracts stemmed from lack of confidence in AWB and the single desk, following the Cole inquiry. They believed they were not getting paid enough from the AWB pool. SA Farmers Federation grains council vice-president James Rackham said that with forward selling growers should realise they were selling something they did not have and were betting against the market. "We are learning the hard way very fast," he said. SAFF state president Wayne Cornish told farmers he would be pressuring the State Government for action. He said many SA politicians did not understand the severity of the drought but the Federal Government's increased assistance had markedly improved the accessibility and level of drought relief. He said the State Government was not shaping up. "They are not in the same league as the eastern state governments," he said.

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**Herald Sun**  
**Town's water doesn't fit bill**

A small community in central Victoria is paying for water it can't drink. The supply to Sebastian from Coliban Water reportedly causes itching skin, stains paintwork and turns clothes a murky grey. A Bendigo councillor has labelled the situation as "Third World". Sebastian is only 18km north of Bendigo, but residents have been forced to install water tanks at their homes, then buy drinkable water to fill them. Mother Kim O'Neill said she received burns to her scalp because the water was over-chlorinated, and her children's school uniforms turned from navy blue to grey after being washed in the town supply. Neighbour Ron Balnaves said the water once changed his daughter's hair colour. "It turned it green, but that's not the worst of it," he said. "The water here stains the clothes, it stinks like hell, it nearly makes you spew when you're having a shower. "We wash in it, but we don't drink it or cook with it." The local watering hole, the Little Sebastian Hotel, is also feeling the pinch. Owners Jason and Kylie Harris would not comment, but they are bringing in water daily from Bendigo so they can meet health regulations. Coliban Water managing director Geoff Michell said yesterday there were plans to connect Sebastian to the main Bendigo supply between next year and 2013. "When they connect with us they are made aware that it's a non-drinking water supply and there's no guarantee of water quality," he said. He said Sebastian would be connected well before 2013. Councillor Kevin Gibbins said that timetable was not good enough. "We're not third world. Surely we can help this little place down the road," he said.

**Businesses avoid water fines**

Businesses that fail to keep their promise to save water will not face any fines, restrictions or sanctions this summer, the Government has confirmed. Water Minister Tim Holding said big businesses that did not deliver the water savings identified under special plans to be lodged in January would not be fined or sanctioned. This is despite on-the-spot fines of \$429 for householders who break stage 3a water restriction rules. But with business in Melbourne last year saving nine billion litres of water, the Government is confident industry will make every effort to save water. And with the cost of water to rise by more than 14 per cent, businesses will have an extra incentive to find ways to recycle or reduce their water use. The Government wants business to save 13 billion litres of water by 2015. Businesses are required to submit water plans by January, showing how much water they think they can save. Industry uses about 30 per cent of Melbourne's water. Melbourne's water supplies are expected hit 40 per cent today for the first time in almost a year. Reserves have been boosted during the past three months from rain in the catchment areas and some run-off from snow melt. But the city's dams are still 5.9 per cent down on the same time last year, when they held 811 billion litres. With no significant rain forecast in the next week, it may not take long for reserves to fall.

**City's \$4.5m water action plan**



Recycling wetland water, mulching and installing more drip systems are part of a \$4.5 million plan by Melbourne City Council to halve its water use. The council plans to protect parks and gardens by reclaiming water. Tankers will water stressed trees and portable water-filled barriers will drip-feed parched beds and sports grounds. City parks and sports grounds will be replanted with drought-tolerant grasses and there will be an extension of the storage capacity of Royal Park Wetlands reclaimed water scheme. MCC environment committee chair Fraser Brindley said: "We've spent a lot of time preparing for the warmer months and we're confident the measures . . . will ensure our parks and gardens can survive another hot summer."

### **Drought breaks hearts**

Is this the worst rural crisis in Victoria's history? Geoffrey Blainey asks. In my opinion it is not yet the worst crisis: not quite. Are we heading for a grave long-term rural crisis, propelled by drought? It is too early to predict, but one fact is beyond dispute. In most of rural Victoria the outlook is gloomy with a dash of desperation. Farmers who have a low income and high debts, and see no future for their children in their district, are entitled to call for help. But what kind of help is in the national interest? This crisis is grave, but we forget that farming is almost a crisis industry. The first rural crisis in Victoria came in the early 1840s when sheep were almost unsellable. The second crisis came in the 1850s and 1860s when the wheat farms were in the wrong place. Most lay south of the Great Dividing Range. Thus, if you rode your horse to the Bellarine Peninsula you would find wheat farms where now stand vineyards. In fact, these struggling farmers around Portarlington were among the first Australians to tax foreign imports. South Australian wheat was especially foreign. These early Victorian farmers began to trek across the Divide to northern Victoria and the Wimmera. The best of these farmers flourished until the 1890s when another crisis hit them. Prices were low and drought arrived. Thousands were ruined. This seesaw of prosperity and slump was the same for the owners of sheep and dairy cattle, orchardists and potato growers. It was worse for Victoria's vineyards, already hit by the disease called phylloxera. Farmers suffered again in the world Depression of the 1930s. Then came that wonderful period - not for everyone - of high prices and good rains, extending from the end of the World War II to, say, the late 1970s. That period now seems a long time ago to farmers battling with today's drought. We should be alarmed, but not surprised by this present drought. We have long known that the climate of this land is highly variable. If we possessed Australia rainfall records going back to the time of Christ, they would almost certainly show various arid periods much longer than the present drought. Unfortunately, our fears sometimes run ahead of the facts. We are told, again and again, that Australia's annual rainfall is now the lowest in its history. This is nonsense. Reliable nation-wide rainfall records only go back to 1900. What was Australia's worst year for rainfall since then? The worst year was 1902, followed by 1905. Victoria suffered severely from that Federation Drought, prevailing from about 1894 to 1902. Indeed, Victoria's whole economy then was rural-based and so it suffered far more than our present economy is suffering from the effects of drought. That drought came to an end, but it hovered. In Victoria, the whole era from 1890 to 1945 was relatively dry. It was then followed by a wetter era running for at least 30 years. You can learn about the fluctuating weather of the whole of south eastern Australia from an impressive report by the Australian Academy of Science in 1976. Dr C.H.B. Priestley was the main author of this Report of a Committee on Climate Change. His report has been forgotten. It was his misfortune to report when global cooling was the stronger fear. If more state politicians had read Priestley's report, or studied a little Australian history, they would have realised that the good climatic periods, and the bad, invariably come to an end. Part of the present concern, and even desperation, comes from our own failures, especially in state politics. By 1980, we had inherited a great network of reservoirs. After that we rarely added to them, though the population grew and the irrigated acres expanded. The severity of the drought, in short the scarcity of reservoir water, is partly our own fault. How did this strange trend happen? It's a simple story. The people in NSW, SA and Victoria, who had known the terrible Federation Drought and the subsequent dry years, wisely resolved to dam water, at heavy expense. The conservation of water is one of our most urgent and vital problems. Who said that? It sounds so recent. It was in 1936 when the governor-general, Lord Gowrie, opened the Hume Weir. His message was already taken seriously throughout the nation. From the 1930s to the 1970s, the governments built new dams and enlarged old dams on an impressive scale. The water dammed in Victoria was quickly multiplied scores and scores of times and more. There was one hitch. We all wanted very cheap water and we got away with it. Consumption of water in rural and urban areas leapt. As a result, the new and old reservoirs were half-emptied more quickly than they should have been. Henry Bolte, the long-time Victorian premier, vigorous sponsor of new dams and simple farmer, would be dismayed if he could see the effects of this increasingly complacent attitude to water. The complacency continued long after this present drought became visible. In the last quarter century, for the first time in Australia's history, dam-building has often been regarded as a sin. No voices were louder than the city-based greens in calling for an end to plans for new reservoirs. Politicians and citizens were happy to oblige. Now the cities, having voted for this inaction, are hoping for new pipelines to bring them water previously reserved for rural uses. Now governments are planning desalination plants, which will be gluttonous for energy. Will this dry period persist in Victoria? By some definitions, but not all, this is about to

become a worse drought for rural Victoria than the Federation Drought. Low rainfall has been aggravated by high evaporation. And yet, the possibility remains that the present drought here is mainly the reflection of the age-old pattern of wet and dry, wet and dry. On the other hand, it could turn out to be partly or largely the effect of recent global warming. We still don't know. The majority of meteorologists - and Australia has a great reputation in this difficult science - probably think the present drought is largely the repeating of an old pattern, with an ingredient of climate change added in. How powerful is that new ingredient? On that vital question there is unlikely to be agreement. In this era of uncertainty, one thing is certain. Inventiveness will continue to be applied to rural problems. The history of rural Australia is largely the story of improvisation and invention.

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My guess is that at least two thirds of the ploughable land in Victoria was too risky for regular crops when the first white settlers arrived. The Wimmera, Mallee and the Northern Plains became the home of tens of thousands of grain farmers only because of new ideas and methods. Farmers gained from superphosphate and other fertilisers, the almost revolutionary clydesdale horse and then the tractor, the mechanical harvesting of the grains, new breeds of wheat, sub-clover, and the wheat silo. Whether innovation will again help to revitalise some of our most vulnerable rural districts we don't know. Certainly, there is large scope for innovation in reducing the high rate of evaporation from Australian reservoirs and in reducing the waste of urban and rural water; still at a massive scale. Meanwhile, the plight of the smaller towns and even some of the crossways communities, with two weatherboard churches and a fire-brigade shed, are as much a national worry as the plight of the farmers on whom those towns depend. Jeparit was the childhood home of Australia's longest-serving prime minister, Sir Robert Menzies. When he was a boy, it was a flourishing wheat town with well-attended churches and bustling general stores, one of which was owned by Menzies' father. Like many others, Jeparit was a footballing town. Fielding a team in the Wimmera League, Jeparit competed for 40 years against bigger towns such as Horsham and Stawell. Then the town and district lost population and could no longer finance a top team. In 1989 came humiliation, like that seen at the MCG on Saturday. Big-town Ararat kicked a record score of 46 goals 28 behinds against little-town Jeparit. Next year, Jeparit crept into a humbler Mallee league. The same story can be read in a hundred smaller rural towns. What will happen to them if the rural crisis continues? The whole nation will be the loser. Much of the vitality of Australia lay in these small townships. From them came numbers of distinguished Australians out of all proportion to the towns' size. The rural crisis is more than a crisis for farmers and their families. It is a dilemma for the little towns and also the cities where most of the nation's voters live.

How to handle the crisis is made difficult because nobody can agree on what the climate will be like in rural Victoria in 30 years' time. Nonetheless, the problem should be high on the nation's agenda. My own feeling, for what it is worth, is that to the crisis will eventually come common sense and ingenuity. It will be eased and mostly overcome. **Professor Geoffrey Blainey is Australia's pre-eminent historian**

#### **New global warning**

More severe droughts, shorter snow seasons, decreased rainfall and heatwaves are predicted as the effects of climate change take hold in Australia, scientists warn. Average temperatures will rise 1C by 2030 and could increase as much as 5C in Australia by 2070 if global greenhouse emissions are not cut drastically. A major report by the CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology, released yesterday, warns marine ecosystems, including the Great Barrier Reef, could be damaged beyond repair if temperatures rise more than 3C and alpine ecosystems are at risk from increasing temperatures. The Climate Change in Australia report concedes a 1C temperature rise is inevitable but human activity will dictate increases beyond 2030. Under a low emissions scenario, in which greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are stabilised, temperatures may increase 2.5C by 2070. But if emissions continue unchecked, the worst-case scenario has temperatures rising by up to 5C and rainfall slashed by 30 per cent by 2070. CSIRO scientist and report co-author Dr Penny Whetton said the report was the most comprehensive assessment of Australia's changing climate. "Some climate change for Australia is certainly inevitable, so we're going to need to adapt to its impact," she said. "However, for later on in the century, if we're able to reduce our global levels of greenhouse gas emissions we'll be able to reduce the risks of some of those higher rates of warming." The report also warns:

THERE will be 20 per cent more drought months by 2030 and 40 per cent more by 2070.

MELBOURNE will experience 20 days over 35C by 2070, up from 9, while Mildura could endure 60 days over 35C, up from 32, under a high-emissions scenario.

SOLAR radiation in Victoria could rise 2.6 per cent by 2070.

STORM surges along the East Gippsland coast will increase, leading to flooding.

ANNUAL rainfall in southern Australia will be cut by 10 per cent by 2070 under a high-emissions scenario.

Dr Whetton said rainfall decreases would severely stress urban water supplies. "There will still be wet years in the future but dry conditions will occur more frequently," she said. Bureau of Meteorology principal research scientist and report co-author Dr Scott Power said Australia's climate was already hotter and drier. He said 2005 was the warmest year on record, but for the year to date the Murray Darling Basin and southern Australia had recorded the highest mean temperature. This comes on top of 10 years of below-average rainfall in Melbourne and more El Nino

events in the past 30 years than any other period. "It's a highly plausible hypothesis that global warming contributed to this. We are now more confident of this than ever before," Dr Power said. "It is crucial we continue to improve our understanding of processes affecting Australia's climate." Scientists and environment groups welcomed the report, released at the Greenhouse 2007 conference in Sydney, saying it highlighted the need for government action to reduce emissions. Climate Institute chief executive John Connor said the report showed the legacy we would leave the next generation if action wasn't taken. "These projections give us a window into the future that we could be leaving our kids," he said. "Disturbingly we are already experiencing the impact described in this report like hotter, drier droughts and more frequent and severe bushfires. "By taking urgent action now we

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can avoid the worst impacts of climate change and create a more hopeful future for our kids." Australian Conservation Foundation executive director Don Henry said the report proved the worst climate change effects were avoidable. "This has got to be a really big wake-up call for all our politicians and it's essential as a nation we act to strongly to cut our emissions," he said. "We have to become an international leader in tackling climatechange. We don't need any more talk. We need really serious action." Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull said the report would benefit governments, business and planning bodies. "Firstly, we need to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid changes at the upper end of the projected ranges," he said. "Secondly we need to plan how we can adapt to the changes that are inevitable due to the greenhouse gases that have already been emitted."

### **Beware of thirsty peril**

Australia's north faces a future threat of invasion by Asian refugees who have run out of water because of climate change, outspoken Liberal senator Bill Heffernan has warned. In a *Bulletin* article to be published today, Senator Heffernan says that underpopulated northern Australia has to be developed and settled to avoid such a fate. "Without being alarmist, it would be better for us to do it than letting someone else," he told the magazine. "We're not talking tomorrow, but in 50 to 80 years time. If there are 400 million people who have run out of water -- Bangladesh or Indonesia -- well, you've got to have a plan." Senator Heffernan said northern Australia was a soft entry point in security terms. "If we go to the level of climate change that science is predicting, where you're going to have 50 per cent of the world's population water-poor and you're going to have the Arctic melt and rising seas, it will be a very attractive proposition." Senator Heffernan chairs the government task force studying development of water and land resources in the north.

### **City water curbs long term**

Melbourne is likely to remain on harsh stage 3 or 4 water restrictions for at least three years. The state's most senior water bureaucrat, Office of Water general manager David Downie, has revealed the city would probably be on tough restrictions until the \$1.8 billion north-south pipeline and the \$3.1 billion desalination plant came on line in 2010 and 2011. Government documents also reveal that with poor rainfall predicted, the city will stay on water rations, possibly until 2013. The revelations come despite the Government continuing to duck direct questions on whether water restrictions would be permanent. Mr Downie told a forum organised by the Australian Industry Group it was likely Melbourne would not go back to stage 1 or 2 restrictions for three to five years. The comments were made in July -- but have just begun circulating widely after the AIG reported his comments in their Industry magazine. No comment could be obtained from Mr Downie yesterday, with the Department of Sustainability and Environment saying he had other commitments and was not available. But documents prepared by the Government in support of its desalination plant and cross-country pipeline also show the Government expects the city to remain on tight restrictions for years. 'If the scenario based on the past three years (of low rainfall patterns) is taken as a guide, the new supply will enable Melbourne to move to stage 2 water restrictions by 2010 and progressively move back to low level or no restrictions by 2013," it says. Opposition water spokeswoman Louise Asher said former premier Steve Bracks had announced that the plans for the desalination plant and the pipeline would mean the end of water restrictions for Melbourne. "All of the spin made that point," she said. "I'd call on the Premier John Brumby and the Water Minister Tim Holding to tell the truth about the long-term nature of Melbourne's water restrictions. "It makes a mockery of Holding's announcement last week that he would re-consider stage 3A restrictions on June 30 next year when his most senior bureaucrat has already told us what's going to happen." Mr Holding did not comment directly last night on whether he agreed with Mr Downie's assessment, but hinted harsh restrictions could be here to stay, pending unlikely heavy rain. "Even if there is above average rainfall and above average inflows into Melbourne's catchments, it will take some time to replenish our depleted reservoirs, and we need to keep this in mind when managing the water restrictions regime into the future," he said. "The Government determines the level of water restrictions based on the need to balance certainty for water users, the current level of storages, and the future predicted inflows based on different rainfall scenarios."

### **Drought tightens grip**

Melbourne as recorded its driest September for 26 years, according to online weather monitor weatherzone.com.au.

The city received just 19mm in September, well down on the long-term average of 59mm for the month, making it the driest September since 1981. September was a dry month across Victoria, with Tatura, in the north, receiving just 6mm, making it the driest September there in 65 years of records.

### **Vaile defends rescue package**

The Federal Government's drought package for farmers is a survival mechanism, not a get rich scheme, Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile says. The Government last week announced a major drought assistance package including \$150,000 exit grants for those wanting to leave the land and a cut off of \$20,000 in off-farm earnings before farmers lose welfare entitlements. The announcement has led to complaints the Government is being exceptionally generous as an election approaches. However Mr Vaile said the Government also supported other sectors, such as the automotive; and the textiles, clothing and footwear industries.

