

NEWS.com.au - Wong leads last-ditch talks on climate deal

Australia's newly installed Climate Change Minister, Penny Wong, was last night leading last-ditch negotiations in Bali to rescue a global climate change deal. Senator Wong, who has been in the post for just two weeks, was asked to co-chair a small ministerial working group charged with resolving crucial differences between the US, Europe and key developing countries. Senator Wong was the senior Australian delegate left at the week-long talks after Kevin Rudd flew out yesterday for a brief visit to East Timor - where he met President Jose Ramos Horta and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao - before returning to Australia last night. The parties in Bali are debating the text of the Bali Declaration - a statement from the conference that will set out the priorities for negotiations on a new global climate change pact to replace the Kyoto Protocol. Last night, the group was still working out key differences after the Indonesian president of the UN climate talks, Rachmat Witoelar, prepared a revised "road map" draft that knocked out the contentious reference to non-binding emission cut targets of 25-40 per cent by 2020. The president's draft has also ruled out direct reference to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, but recognises the need for greenhouse emissions to peak in 10 to 15 years and to halve by 2050. Talks were continuing last night on the even more contentious issue of the final commitments of developed and developing countries under a new tougher global climate deal expected to begin in 2012. A spokesman for Senator Wong said she was hopeful of finding common ground, but that the negotiations were expected to continue into the night after they lasted until 3.30am yesterday. The conference has brokered agreement on other key areas, including deforestation and technology transfer between rich and poor countries. But sections of the road map text remain the main barrier to the start of new negotiations. The US had come under growing criticism at these talks for playing a spoiling role by refusing to accept key terms proposed by the European Union. Reflecting a growing mood of detente, German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel late yesterday said the US negotiating position had shifted sharply overnight to the most accommodating in three years. EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said yesterday there had been "good progress" on the development of a road map, and showed signs of a softening position on the inclusion of targets by dropping calls for the inclusion of a specific reference to cuts of between 25 and 40 per cent for developed countries by 2020. This refers to the most aggressive of the scenarios projected by scientists to avoid the risk of dangerous climate change, and although it is a non-binding clause, has been strongly opposed by the US, Japan and Australia. These draft texts say developed countries should take the lead in driving cuts in emissions and set tougher expectations on them to make firm commitments under any new deal.

Climate conference goes virtual

More than 10,000 people are in Bali thrashing out action on global warming, but those who couldn't make it in person are in there virtually - some in the form of dragons and action heroes. Hoping to widen the debate and cut down on carbon emissions from air travel, Oneworld.net, a left-leaning website, has taken the UN conference on climate change in Bali to the online virtual world *Second Life*. The website has brought together everyone from a US congressman, who travelled virtually as a 3D animation, to anonymous participants hailing from Japan to Turkmenistan and Romania. *Second Life*, which has drawn millions of users since it was created in 2003 by San Francisco-based Linden Labs, is a fantasyland in which users mingle under assumed identities as "avatars". While most delegates in Bali opt for formal attire, online users pick the virtual likeness of their choice - ranging from purple hair to outfits befitting action heroes. The mostly anonymous avatars type in questions and comments at a virtual arena in a daily webcast featuring real-world officials and experts. "I admit I was a bit of a cynic at first about these avatars. I just found it totally bizarre," said Danny Nelson, 64, a former British journalist who conducts the interviews for the webcast. "But then I saw the results. This has the potential to bring in all sorts of people who never would have come to Bali unless they're millionaires or in NGOs," he said.

Online politics

One person who used the website to get through to Bali was US Representative Edward Markey, a leading critic of President George W Bush's energy policies which he accused of worsening global warming. "I have teleported here over the internet, as you can see, as an avatar," Mr Markey said as he introduced his virtual persona - a comparatively staid animation in which he appeared in suit and tie. "I believe that I am the first member of the United States Congress to be introduced by someone with a blue dragon on her shoulder," the Massachusetts Democrat noted. Markey said he had to stay in Washington to spearhead a clean energy bill in the Democratic-controlled Congress, but wanted to get his message out in Bali where talks have deadlocked. "Dozens of representatives of the Bush administration are in Bali - all carrying instruction to say 'no' to real progress," Mr Markey said. "It is important for Bali and the world to hear other American voices - voices advocating a new direction for the United States." Mr Markey said he also hoped to lead by example by finding a way to Bali that emits almost none of the carbon blamed for global warming.