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"This is about keeping people on their properties, enabling them to survive. This is not a get rich mechanism, this is a survival mechanism," he told the Ten Network. "People need to understand just how severe the circumstances are." Mr Vaile said the cut-off would allow the husband in a farming couple to stay to try to keep livestock alive while his wife got a job, or vice versa. Asked if he believed climate change had anything to do with the drought, Mr Vaile said the Government was focused on the broader climate-change issue. "There is still a lot of science out there in terms of how accurate some of the forecasts are and to what extent the effect is. "The reality is that climate change per se as far as drought is concerned is cyclical in Australia and history proves that," he said. Mr Vaile said Australian agriculture had changed over the decades to adjust to changing circumstances, adopting new crop varieties and stock breeds.

### **Farmers despair in drought**

They say farmers' wives in the Mallee and Wimmera are hiding their husbands' guns, terrified that frustration and fruitless toil will end in the ultimate personal sacrifice. An alarmist rumour? Maybe, but there's no doubting the mood of utter despair and resignation spreading across the land. A decade of drought has sucked all the nourishment from the soil, just as it has leeched resilience from the soul of much of Victoria's farming community. What exactly does it take to end generations of labour and love to mail off an application for one of the Federal Government's \$150,000 exit grants, or "quitters' fee" as they're being branded? It could be the paddock of grey stubble that has withered and died yet again, long before the green shoots reach up out of the ground for life giving moisture. Or the ribs poking through the desiccated hides of a once sleek herd of dairy cattle. Or even the pit that's never spoken about in the bottom paddock, where the emaciated corpses of an entire flock of sheep lie buried. It could be all or any of these, but it's often something less tangible: a feeling of shame and defeat engendered by the terrible awareness that all those years, all that backbreaking yakka, were for nothing. How must it feel to know that generations of your family before you have overcome similar droughts, without your access to sophisticated technology, and have still maintained a viable legacy for their sons to inherit? How must it feel to walk off a property for the last time, to wander its parched paddocks for one final lingering look, knowing you'll never work them again? Aborigines are not the only Australians who regard their connection with the land as sacred. I know of one farmer who made the decision to quit his property and went to Queensland with his wife for five weeks to forget. But he couldn't. So he came back and took his gun out for one last time, put it in his mouth and ended his life on the ground where his ancestors had begun theirs. Farmers are men of dogged independence, gained over years of often solitary labour undertaken in vast landscapes empty of all but their transforming endeavours. But when cruel and capricious weather leads to suicide, divorce and emotional breakdown, what future is left to them? Half a century spent working the land equips a man for little else than more of the same. The prospect of a claustrophobic office environment is unthinkable. John Howard doubts many farmers will take up the exit grants, believing they will stay on and hope for better times. Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran doesn't agree. He reckons more than 1000 cockies will take the money and go. Their divergence of opinion sums up how little the Government and the rest of us comprehend this tragedy, which is ending forever a way of life.

### **Farmers face the wall**

More than 250,000 cattle, sheep and lambs were sent to slaughter in the past week as horror drought conditions tightened their grip on Victorian farmers. Unable to afford water and feed to sustain stock, farmers are offloading in massive numbers across the state. Yardings for cattle have doubled, while the number of sheep and lambs being sent to market has increased by 20 and 38 per cent respectively. As the market floods, stock prices are falling. Cattle fetched just 298.5c a kilogram last week, compared with 330c a kilogram a month ago. National Livestock Reporting Service manager Travis Parsci said while slaughter numbers tended to increase in spring, there were more younger animals being sent in because of the drought. "Because grain is so expensive and water is limited, a lot of guys have no other option than to sell," he said. He said numbers for slaughter last year were high because of the drought and they'd gone up again this year. "In the past four weeks, yardings have gone up by 10 per cent compared to a year ago, and that is most likely due to the poor season." Mr Parsci said the season was teetering on a knife-edge. Offloading stock is the latest chapter in Victoria's horror dry season, which is bringing farmers to their knees. Most agricultural regions around the state are struggling:

IN the northwest, fruit growers are leaving their vines and trees to die because they cannot afford to buy water to keep them alive.

DAIRY farmers in the Goulburn Valley have begun culling their herds as fodder becomes even more scarce.

MALLEE and Wimmera grain crops are failing and farmers have begun cutting what little growth they have for hay in the hopes of clawing back some of the money invested at the beginning of the season.

ONLY two farming pockets -- in the southwest around Portland and South Gippsland -- have received enough rain to expect a good season.

The farmers' despair has been heightened by the fact that they received the best rain in years in July to kick off their season and current world grain and milk prices are at record highs. Victorian Farmers Federation president Simon Ramsay said many farmers were resigned to the fact that this season would be their last.

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"I think, psychologically, people are worn out and can't see themselves going through another drought," he said. "Tension out there is high. It takes a toll on people -- relationships are under stress. As long as I can remember I have not seen the magnitude of problems we're seeing at the moment because of the drought." Mr Ramsay said risks to the viability of regional towns were immense and the exodus of skilled rural workers would be huge. All of Victoria has been declared drought-affected by the Federal Government, making farmers eligible for income support payments and interest rate subsidies. The strain of the drought is being felt around the state, not just on farms but in rural and regional towns, as spending comes to a standstill. Almost \$430 million in interest rate subsidies and income support payments has been paid to farmers and drought-affected businesses under the Exceptional Circumstances system since 2002. But farmers are being pushed further into debt as they try desperately to secure feed for stock as summer approaches. Australian Fodder Industry Association executive officer Colin Peace said fodder prices had already reached \$300 a tonne. At that price it would cost a dairy farmer with 200 cows more than \$1700 a week to feed them. Mr Peace said Victorian farmers were already buying fodder from interstate. High prices and spiralling debt are pushing farmers to the brink and banks are telling customers to make sure they have a financial plan.

Rural Finance Corporation CEO Dugald Graham said despite the hardship many farmers were continuing on. "We are dealing with farmers who've been in drought for 3-4 years and we are constantly buoyed by their optimism," he said.

#### **Water cuts stay over summer**

Melbourne will stay on tough stage 3a water restrictions at least until June even if there is heavy rain. The Government has abandoned the storage level trigger points it had been using as a guide to restrictions. Water Minister Tim Holding said Melburnians should be proud of their water saving efforts, but said: "Even if it rains, we will stay on stage 3a restrictions. "If the storage levels fall below what would have been the previous stage 4 trigger point, we will stay on stage 3a restrictions. We are doing this to provide certainty." Stage 3a allows householders to water their gardens twice a week. Dams have risen 11 per cent in the past three months. Nursery and Garden Industry Victoria boss Steven Potts said the sector employed 11,000 people and would be bolstered by the guarantee we won't be facing tougher restrictions. But the Nationals said the state's water woes would go some way towards being solved only if Melbourne stayed on 3a restrictions for at least three years. The Opposition said the Government had managed water poorly and we shouldn't be on tough restrictions. Deputy Opposition Leader Louise Asher said Melburnians could rightly expect to have water restrictions cut when dams filled.

#### **Farmers learn climate lesson**

Federal Labor set itself apart from the government on drought policy today, saying it would help farmers adapt to climate change instead of offering financial aid. "For 11 years, the Howard government has failed to act on climate change," Labor's primary industries spokesman Kerry O'Brien told the Queensland Rural Press Club. "Federal Labor believes that climate change is the greatest challenge confronting Australia's farming future." Labor, if elected, will spend \$130 million on climate change research and funding to help farmers adjust to its impact. The package includes \$15 million to research the link between climate change and productivity, \$55 million for a so-called climate change adjustment program and \$60 million to look at investment potentials like geosequestration. But Senator O'Brien was quick to say Labor would not walk away from financial aid.

"Earlier this week, Labor provided bipartisan support for (the government's) additional changes to drought assistance," he said. Labor's plan comes in stark contrast to the government, which this week announced its latest agricultural aid package, \$714 million to widen financial assistance and help some leave the land with dignity. There was no mention of climate change in Prime Minister John Howard's press release, just a "severe and prolonged drought". Today Mr Howard again would not link the worst drought on record and climate change, saying instead it was a "climate shift". "We are seeing what the experts call a climate shift and I do think we should keep our heads about it," Mr Howard told Southern Cross Broadcasting. "I don't think we should write off farming." However, he did warn of escalating food prices because of the continuing drought. "There will be a food shortage and that will have an effect on prices," Mr Howard said. "We do have to face that reality." Much of the NSW wheat crop has already failed or will fail within a fortnight unless rain arrives. South Australia is patchy, with

the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics saying 10 days ago the state had shared the biggest decline in potential harvest yield with NSW. But in Western Australia a remarkable story is being played out with small parcels of crops looking at a record season. Farmers near Katanning in the south west of WA, if the season holds out, will sell record amounts of wheat at high prices. However, the all-important northwest wheat belt in WA is an unmitigated disaster. "There are large chunks that are just bare paddocks," Pastoralists and Graziers Association spokesman Slade Brockman said. - *AAP*

### **Water vow a bid for votes**

Kevin Rudd has offered hundreds of millions of dollars to help build a desalination plant in South Australia -- but failed to extend the offer to Victoria. On the eve of the federal election, Mr Rudd moved to woo crucial votes in SA with a commitment that could run up to \$1 billion. Victoria's planned desalination plant near Wonthaggi will be

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built with the private sector and could cost as much as \$4 billion. "We would want to be partners with the South Australian Government in a project of this nature," Mr Rudd said. "In principle, we would want to be financial partners in this project." Premier John Brumby last night said Victoria would not ask Labor -- should it win the federal election -- to extend the offer. Mr Rudd made the offer while in SA yesterday, but would not commit to similar help for other states. "In each state it will be different but we believe a national response is necessary," Mr Rudd said. "Climate change is a national challenge -- it is a national crisis. "It is bringing about a real problem for Australian water and we need a national response." Mr Rudd would not say how much a federal Labor government would contribute to SA's desalination plant, estimated to cost \$1.4 billion. The federal Labor leader also urged the Brumby Government to sign up to Canberra's plan for the Murray-Darling Basin. Mr Rudd said the implications for SA were huge if there was not a result soon. "For South Australia's needs and for the nation's, that agreement has to be brought about and I'd urge both parties to get back to the table," Mr Rudd said. A spokeswoman for Mr Brumby, Alison Crowweller, said the State Government's position on the Murray-Darling agreement had not changed. Victoria is the only state not to sign the agreement. Ms Crowweller also said no request would be made for federal funding for the desalination plant because it was to be built as a public-private partnership. This means the \$3.1 billion plant will be bankrolled by private investors. Ms Crowweller said Mr Rudd had pledged to fund other major water projects in Victoria, such as the Goldfields Superpipe. The pipe will carry water from the Goulburn Valley to Ballarat and Bendigo.

### **Poor suffer as larder empties**

Jumps in milk, bread, pork and egg prices would add to the daily struggle of families already in financial difficulty, the Brotherhood of St Laurence said. "It will hurt," the Brotherhood's senior manager of research and policy, Michael Horn, said. "Either they will have to forgo buying those foods, or they will have to make other sacrifices from their weekly expenditure. "We know that some of the things that do go, for example, are dental services and obtaining prescription medicines when they need them." He said research had shown that despite a record period of economic growth, a significant percentage of households were still struggling to make ends meet. Of course, the price rises will affect everyone. For Don Sharples, 28, who has recently returned from several months in Britain, the discovery that prices for staple foods were increasing came as no shock. "I've been away since the beginning of April and I've noticed a change. Being an Australian in the UK. . . you expect things to be cheaper when you come back, and it hasn't really been that way." Tatum Michael, 27, from Southbank, said the extra dollars she would be forced to spend on staples meant she would cut back on her impulse to treat herself and keep to the basics when cooking. "My little sister stays over four times a week, and obviously these prices will affect me when I'm feeding her," she said. "Honestly, the drought and the situation in Australia is sad, and I realise prices have to go up. But that is where you hope the Government helps out." Mother-of-eight Angie Nieman said the price hikes would have a big impact. "My food bill will go up by about \$100 per week," the West Australian mum said. "It just means that our quality-of-life stuff goes down, and you can't do the other things that you want to do because you can't afford to any more."

### **Drought relief flood**

Hundreds of drought-stricken Victorian farmers will consider taking up the Federal Government's offer of up to \$150,000 to walk off their land. Rural counselling services have begun taking calls from farmers seeking details on the exit deal the Prime Minister announced under a \$714 million drought package. Victorian Farmers Federation president Simon Ramsay said farmers with low equity in their property and high debts would consider their future. "It will give them the choice of leaving with some capital and some dignity," he said. Mr Ramsay said older farmers with no one to pass the farm on to would be among those pondering their options. "These farmers are drought-weary," he said. "They won't be willing to suffer any more hardships or fight through another drought." But he said their decision wouldn't be made overnight. "It's more than just a financial decision," he said. "For many, their families have been on the land for generations. And, if you're a 60-year-old farmer, you have to think about what else you can do." Farmers are seeking details from Rural Financial Counselling Service offices statewide. Sunraysia RFCS counsellor Graeme Thornton said the exit package would generate "significant interest among horticulture farmers across the Mildura region" hit hard by low water allocations. But Swan Hill counsellor

Kaylene Birch said farmers in her area were reluctant to consider any exit package yet. "I've taken dozens of calls today and the only thing everybody wants to know about is the Federal Government's new \$20,000 grant for irrigators who have had their water allocations cut," she said.

### **Drought hits family budgets**

Drought pain is coming to dinner tables nationwide as rising farm costs bite deeply into family budgets. The price of bread, milk, eggs and meat is set to rocket on the back of high grain costs. Winter crop forecasts have been slashed by 30 per cent, and there are signs desperately needed spring rains could fail. And former deputy prime minister John Anderson yesterday raised the spectre of a possible global "food shock". "We talk about oil shocks. We have gone on assuming that the supermarket shelves will always be loaded," Mr Anderson said. Retailers said bread would jump by up to 30c a loaf and milk could rise by 20c a litre.

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Eggs are almost certain to rise by at least 50c a dozen, while the price of bacon and other pork products could climb by up to \$2 a kilogram. The price of feed grain increased from a three-month average of \$290 per tonne to a peak of \$490 per tonne on Monday. A report for the Australian Egg Corporation predicted it would stay above \$350 for some time. "These prices don't seem to be abating," AEC managing director James Kellaway said. "All the feedback from my members is such that they can't afford to not increase their prices." Bakers Delight, which has more than 600 stores nationally, said it was anticipating a 30 per cent jump in the price of flour by January, after a 30 per cent jump this year. "That means an increase of around 20c to 30c a loaf," chief financial officer Richard Taylor said. "It's an absolute concern, but you can't do anything about it." Goodman Fielder, which owns brands including Country Life and Helga's, said its prices would rise. "Wheat prices are at record highs," spokesman Ian Greenshields said. "You try and absorb as much of the costs as you can, but part of this has to be passed on." Dairy giant National Foods said the drought was having a double impact on milk prices. Spokesman Rupert Hugh-Jones said pasture levels were down, which lowered production. And the skim milk, butter fat and cheese markets were also attractive to dairy farmers, which reduced local volumes of milk. "Our wholesale price of milk might rise by up to 20 per cent over the next six months," he said. Australia Pork Limited CEO Andrew Spencer said the industry was facing its worst trading conditions in living memory, and prices would rise. "It could be a couple of bucks a kilo across the board but it is very hard to judge because of the impact of supply and demand over time," he said. Eating out is also set to become more expensive. Restaurant and Catering Australia said higher produce prices would be passed on to customers. Mr Anderson, a former federal leader of the Nationals, yesterday warned of possible global food and grain shortages. "This comes at a time of unprecedented concerns globally of very low grain stocks," he said. "It is not beyond the realms of possibility that we will see a food shock in the next few years." Thousands of farming families are weighing up whether to stay on the land or take \$150,000 exit grants now offered by the Federal Government. Prime Minister John Howard denied he was paying farmers to walk away. "We're helping people who've reached a rational decision, because of the desperate difficulties of farming their particular properties, to try something else in their career."

### **Farm welfare now 12 times that of others – expert**

A drought policy expert says farming families are now receiving welfare support at 12 times the rate of other welfare recipients in the community. Australian National University (ANU) researcher Dr Linda Bottrill says she is mystified by the rationale for the latest government drought welfare assistance which allows a doubling of the allowable off-farm income to \$20,000 before the welfare payment is decreased. "I don't understand the rationale for allowing them to earn an additional \$20,000 a year and then receive a full welfare payment on top of that," Dr Bottrill told ABC Radio. "If the welfare payment is intended to be that, it seems to me that it is only reasonable that it is offered to farmers on welfare at the same rate that it's offered to others in the community. "The issue that they are farmers and not other members of the community shouldn't be relevant when we're talking about meeting day-to-day welfare needs. "Their farm businesses are being catered for through other Exceptional Circumstances programs." Dr Bottrill speculated that part of the reason for the change was that most of the community's welfare policy was developed in one government department but, when it comes to farm welfare policy, it was developed in another government department. Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran said off-farm income was now being linked to the farm business itself due to the length and severity of the drought. "After all, these farm businesses are earning no income themselves yet they've got costs such as fixed water charges, local government rates or lease payments on machinery of the like," he said. "That is the connection, and by allowing those with off-farm income entitlement to income support we can provide security for the families' basic needs."

### **Drought hits food prices**

Bacon, egg, milk and cheese prices are set to rise as the drought bites deeper into the pockets of shoppers. Customers could also be forced to swallow more expensive restaurant meals. Consumers will be paying up to 50c more for a dozen eggs, 10c extra for a litre of milk, and \$1 a kg more for cheese in coming months as farmers pass on costs, industry groups warn. And restaurant meals will be next in line for increases if fruit and vegetable costs keep climbing. The pork and egg industries today said the cost of producing foods on most household shopping lists had leapt due to skyrocketing grain prices, and the increase would have to be passed on to consumers. The

crippling drought and other International forces are also putting pressure on milk and cheese prices. The Australian Egg Corporation and Australian Pork Limited said grain prices have soared over the past few weeks from a three-month average of \$290 per tonne to a peak of \$492 per tonne on Monday, an increase of 70 per cent. An independent economic forecast indicated the grain price would stay higher than average for some time, unless rains came or more was imported from overseas, the groups said. "The Australian Egg Corporation and Australian Pork Limited are therefore warning consumers that the cost of producing eggs and pork will increase in the short-term and remain high for the foreseeable future, unless there is a substantial fall in the price of grain," they said. "Egg, milk, pork and meat producers are being particularly hard hit due to the high dependence on grain for the production of these foods." Australian Pork Limited chief executive officer Andrew Spencer said there was a worldwide grain shortage. Crop failures around the globe, increased demand from food manufacturers and

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competition for grain from the rapidly emerging bio-fuels industry meant other countries were also suffering from record grain prices. In Australia, the cost of producing a dozen eggs had increased by up to 50c – or more than 20 per cent – over the past three months, the Australian Egg Corporation said. This had cost producers a quarter of a million dollars over the past two weeks alone. "Australian egg farmers have never seen grain prices reach these levels for such a sustained period," managing director James Kellaway said. "Despite their best efforts at absorbing the rising cost of production, egg farmers exist on slender profit margins and unfortunately cannot continue to insulate consumers from the effects of this massive increase in grain prices any longer." Dairy Australia trade and strategy spokesman Chris Phillips said the drought was one factor forcing up costs. Others included less production in some parts of the world, strong demand in Asia, and international exchange rates. "World prices drive the market," Mr Phillips said. Mr Phillips said supermarkets were expected to pass on increases at the counter within six to eight months. Restaurant and Catering Australia president Con Castrisos warned menus could also be on the way up. "With all the talk about the price of raw produce going up, consumers need to be aware that the price of restaurant meals will also have to increase," Mr Castrisos said. "Restauranters will not be able to keep a lid on prices if there are significant movements in the price of raw ingredients." However, beef prices should remain relatively stable because the strong Aussie dollar has cut exports to the United States, Japan and Korea, leaving more product here. "We are not anticipating massive spikes up or down," said Meat and Livestock Australia spokesman Damon Whittock. -with AAP

#### **Former Nationals leader warns of global food shock**

Former deputy prime minister and Nationals leader John Anderson has warned of a potential global food shock with falling production and soaring prices. Mr Anderson said anyone outraged by the federal government's support package for drought-hit farmers had never gone hungry. He said the aid package reflected the fact that farming was essential, unlike any other business, and farmers could not do it on their own. "This comes at a time of unprecedented concerns globally of very low grain stocks. It is not beyond the realms of possibility that we will see a food shock in the next few years," Mr Anderson told ABC Radio. "We talk about oil shocks. We have gone on assuming that the supermarket shelves will always be loaded." Mr Anderson said in an average year Australian farmers produced enough food and fibre for perhaps 100 million people, with most exported and plenty left for our own supermarkets shelves. But in a world where a billion people still live on less than a dollar a day and go hungry, there are major humanitarian issues, he said. "This affects everyone from the farmers right through to those people who are dependent on countries like Australia to feed them," he said. "We are going to have to look closely at what the scientists are saying. They will need to be properly resourced. They will need to be drawn upon in terms of painting a road map for the future. "We may very well be facing changes. But I don't for a moment believe that the severity of this drought is something we will see year in and year out." Mr Anderson said among the tough decisions ahead was whether or not to accept the use of genetically modified crops. He said there were some very interesting drought-tolerant varieties coming through which would perform much better in a drier, hotter climate. "That I know is a contentious issue but we won't be able to simply be indulgent on the basis of full bellies and not worry about impacts globally," he added.

#### **Dry, hot days forecast for rest of year**

##### **Water bans for keeps**

The State Government is considering new, permanent water restrictions across Victoria. Premier John Brumby said yesterday the water restrictions system would change. The news comes as the weather bureau predicted Victoria is set for a hot and dry end to the year, with little chance of good rainfall. "It would be good if we could move to a system that provided more security and certainty . . . not have this business where we go up and down every month with possible different levels," Mr Brumby said. He also flagged relief might be close for more than 200 country towns on stage four limits. "There is a chance they may be on a lower level of restrictions going forward, and that's being worked through with those country towns at the moment," Mr Brumby said. The changes are still being finalised and will be announced within a week, but he would not indicate whether Melbourne's restrictions would get tougher. A change in water restrictions would be likely to take effect from November 1. The weather bureau's seasonal outlook for the next three months predicts an 80 per cent chance of exceeding average maximum



temperatures across most of the state. There is also just a 30 per cent chance of above average rainfall in southern Victoria, excluding east Gippsland, also raising bushfire worries. CFA deputy chief Geoff Evans said firefighters had already attended 476 grass fires this month and the dry conditions were worrying. In Melbourne, the drought has killed 300 trees in parks and streets in the past year. Melbourne council parks and gardens officers have had to rip out 16 of the city's ageing elms this year, and the fight continues to save more. Thousands of litres of drinking and recycled water a week is being used to keep plants and trees alive, but up to 300 trees face removal. Already, many of the city's famous parks that circle the CBD are parched and brown. Yarra Park, doubling as the car park at the MCG, is showing signs of wear and tear.

### **Council water supply stolen**

An expensive scheme to save Boroondara Council's leafy parks is in jeopardy after the theft of 45,000 litres of recycled water from a tank. The council believes the thief used a pump to empty the water, which the council trucked in to St James Park in Hawthorn to preserve trees and gardens. Police are hunting for the thief, who took about \$1000 worth of water around September 13. The council said the thief might have made two trips to take the full amount of water, probably with a truck. Boroondara Mayor Cr Phillip Healey said the crime was devastating for local parks. "Not only is the theft of this water a cowardly and immoral act, it puts the park at risk -- effectively, the person responsible is stealing from our entire community," he said. Municipal Association of Victoria president Dick Gross said the theft was unprecedented. "In over a decade of experience, I've heard of a lot of stuff being stolen from local councils, but never recycled water," he said. "This really is a sign of the times." Cr Gross said councils were doing their best to manage sporting fields and gardens during the drought, but the situation was grim. Boroondara Council has installed 22 tanks, trucking in class-A recycled water. Cr Healey said residents should be wary. "I would encourage anyone who sees any suspicious behaviour around water tanks, particularly at unusual times, to contact the police immediately on 000 and also to alert the council," he said.

### **The Australian**

#### **Climate inaction will hit output**

Some of Australia's biggest greenhouse polluting industries, such as coal, iron and steel, and agriculture, could see major cuts to their output by 2050 if no action is taken to contain global warming. The findings, from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics, show that Australia's farming productivity is likely to be 10 per cent lower, iron and steel output 6 per cent lower, and coking and thermal coal output almost 8 per cent and 5 per cent lower respectively than they would otherwise be in 2050. "They will be vulnerable - the economy is going to be vulnerable - because of the climate change impacts," ABARE chief economist Don Gunasekera said. The results, presented at a greenhouse conference in Sydney yesterday, are among the latest to emerge from a continuing calculation of the costs of climate change to the Australian economy. John Howard has used ABARE's earlier studies into the subject to argue against binding international targets for emissions cuts, arguing for Australia's right to set its own "aspirational" ones. Last year, ABARE said the nation's gross domestic product could fall by about 10 per cent, and its real wages by about 20 per cent, under the deepest-cut scenario modelled. But Dr Gunasekera said the bureau's analysis last year was not comparable with its latest findings and should not be used to forestall action to cut emissions. "There's an admission all over the world that climate change is real, it's happening," Dr Gunasekera said. "Rather than trying to compare the cost of inaction with the cost of action, let's get on with it." The CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology this week warned Australia was almost certain to be 1C warmer by 2030, as the continent moved towards a drier and more extreme climatic future. ABARE's own work forecasts that Australian health and productivity will be among the casualties of global warming, with Queensland and the Northern Territory bearing the brunt of declines in both. Sick days, less productive workers and higher government spending on healthcare are likely to shave about 3.5 per cent off Queensland and Northern Territory's annual gross output in 2050 under a no-action scenario. Labour productivity will have fallen 5 per cent and health expenditure risen 10 per cent by the same date in the two jurisdictions. South Australia will also suffer disproportionately among the states because of its reliance on agriculture. Changes in pasture and crop growth, thermal stress, and rising pest control costs could combine to reduce the state's gross output by more than 1 per cent in 2050. ABARE attributed the forecast falls in output in coal, iron and steel to a global dampening in demand, based on the Stern report's modelling of a 5 to 10 per cent reduction in economic growth across developed and developing countries. Dr Gunasekera said Australia's energy and resource sector's strong export focus left it exposed to economic downturns overseas. "(Climate change) could potentially have a big impact on international trade in international commodities," he said. Even the electricity industry can expect a 4 per cent drop-off in its 2050 output levels, despite the extra domestic demand for power as Australians turn their airconditioners on for longer. "Climate change will affect all sectors and it's important for all sectors to improve their productivity and maintain their trade competitiveness," said Melanie Ford, manager of ABARE's climate change modelling section.

## Adelaide Advertiser

### Yes, you can water garden

Relaxed water restrictions become effective from today as gardeners again are allowed to use hoses and drippers on weekends. Drip irrigation systems and hand-held hoses, fitted with trigger nozzles, again can be used but only for three hours a week at even-numbered addresses on Saturdays and odd-numbered addresses on Sundays. Gardeners have a choice of watering between 6-9am or from 5-8pm but will not be allowed to do both, as was allowed last summer. Watering cans and buckets can be used at any time but sprinklers and other watering systems are banned. Acting Water Minister Kevin Foley said he wanted to remind people the drought was not yet over and it still was important to save water. "We are asking householders to continue to use water responsibly," he said. Mr Foley also said the state's biggest industrial water users had completed savings plans ordered by SA Water and were working on changes, although he has ruled out any move to force the state's manufacturers to ration their supplies.

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"The SA Government is not exploring water rationing for manufacturers," he said. "All SA Water industrial users have been asked to reduce water consumption where possible." As householders prepare to give their gardens a drink, a new Murray-Darling Basin Commission drought report released yesterday declared river flow conditions to be among the worst since records began. It says system inflows are dropping towards last year's record lows as cyclical spring rains fail to materialise. It also says the prospect of substantial inflows over the rest of the season is "poor", noting River Murray operations now are focused on saving water in upstream storages.

### Water crisis: Farm hopes wither on the trees

Riverland citrus growers are accusing the State Government of stealing their water and sending them to ruin, as many prepare to stop irrigation and leave their trees to die. Citrus Growers SA chairman Kent Andrew said yesterday that the Government had taken 200 gigalitres of water from the River Murray this year and placed it in a reserve for critical urban and industrial use in 2008-09. He said growers were being forced to buy extra water at more than 10 times the normal price, while the Government was taking its water for free. Mr Andrew said the Government was contributing to the impending death of crops throughout the Riverland. He urged it to immediately make 150 gigalitres of water from the reserve available to growers to prevent the death of permanent plantings and help stop the devastation of river communities. "Even if Adelaide suffered a dry winter next year with only about 50 gigalitres flowing into its reservoirs and with a standard 90 gigalitres from the Murray, SA reservoirs would still be more than 55 per cent full at the end of 2008-09," Mr Andrew said. He said 150 gigalitres would represent a nearly 30 per cent increase in irrigation allocations and take the total to nearly 50 per cent. "We have had growers slowly turning off the water to their citrus trees for the past eight weeks and that will become a flood soon unless the Government does something immediately," Mr Andrew said. "We stand to lose more than half the citrus trees in South Australia with devastating impacts." SA Murray Irrigators chairman Ian Zadow said the release of 150 gigalitres of water from the reserve would save the irrigation industry hundreds of millions of dollars. A spokeswoman for Acting River Murray Minister John Hill said the Government was negotiating with Murray-Darling Basin states in regard to a strategic reserve. Loxton citrus grower Ron Gray plans to turn the water off and leave his trees to die as soon as his valencia crop is picked two weeks from now. "Only 300 growers of 1500 farmers in the Central Irrigation Trust have bought water this year, which means a large amount of irrigated crops will die," he said.

## Sunday Mail

7<sup>th</sup>

### **Closure of lake will kill our town**

#### Barmera's death cry

The Riverland town of Barmera has warned it will be quickly choked to death if Lake Bonney remains cut off from the River Murray. Many of the town's 4500 residents fear the State Government's decision to stop fresh water flowing into the lake 12 days ago is the "tipping point" for a town already struggling to cope with the drought. Flow was cut to reduce evaporation and prevent saline water in the lake draining back into the river. The State Government has predicted Lake Bonney's surface area will shrink by five per cent – but locals expect the shallow shoreline to recede dramatically. They hold grave fears that visitor traffic through the town will cease if Barmera's main attraction dries up. The drought has already caused house prices to plummet about 40 per cent in the past six months, and some lifelong residents are considering leaving the town. Local charities say more people are asking for help with food, clothing and furniture. Save Lake Bonney group spokesman Mark Beech feared "the longer the lake is blocked the more damage that will be done." Mr Beech said townspeople felt "emptiness" and "anger" and many were considering leaving the Riverland. The Sindos family, who own almost eight hectares of vineyards and olive trees, said the blocking of the lake was the last straw. They believe they will have to leave their property and move to a larger city if the outlook does not improve. "We're not going to be able to live off the vineyards," Jenny Sindos said. "It is going to be a hard decision." Barmera newsagent Robyn O'Dea likened the closure of Lake Bonney to Adelaide's West Lakes being left to dry up. "How would West Lakers feel?" she asked. "You really need to bring it back to people in Adelaide." The average house price in Barmera has fallen almost 40 per cent in the past

six months. Houses are selling for an average \$136,130 now, compared to \$221,740 in April. The length of time properties remain on the market also has blown out, from about a month to six months. Ray White Real Estate principal Greg Cram said Barmera was probably the slowest performing real estate market in the Riverland region. The depressing situation has caused many land and business owners to consider selling and moving on, said Mr Cram, who was fielding about six inquiries each week from "people who are serious about putting (their land) on the market". Five other lagoons and wetlands are set to be closed off by November. Twenty-nine wetlands have already been blocked.

### **That sinking feeling**

**The question they're all asking: Can Barmera and Lake Bonney survive?**

**Lifblood of town could drain away.**

**Turtle breeder fears for wildlife.**

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### **Why it's happened?**

Why are the Barmera & Lake Bonney community complaining, they had the facts explained to them at a meeting I attended some months ago. They were informed as to what may occur if the situation worsens, as it has. It's not like they are the only persons affected, many are feeling much more pain and economic loss than persons living near Lake Bonney. We all hate the situation that has arisen but we must all feel some pain. They should just get on with life and make the most of what is occurring.

8<sup>th</sup>

### **FarmOnLine**

#### **Drought: 'Three-headed dog' cruels spring hopes**

Drought-stricken farmers could face spring rainfall that is up to 40pc below average because of a rare weather pattern that was last seen 40 years ago. A CSIRO scientist, Wenju Cai, told the Greenhouse 2007 conference in Sydney yesterday that Australia was experiencing an unusual combination of two events: a La Nina phenomenon in the Pacific Ocean in the east, and an Indian Ocean Dipole phenomenon in the west. "The only time in [recorded] history we had this kind of combination was in 1967," he said. In that year, spring was extremely dry in the south and east of the country, and this could provide an indication of what was ahead in the next few months, he said. Although La Nina usually brings more rainfall to eastern Australia, it appeared to have been overwhelmed in 1967 by the positive Indian Ocean Dipole, which reduces rainfall across Australia, including in the southeast. Dr Cai said that, overall, the projection in coming decades was for reduced rainfall in winter and spring in southern Australia, with a decline of up to 15pc by 2070. "There is no longer any doubt that climate change caused by increases in greenhouse gases is influencing seasonal shifts in rainfall patterns," he said. Global warming would also lead to greater evaporation that would magnify water shortages. "Our results provide strong evidence that rising temperatures impact on Australia's water resources, in addition to any reduction in rainfall." Dr Cai said that three major phenomena, which he likened to a "three-headed dog", influenced Australia's rainfall: El Nino events, the Indian Ocean Dipole, and the Southern Annular Mode, a weather pattern in the Southern Ocean that promotes airflow towards south east Australia. Last year, each had had only a small effect on rainfall decline. "But in sequence they gave us a very big dry, on top of the impact of the very high temperatures," he said. The good news was that the dog had "a tail", which may be able to partially offset some drying. This was rapidly heating waters in the Tasman Sea, which research suggested could lead to an increase in rainfall in the south-east during summers. Dr Cai said that greenhouse gas emissions accounted for about half the rainfall reduction in the south west of the country, where there has been a 10pc decline since the early 1970s. Separate research on an Antarctic ice core suggests this drying may represent a very unusual event. Tas van Ommen, of the Australian Antarctic Division, told the conference his team had identified a link between rainfall in the southwest and snowfall at a site called Law Dome in East Antarctica. Their study of an ice core from Law Dome that covers the past 750 years suggests that the last 30 years in southwest Australia has been the driest period, and longest period of reduced rainfall, since the year 1250. "So media suggestions that the drought in Australia is a 1-in-1000-year event is not unreasonable, at least for the south-west," Dr van Ommen said. SOURCE: *Sydney Morning Herald*, a Fairfax Media publication.