Fighting global warming

Jeffrey Allen, part of the team of two running the virtual space from Bali, admitted technology has not yet been perfected to the point that major international conferences could be conducted purely in cyberspace. But Mr Allen, 30, who telecommutes to Oneworld's Washington office from his home in Denver, said the *Second Life* project could still help fight global warming, which he called "the defining issue of our generation". "You just have to do a little creative thinking to see what's excessive," Mr Allen said. He also said while the site had drawn users from around the world, most were North Americans or Europeans as they were more likely to be familiar with *Second Life*. But as the internet grows more sophisticated and widespread, he hoped more people would come online and bring a truly global perspective unavailable in the real world. "Through *Second Life*, it doesn't matter if you're a farmer in Turkmenistan or a professor at Harvard. Everyone can ask questions anonymously and everyone's opinion is just as valid," Mr Allen said.

Bligh finds Wally by the telephone

He side-stepped more than 50 questions about a controversial new policy this week but slippery Water Minister Craig Wallace couldn't dodge a chiming ringtone yesterday when his unhappy boss called. The telephone call from Premier Anna Bligh came after Mr Wallace's bumbling performance on Thursday when he revealed changes to the popular Home WaterWise rebate scheme that were effectively disincentives. Ms Bligh yesterday revealed she gave her minister a dressing down after witnessing his exploits in ensuing media reports to make it "very clear" that the public deserved better. "These are the sort of responsibilities you have as a leader, to talk to people about how they can make sure that they are doing their job and doing it as well as they can," Ms Bligh said. Mr Wallace had been happy to tout a \$500 increase in the tank rebate to \$1500 but refused to discuss expensive new changes that will force residents to plumb their tank internally. He ignored numerous questions about how much the Government would save in making the scheme less attractive and how much the rebate budget was, preferring to give answers that were unrelated. When asked if he planned to use the same line for every question, Mr Wallace said: "This has been a wonderful success, this rebate scheme". And when he did answer, Mr Wallace admitted he hadn't done the crucial calculation of how much plumbing would cost, saying "I, ah, I haven't looked into it fully". Ms Bligh yesterday defended Mr Wallace's knowledge of a "complex area" of his portfolio but admitted he had conceded that his behaviour was wrong. "Minister Wallace, I think, is doing a very good job at his portfolio but, in relation to the issues raised yesterday, I think he should have put more information to the public," Ms Bligh said. A spokesman for Mr Wallace said he would not be commenting further. He has been joined on the tank casualty list by Labor lord mayoral candidate Greg Rowell, who has been forced into an embarrassing backflip on the same issue. In June, Mr Rowell criticised Lord Mayor Campbell Newman for changing his rebate scheme to the plumbing requirement. "I don't think they should have to plumb them in," Mr Rowell had said. "I think people should be given the choice." But Mr Rowell has now changed his tune in light of the State Labor Government's overhaul, insisting that plumbed tanks help save more water. "I've always said City Hall should be doing more to help families cover the cost of plumbing a tank to the laundry or toilet because the plumber's bill can be expensive," Mr Rowell said. Cr Newman said the public had a right to be angry over Labor's cynical political games during the drought. "This has been a ruthless political game over our most precious resource," Cr Newman said yesterday.

SOUTH Australia is sweltering through its hottest year on record.