#### **Drought: New rain tank facility to ease waiting lists**

Producers worried about delays in accessing rainwater tanks will be pleased to hear that one company is making a determined bid to shorten waiting lists. The opening of Team Poly's new production facility in Toowoomba, Qld, saw it roll out its first moulded polyethylene tank late last week. Parent company Hills Industries' managing director, David Simmons, says the new factory increases its presence in Australia's \$750m water storage business, offering customers rain tanks that vary in capacity from 500L to 45,500L. As a bonus the Toowoomba venture currently employs about 20 people. While rainwater tanks on sale in Australia may be made of metal, cement and glassfibre, the largest market segment now is accounted for by polyethylene. Team Poly already claims to have the largest polyethylene rotational moulding facility in Australia, based in Adelaide, and is helping to boost rural and regional employment with sites at Bathurst, NSW, and (shortly) Ballarat, Victoria, in addition to its showcase Toowoomba plant. SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*, weekly rural newspaper, posting news updates daily on

### **Drought: More bleak news for Murray water availability**

The latest Murray-Darling Basin Commission Drought Update released today has confirmed more bad news for water availability. Chief executive, Dr Wendy Craik, says current water availability is the lowest for the Murray system based on modelling of the past 116 years. "Unless there is heavy rain over the next few months there will be serious consequences for human users and for the environment," she said. Dr Craik said the two-monthly update reported that rainfall and inflows over August and September, while better than last year, had still been among the lowest ever and that the outlook for the next few months was not good. The update shows rising river salinity in South Australia, damage to the environment and the threat of blue green algal blooms developing. "We are managing the Murray storages outside the normal operating regime to conserve water and minimise losses," Dr

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Craik said. "As rainfall failed in August and as inflows from the Kiewa and Ovens receded, we had to increase releases from Hume Dam in mid September." Dr Craik said Yarrowonga Weir pool was lowered to cut evaporation losses and the first stage of the draw down at Euston Weir and its associated lakes began in August. The weir at Torrumbarry will be used to re-regulate flows along the mid reaches of the Murray causing pool levels to fluctuate during the next few months. The MDBC is also considering a draw down of Weirs 8 and 9 but water users will be notified well in advance. Dr Craik said weir pool levels in South Australia would remain as close as possible to full supply levels to contain salinity increases. SOURCE: MDBC

### **New CRDC chief wants to double water efficiency**

New chairman of the Cotton Research and Development Corporation, Michael Logan, has issued himself a challenge of helping the industry double its water use efficiency in the next decade. That will be one of his key aims as he settles in to the role, complementing his existing farming operation outside Narrabri, and backed by roles on the Land and Water Australia board, Cotton Australia, and the CRC for irrigation futures. "We have already doubled our water use efficiency over the last 10 years and the challenge now is how we do it again," he told *Australian Cotton Outlook* at his property, Oakville, earlier this month. "We take x megalitres from the environment and produce y bales. "But the challenge is taking that x megalitres to produce 2y bales. "And the industry has broadly agreed to that strategy and I think it is exciting." As an extension to that, part of his mission will ensure this is being measured accurately and reported well. He said it was a collective responsibility for the industry to promote its message of continuous improvement. "First we need to measure it, and we need to do that in a way that that is affordable and understandable, so it can be understood not just by farmers but also by the broader community," he said. Part of this approach, he suggests, would be to take incremental improvements each year of, say 5pc, and then demonstrate these at the end of a 10-year period." You look back and it appears to be a quantum leap, whereas it was actually a series of manageable steps." SOURCE: *Australian Cotton Outlook*, out October 11.

NEWS.com.au

### **Cane toad trek west simply cannot be stopped**

Efforts to halt the cane toad's inexorable march westwards are failing. Despite the culling of an estimated 200,000 toads and millions of tadpoles over the past two years, a new report says the toads continue to head west across the Northern Territory at up to 80km a year. As scientists battle against time to find biological controls to stop the pest, including plans to map the cane toad genome, experts predict the toad may cross the border into Western Australia next year. The report's author, Tony Peacock, head of the invasive animals co-operative research centre at the University of Canberra, has called for a national cane toad plan to co-ordinate research, culling and other eradication efforts. Cane toads are throughout Queensland, the Territory and northern NSW. The West Australian Government on Friday announced \$500,000 in funding for the Australian Cane Toad Genome project, topping up previous funding of \$350,000 and a commonwealth contribution of \$260,000. Dr Peacock said the toads spread by 50-80km in the long wet season of 2005-06 and by 20km-40km during the recent weaker wet season. Toads were likely to cross the border next year if the coming wet season was above average.

ADELAIDE.now.com

### **Food prices to soar**

The price of dairy, fruit, vegetables and other basic food will soar in South Australia this Christmas as the drought impact reaches supermarkets. Bread, cakes, pies, eggs, cheese, butter and some fruit and vegetables will be hit. With world wheat stocks at a 30-year low, some baking product prices are tipped to rise 30-50 per cent within six months. The viability of about 12 Adelaide bakeries - ranging from corner bakeries to larger operations - is also under threat because of the crippling cost of ingredients such as flour, vegetable oil, sugar, margarine and milk powder. Industry leaders said imports would increase as Australia struggled to supply some foods, but they would not necessarily be high quality. Cream is already imported from New Zealand and white onions from the U.S, while oranges and ham are expected to be imported this summer. Experts also warned that consumers should make the most of relatively low wine prices before they rise sharply next year. Laucke Flour mills managing director Mark Laucke said Australia was in danger of not having enough grain to meet its needs in the next year. "We're

sending a letter to our customers saying we will have to raise the price of flour by 30-40 per cent if the crops finish off well," he said. "But if the weather is bad between now and harvest then the sky is the limit for price increases." Mr Laucke said the supermarkets forced farmers and flour processors to absorb costs last year, but can't do it now. He warned some businesses such as feedlots that couldn't pass on high grain costs would have to close. Mr Laucke said his best guess was bread prices would rise by 40-50 per cent a loaf. Nick Davey, from Orange Spot Bakery at Glenelg, said prices would have to be passed on this year because price rises for various ingredients were occurring almost weekly. He predicted all bakery products would rise by at least 30 per cent in the next few months, with a standard loaf of bread jumping from \$3.80 to \$5 to \$5.50 a loaf. "The price of pies and pasties will rise from about \$3 now to \$4 to \$4.50 by next Easter," Mr Davey said. He said breakfast cereals and biscuits should also rise by 30 per cent. Southern Egg chief executive Steve Todd said egg prices would rise by 30c-50c a dozen in the next few weeks.

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Meat and Livestock Australia spokesman Lachlan Bowtell said problems with the quality would be even more of an issue than price. SA Dairy Farmers Association president David Basham said it would be realistic to expect milk prices to rise by up to 10 per cent. SA Farmers Federation pork committee chairman Butch Moses said pork imports were a problem with Christmas ham already imported from the U.S., Denmark and Canada. SA Farmers Federation horticulture chairman John Mundy said consumers might have to get used to paying "a reasonable price" this year.

### **State's luckiest farmers**

Lush fields of crops are thriving in parts of Lower Eyre Peninsula while much of the state is being devastated by a second successive drought. While most of the focus has been on the breaking down of rural communities, the heavens have smiled for some SA farmers who will end the year by making a small fortune. Grain prices are at record highs and farmers lucky enough to reap average yields from their crops will benefit from the shortfall of raw product in Australia. Farms in the Green Patch, Wanilla and Cummins areas on Lower Eyre Peninsula are producing quality crops, and while yields are expected to be below average or average, the high price of grain will offset reduced yields. Rural Solutions SA Lower Eyre Peninsula consultant Kieran Wauchope said some crops in the Green Patch area, 10km northwest of Port Lincoln, would yield between three and 3.5 tonnes/ha of grain. Other areas in the region will struggle to reap crop yields of 0.5 tonne/ha. "It's really only a few thousand hectares of land on Lower Eyre Peninsula that will produce average yields," Mr Wauchope said. Green Patch has an average annual rainfall of about 550mm, Cummins about 400mm, north of Tumby Bay is about 300mm. "Normally Green Patch runs into problems because it gets too wet," he said. Opposition Agriculture spokesman Mitch Williams, who toured Eyre Peninsula last week, was surprised that crops were doing well enough to be reaped in some areas. However, the overall situation was grim for the region. "There are a lot of people who will reap crops who won't cover their costs, the confidence of farmers has been rocked and they're thinking how are they going to borrow another \$300,000 to plant next year's crop," he said. "The biggest thing I noticed was the breaking down of the communities . . . "Every community was talking about people moving out and in Cleve about 15 people have left the town in the past couple of months and that affects everybody including the local schools."

### **Historic \$30m tomato plant**

A new \$30 million tomato greenhouse at Two Wells - Australia's biggest - has started producing its first crop. In the shape of things to come, producer d'Vine Ripe is growing crops hydroponically with Class A recycled Bolivar water in an 8ha greenhouse. That will produce an average of 96 tonnes of tomatoes a week for sale at full production. Production is expected to reach 5000 tonnes a year with up to 200-plus tonnes a week in periods of peak demand. D'Vine Ripe general manager Greg Prendergast said Class A water was being recycled through the crop. "We're the first nursery to ever use Class A water," Mr Prendergast said. "We use a fine membrane to clean it further and then a reverse osmosis system to take the salt out of the water." Mr Prendergast said the first 4ha would start producing tomatoes in five weeks with the giant Woolworths retail group holding exclusive retail rights for the first six months. The first 2ha is a specialty roma cherry tomato variety imported from The Netherlands and grown for the first time in the southern hemisphere. Mr Prendergast said the 25g cherry tomatoes will appeal to children as they are twice as sweet as normal cherry tomatoes but very healthy. The second crop will be 100g tomatoes. D'Vine Ripe has employed 50 people and will expand to 80 staff from the Elizabeth, Gawler and Virginia region once it reaches full production. The staff includes irrigation specialists, crop workers, pack-house, quality assurance, human resources and administration employees. Mr Prendergast, a New Zealand glasshouse expert, said he had selected the Virginia region as the site for the glasshouse because of its ideal climate and other attributes. The joint venture company was set-up by Mr Prendergast, agribusiness investment manager Timbercorp and Australian food marketing company Perfection Fresh. Mr Prendergast said the tomato-growing facility was bringing a new era to the SA horticulture industry with some of the world's latest glasshouse technology.

## AWA

\*Water Corporation has appointed Price Waterhouse Coopers to assist in identifying options for involving the private sector in Western Australia's Pilbara region. It is anticipated that mining growth will see the total volume of water managed in the Pilbara more than double in the next three years.

**\*The latest Climate Modelling by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), presented at Greenhouse 2007, provides evidence that Southern Australia will continue to experience a reduction in rainfall in winter and spring, the impact of which will be magnified by increased temperatures.**

\*Hydro-Share, a unique web-based system that monitors water usage, customises and displays "real-time" information through users' own websites, recently won the Victorian Engineering Excellence Award in Technology.

\*Gutermann have sponsored a water industry resource website on leakage and pressure management. The website provides information current international water leakage strategies, pressure management, technical papers and case studies. ([Website](#))

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\*Sky-water 300, a new machine being heavily promoted with claims to "make water from air" by an elaborate cooling, condensation and disinfection process, has been examined by UNSW's Senior Researcher Greg Peters who found its energy consumption was 2000 times greater than that required for producing tap water.

\*An underwater wave farm could provide zero-emission energy and desalinated water on an infinite scale - enough to provide for Australia's needs ten times over.

\*A report from the Business Council of Australia (BCA) on national infrastructure advocates changing ownership and structure of the urban water sector including introducing national regulation together with competition for bulk users. Measures to allow them to pay more for reliable supply & to trade their entitlements are also canvassed.

\*A new study from Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) identifies serious gaps in the country's water supply planning to maintain adequate water supplies in an uncertain future for availability and demand. It claims that institutional support and technical rigour for planning are largely absent in some states and territories.

\*The National Water Commissioners met in Canberra last week, examining progress on some of the major water reform issues (a project able to access \$5 million) facing Australia. At the meeting, Victorian representatives showcased the development of the Victorian state water register, which would consolidate 7 separate registers currently operated by rural authorities.

\*Water cartage firms are transporting up to 60,000 litres at a time to fill backyard pools & keep gardens green in Melbourne with some residents spending more than \$3000.

\*The Victorian Government has advised that Melbourne's Stage 3a water restrictions will remain in place until 30 June 2008 to provide residents with greater certainty over the summer while maintaining existing savings by households, industry etc and allow sport to continue throughout summer and autumn.

\*The Decisions Report has been completed for the Hoxton Park Recycled Water scheme to provide >2billion litres of recycled water/year to residents within new development areas and businesses in SW Sydney and for use outdoors and in flushing toilets.

\*Carnegie Corporation is promoting its CETO energy converter or underwater wave farm, which it says, will provide zero-emission energy and desalinated water on an infinite scale - enough to provide for Australia's needs ten times over.

\*A new machine, the Sky-water 300 is being heavily promoted with claims to "make water from air" by an elaborate cooling, condensation & disinfection process has been examined by UNSW's Senior Researcher, Greg Peters who studied its energy consumption and found it was 2000x greater than that required for producing tap water.

\*Pollution is threatening to turn Greece's Aegean Sea into another Adriatic Sea, due to contamination from heavy ship traffic that dumps oil and other wastes and land-based discharges, such as farm runoff and sewage, from rivers that empty into the ocean.

\*The Lasithi Prefecture of Crete is considering another desalination plant for the island to clean the brackish water from the Malavra Springs and store it in the Bramiani Dam, which is very low at present, to increase irrigation supplies.

\*Australian investment banker Babcock & Brown is part of consortium run by Goldman Sachs tendering to buy Southern Water in UK in a highly contested auction.

## 9<sup>th</sup>

### FarmOnline

#### Goyder's Line on the move with climate change

An original climate benchmark first identified for South Australian farmers in the 1860s - Goyder's Line - is on the move, according to a review by scientists and primary producers. The review, conducted this year by the South

Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) and CSIRO, found that while technology improvements such as conservation farming and drought-resistant varieties may continue to offer advantages, there is general pessimism about the longer-term impact of climate change. Goyder's Line originated in 1865 when the then Surveyor-General of South Australia, George Goyder, drew a line of reliable rainfall to delineate cropping country from extensive grazing land. But his observations were ignored when a series of good seasons saw farmers growing grain in the arid zone north of the line, before whole townships were abandoned when the seasons returned to 'normal'. "The story of Goyders' Line is a cautionary tale against over-confidence arising from a few years of above-average rainfall," SARDI's Dr Peter Hayman said. Dr Hayman and CSIRO's Dr Mark Howden recently surveyed 270 primary producers, rural advisers, land valuers and agricultural students on three issues likely to affect a future delineation: technology improvement and no climate change; climate change and no technology improvement; and, climate change and technology improvement. Armed with a graph of wheat yields and climate projections developed in 2006, participants were asked how vulnerable they thought they would be and how far they thought Goyders' Line would shift with an intensification of climate change. Dr Hayman said the majority of farmers surveyed accepted that climate change is real.

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They also tended to be optimistic about technology and pessimistic about the impact of climate change. "The overall consensus was that by 2030 technological improvement and climate change stress would more or less cancel each other out, but by 2070 climate change would override any technology improvement," Dr Hayman says. SOURCE: CSIRO and *FarmOnline*.

### **One-off water move could save Vic orchards**

A portion of water losses in the Goulburn Murray system saved through a 25pc shortened irrigation period could save Sunraysia's wine and citrus industries this season. If the water was made available for permanent plantings, Victoria would benefit by \$830 million compared to a benefit of \$150m if the water stayed where it is designated. Murray Valley Citrus Board chief executive, John Tesoriero, says consultants have determined that 25pc of Goulburn "losses" transferred to a 197-gigalitre pool for permanent plantings would have enormous benefit. And representations have already been made to the Victorian Government on the idea. Mr Tesoriero was one of a delegation who met with Victorian Agriculture Minister Joe Helper in Mildura on Friday. He told Mr Helper water losses in the Goulburn Murray Water system were about 780GL a year. "We're saying that as a one-off measure, the State Government could offer GMW customers the opportunity to take compensation for a shortened irrigation season and re-allocate the saved supply system losses to a dedicated pool sufficient for a 50pc allocation to permanent plantings," Mr Tesoriero said. SOURCE: *Sunraysia Daily*, a Rural Press publication.

### **Dam cover saves valuable water for Qld avocados**

As the temperature rises, so do evaporation rates, prompting Gatton avocado producer Robyn Lubach to invest in an exciting polyethylene cover that floats on top of her 80ML capacity dam. The obvious solution to the Australia-wide issue of how to limit water losses across thousands of dams across the country has been up-and-running at RedBank Plantations for some 18 months. Part of its day-to-day operation sees property manager, Graham Carswell, checking to see whether it's working to its design brief. "We need all the water we can get," Mr Carswell said. Keeping the district's "huge" evaporation rates to a minimum is a floating dam cover measuring some 75mx62m. Installed in only a few days, it was specifically designed not to cover the dam's entire surface area when full. The reasoning here is that the dam is only likely to be full in winter when the evaporation is much less. Key design points include floats at each corner to help stabilize the covering, plus weighted skirts hanging beneath its perimeter, also to prevent it being affected by gusts of wind. Wire hawsers located around the polyethylene cover are wound out when levels fall and wound in when water flows into the dam, thereby keeping the structure as secure as possible. Evaporation levels are believed to have been reduced by up to 95pc, depending on weather conditions. "Because we are continually pumping water in and out, we've never been able to pin point the exact figure here," Mr Carswell said. "But the covers have been tested at USQ to achieve 90pc savings, and is definitely saving us water over the course of a year." SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*, weekly rural newspaper, posting news updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

### **Drought leads to bush suicides**

Prolonged drought has been blamed for the suicide deaths of 106 Victorian farmers in the past seven years. And Beyondblue deputy chief executive, Nicole Highet, said the real number of suicides among farmers could be dramatically higher because only cases clearly identified as suicides were included in the figures, which were issued to the media by the Victorian coroner. Most of the suicides were among middle-aged male farmers, but three women also killed themselves. Guns were used in almost half the deaths. Dr Highet said many single-vehicle accidents in rural areas were often suicides. "A number of deaths are not identified as suicides but seen as accidents, so it's likely to be under-reported," she said. "We are seeing the impact drought is having on people's mental health and livelihood." Salvation Army drought support co-ordinator, Lyn Cochrane, said farming families were suffering. "We are seeing increased levels of domestic violence," Major Cochrane said. "History tells us this is what can happen: people stick through thick and thin, but reach a breaking point." SOURCE: AAP

### **SA irrigators save \$400,000 in fees**

Irrigators in South Australia's Murraylands will not pay any water transfer fees to 'top up' their annual water licence until the end of June 2008. The State Government announced on Friday nearly \$400,000 in fees would be waived for South Australian irrigators, which are incurred when water is traded. South Australian Murray Irrigators president Ian Zadow said removing the fee would relieve a little pressure off farmers. Across the State there are 3800 irrigators that could apply for a 'top up'. "While not all (irrigators) will do so, many are likely to apply more than once during 2007 to 2008, given that the volume of water available within South Australia and interstate is severely limited," Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald said. Already, this water year, which began on July 1, the amount of transfer applications has increased four-fold compared with the same period before the drought. Mrs Maywald said this increase means it will take longer for the Department of Water Land and Biodiversity (DWLBC) to process the applications. "Irrigators are reminded the transfer process through the DWLBC only begins once an application has been lodged with the department, not when a trade is lodged with a broker," she said. Those who have already paid a transfer fee this water year will have their money refunded. About \$310,000 in relief was provided to irrigators, when transfer fees were first waived last water year. SOURCE: *Murray Valley Standard*,

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### **Crunching numbers on dairy cows**

Dairy farmers across Australia are scrutinising the financial outlook for their farm businesses as they develop strategies to deal with the ongoing drought. Deciding whether to keep or cull milkers as they face the daunting prospect of rising grain and fodder prices is proving one of the biggest challenges ever seen in the industry. Making decisions even harder is the optimistic outlook for the industry with record farm gate prices, increasing worldwide demand for dairy products and new technology opportunities allowing more efficient production. SOURCE: Extract from full story to appear in *The Land*, NSW, October 11 issue.

### **Adelaide Advertiser**

### **Backlash as Garrett supports pulp mill**

Labor's environment spokesman Peter Garrett is facing a potential backlash for supporting the Tasmanian pulp mill after years of campaigning for the environment. Mr Garrett, who before joining the ALP in 2004 to become a federal MP, was one of the country's most prominent and uncompromising environmental campaigners, has raised the ire of green activists for backing the mill. The issue has raised speculation Mr Garrett could be moved to another portfolio if Labor wins the election after a series of high profile backflips that have damaged his previous image as a politician of conviction. In recent months he has been forced to reverse his public positions on several issues including opposition to U.S bases, uranium mining, and now the pulp mill. His opposite number, federal Environment Minister, Malcolm Turnbull last week gave the project the go ahead but with strict conditions as to the levels of toxic effluent able to be pumped into Bass Strait. With the majority of Tasmanian voters likely to line up behind the \$2 billion mill because of the jobs involved, Mr Garrett immediately agreed with the Turnbull decision. Opponents of the mill are currently planning their response, which could include legal action and a political campaign against Mr Turnbull in his marginal Sydney seat of Wentworth. However there are signs some of the anti-mill anger is also being directed towards Mr Garrett with members of the public arguing the former Midnight Oil frontman and head of the Australian Conservation Foundation has placed the ALP's electoral interests in Tasmania ahead of his long-stated environmental principles. Speakers at anti-mill rallies have targetted Mr Garrett, and letters pages in the nation's newspapers have also revealed anger with one writer calling for his money back for "11 Midnight Oil albums bought over the past 20 years". "Garrett actually had me convinced he stood for something and his song lyrics were genuine," one said. As the battle for votes in the Apple Isle continued yesterday, Prime Minister John Howard promised another \$35 million for public hospitals.

### **Power at the expense of the passion**

It can be considered curious that Labor has managed to establish credentials as the most environmentally conscious major political party. One of the biggest environmental issues in recent years has been the debate over the Gunns pulp mill in Tasmania's Tamar Valley. Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull last week approved the mill, with 48 strict conditions, under the Environment Protection Act. Labor supported the decision, in what effectively was a tactic to meekly criticise the process but ultimately back the project. The politics of this debate are illustrative of the election-year struggle between the major parties. Opponents of the mill are looking for Labor to put forward a strong counter-argument to the project. Instead, Labor environment spokesman Peter Garrett has argued the process, promising to "look at" amending the EPA Act to "fix up some of the deficiencies that we think it has". "The Howard Government has actually contained the Environment Protection Act in such a way to leave the minister with a range of issues that he can consider but other issues that actually don't come into its verdict," he said on the weekend. This argument exposes Mr Garrett to charges of hypocrisy but it also is a recognition that Labor is playing to win. In its effort to avoid being "wedged" by Prime Minister John Howard, Labor is avoiding staking out controversial positions on numerous key issues. Rather, it is keeping open the option of making changes should it win office. With this in mind, it is interesting to study the responses of some people who admired the lyrics of Midnight Oil, the band for which Mr Garrett was the frontman. These fans, who admired Mr Garrett for



raising issues in his music without fear or favour, now are wondering whether he has been muted by the party political system. In a variation of Midnight Oil's lyrics, perhaps Labor and Mr Garrett now believe it is better to run from an issue than to live on your knees.

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### The Australian

#### Gore's a convenient fraud

A WORD of advice to the many teachers who have been scaring our children with screenings of Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*. Be aware that a judge this month instructed British teachers showing the film to tell their pupils that Gore makes at least 11 false or unsupported claims. I hate to think it is necessary to remind our own teachers to do likewise, but I fear the worst. Every school in the country has now been offered free DVDs of *An Inconvenient Truth*, by Paramount and Jackgreen International, which makes money from the global warming scare. Even the Environment Protection Authority is urging schools to show it. And, indeed, with our pop stars lip-synching green platitudes and polls showing Australians are more panicked by global warming than people of almost any other country, it seems all this propaganda is working brilliantly already.

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In Britain, though, teachers are at least required to be more careful before force-feeding such hype to children. The Education Act bans the teaching of partisan political views and demands politics be taught in a balanced way, which would be a novel approach in some of our own schools. So, when Stewart Dimmock, a truck driver and school governor from Kent, heard that Britain's Labour Government was sending copies of Gore's film to more than 3800 schools he sued. "I wish my children to have the best education possible, free from bias and political spin, and Mr Gore's film falls far short of the standard required," said the father of two. What followed was three days of argument in the English High Court on just how truthful Gore's Academy Award-winning film really was. Justice Michael Burton is yet to give his final ruling, but has already said the film promotes "partisan political views" and schools must warn students of that. Worse for Gore's reputation, Burton also said the Government had to rewrite the guidance notes for teachers that accompany the film to point out that *An Inconvenient Truth* contained 11 serious untruths or unsubstantiated claims. Only then could it be shown in class. Here are those 11 corrections to Gore's film - and many will be familiar to readers of this column:

- 1 Gore presents Mt Kilimanjaro's melting snows as proof of global warming. In fact, the snows are vanishing thanks to local factors, including deforestation.
- 2 Gore suggests Antarctica's ice cover is melting. Most studies say it is increasing or stable.
- 3 Gore shows scary graphics of cities drowning in seas that rise 7m, causing millions of refugees. But the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says the seas will rise at worst by 59cm this century.
- 4 Gore uses images of Hurricane Katrina and suggests it was caused by global warming. The Government's expert in this case admitted such one-off events can't be blamed on warming.
- 5 Gore suggests ice-core evidence shows rising CO2 caused temperature rises, which ended the past seven ice ages. In fact, the CO2 rises followed temperature rises by 800 to 2000 years.
- 6 Gore claims global warming could stop the Gulf Stream, causing an ice age in Europe. Recent studies deny it.
- 7 Gore blames global warming for species losses and coral reef bleaching. The Government couldn't show evidence to back this claim.
- 8 Gore claims a study showed polar bears had drowned because of vanishing ice. The study actually said just four polar bears drowned, and only because of a bad storm.
- 9 Gore suggests Greenland's ice could melt, causing a dangerous rise in sea levels. In fact, Greenland's ice won't melt for thousands of years.
- 10 Gore shows the drying up of Lake Chad and claims this was caused by global warming. The Government's expert agreed this was not the case.
- 11 Gore claims rising seas have forced people to flee Pacific islands to New Zealand. There is no record of any such warming-caused evacuation.

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I don't know why the court stopped at just 11. Hyperbole overload? But this must be enough to make rational viewers sceptical of all Gore's case. The British Government has now rewritten its guidance to teachers to take in those 11 objections, while trying very hard not to make Gore's film seem fraudulent. To correct that last false claim, for instance, of global warming causing islanders to evacuate their homes, the guide now includes this weasel disclaimer: "It is not clear that there is any evidence of evacuations in the Pacific due to human-induced climate." What: not clear? But that's not the only sign that the educationists who push Gore's film on to students are as devoted to his apocalyptic faith as are our own class of teacher-preachers. Note this line from the guide, urging children to question even their parents' lack of faith: "Pupils may ask, what were my parents and grandparents doing during this time? Did they know that this was happening?" But here's the real questions those students will be asking once they are old enough to think for themselves, and to see Gore's promised Armageddon never came. What were my teachers doing, pushing on me an end-of-my-world film that clearly didn't tell the truth? What

madness took hold even of our scientists, that the CSIRO could claim of this deceitful film, "its scientific basis is very sound"? Children, you are being told untruths to scare you. And shame on those who are party to this deceit.

### **Fast cuts can't halt climate change**

Significant climate change may be inevitable even if the world agrees to cut emissions of greenhouse gases immediately. The worrisome prediction comes from the final report of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, to be released next month at its meeting in Valencia, Spain. Figures from the draft final synthesis report, obtained by The Australian, show global cuts of 50-85 per cent are needed by mid-century to contain global temperatures within 2C of pre-industrial levels. However, Monash University climate scientist and Melbourne-based consultant Graeme Pearman said continuing change could not be avoided as concentrations of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane were rising, pushing up the global temperature and triggering changes in the world's climate system. As detailed in IPCC working group reports in April and May and synthesised in the final report, key changes that may be unstoppable include sea-level rise and acidification of the oceans, as well as increased frequency and intensity of hurricanes and droughts. "We are at a tipping point," Dr Pearman said. Bureau of Meteorology climate scientist Geoff Love said: "The 2C target is essentially a European target.

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They say any warming more than 2C causes dangerous climate change. I think they're right." The draft final report says atmospheric CO2 concentrations have increased by about 100 parts per million since pre-industrial times, reaching 379 ppm in 2005. When all greenhouse gases are combined into so-called greenhouse gas equivalents, atmospheric levels are 455ppm. Speaking on ABC's Lateline program on Monday, Macquarie University environmental scientist Tim Flannery suggested that that heralded "dangerous" climate change. "And that's the sort of climate change that's very large scale and rapid and irreversible," he said. Dr Flannery said an aggressive program to pull "gigatonnes of carbon out of the atmosphere" would be needed within the next 20 years. The draft report concludes that in order to stabilise CO2 levels at 450ppm, emissions must be cut from roughly 2460 gigatonnes to about 1800 gigatonnes of CO2 "over the 21st century". Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull said IPCC figures highlighted the need for urgent action on forests. He claimed the Government's \$200 million Global Initiative on Forests, as well as the APEC meeting's Sydney declaration and meetings in New York and Washington had succeeded in putting forestry at the top of the climate change agenda. He said if the world embraced a global aim of a 50 per cent cut in emissions by 2050, even with the unlikely scenario of the developed world cutting all its emissions, the developing world would have to cut its by 46 per cent. Labor environment spokesman Peter Garrett said: "Labor is committed to a long-term target based on science, our position remains." Labor has commissioned economist Ross Garnaut to assess ways of tackling greenhouse gas reduction targets. *Additional reporting: Sid Marris, Siobhain Ryan*

### **Turnbull open to new climate treaty**

Australia remains open to signing the right kind of international climate change agreement after 2012, Malcolm Turnbull says. The federal environment minister says the Kyoto Protocol – which Australia has signed but not ratified or put into domestic law – was always based on the false premise that developing countries could be excluded from commitments reducing emissions. But Mr Turnbull says there is a change in attitude, marked by recent international meetings New York and Washington as well as the APEC forum's Sydney Declaration. "The message is starting to get through to everybody that you can't achieve an environmentally effective strategy which is based on the developing world making cuts," he said. "This is the false premise underlying the first commitment period of Kyoto." Mr Turnbull said the first commitment period of Kyoto runs out in 2012, meaning there would be no international agreement regarding emission reductions after that date. "The focus therefore is on the new agreement, variously called "post Kyoto" or "new Kyoto" or more likely named after whichever city it eventually gets signed in," he says. "Australia is committed to a new, environmentally effective global agreement and if it is global and effective and involves all the major emitters, we would expect to sign it. "Whether this new agreement is done by amending the Kyoto protocol or by entering into a new protocol with another name remains to be seen - but that is a question of process only. " The United Nations will host a meeting in Bali in December to discuss the post 2012 arrangements. In the lead-up environmentalists have been stressing that the effects of global warming are more pronounced than previously thought and require more urgent action. Scientist and Australian of the Year, Tim Flannery, says the raw data he has seen for the next UN international panel on climate change report, suggest that the globe has already passed one of the critical thresholds – greenhouse gas concentrations of 450 parts per million. Dr Flannery says an aggressive program designed to pull "gigatonnes of carbon out of the atmosphere" will be needed within the next 20 years. Mr Turnbull said he agreed with Dr Flannery on the need for urgent action on forests and together with Australia's \$200 million Global Initiative on Forests was seeing greater interest around the world in halting deforestation. Mr Turnbull if the world embraced a global aim of a 50 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050, even with the unlikely scenario of the developed world cutting all its emissions the developing world would have to cut its by 46 per cent. Australia has shifted its previous opposition to targets with the decision to adopt a carbon trading system from 2011. The targets required, both short term and long term will be calculated by Treasury and presented to the Howard Government next year if it is re-elected. Labor has set an aspirational

target of a 60 per cent reduction of emissions by 2050 and has asked academic Ross Garnaut to undertake more detailed research and also report next year. The Coalition says Labor is jumping the gun by setting the target without first properly determining the economic and climate effects of that target.

### **FarmOnLine**

#### **Greenhouse gas levels 'dangerously high'**

Australia's greenhouse gas emissions have already exceeded worst-case scenario projections, a leading scientist says. Acclaimed author and scientist Tim Flannery said results of an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) synthesis report, due for release next month, show that since 2005 Australia has already been producing the amount of greenhouse gases expected a decade away. "What (the report) says is we already stand a risk of unacceptable climate change and that the need for action is ever more urgent," Professor Flannery told ABC television. "We thought we would be at that threshold within about a decade ... but the new data indicates that in about mid-2005 we crossed that threshold. "As of mid-2005 there was about 455 parts per million of what's called carbon dioxide equivalent, and that's a figure that's gathered by taking the potential of all 30 greenhouse gases and converting them into carbon dioxide potential."

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Prof Flannery said carbon dioxide levels were the most worrying, accounting for about 75 per cent of the greenhouse gases, but others - such as nitrous oxide, methane and HFCs (hydro fluorocarbons) - were also concerning. "What we've all been hoping is that we can avoid dangerous climate change and that's the sort of climate change that's very large scale and rapid and irreversible," Prof Flannery said.

"We haven't done the homework right in terms of converting the potential of those greenhouse gases in the past into the CO2 equivalent ... but also we have really seen an unexpected acceleration in the rate of accumulation of CO2 itself and that's been beyond the limits of projection ... beyond the worst-case scenario." Prof Flannery said the report should drive political debate on climate change and further highlight environmental scientific research. "We are already at great risk of dangerous climate change - that's what the new figures say," Prof Flannery said. "It's not next year, or next decade; it's now." SOURCE: AAP

### **Adelaide.now.com**

#### **Drought may last six years**

**They would be better off saying 'for years.'**

Australia may have to endure a drought stretching to at least 2014, Greens senator Rachel Siewert says. Senator Siewert said that even without factoring in the impact of climate change, historical data suggested Australia could face another six years of low rainfall, a terrifying prospect for the Murray-Darling Basin. "Factoring in climate change makes this scenario potentially even bleaker," she said. "We cannot take these kinds of risk with our water security." Senator Siewert said Australia had mismanaged the Murray-Darling Basin over many years, and the country needed a government prepared to take significant action. "We have been borrowing from the future," she said. "Our failure to deal with over-allocation and manage the system based on the risks of historic drought means that we have sacrificed the environment and agriculture, and still face an uncertain future." Senator Siewert said that at present there were no plans in place to deal with the crisis. "It's obvious that we need dramatic change to the way that we manage the system, and we need it now," she said. "So, the Greens are calling on both the major parties to commit to dealing with this water crisis, and to start addressing it now. "The answers are not simple, they are very complex and will require a range of mechanisms." While she was not blaming agriculture for the Murray's issues, Senator Siewert said that as a start further plantings along the river should be stopped until such time as Australia emerged from the drought, had an effective management system in place and had restored the Murray's environmental flows. "I don't think anybody can claim, at this current time, that we have system that will manage the Murray-Darling Basin on a sustainable basis," Senator Siewert said. "There are no plans in place that will ensure the future of the Murray, at this stage. "We need to get serious about the fact that we are in a changing environment."

### **News.com.au**

#### **Want to fight climate change? Eat more kangaroo**

Eating kangaroo meat instead of beef will help lower Australia's greenhouse emissions by reducing the numbers of methane-belching cows, a study says. The University of New South Wales research suggests a 20 per cent cut in beef production from 1990 levels, the equivalent of 15 million tonnes of methane. "Beef production is chosen in this measure because it is responsible for the biggest share of livestock-related methane emissions," says the report, Paths to a Low Carbon Future. "This measure could be accomplished by shifting to kangaroo meat and/or lower-meat diets." Author Mark Diesendorf, of the university's sustainability centre, admits achieving such a cut in beef production would be politically challenging. The recommendation comes under a scenario of measures to reduce the nation's emissions by 30 per cent by 2020. Recommendations also include removing subsidies on electricity for aluminium smelting and cutting emissions released when extracting, processing and transporting fossil fuels. Others are improving energy efficiency, using renewable energy sources and halting land clearing and deforestation. The report finds a 33 per cent emissions cut is achievable within 13 years through the use of proven

technologies. Dr Diesendorf said making such a cut was critical in avoiding a dangerous increase in average global temperatures of more than two degrees Celsius. "This is possible, but only with a wide range of concerted actions in the energy, industry and land-use sectors, of which improving energy efficiency is the key," he said. Greenpeace commissioned the report. "This short-term target is essential if Australia is to play its part in setting the planet on a path to prevent dangerous climate change," Greenpeace energy campaigner Mark Wakeham said.

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### **FarmOnline**

#### **McGauran visits WA on drought mission**

WA's drought affected northern wheatbelt farmers have told Federal Agriculture Minister, Peter McGauran, they will do whatever it takes to stay on the land, but they need the Government's help to get through their toughest season on record. Mr McGauran visited the region last week - including the Morawa and Perenjori shires - as part of a tour organised by WAFarmers to see the severity of the gruelling drought experienced by many farmers. Mr McGauran announced the Federal Government's decision to accept WA's application to declare Exceptional Circumstances (EC) for the area.