So far this year, the average temperature in Adelaide has increased by 0.5C over the previous record set in 2000. Adelaide has recorded a mean temperature of 18.3C to date, compared to 17.8C in 2000 and 17.7C in 1988. The average temperature could have been warmer, if not for a cold snap which hit Australia in June and caused the coldest June temperatures on record. Bureau of Meteorology climate meteorologist Darren Ray said only a severe cold snap could prevent SA from recording its hottest year. Forecast temperatures for at least the next week, however, are average or above average for December. "It's extremely likely that it's going to be the warmest on record," he said. National Climate Centre head Dr Michael Coughlan said it was the hottest year for other southern states and Australia's fifth warmest year since records began in 1910. He said higher temperatures were affecting the availability of water. He said it was clear that the difference between the current and previous droughts was increased temperatures, which caused rainfall to evaporate or be soaked up by the ground before it could flow into water storages. For Australia's water supplies to get back to normal, efforts to reduce global warming were vital, he said. Murray-Darling Basin Commission chief executive Dr Wendy Craik said the dry, hot conditions were reflected in the volumes of inflows into the river in the past year. "There's about enough water now in the system to sustain (irrigation) to keep horticulture alive," she said. "We are now looking at ensuring we can provide critical demand for 2008." World Meteorological Organisation preliminary records show the past 10 years has been the hottest decade on record globally. This year was the seventh warmest year on record globally, while the month of January was the hottest January recorded.

The Australian - Climate talks 'on brink of agreement'

Marathon talks on climate change are poised for a deal that will spur US involvement in the fight to curb greenhouse-gas emissions. The UN-led talks in Bali took a break at about 2:00am today with most issues settled but dispute remaining on how far to commit rich and poor nations to slash the emissions warming the planet. The discussions were scheduled to resume at 8:00am today, giving exhausted delegates and throngs of weary assembled media barely time to snooze. "We have a compromise, which is a good situation for everybody," German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel said. Senior US negotiator Harlan Watson said the talks were going "swimmingly". The 190-nation conference headed deep into overtime after the United States and European Union (EU) feuded over the framework for accelerating the fight against climate change beyond 2012.

But the atmosphere brightened in the last scheduled hours of the 12-day conference, said Yvo de Boer, the chief UN official on climate change. "On the brink of agreement, I think, absolutely not deadlocked," Mr de Boer said.

"People are working hard to resolve outstanding issues." In an unexpected move, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, on a visit to East Timor, said he would fly to Bali to address the conference on Saturday. The biggest obstacle at the talks had been on how ambitious to be on slashing carbon gas emissions, which are blamed for heating up the globe's surface and disrupting its delicate climate system. Nobel-winning UN scientists this year warned the "greenhouse effect" could intensify natural disasters, with potentially catastrophic consequences decades from now for millions of people. A draft text obtained by AFP calls for both rich and poor nations to take "measurable, reportable and verifiable" steps to fight climate change. The United States is the only industrial nation to reject the Kyoto Protocol, with President George W. Bush arguing that it would be too costly for the world's largest economy and biggest emitter. The European Union (EU) had fought for the Bali conference to mention an "ambition" by which industrialised countries would slash their emissions by 25 to 40 percent by 2020 compared with 1990 levels. But in the draft text, US pressure relegated these figures to the status of an indirect reference of a footnote - and the "ambition" refers only to parties that are members of Kyoto, thus excluding the United States. Washington had insisted that the EU proposal would prejudge the negotiations for the great post-2012 pact. Piqued, the Europeans had warned that they would snub a meeting that Bush called for next month in Hawaii if the Bali text was too weak. Gabriel, the German negotiator, said: "I think this must be possible for everybody to accept, but I don't know, we will see tomorrow (Saturday) morning." Environmentalists, though, immediately said they would not accept the deal. "It's important to have the US in, but should it involve the US at any price?" Greenpeace political chief Shane Rattenbury said. "The Bush administration still says that if you want to play, you have to do it our way, which is really code for not doing anything," he said. All sides said they had yet to work out language with developing countries - a bloc that includes China, the world's second biggest emitter after the United States - which has no binding obligations to cut greenhouse-gas pollution under Kyoto.