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The lack of rain comes on the back of several dry years, including a dismal 420,000t of grain delivered to CBH bins in the Geraldton zone last season. According to CBH, the zone will again experience one of its worst seasons on record, with estimated grain Receipt of about 280,000t, a fraction of 2mt average Receipt. After touring Morawa's dry paddocks and speaking with local farmers, including members of the new Morawa Dry Season's Focus Group, Mr McGauran spoke at a packed Morawa Town Hall. More than 130 local farmers and community members gathered, including representatives from the district's seven shires. A large contingent of WA Liberal and National party politicians were also present, including Opposition agriculture spokesman Gary Snook, Nationals WA leader Brendon Grylls and WA Liberal Senator Judith Adams. Mr McGauran said the EC funding would benefit an estimated 3,000 growers and provide an additional \$55m of assistance. But long-term solutions remain foremost on the minds of the local community. SOURCE: *Farm Weekly*, WA, October 11.

#### **Not just the drought lifting retail food prices**

The global commodity price climb is putting more pressure on food prices in Australia, than is the impact of drought, according to NFF vice president, Charles Burke. Mr Burke said recent reports connecting the rise in food at the supermarket to the current drought "over-simplified" how domestic food prices are set. "At face value it looks a simple equation, but the relationship between higher food prices and the current drought is not cut and dry," Mr Burke said. "While Australia's drought is a factor, the price of agricultural commodities on the world stage is more critical to the ultimate price mix." He was commenting on the Westpac-NFF Commodity Index released today. This reports the growing strength of world agricultural commodity prices of a further 6.0pc during September. Prices are now a staggering 30pc higher than they were 12 months ago, and this is having a greater impact on Australia's supermarket prices. "With a population of just 21 million people, Australian farmers rely heavily on international buyers for our high quality food products," he said. "In fact, while most of the food Australians consume on a day-to-day basis is grown and produced here at home, this accounts for only 30pc of the total volume of Australian agricultural production. "Therefore, any analysis of domestic food prices must include an understanding of ever-changing world demand and supply. Mr Burke said, a combination of trends push up global commodity prices.

These include:

- The increasing use of grain and sugar for biofuel production
- Rising global incomes and increased food demand flowing from the skyrocketing Asian economy, plus
- Australia's drought.

Senior Westpac Economist Justin Smirk noted too, "Global markets are the leading contributor to setting local supermarket prices. "Yes, drought in Australia can still have a real impact, with each commodity having a different effect. "Any analysis of domestic prices, however, must observe global supplies. "For example, world grain stocks have diminished to their lowest levels in over 30 years – not just in Australia." Mr Smirk said Australian exports of commodities such as beef, grain and skim milk powder represent 19pc, 15pc and 17pc of total world trade, respectively. "In each case, drought in Australia has an impact on world supply and therefore, world prices. "However, it is only one factor," Mr Smirk said.

Compared with August 2007 levels, September global prices have increased by:

- Barley 13.4pc
- Canola 5.6pc
- Wheat 16.7pc
- Wool 1.6pc
- Beef 2.4pc
- Cotton 2.4pc and
- Dairy 1.1pc.

Only Sugar, down 2.2pc, experienced a decrease in price from previous month levels. The overall weighted index increased by 6.0pc over September, taking it to 30.6pc above the same period last year. SOURCE: NFF

### **Cotton Australia calls for water money to flow**

Irrigators want the money earmarked for on-farm infrastructure upgrades in the Government's \$10 billion water plan to start flowing now, so work can start while dams, channels and pipes are dry and not being used. The government allocated a specific \$1.6 billion to improve on-farm irrigation technology and metering as part of the national plan for water security, announced in January this year. The gains from those efficiency improvements will be shared 50:50 between irrigators for agriculture and the Government for environmental flows in the Murray-Darling system. Although the plan has been legislated, State Governments are still to sign the intergovernmental agreement pivotal too much of the funding for off-farm infrastructure improvements being granted. But the on-farm funding is not dependent on the signatures of the State premiers. It's believed there are some moves afoot to get the program rolling.

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However, Assistant Federal Minister for Water Resources, John Cobb, would not comment on when the funding for on-farm works might start, and whether plans might change to take into consideration the convenience of upgrades during the drought. This year's budget papers reveal only \$52 million, of the \$5.9 billion earmarked for modernising irrigation systems, has been budgeted for the 2007-2008 financial year. The major part of funding for irrigation improvements budgeted, is post-2011. Cotton Australia chief executive officer, Adam Kay, said now was the best time to improve storages and channels and learn about new irrigation techniques. With cotton the predominant crop grown along the Darling, or northern stretch of the Murray-Darling basin, Mr Kay has made a number of trips to Canberra to discuss this option with the Department of Environment and Water Resources and respective ministers. "One of the things we're really pushing to start soon is the initial capacity building of some pilot work to demonstrate how to do efficiency evaluations on farm," Mr Kay said. "We need to start showing farmers where potential inefficiencies are and where they should be targeting government funding on their own farms." SOURCE: *Australian Cotton Outlook*, updated daily on *FarmOnline*, Rural Press Limited.

### **Adelaide Advertiser**

#### **Lib stance on emissions 'weakening'**

Federal Labor has accused the Government of preparing to perform a backflip on mandatory emissions targets ahead of the election. Opposition environment spokesman Peter Garrett said there were signs the Government's "steadfast" opposition to mandatory targets was weakening. Newspaper reports yesterday carried comments from Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull suggesting Australia's decision to implement an emissions trading scheme by 2011 meant the country would be disadvantaged compared to other countries that already have such schemes. He said this meant it might be in Australia's interests to press for a post-Kyoto agreement which included binding targets. Mr Garrett's comments were backed up by Irwin Jackson from the Climate Institute. "Internationally, that is a seismic shift if Australia is talking about internationally binding targets," he said. "That would leave the U.S. isolated in its campaign against a global emissions framework."

#### **Sickness new threat for farmers**

Farmers are facing a double whammy of drought and life threatening illness. In a survey conducted by the Flinders Medical Centre it found nearly three quarters of the people in the state's South-East are dangerously overweight, obese, or have other life-threatening health problems and about 30 per cent of them had metabolic syndrome.

### **River News**

#### **State stands accused - Andrew accuses State Government of water theft**

Citrus Growers of South Australia (CGSA) chairman Kent Andrew said last week that the State Government is stealing water from River Murray irrigators, and so contributing to the impending death of permanent horticultural plantings in the Riverland. "The State Government is holding a totally unrealistic 'strategic reserve' of 200 GL taken from irrigators for urban and industrial use for the 2008/09 year. Even if Adelaide suffered a dry winter next year with only about 50 MGL flowing into its reservoirs and with a standard 90 GL from the Murray, SA reservoirs would still be more than 55 per cent full at the end of 2008/09, this would be better than many other Australian capital cities. "One hundred and fifty gigalitres would represent nearly 30 per cent of our irrigation allocation," he said. "With SA irrigators still only able to use 16 per cent of their allocations, a 'fair share' of this reserve to irrigators would save the death of many permanent plantings and the resultant devastation to river communities. "If the State Government and SA Water genuinely believe they need such a reserve, then they should be either in the water market buying or leasing it (just like irrigators have to do), or compensating irrigators for taking it from them." Mr. Andrew challenged the State Government to formally intervene in the water market, because by holding this 'strategic reserve', it was contributing to artificially raising the price of leased water. He went on to say that there is complete market failure in the current water leasing market evidenced by:

1) The current market price of over \$1,000 per MGL (more than 20 times it was three years ago) has no

commercial reality in relation to returns from crops.

2) The market is arguably being controlled by the significant leasing by very large corporates, e.g. Macquarie Bank and now Woolworths – family farms just cannot compete.

3) It is also alleged by irrigators attempting to lease water that some water brokers (who are largely unregulated) are now speculating and trading in the market themselves. In such an unreal and arguably corrupt market, governments have a responsibility to intervene in the market to ensure equity and integrity for all water users. Failure to do so illustrates they are abandoning their irrigator commitments. If the price of usable lease water continues to be manipulated, many of the state's irrigators will simply not survive. Mr. Andrew said that Citrus Growers of SA would continue to work with SAMI and other major commodity groups, particularly with representations to the Federal Government, to ensure a needed Rural Industries Assistance package would deliver sustainable benefits. However, to avoid immediate disaster, irrigators needed more water immediately and the State Government has an excess reserve available that could be used. It must understand that by delaying further decisions to provide additional water is forcing irrigators to hasten the death of plantings by not irrigating them, just to ensure a minimal number can survive.

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On Wednesday last week the NSW Government announced available water for high security users in the Murrumbidgee Valley would be increased from 60 to 75 per cent- a far cry from SA's paltry 16 per cent. For far too long this State Government has put 'its head in the sand' and made no decisions to ensure that all South Australia's water needs are met.

"Citrus Growers SA calls on Premier Rann and Minister Maywald to be responsible and equitable by intervening in the water market and fairly sharing the reserve to minimise disastrous long term damage to SA's irrigation communities," Mr. Andrew said.

### **Global warming in our backyard - take action**

#### **By year 12 Swan Reach Student Danielle Brown**

Global warming is a problem that is affecting everyone in our local area. The drought is the major issue of the Riverland. The water level is getting lower and water restrictions are getting tougher. Farmers are barely able to water their crops anymore and people can't even water their gardens anymore due to new water restrictions. Whether it is a minor or major impact for you it is still a problem we are facing. Due to the major impact global warming is having on our planet, our class's topic for SOSE (Society and Environment) was global warming. We started out by watching the documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" by Al Gore. It really opened our eyes to how serious the problem is and how much worse it is going to get if we don't act now. We then had a guest speaker, Peter Smith come into our class Peter has had Al Gore training and he came to speak about global warming and its effects on the local area. He explained the effects of climate change on our local community and what we can do to help. We then did a task where we evaluated the issue using an issues compass. The class said what effects global warming had on the natural world, economically, socially and who is and isn't in power. We then presented our compasses to the class as an oral presentation. The next task was to research and collect the information we already know and present it as an essay, poster or oral presentation. The information included how the issue is being portrayed and what interest groups are involved in projects to fight global warming. Now that we have done these tasks we are now taking action against global warming in our community. People have either formed small groups or worked by themselves to plan an action proposal against climate change. Some of the ideas that have come out of the group have been really original and creative like writing a song promoting action, posters, websites, recycling paper, and lots of other different ideas. Everyone is putting in a lot of effort and really trying to do all they can to make a difference. Everyone can get involved in doing something to help. Whether you take shorter showers, turns off lights, spread the word about the seriousness of the issue, it all helps our globe and our fight against global climate change. Whether the change is big or small, any change can always make a difference.

#### **The Australian**

#### **Nine untruths in Gore film: judge**

Al Gore's award-winning climate change documentary was littered with nine inconvenient untruths, a judge ruled today. An Inconvenient Truth won plaudits from the environmental lobby and an Oscar from the film industry but was found wanting when it was scrutinised in the High Court in London. Mr Justice Burton identified nine significant errors within the former Democratic presidential candidate's documentary as he assessed whether it should be shown to schoolchildren. He agreed that Mr Gore's film was "broadly accurate" in its presentation of the causes and likely effects of climate change but said that some of the claims were wrong and had arisen in "the context of alarmism and exaggeration". In what is a rare judicial ruling on what children can see in the classroom, Mr Justice Burton was at pains to point out that the "apocalyptic vision" presented in the film was politically partisan and not an impartial analysis of the science of climate change. "It is plainly, as witnessed by the fact that it received an Oscar this year for best documentary film, a powerful, dramatically presented and highly professionally produced film," he said in his ruling. "It is built around the charismatic presence of the ex-Vice-President, Al Gore,

whose crusade it now is to persuade the world of the dangers of climate change caused by global warming. "It is now common ground that it is not simply a science film - although it is clear that it is based substantially on scientific research and opinion - but that it is a political film." The analysis by the judge will have a bearing on whether the Government can continue with its plan to have the film shown in every secondary school. He agreed it could be shown but on the condition that it was accompanied by new guidance notes for teachers to balance Mr Gore's "one-sided" views. The British Government's decision to show the film in secondary schools had come under attack from Stewart Dimmock, a school governor in Kent and a member of political group the New Party, who accused the Government of brainwashing children. The first mistake made by Mr Gore, said Mr Justice Burton in his written judgment, was in talking about the potential devastation wrought by a rise in sea levels caused by the melting of ice caps. The claim that sea levels could rise by 20ft "in the near future" was dismissed as "distinctly alarmist". Such a rise would take place "only after, and over, millennia". Mr Justice Burton added: "The armageddon scenario he predicts, insofar as it suggests that sea level rises of seven metres might occur in the immediate future, is not in line with the scientific consensus." A claim that atolls in the Pacific had already been evacuated was supported by "no evidence", while to suggest that two graphs showing carbon dioxide levels and temperatures over the last 650,000 years were an "exact fit" overstated the case.

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Mr Gore's suggestion that the Gulf Stream, that warms up the Atlantic ocean, would shut down was contradicted by the International Panel on Climate Change's assessment that it was "very unlikely" to happen. The drying of Lake Chad, the loss of Mount Kilimanjaro's snows and Hurricane Katrina were all blamed by Mr Gore on climate change but the judge said the scientific community had been unable to find evidence to prove there was a direct link. The drying of Lake Chad, the judge said, was "far more likely to result from other factors, such as population increase and over-grazing, and regional climate variability". The melting of snow on Mt Kilimanjaro was "mainly attributable to human-induced climate change". The judge also said there was no proof to support a claim that polar bears were drowning while searching for icy habitats melted by global warming. The only drowned polar bears the court was aware of were four that died following a storm. Similarly, the judge took issue with the former Vice-President of the United States for attributing coral bleaching to climate change. Separating the direct impacts of climate change and other factors was difficult, the judgment concluded. Despite finding nine significant errors the judge said many of the claims made by the film were fully backed up by the weight of science. He identified "four main scientific hypotheses, each of which is very well supported by research published in respected, peer-reviewed journals and accords with the latest conclusions of the IPCC". In particular, he agreed with the main thrust of Mr Gore's arguments: "That climate change is mainly attributable to man-made emissions of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide ('greenhouse gases')." The other three main points accepted by the judge were that global temperatures are rising and are likely to continue to rise, that climate change will cause serious damage if left unchecked, and that it is entirely possible for governments and individuals to reduce its impacts. The Times

#### **Australia third-worst on environment**

Australia's environmental performance is the third-worst among 21 of the world's rich nations, an independent report has found. The dismal ranking came as the head of the United Nations think tank on climate change said Australian government moves towards the Kyoto Protocol had the rest of the world poised with welcome home gestures. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change executive secretary Yvo de Boer said it was not possible to amend Kyoto. But if Australia were to ratify the agreement as it was, the international community would be "putting the yellow ribbons in the tree". "Clearly, it's a disappointment that Australia decided it could not ratify the Kyoto Protocol and I respect that position," Mr de Boer said. "Having said that, it makes it all the more important to listen very carefully to what Australia feels would be a post-2012 agreement that really makes sense, whatever party wins the elections." Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull has said the Government would sign an updated version of Kyoto, which expires in 2012, if an effective international agreement is reached. The Government signed Kyoto but then joined the US in refusing to ratify it, saying it placed burdens on Australia not faced by its developing-world competitors. Critics have branded Mr Turnbull's comments as pre-election posturing to win back support from voters leaning toward Labor, which vows to ratify the greenhouse blueprint. Meanwhile, the US ranked lowest on environmental policy, with Spain one place higher and Australia and Canada tied at third-last in the 2007 Commitment to Development Index launched in London today. CDI author David Roodman said Australia's poor environmental performance was largely due to global warming issues. "Australia has the highest emissions of greenhouse gas per person," Mr Roodman said. "Australia, like the US, has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol, which is the international community's most serious commitment to climate change. "That's where it falls down." Mr Roodman said he would welcome any decision by Australia to ratify Kyoto. "We would reward it in the index," he said. "Australia right now is losing points because it has not ratified Kyoto." The CDI, is produced annually by the Centre for Global Development, an independent Washington research and policy organisation. It ranks 21 high income industrialised countries on how well their policies and actions support poor countries' efforts to build prosperity, good government and security. The Netherlands topped the overall index on the strength of its aid-giving, falling greenhouse gas emissions and support for investment in developing countries. Other big

aid donors Denmark, Sweden and Norway followed, with Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Finland tied for fifth and Japan last. The report said Australia's score was driven by its leading role in peacekeeping efforts, low trade barriers against exports from developing countries and relatively open migration policies. On the negative side, Australia gives only a small share of its income in foreign aid. AAP

### **Beazley backs Tasmanian pulp mill**

Former federal opposition leader and deputy prime minister Kim Beazley has waded into Tasmania's pulp mill debate, saying the \$1.7 billion project "would be a boon for the state". Speaking in Hobart today, Mr Beazley acknowledged the Gunns Ltd mill had the potential to become a political powderkeg going into the election. Federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull last week gave the project final approval, subject to 48 conditions. "I have been coming to Tasmania for 25 years as a member of parliament," Mr Beazley told AAP. "For those 25 years, it doesn't matter if you're left or right, Green or not Green, everybody has said somehow or other you have got to value add the timber industry, you have got to get a pulp mill. "So, for 25 years that has been an article. "I notice there are very heavy environmental restrictions in place on the mill and that should be so.

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"I would be sad for people here if they came away from this process with what has been their objective for a very long period of time is not completed. "Provided the mill can be done in a way that is environmentally suitable, it is the right thing." Mr Beazley, who retires from federal parliament at the upcoming election, said the mill earmarked for the Tamar Valley, in Tasmania's north, had been subjected to tough environmental conditions by commonwealth chief scientist Jim Peacock. "Hopefully, that would mean it could perform to a decent environmental standard. "Hopefully, that is the case, because if it does, it'll be a boon." Mr Beazley was invited to Tasmania by federal Labor MP for Denison Duncan Kerr for a farewell function to mark his retirement from politics. It is likely to be Mr Beazley's last public event as an MP before he ends his political career, which has spanned 27 years. Mr Beazley joked that he had taken the decision to retire "before he became serial pest". He admitted that coming so close to running the country was a disappointment he will never forget. "We almost did it in 1998 and 2001, we actually got right back in 2001," he said. "The thing a lot of people don't understand about politics is that we are single constituency operations and one or two per cent (in elections) makes all the difference."

12<sup>th</sup>

### **FarmOnLine**

#### **Banks and farmers look at drought long-term**

The Australian Bankers Association is positive about the long-term future of agriculture, despite meeting with farmers to discuss the impacts of failed wheat crops which had been hedged. The association met with State-based farming organisations in Sydney today to discuss the impact on farmers whose wheat crop has failed and they have hedged the price of their wheat or forward sold their crops to grain merchants. The meeting was organised to discuss the current debt levels associated with the drought and forward grain contracts. NSW Farmers' Association, Victorian Farmers' Federation, South Australian Farmers' Federation, AgForce Queensland and Western Australian Farmers Federation welcomed a commitment by the members of the ABA to take a long-term perspective of the agricultural sector. The farming groups pointed out commodity prices were high, despite the soaring Australian dollar, and there was no evidence to indicate that land values would abate any time soon. ABA acting chief executive, Ian Gilbert, said the banking sector is positive about the long-term future of the agricultural sector. He said around 2000 wheat growers had hedged using bank products, representing six per cent of the current wheat crop planted. "Typically banks are cautious when issuing these types of products to customers by hedging only a small proportion of the expected crop," Mr Gilbert said. "Hedge contracts provided by banks are, in most instances, for less than 30pc of the expected yield. "This approach by banks provides the customers with some protection from crop failure." Mr Gilbert said banks wanted to know if grain growers entered into hedging arrangements with service providers other than banks or forward sold their crop to a grain merchant. ABA members said they will continue to examine each customer's circumstances on a case-by-case basis. Banks and farming groups are also urging any grain producer concerned about their financial position to contact their banks to discuss their options as soon as possible. The Victorian Farmers' Federation wants to develop a register to facilitate the delivery of other growers' grain against forward contracts where producers are unable to meet their contractual obligations.

#### **More Murray Valley water cuts paid back**

NSW Water Minister, Phil Koperberg, this week announced a further 10 per cent of the Murray Valley account water suspended late last year will be immediately re-credited and available for use. Mr Koperberg said there was also enough water to provide another period of contingency water to support high security permanent plantings and to meet the critical needs of all towns and high security intensive livestock and forest industries for the remainder of the water year. "The Murray Valley needs this good news," Mr Koperberg said. Farmers and other property



owners in the area have been struck particularly hard by this drought and are doing it tough. "The current improvement in the area is a combination of small rainfall and recent warm weather which has caused some snow to start melting." Mr Koperberg said the re-negotiated tri-state water sharing arrangement would also benefit Murray Valley irrigators. "Under the arrangement NSW borrowed 195 Gegalitres of water early in the season from Victoria to secure town water supply and to supply the critical water of permanent plantings and other high security industries," he said. "As we have repaid our part of that agreement NSW irrigators are now in the position to benefit from any future Murray Darling Basin inflows. "Whilst this is good news, the outlook for the Murray Valley is still extremely critical. "We have inflows receding to record low flows seen last year and no reserves set aside for 2008/09." Mr Koperberg said the Murray Darling Ministerial Council would continue to investigate a 'southern basin approach', which could be adopted if conditions continue to stay dry. "We need to look at the best way to manage what will be a very limited resource. This will include looking at the Murray, Murrumbidgee and relevant Victorian tributaries," he said. SOURCE: NSW Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Water and FarmOnline.

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### **Dairies face tough call on farm future**

Milk producers are facing tough decisions about paying huge prices for grain and fodder or reducing herd sizes, as they try to guess just how high feed prices can go. Making decisions even harder is the optimistic outlook for the industry, with record farm gate prices, increasing worldwide demand for dairy products, and new technology opportunities under development to allow more efficient production. For some farmers, milking at a loss in the short-term may be the best strategy as industry advisers warn expanding once the drought breaks could prove costly, if not impossible. The one piece of standard advice across the industry is that feed budgets and cash flows are an absolute necessity and farmers should make decisions using support from a range of sources, including NSW Department of Primary Industries' (DPI) staff, dairy consultants and financial counsellors. DPI dairy extension officers have been run off their feet helping prepare feed budgets but the trends that are emerging vary greatly between regions. Farmers along the Murray irrigation system are facing the prospect of feeding their herds a total mixed ration for the first time, while many coastal dairies have good pastures thanks to August rain and have been delaying culling decisions to take full advantage of better milk prices. DPI dairy officer at Taree, on the North Coast, Ray Johnston, said some farmers were now reducing grain inputs due to high prices, relying heavily on their good pastures. "What needs to be considered is whether that will mean less conserved fodder and therefore the danger of running into a severe feed deficit next autumn," he said. "What farmers can't risk is losing condition on their cows. "Underpinning decisions now should be the fact increased demand for dairy products is global and that means the good returns should hold solid. "Position yourself to be here in the long-term." In the Riverina, most farmers have already culled the bottom end of their herds and are tossing up about further reductions among their better-quality animals. DPI dairy officer at Deniliquin, Regan Johnson, said farmers who opted to feed should ensure they fed well. Dairy consultant Dr Ian Lean, managing director of Strategic Bovine Services, Camden, said producing at a loss in the short term could be a viable strategy. "Some farmers who were forced into this situation immediately after deregulation have now emerged in a positive position," he said. "There is the distinct possibility stock will not be there to buy back next season."

SOURCE: Extract from full story in *The Land*, October 11, 2007.

### **Adelaide Advertiser**

### **Murray lowest since 1957**

The amount of water now stored in the River Murray system is at its lowest since 1957, before major dams were built to store four times as much water. Figures from the Murray-Darling Basin Commission show the last time such a small amount of water was held in storage was before Dartmouth Reservoir, the dam designed to "drought proof" the river system, was proposed. The 2130 gegalitres now being held there, in Hume Dam, Menindee Lakes and Lake Victoria is 23 per cent of the 9352 gegalitres the system can hold. That is enough water to provide critical urban needs in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales for the next 18 months if no further inflows are received in that time. Commission chief executive Dr Wendy Craik said that in the past 50 years, the system's largest storage, Dartmouth, was built in New South Wales, the Menindee Lakes were commissioned to hold water for users and Hume Dam was doubled in size. The works provided space for an extra 7135 gegalitres of water in storage. "Dartmouth was put in there as basically a drought reserve to provide water in the event of a long drought," she said. "It has proved its worth in terms of providing that storage . . . but this drought is so severe." The long-term storage average at this time of year is about 7000 gegalitres or 75 per cent of capacity. The lack of water has caused 80 per cent of the wetlands below Lock 1 at Blanchetown to become bone dry. The South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management board will monitor wetlands to determine what damage is being caused by the drought. That will include identifying the level of stress suffered by red gums – and vegetation

growing on dry wetland beds. Dr Craik said there was enough water in storage to provide critical urban water needs to cities and towns until the end of June next year with contingency plans being prepared for the following year. Urban users in NSW, Victoria and SA need 1329 gigalitres of water per year to meet need. Dr Craik said inflows continued to be below average but some water was flowing into the river and it was expected to continue in coming months. Meanwhile, Yatco Lagoon in the Riverland will be permanently cut off from the river to save 800 megalitres of water a year, federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull will announce today.

**Adelaide.now.com**

### **Libs' plan to rescue irrigators**

A ten-point rescue plan to provide more water and financial help for struggling Riverland irrigators was released today by the State Opposition. Farmers had not been allocated enough water from the River Murray to keep irrigated trees and vines alive during the drought, Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith said during a tour of the Riverland today. The plan includes leasing water and buying back over-allocated water licences immediately, before permanent plantings die. Mr Hamilton-Smith said low cost loans must also be provided for permanent growers to buy their own water. "They need help now not in five years, Mr Hamilton-Smith said "If the Government can provide low-cost loans to see them through this summer, and it rains, it would save a lot of crops that would instead be bulldozed."

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**News.com.au**

### **Gore shares Nobel Peace Prize**

Former US vice-president Al Gore and the UN climate panel will share the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize for raising awareness of the threat of global warming. Mr Gore and the UN climate panel won the Nobel Peace Prize for their part in galvanising international action against global warming before it "moves beyond man's control." The award seemed to be a snub to President George W. Bush, who has doubted the science of global warming and rejected caps on emissions of gases believed to cause it, but the White House said it was happy for the winners and praised their work.

#### **Will Nobel prize push Al Gore into race for White House?**

Gore, who lost narrowly to Bush in the 2000 presidential election, and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change were chosen to share the \$1.6 million prize. Prime Minister John Howard today congratulated Mr Gore. Mr Howard said Mr Gore's film had made a significant contribution to the climate change debate. "Some of the things Mr Gore says I agree with, some I don't," Mr Howard said. Mr Howard said his position on Kyoto had not changed. He said he had watched the film *The Great Global Warming Swindle* that countered many of Mr Gore's claims. "My advice to the public is to look at all of the evidence and not get carried away by either point of view," he said. The committee awarded the prize from a near record field of 181 candidates for their efforts to draw attention to mankind's impact on the climate and measures needed to address it. "Action is necessary now, before climate change moves beyond man's control," the committee said. It warned that climate change - linked to droughts, floods and rising seas - could threaten living conditions across the world, prompt mass migrations and increase the risk of wars. "We wish to put world climate on the agenda in connection with peace," committee chairman Ole Danbolt Mjoes said. Since leaving office in 2001, Gore has lectured extensively on the threat of global warming and last year starred in his own Oscar-winning documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth* to warn of the dangers and urge action against it. "He is probably the single individual who has done most to create greater worldwide understanding of the measures that need to be adopted," the Nobel committee said. "The IPCC has created an ever-broader informed consensus about the connection between human activities and global warming."

#### **Pressure rising on climate deal**

The award was seen raising pressure on the world to agree a new deal to combat global warming at a UN climate conference in Bali, Indonesia in December. Gore and the IPCC will collect their prize in Oslo on December 10, while it is underway. Congratulations poured in from world leaders, including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, but Gore's critics said the award was wrong. "Al Gore doesn't understand the science behind climate change or he deliberately misrepresents it," said Joseph Bast, whose Chicago-based Heartland Institute has run newspaper ads challenging Gore to debates on global warming. Czech President Vaclav Klaus was surprised at the award because the relationship between Gore's work and world peace was "unclear and indistinct", his spokesman said. It was the second Nobel peace prize for a leading US Democrat during the presidency of Republican Bush, who rejected the 1997 Kyoto Protocol setting limits on industrial nations' greenhouse gas emissions. The 2002 prize went to former President Jimmy Carter, which the Nobel committee head at the time called a "kick in the legs" to the US administration over preparations to invade Iraq. Mjoes said the peace prize, the first to go to climate campaigners, was not meant as criticism of Bush.

#### **Gore to donate prizemoney**

Mr Gore, 59, said he was deeply honoured and would donate his share of the prize money to the Alliance for Climate Protection. "This award is even more meaningful because I have the honour of sharing it with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - the world's pre-eminent scientific body devoted to improving our understanding of the climate crisis," he said. IPCC chairman Rajendra Pachauri said he was overwhelmed and felt privileged to share the prize with Gore. "This recognition ... thrusts a new responsibility on our shoulders. We have to do more and we have many more miles to go," Mr Pachauri said in New Delhi. The IPCC groups 2,500 researchers from more than 130 nations and issued reports this year blaming human activities for climate change ranging from more heat waves to floods. It was set up in 1988 by the UN to help guide governments. Ahead of the announcement, speculation that Mr Gore could win the prize prompted questions about whether he might join the 2008 race for the White House. He has shown no sign of interest. Monica Friedlander of the group [www.draftgore.com](http://www.draftgore.com) pushing Mr Gore to run said it would "be very difficult for him to say no".

### **Bookies nervous of triple win**

British bookmakers once put 100-to-1 odds on Mr Gore winning an Oscar, a Nobel prize and the presidency. They cut the odds to 8/1 from 10/1 yesterday after he completed the second step. The scope of the prize established by the 1895 will of Swedish philanthropist and inventor of dynamite Alfred Nobel has expanded from its roots in peacemaking and disarmament to human rights, work for the environment and the fight against poverty. The prize is worth 10 million Swedish crowns (\$1.6 million). *With Reuters and AAP*

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### **Adelaide Advertiser**

#### **Water emergency**

Emergency plans have been prepared to supply Adelaide with spring water for drinking as experts warn the drought is forcing us to consider extreme measures. Spring water suppliers yesterday said they had talks with SA Water about the feasibility of delivering water in either bottles or tankers to households if Adelaide's water crisis dramatically worsened. SA Water last night said discussions with suppliers were held as part of "contingency planning" in case mains water became undrinkable because of poor quality. Australian of the Year Tim Flannery, a climate change expert, said Adelaide was at a "significant risk" of a water crisis within the next six to 12 months, because of salinity and toxic algal blooms in the River Murray. SA Water insists Adelaide will not run out of water but says contingency plans are essential to ensure the water supply, "including in times of drought". "As a corporation, we need to be able to continue supply of drinking water to our customers," the utility says in a written statement. Spring Water Association state president Ian Bailey said he spoke with SA Water about a year ago, during the early stages of developing the emergency plan. "SA Water has contingency plans and has spoken to the Spring Water Association," Mr Bailey said. "They were coming to find out what the capabilities of different people were . . . if we had a problem with a certain pipeline or problem in a certain area, could you supply, how much could you supply and so on." Mr Bailey said SA Water already supplied bottled water to households when mains water supply was cut, for maintenance or other reasons. In the event of a water supply emergency, Mr Bailey said tankers would deliver water to drop-off points for householders to fill large bottles. In less severe cases, bottles would be distributed. Adelaide University Professor Mike Young said the situation in SA was "much, much worse than many people realise". The Wentworth Group member and former CSIRO chief research scientist said SA Water had a responsibility to develop "contingency plans for the worst conceivable event". "The scary thing is that what seemed to be totally inconceivable is now starting to look quite conceivable," Professor Young said. "If next year is the same as last year and this year, there are no options left to get water out of the River Murray. The River Murray will collapse, that is the reality." Professor Young warned if present conditions continued, "we could end up with a system where we can't drink the water". Dr Flannery said there was a 10 per cent chance hot weather and a lack of rain would present major water quality problems. Adelaide stands a significant risk of having a crisis over the next six to 12 months, so the response has to be different again to the rest of the world, you have to go into true crisis mode," he said. Dr Flannery warned all indications were "Adelaide will face a hard time this summer and into the next winter". "You can imagine a situation where there's an extremely hot summer, where the worst-case scenario eventuates with water so you've got very salty water in the lower Murray or an algal bloom in the lower Murray," he said. Murray-Darling Basin Commission chief executive Dr Wendy Craik said the aim was to maintain water quality within levels suitable for human consumption but there was no guarantee. Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald, in a written statement, said there was "a low probability the current drought conditions will continue into next year" but contingency planning was needed for "a worst-case scenario". Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith said he was shocked the State Government had "let it come to this, let it reach this point".

#### **St Kilda flooding wall will be built**

Coastal properties in St Kilda will gain better protection from flooding and erosion with the construction of a \$900,000 sea wall. Work on the project, jointly funded by the State Government and Salisbury Council, is expected to begin before the end of the financial year. Environment Minister Gail Gago said the new 500m wall would protect properties against storm surge flooding, coastal erosion and future sea levels resulting from climate change.

She said the Government's share of funding would be \$720,000 spread over four years. St Kilda's artificial foreshore was built in the 1940s by property developers but Ms Gago said changing climatic conditions demanded more protection. The sea wall is between 2.1m and 3.1m above sea level, but recommendations by the Coastal Protection Branch call for a final height of 4.2m for the wall to be effective. "If ever there was a wake-up call to the Howard Government on climate change and rising sea levels, this is a great example," Ms Gago said.

#### **Call to release reserve**

River Murray water reserved for the environment should be given to irrigators to save their drought-stricken crops, the State Opposition says. Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith yesterday revealed his plan to help irrigators, who say thousands of citrus trees and vines will be dead by Christmas. The Opposition plan includes providing irrigators with 22 gegalitres of the 35 gegalitres South Australia reserves as environmental flows under the Living Murray agreement. Australian Conservation Foundation healthy rivers campaigner Amy Hankinson said the river and its wildlife was desperately in need of environmental flows.

As much as I feel for all primary producers doing it tough, though, than ever before, we must not lose sight of the goal posts. The comments in the above article (Water Emergency) by Professor Mike Young, Dr. Tim Flannery and Dr. Wendy Craik must be heeded we must at all cost ensure a safe supply of drinkable water but blaming any particular body for our problems is really just **shifting the blame**. We must look at ourselves and what has is happening the blame is with all of us we must all be part of the solution.

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#### **Escape for some but most suffer**

A strong divide is emerging on the farmland - between the haves and have nots. While some farmers, mainly in the state's southern areas, are expecting a reasonable year, a majority are facing another horror drought year. The crisis is predicted to hasten the exit of a significant number of farmers from the land, particularly grain growers and River Murray irrigators. For those who remain, the economics of farming are becoming more difficult every year. But for the top farmers and those lucky enough to get rain at the right time the rewards can be as good as from any investment class. South Australian Farmers Federation general manager Carol Vincent said the industry was seeing "a real imbalance developing between those who have good crops and those who don't". "A number are also locked into the present and are unable to grasp the opportunities of the future because of the stress of day to day survival," she said. Mallala farmers John and Paul Lush are among the lucky ones, and admit they couldn't believe their luck when 18mm of rain fell a month ago and saved their crops. They expect to earn an average income this year because astronomical grain prices will off-set their low yields. "We're bloody lucky. We fluked a couple of rains this year and we'll get through with enough moisture by the skin of our teeth," John said. Other regions have not been as fortunate. In areas such as the Eyre Peninsula, there have been some calls by a handful of academics to stop farming altogether. Shane Trowbridge, 38, from Chara, 50km west of Ceduna, dismisses the view, saying if people want to make a business out of farming they should be allowed to. "This is regarded as marginal country but I'm a third-generation farmer and we've survived until now," he said. "There's quite a bit in the management and in being conservative." Mr Trowbridge is unsure whether he will make a little money or lose a little this year until he markets his grain. "The other thing that is vital out here is for the Port of Thevenard to be deepened," he said. "We could get \$12 a tonne extra if the port was deepened." He also said another issue flaring in farming regions is that farmers were good at growing grain but not good at marketing it. "It is putting farmer against farmer and that is the last thing we need," Mr Trowbridge said. In March, 2004, the South Australian Farmers Federation's Triple Bottom Line for the Bush report painted a dire outlook with the number of broadacre farmers halving in the next 50 years. Ms Vincent said the forecast is coming true even faster than predicted, partly because the continuing drought has exacerbated an already difficult situation.