Careful with cuts: unions

Unions this is not there core business let those who know help save the planet its altra important we dismiss hurdles by persons etc, thinking of them selves.

International unions have demanded that global efforts to tackle climate change be managed carefully so they do not leave millions of workers on the employment scrap heap. Australian union leader Tony Maher spoke for nearly 170million unionists worldwide when he told the UN climate change conference in Bali yesterday that policymakers must consider the jobs of working families as the world shifts from carbon-intensive energy sources to green energy solutions. Mr Maher said the Rudd Government's ratification of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change had triggered a major shift in global politics, isolating the US and beginning the restoration of Australia's reputation as a middle-level power on the world stage. Mr Maher, national president of the Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union's mining and energy division, addressed the Bali summit on behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation. His union, which this year spent \$1million on a television advertising campaign spreading awareness of climate change, supports the development of all alternative energy sources, particularly clean coal technology. Mr Maher said unionists understood the effects of climate change demanded deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. But he said the changes needed to be properly managed to ensure that jobs in carbon-producing sectors were replaced by jobs in newly developed green industries. "Decent jobs is what it's all about, not just any jobs," Mr Maher said. "A carbon-constrained future that does not incorporate workers is unsustainable." He said the declaration at the end of the Bali conference, being staged to begin work on forging a new global pact on carbon emission reductions, should mention the needs of labour, because working families were key stakeholders. "Every time a worker is placed on the scrap heap because of climate change, rather than given a new job, we create a barrier to change rather than an opportunity," Mr Maher said. "Workers must be retained and relocated to meet this challenge. That's why

Australian coalminers are calling on all coal companies to invest at least \$1 per tonne of coal sold into new technologies."

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He said he hoped the union movement was "pushing an open door", because it was in the interests of business to work with workers. Mr Maher said the Government's decision to ratify the Kyoto agreement had made Australia the flavour of the fortnight at the Bali conference. "It makes a huge difference," he said. "It isolates the US, and you can see the pressure turning squarely on the US now. "Australia can now get back to the position it had for most of the last century as a middle-ranking social democracy that punches above its weight in these sorts of forums and provides a bit of regional leadership. "We haven't done it for a long time."

The long road home

The world lumbered towards kick-starting a new global climate change deal last night. The much anticipated Bali roadmap is the exhausting and dramatic exclamation mark to a big year on climate change. After two weeks comprising more than 800 meetings covering the paralysing complexity of the details underpinning global climate change agreements, last night negotiators were locked once again in traditional last-minute airport brinkmanship. This year there has been a carefully stage-managed program of international events and reports designed to build momentum towards these Bali talks. It began with the release of scientific reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in February, followed in May by the meeting of the Group of Eight leading developed economies with the five biggest developing economies. In September came the crafting of a modest but encouraging Sydney declaration at the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation forum, US President George W. Bush's anti-climactic leading emitters meeting in Washington and a special UN climate summit in New York. All this has culminated in this UN Framework Convention on Climate Change meeting in Bali. In practical terms it has come down to this: putting delegates from 187 countries in a tropical holiday resort for two weeks with no rules to try to get them to agree on the wording of a three-page document to frame the terms of a two-year negotiation to establish a new global climate change deal after 2012 when the Kyoto Protocol expires. As has been the case at almost all of the 12 previous meetings of this climate change convention, the threat of ministers and senior negotiators missing their flights home has served as the biggest incentive to finally hammer out some kind of agreement. Last night the US and Japan looked as if they were getting their way on a softer and more neutral version of the text that excluded any reference to non-binding targets championed by the Europeans but retained a reference to peak global emissions in the next 10 to 15 years. For its part, the European Union delegation formally threatened to boycott Bush's plan for another meeting of leading emitters in Hawaii in January unless the US starts to play ball on these negotiations. Negotiations on the most contentious parts of the text were led last night by a small group co-chaired by Australia's new Climate Change Minister Penny Wong. It has been a remarkably steep learning curve for her this week and a role Prime Minister Kevin Rudd could only have dreamed of at the start of the week: a reward for ratification and an invitation to play a greater brokering role. This week has been a dream start to the PM's gently evolving - rather than radically shifting - negotiating position. Rudd has managed to sit quietly on the fence while the wars have been waged by others, but he received a genuinely warm reception from ministers at the convention following his official handover of documents to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. As one of a handful of heads of government to attend these negotiations, it also put him on the top table at the start of the high-level negotiations on Wednesday and on the front pages of newspapers across the world. In the cavernous media centre, one heavily accented foreign television reporter came over to check the pronunciation of the newest face in world politics: "Tell me, the Australian president, do you call him Kevin Rude?" This brief moment of glory hasn't stopped some activists and commentators from ripping into Rudd and Wong. They are quickly learning that world climate negotiations are an unforgiving space and that many environmentalists are publicly intolerant of any view but their own. With just a few days to understand what is at stake at these negotiations, Rudd's underlying priority was to get through the week unscathed. His reluctance to back the contentious European push for specific reference to the most aggressive targets prescribed by scientists in the Bali roadmap this week was as much about not confusing his pre-election domestic promises with any developments at these negotiations. In her impressive debut performance in front of a large and hostile media pack this week, Wong danced carefully and deliberately around the issue for more than a half hour. "We have no difficulty with the reference to the IPCC's work, but Australia is not going to set an interim target at this stage," she said. "We agree with our friends in the EU and other nations who say that we need an interim target. But what we have done is put in place a process to determine what that target will be and, as importantly, how we propose to do that." The Australian Government's position here is anchored in delivering its four-pillared mandate on climate change: ratify Kyoto, set short-term 2020 targets after economic analysis from Ross Garnaut, establish emissions trading from 2010 and major emitting countries must be included in any new global deal. Rudd will not be too fussed if a final deal includes or excludes any mention of targets, and can

live with most rhetoric in a new roadmap that launches negotiations in a post-Kyoto deal, providing it doesn't compromise any of these commitments.

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His domestic political concerns have been eased by the rapidly evolving position being developed by the Coalition, with Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson first backing Kyoto ratification, then Opposition climate change spokesman Greg Hunt offering bipartisan support on non-binding targets. "Our fundamental position has been not to bind Australia before we do the economic analysis," Hunt says. "This roadmap allows us to do the economic analysis first without binding Australia." The dispute over the symbolic targets has been elevated above its real significance to the final deal, cast as the simple and defining ideological disagreement between Europe and the US on how a global climate solution should be brokered. A tough response to climate change suits European sensibilities and sits with its looming crisis over energy security. Europe has already made significant inroads into decarbonising its economies, helped by the exhaustion of its reserves of fossil fuels. During the past 200 years, Europe has burned almost all of its coal, consumed most of its gas. It faces growing problems with energy security issues, forced to import the bulk of its energy from Russia, Albania and the Middle East. Energy prices are high and many of its energy-intense industries have reinvested elsewhere. Eastern European countries will be included in EU emissions measurement. The creation of the 1990 baseline was a masterstroke by EU negotiators when Kyoto was drafted in 1997. Following their radical post-Soviet restructuring, their emissions are nearly 40 per cent lower than they were in 1990. It gives Europe an advantage in any push towards similar targets for developed countries. That's not to understate European governments' commitment to cutting greenhouse emissions, but their response is quixotic. Germany is talking about making cuts of 40 per cent by 2020 and has aggressive schemes to stimulate renewable energy technologies. But it also has plans for up to 26 new coal-fired power stations. The US view is informed by its low energy costs and plenty of fossil fuels still in the tank. In common with Australia and Canada, a response to climate change is more of a leap of faith than in Europe. Australia is relatively blessed even in a low-carbon future, with access to a wide suite of lower emission energy sources for its small economy. But the US faces a tougher transition. One of the underlying concerns in Bali is that the US negotiating team is big on rhetoric but under growing criticism for real signs of a genuine alternative strategy to the European attraction to command and control caps and targets. This perception was not enhanced any by the leak of the Canadian Government's negotiating position, which implied an obstructionist approach at Bali. It's here that Rudd hopes to find a space for Australia at these negotiations: a credible, target-driven non-European economy drawing on the best policies and not straitjacketed by a historical negotiating position. While the US Democrats have been keen to publicly distance themselves from the Bush administration's approach, statements this week from US senator John Kerry in Bali suggest a subtle shift in intent rather than a radical shift in negotiating position. "If the roadmap that comes out of Bali does not embrace the notion that less developed countries have also to be part of the solution at an appropriate moment in an appropriate way, it would be very difficult to pass something, certainly in our country," Kerry said this week. "But I believe that won't be the case. I believe we're going to make progress both in the US and globally." Developing countries have continued to want more tangible commitments from developed nations, more money to help them develop cleaner technologies and greater access to new cleaner technologies and financial support for deforestation. Negotiations here have broadly agreed these are crucial aspects of any future climate deal, but left aside many of the tougher questions of how and how much. The Europeans have held out all week on wanting the reference to non-binding targets and halving global emissions by 2050. The US won't agree unless these are removed. Developing countries want removal of anything that could place binding commitments on them, but rich countries won't agree unless they do. At least almost everyone can agree that they want a new global agreement and a two-year time frame. Everyone, that is, except the Saudi Arabians, who really wish this whole thing would just go away. The rhetoric during the past three days from world leaders has been consistent to the point of boring: they almost universally recognise the threat of climate change and the need to take action to address it. But the protracted and difficult negotiations serve as a reminder that responding to climate change is not simply a question of will. The stakes are high.