13<sup>th</sup>

#### **Sunday Mail**

#### **A comment from Professor Mike Young**

We are now borrowing from the future and it is prudent to assume that we will have to live with much less water.

Wentworth Group Professor Mike Young says SA could become the "most water savvy state."

Maybe it's time our Premier Teflon Mike started listening to those who know instead of his minders who so far have just managed to make this worse. Also maybe the Leader of the Opposition could also take note instead of suggesting to release reserve, he should take a look at what is happening to our grain growers who sold their crop before it was harvested.

Excerpt From a lecture delivered 9<sup>th</sup> October by Professor Mike Young

There's a hole in the bucket, dear Liza ...

So fix it, dear Henry, ...

With what should I fix it, dear Liza ...

With business, dear Henry ...

But we have postage stamp pricing, dear Liza ...

So change the price, dear Henry ...

But what about equity, dear Liza, ...

Try Rebates, dear Henry, ...

But business needs access, dear Liza ...

So charge for access, dear Henry...

So who sets the charge, dear Liza...

An independent price regulator, dear Henry...

But SA Water owns all the water, dear Liza...

So lease some of it to business, dear Henry...

But there is not enough water, dear Liza, ...

Recycle it, use groundwater, stormwater & seawater, dear Henry, ...

But we might need more, dear Liza ...

Let people trade water, dear Henry ...

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Water businesses are growing, dear Liza, ...

That's good, dear Henry, dear Henry, that's good!

So we don't need restrictions, dear Liza, dear Liza ...

That's right, dear Henry, dear Henry, ...

I think you have got it, dear Henry, we've got it!

**Now we are in election mode. I will try as much as possible to keep political grandstanding and bullshit out of my "Snippets Plus" editions.**

**As far as I am concerned 'CLIMATE CHANGE' the MURRAY-DARLING BASIN including the effects of the worse DROUGHT this country has ever experienced are or should be above politics. I will need to cut and paste some, which will have political leaning, but my vote is my vote as your vote is your vote.**

15th

### **FarmOnLine**

#### **Food prices to treble in five years: CBH**

Food prices will treble in the next three to five years as world grain stocks decline to their lowest levels in history, CBH chief executive, Imre Mencshelyi, has warned. Mr Mencshelyi says world grain stocks are starting to run out while supplies are shrinking, creating the greatest crisis in 50 years and threatening to curtail the emerging biofuels industry. "On the one hand you've got the biofuels industry pushing grain prices higher, but on the other, questions are being asked about where the focus should be — energy or feeding the populations?" he said. "There is evidence in North America that there will be reduced corn plantings for biofuels to be replaced by mainstream food crops. "But the questions need answering because declining food stocks and higher prices also will affect meat and dairy." While consumers might be aghast at food price rises, it was CBH's view that the world was feeding itself too cheaply, Mr Mencshelyi said. "Higher feed prices for producers should translate to higher prices for consumers," he said. "Either producers get the right price or, for example, consumers don't get milk. "Bread and meat also are so cheap and I think that by Christmas this year they will cost more."

SOURCE: Extract from *Farm Weekly*, WA, October 11 issue.

#### **Funding starts flowing in \$10B water plan**

The first dollars from of the Federal Government's \$10 billion National Plan for Water Security have been allocated today, with NSW and South Australian irrigation schemes to receive upgraded infrastructure.

Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull says the money, from the \$5.9B Modernising Irrigation component of the fund, will "deliver long-term benefits for the Murray-Darling Basin and the communities that rely on its precious resources". Mr Turnbull said a call for proposals for pilot on-farm irrigation efficiency projects will be advertised from this weekend. "Each pilot project will be required to save at least 25 megalitres per water entitlement for returning permanently to the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder," he said. A second component of the package launched today is the Irrigation Modernisation Planning Assistance programme, also to be advertised this weekend. "Successful applicants will be eligible to receive funding of up to \$500,000 to support development of modernisation plans for their districts," he said. Modernisation plans will identify potential water savings available through the upgrade of aging irrigation infrastructure. As part of this announcement, the Federal Government has also committed support to two projects to assist the development of a modernisation plan:

\* The Macquarie Valley will receive funding support for the development of a modernisation plan for the Trangie-Nevertire irrigation supply scheme in the Macquarie Valley.

The scheme has around 73,000ML in entitlements, but it is estimated that there is the potential to make water savings of up to 25,500ML or 35pc through delivery system upgrades.

\* Murray Irrigation Ltd will receive funding to develop a modernisation plan of its water supply infrastructure in the Murray Valley.

Murray irrigation has 1,494,312 water entitlements from NSW Murray regulated river resource, supplying water through 2956km gravity fed earthen channels, 3900 irrigation outlets, and a further 1425km gravity fed earthen channel stormwater system. It is estimated that there is likely to be about 50,000ML of water savings achievable from a Murray irrigation modernisation. In each case, funding of up to \$500,000 will be available to conduct studies to assess and identify the potential for water savings through infrastructure upgrades, investigate potential water savings by matching land use to factors such as soil type, and matching on-farm water deliver infrastructure to land use capability and crop type. Mr Turnbull said the Government would also provide \$3.3 million to improve river operations in the South Australian Murray by permanently disconnecting the Yatco Lagoon. "Management of the wetland will be returned to a more natural cycle of drying and wetting, which is anticipated to save up to 2.5 gigalitres over three years currently lost to evaporation," he said.

#### **Telstra agrees to switch on rural broadband**

Telstra has waited until the eleventh hour before signing a multi-million dollar funding deal under the Federal Government's Australian Broadband Guarantee, which will now see ADSL delivered to 211 rural towns.

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Communications Minister, Senator the Hon Helen Coonan, yesterday welcomed Telstra's participation in the program alongside 13 other applicants. "The Australia Broadband Guarantee provides a safety net for all Australians who cannot receive an affordable metro-comparable broadband service," Sen Coonan said. "Since 2004, more than one and a half million Australians have gained access to affordable broadband for the first time as a result of per customer subsidies from the Howard Government." SOURCE: Rural Press National News Bureau, Parliament House, Canberra.

#### **NEWS.com.au**

#### **'Sinking Fort Denison a victim of climate change'**

Sydney's historic Fort Denison is sinking, wreaking havoc on the sandstone walls and threatening the former penal site's survival. The tower is one of 64 sites around NSW which the State Government has identified as victims of climate change. "We don't want this icon to become the first victim of climate change," Environment Minister Phil Koperberg said yesterday as he announced a \$1.5 million rescue package. It comes as the Government will announce 25 coastal and 39 estuary grants, each to be matched dollar for dollar by local councils, in a bid to battle erosion. A standing tribute to Sydney's convict past, Fort Denison celebrates its 150th birthday this week. It was built more than a century ago to defend the Harbour from the French and the Russians. "In the past 100 years we have seen sea levels rise by some 10cm and the dire predictions are that during the 100 years it is not going to be another 10cm, but 100cm or a whole metre," Mr Koperberg said. Increased Harbour traffic, coupled with the rising sea levels, has already destroyed the slipway and the sandstone fort takes the brunt of the Harbour's waves; the porous sandstone drinking in the salt right down to the fort's foundations. It is one of many icons around the state that are beginning to see the effects of climate change with the coasts of Byron Bay, Tweed Heads and Rockdale's Lady Robinson's beach just some of the sites targeted for restoration. At Byron Bay storm weathering has become so serious the council is considering a project to move coastal houses away from the beach. Other councils are investigating dredging and raising the height of some beaches. Specialist stone masons will be working on restoring Fort Denison.

#### **The Australian**

#### **Howard firmly against Kyoto**

John Howard has dashed any hopes that he might end the government's Kyoto Protocol boycott, insisting he won't sacrifice economic growth to cut greenhouse gas emissions. Mr Howard's first election campaign appearance today on internet video site YouTube suggested the coalition would not be veering far from its existing climate change policy. "The government will very shortly announce detailed plans on many issues including a climate change policy that balances our obligation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with the need to keep our economy growing," he said. The prime minister later reiterated his opposition to the Kyoto Protocol on economic grounds, but not necessarily its post-2012 successor. "The reason I won't ratify the Kyoto treaty is: the existing Kyoto treaty doesn't cover countries like China, and we could be at a competitive disadvantage," he told Southern Cross Broadcasting. "We'd be interested in ratifying a new international agreement that includes all of the major emitters because that would not put us at a competitive disadvantage." Mr Howard's comment came after federal Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull last week moved closer to accepting the Kyoto position by saying the government might sign an amended version for post-2012. The independent Climate Institute argues that the

necessary greenhouse gas cuts and a switch to clean energy can be made while sustaining economic growth. "Government and independent groups such as ABARE and CSIRO show that strong economic growth is set to continue even if we substantially reduce emissions," chief executive John Connor said. Federal Labor Leader Kevin Rudd says that ratifying the greenhouse blueprint would give Australia a greater say in climate change talks and help persuade China to commit on emissions cuts. Mr Rudd said while the Kyoto treaty expires within five years, endorsing it would give the government a greater role in international climate change policy, starting at a Bali conference in December. "If you haven't ratified Kyoto, you don't get to vote, that's the problem," he told Southern Cross. "I want to be an international voice for Australia which is carving out the future arrangements." Mr Rudd said China's argument for not accepting greenhouse targets had been because developed nations like Australia and the United States had refused to do so. "Unless we in this country fix the China emissions problem with an international set of rules which bind both economies as well, then frankly our future is deeply compromised." The Australian Greens today urged more federal investment in public transport as a way of tackling climate change.

Senator Kerry Nettle called on the commonwealth to ensure the states had the funding they needed to improve transport systems. An environmental network gave both of the major parties low marks for their climate change policies, but put Labor ahead of the government. Using nine criteria, The Big Switch gave the coalition a grade of 0.8 out of five and Labor 1.8.

### Chinese dam exodus

The Chinese Government will shift at least four million more people from the Three Gorges dam area to prevent an environmental "catastrophe".

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About 1.2 million residents were moved during the construction of the \$24.5 billion, 185m-high dam on the Yangtze River in Sichuan province, from 1994 until the hydroelectric plant began operating a decade later. Some of them will be told they have to move again. Many of the residents of northeast and southwest Chongqing, a vast municipality within Sichuan, will be shifted to outside urban Chongqing. The municipality's Vice-Mayor, Yu Yuanmu, said the reservoir area where many of the four million were living "has a vulnerable ecological environment, and the natural conditions make large scale urbanisation or serious overpopulation impossible here". This latest in a series of damning critiques of the Three Gorges project could not have been widely published by an official source on the eve of the Communist Party's five-yearly national congress unless it had top-level political approval. The message it sends to Chinese audiences is that this vast scheme -- devised by Mao Zedong and implemented largely under the aegis of former premier Li Peng -- was conceived faultily by leaders of a bygone era, neglecting the environment, but will be sorted out by the new eco-friendly team of President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao in their second term. State news agency Xinhua said: "Last month, officials and experts admitted the Three Gorges project had caused an array of ecological ills, including more frequent landslides and pollution, and if preventive measures are not taken it could lead to an environmental catastrophe." A second vice-mayor of Chongqing, Tan Qiwei, told last month's meeting that the shores of the 600km-long reservoir created by the dam had collapsed in 91 places, and that 36km had caved in. And silt is being trapped behind the dam and again making the Yangtze difficult to navigate in places. A film by independent director Jia Zhangke about the original removal of residents from the dam site, *Still Life*, won the Golden Lion award at last year's Venice film festival, and another award at an international film festival in Chile on Wednesday.

### AWA

\*New programs under the \$5.9 billion Modernising Irrigation component of the \$10 billion National Plan for Water Security have been launched: the On-Farm Efficiency Programme supplies funds up to \$1.6B or pilot projects which save at least 25ML/water entitlement for returning permanently to the Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder, Modernising irrigation delivery systems grants of \$500,000 is also available to private irrigation providers.

\*Environment & Water Minister Turnbull has announced a grant of up to \$80,000 plus GST to SA Water to advance the implementation of the National Water Initiative via two new urban water projects that will improve planning & demand management.

\*Melbourne Water's Draft Waterways Water Plan focused on the Port Phillip and Westernport catchments has been released for public comment. The Plan sets out expected investments in waterway health and flood protection for the next 5 years and includes Melbourne Water's new extended waterways and drainage operating boundaries.

\*The North Stradbroke Water Grid Project has been placed on hold pending a new, full EIA following recognition that the aquifer from which the project would take an extra 22 ML/day from North Stradbroke and pump it through an existing pipeline to Redlands and into the South East Queensland Water Grid, could risk long term damaged as a result of the extra demand.

\*Water has begun to flow through the stage 1 of the Wimmera Mallee Pipeline: Antwerp, Dimboola, Doon, Jeparit, Pimpinio, Rainbow, Tarranyurk and Yaapect, part of the 300,000 ha Supply System 1, are first towns to

benefit and it has been announced that towns of Berriwillock, Culgoa and Nullawil would now also be serviced by the Pipeline.

\*Most of the vital works in the two-year \$4 million Waterway debris removal resulting from Cyclone Larry in North Queensland had been completed before the start of the last wet season with completion expected before the onset of this summer's wet season.

\*The Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission (VCEC) has received more than 35 submissions as part of its review of the structure of Melbourne Water Retailers.

\*The SA Government has been forced by speculation to state that it will not be taxing domestic rainwater collection and stated that residents can be further assured that the Natural Resources Management Act 2004 even prevents such a thing from occurring. [Article Below](#).

“The State Government will not be taxing domestic rainwater collection. I want to make it absolutely clear that, despite claims to the contrary; the Government has no such intention of taxing rainwater collected for domestic use. Residents can be further assured that the Natural Resources Management Act 2004 even prevents such a thing from occurring. It clearly stipulates that the Government cannot impose a tax or a levy on rainwater collected for domestic purposes. We have no intention of changing this part of the Act and we would strongly oppose any Opposition motion to do so. The situation for commercial storage of rainwater is quite different to the domestic arrangements, but is unchanged from the previous Act dealing with the sustainable management of our water resources. “There is a runoff policy that applies in surface water prescribed areas. This means that a user capturing rainwater in excess of 500,000 litres requires a water licence, and then may be eligible to pay a water based levy, if that water is used for commercial purposes. They're treated in much the same way as a farmer taking water from the River Murray.

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The Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resources Management Board is currently seeking public comment on how such a Water Allocation Plan will apply in the Western Mt Lofty Ranges. I urge residents to have their say. This would only affect a tiny proportion of profit seeking operations that now have their chance to have a say during the consultation process. For anyone to suggest that the Government is claiming ownership of rainwater falling from the sky is quite wrong. It's like saying we own the air. The State Government does not own the water, the people of SA do. We manage it to ensure a fair and equitable distribution of this valuable community resource which is needed to recharge underground water and keep our rivers and streams healthy.”

\*South-east Queenslanders subject to Level 5 restrictions have beaten Target 140 (water consumption under 140 litres/person for the twelfth week running. The daily average this week was 133 litres/person, up slightly from 130 last week.

\*The American Waterworks Association (AWWA) has been advised that it will shortly require the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to issue a regulation for Perchlorate, a major component of propellants in solid fuels for rockets & missiles & which dissolves readily in groundwater. California sets a level of 18ppb in water (below this is not considered health risk)

\*Australia's water resources, From Use to Management. Our relationships to and attitudes about water have changed substantially over the past decades. Declines in rainfall & its reliability, increased growth of cities, changes in agricultural practices have all impacted on the supply.

\*Southern Water, Britain's last available water asset has been sold with Australia's Challenger Infrastructure contributing to a 27% stake. The total; transaction value is A\$9.45 billion.

\*A vision to modernise irrigation channels supplying 2400 NSW farms will be among the first projects funded under the \$10bn water plan plus also \$3.3million to relocate pumps used by SA Murray Irrigators.

\*Melbourne's big water users could be given "water allocations" and trade excess capacity through plans for an urban water market now before the State Government and being pushed by Yarra Valley Water.

\*The Greens have slammed NSW government claims that a wind-powered desalination plant will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and made reference to the Perth plant.

## 16<sup>th</sup>

### **FarmOnLine**

#### **Queensland urged to prepare for more cyclones this summer**

Queenslanders are being urged to prepared for a busy cyclone, with the the Bureau of Meteorology warning this year is likely to be worse than the quiet season last summer. Just two cyclones developed in the Coral Sea last season, neither of which was severe nor made landfall. And while more cyclones are likely, the Bureau says it is unlikely that the coming season will be as active as 2005/06 when severe cyclones Larry and Monica struck the east coast. The Bureau's regional director, Jim Davidson, says the general climate pattern is uncertain, showing characteristics of what's described as a relatively weak La Niña, but complicated by sea surface temperatures in the deep north being cooler than would normally be expected. He said this made it more of a challenge than forecasting during periods where the climate indicators were better defined such as a strong El Niño or La Niña. "It's only



when we see a strong El Niño or La Niña that we can predict with any degree of confidence whether cyclone numbers in the Coral Sea are likely to be lower or higher than the long term average of 3," Mr Davidson said. Although the number of cyclones is in doubt, it only takes a single severe cyclone to hit the populated east coast to make the season a memorable one. Besides, if the La Niña strengthens further, as may well happen, Mr Davidson said the likelihood of a major cyclone impact on the east coast would be greater. "Pre-season preparation is a key element in disaster mitigation strategy," Mr Davidson said. "The most important advice is to make sure you know about the dangers posed by cyclones, storm tides and floods; understand the warning service; and are sensibly prepared." SOURCE: Bureau of Meteorology and *Queensland Country Life*.