Adelaide Advertiser - Arctic ice melting at record rate

Arctic ice at the North Pole melted at a record rate in the northern hemisphere summer, the latest sign that climate change has accelerated in recent years, climate scientists say. "In 2007, we had off the charts warming," Michael Steele, an oceanographer at the University of Washington, said at the 2007 meeting of the American Geophysical Union, where 15,000 researchers have gathered to discuss earthquakes, water resources, and climate change. It was an ominous summer for the Arctic region, where for the first time in recorded history, ships sailed across the Arctic Ocean in water that had been part of the polar icecap, said Donald Perovich of the US Army Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory in New Hampshire. In the northern summer of

1980 the North Pole was covered by an ice sheet about the size of the continental United States, but this summer the ice would not have covered the states west of the Mississippi River, he said. "It's a tremendous decrease, but of course, the mystery is how did it happen?" Mr Perovich said.

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Scientists said two principal factors were accelerating the vanishing of the polar icepack, which helps cool the Earth by reflecting the sun's rays back into the atmosphere. As temperatures in the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans rose, warmer water moved into the Arctic Ocean. This helped melt the polar icecap, which this year floated in water about 3.5C warmer than its historical mean, Mr Steele said. "Water that is now circulating just 200m below the main icepack is now significantly warmer than it was just five years ago," said John Walsh of the University of Alaska. As ice in the arctic melts to water, it also reflects only 7 per cent of the sun's radiation, much less than the 85 per cent that ice normally reflects. As more of the Arctic Ocean was exposed, it absorbed these extra sun rays, further hastening the planet's rising temperature, Mr Perovich said. "It's a classic positive feedback. And these feedbacks are important from a climate perspective, because they can take small changes and amplify them," he said. He said people near the Arctic Circle were already seeing some of the effects of polar warming. Companies were starting to explore for natural resources in newly exposed areas, and coastal villages were grappling with erosion as sea levels rise. The scientists also expressed scepticism about humans' ability to help generate a cold winter soon enough that could allow the icecap to refreeze. New research shows that carbon dioxide, one gas that traps heat in the atmosphere, can be captured as it leaves coalburning power plants and then permanently sequestered in rock formations thousands of feet below the Earth's surface. However, it will be about 10 years before the first of such plants comes online, said Julianna Fessenden of the Los Alamos National Laboratory. "It's basically the fourth quarter, and we're down two touchdowns," Mr Perovich said. "As you go farther down this (global warming) path, it becomes harder to come back."

Al Gore address – Urgent action needed to combat climate change

As pressure grows for Australia to show leadership at the UN Climate Change Convention in Bali this week by backing steep greenhouse cuts by 2020, Al Gore shares his insights on the action required when accepting his Nobel Peace Prize in Bali on December 10th. This week, I will urge the delegates in Bali to adopt a bold mandate for a treaty that establishes a universal global cap on emissions and uses the market in emissions trading to efficiently allocate resources to the most effective opportunities for speedy reductions. This treaty should be ratified and brought into effect everywhere in the world by the beginning of 2010 – two years sooner than presently contemplated. The pace of our response must be accelerated to match the accelerating pace of the crisis itself. Heads of state should meet early next year to review what was accomplished in Bali and take personal responsibility for addressing this crisis. It is not unreasonable to ask, given the gravity of our circumstances that these heads of state meet every three months until the treaty is completed. We also need a moratorium on the construction of any new generating facility that burns coal without the capacity to safely trap and store carbon dioxide. And most important of all, we need to put a price on carbon -- with a CO2 tax that is then rebated back to the people, progressively, according to the laws of each nation, in ways that shift the burden of taxation from employment to pollution. This is by far the most effective and simplest way to accelerate solutions to this crisis. I salute Europe and Japan for the steps they've taken in recent years to meet the challenge, and the new government in Australia, which has made solving the climate crisis its first priority. But the outcome will be decisively influenced by two nations that are now failing to do enough: the United States and China. While India is also growing fast in importance, it should be absolutely clear that it is the two largest CO2 emitters — most of all, my own country — that will need to make the boldest moves, or stand accountable before history for their failure to act. Both countries should stop using the other's behaviour as an excuse for stalemate and instead develop an agenda for mutual survival in a shared global environment. SPEECH BY AL GORE ON THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE DECEMBER 10, 2007 OSLO, NORWAY

NEWS.com.au - US, Europe kiss and make up in Bali

A row between the United States and Europe over greenhouse gas curbs has been resolved, paving the way for a deal at the UN climate talks in Bali today. After talks lasting beyond the planned Friday deadline, disputes lingered about how far a final roadmap for a climate pact to succeed the Kyoto Protocol should demand action by China, India and other developing nations. Australia's Climate Change Minister Penny Wong and her Argentinean counterpart last night brokered 11th hour talks to prevent the collapse of the Bali conference. "We support this," Humberto Rosa, Portugal's Secretary of State for Environment, today told a session of weary delegates called to debate a compromise among almost 190 nations after two weeks of negotiations in Bali. However, the meeting then broke off again after objections from China and India. "This is completely unacceptable," a source close to the Chinese delegation said. India said it wanted changes to the final text to strengthen the role of rich nations in providing clean technology and finance to help them fight global warming. Soon after resuming today, the talks were suspended to try to resolve the tangle. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-

moon arrived in Bali for an unscheduled return to the talks from East Timor. He was scheduled to hold a news conference later in the day. The talks had been bogged down by a row between the United States, which opposes a guideline that rich countries should cut emissions by 25-40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020, and the European Union, which favoured the target.

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A draft compromise, reached after days of acrimony, relegated the range to a footnote from a more prominent position in the preamble. "Deep cuts in global emissions will be required" to avoid dangerous climate change, the preamble says. The United States, the world's top emitter of greenhouse gases and the only industrialised nation not party to Kyoto, said it was satisfied with the compromise. "We can live with the preamble," said US negotiator Harlan Watson. "I think it is encouraging that the Bali conference has agreed on a decision to launch negotiations with a timebound negotiation by the end of 2009," said the UN's Ban. "Reaching agreement requires a delicate balance to be struck," said Rachmat Witoelar, Indonesia's Environment Minister who was presiding over the talks, imploring delegates not to come up with new objections to a draft text worked out overnight. Washington opposed mention of firm 2020 guidelines for cutting carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, saying it would prejudice the outcome of negotiations on a new treaty meant to slow ever more droughts, heatwaves, storms and rising seas. Most nations favour starting two years of negotiations ending with a broad new pact in 2009 to succeed Kyoto, which obliges 37 industrialised nations to cut emissions of greenhouse gases by an average of five per cent below 1990 levels by 2008-12. UN officials said one section of text still undecided was how far developing nations should be required to take "actions" or make less demanding "contributions" to fight global warming. The main negotiating bloc of developing countries, the G77, said it was not ready to make new efforts to fight climate change by cutting emissions from fossil fuels. It fears curbs would cramp economic growth aimed at lifting millions out of poverty. "People are negotiating, they are posturing, and not rising above entrenched national positions," said Angus Friday, Grenada's Ambassador to the UN and chair of the Alliance of Small Island states. "We are just very disappointed at this stage. We are ending up with something so watered down there was no need for 12,000 people to gather here in Bali to have a watered down text. We could have done that by email," he said. The preamble includes a reference to findings by the Nobel Prize-winning UN Climate Panel, which said emissions by rich nations would have to be cut by 25 to 40 per cent by 2020 to avert the worst effects of warming.

16th

NEWS.com.au - Surprise deal ends Bali talks

A new agreement on tackling climate change was forged late this afternoon when the United States caved in and agreed to support the Bali roadmap. The US concession - 14 hours after the initial deadline passed - came after two weeks of talks and a day of high drama, in which conference head Yvo de Boer stormed out in tears and American delegates were booed and jeered. "We will go forward and join consensus," US lead negotiator Paula Dobriansky told the 190-nation meeting to cheers and applause from the exhausted delegates. Delegates rose to their feet and clapped and cheered as conference president Rachmat Witoelar banged down his gavel and declared that the roadmap had been adopted. The breakthrough came less than 90 minutes after Australia's lead negotiator, Climate Change Minister Penny Wong, said an agreement looked unlikely but promised to keep working for consensus. "We know that building a global consensus on this issue of climate change will not be easy ... but Australia is here for the long haul," Senator Wong said. "We said that we would play a constructive role now and in the future and that is precisely what Australia has done." United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono took the extraordinary step of addressing the delegates, urging them to compromise in the interests of the world. And Mr de Boer, the executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), was given a standing ovation after he returned to the hall in the Bali International Convention Centre after earlier breaking down and leaving the gruelling negotiations. Delegates agreed to launch talks on a new global warming pact to succeed the Kyoto Protocol in 2012, including nations which had not ratified Kyoto such as the US.

Europeans, Greens put on brave face after Bali

European countries and green groups put on a brave face to mask their anger and disappointment after the US thwarted their main goals for tackling dangerous climate change. The accord in Bali launched a two-year round of negotiations for the most ambitious treaty ever attempted for reining in greenhouse gases, the carbon pollution from fossil fuels damaging Earth's climate system. But under US pressure, the deal dodged the goal of halving these emissions by 2050 or of embracing a commitment by industrialised economies to slash their own emissions by 2020 to help set the horse-trading in motion. Both had been set down by the European Union (EU), supported by developing countries, as a prerequisite for negotiations that would be bold and put the whip to rich countries historically to blame for global warming. French Ecology Minister Jean-Louis Borloo said that the key decision was that negotiations were now set in motion, and there remained two years to haggle over pledges before the process winds up in Denmark in 2009. The future "is Copenhagen, it's not Bali," he said. His deputy

minister, Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, acknowledged that the framework for negotiations "is quite weak but ... still moves forward." She noted that the US, for the first time, had signed up to text on "the comparability of efforts" of industrialised countries, a sign of its intentions of being a full-fledged member of the international climate club.

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Green groups, though, accused the United States of gutting an agreement that would have ensured the negotiations got off to a flying start. "What you've got is a situation where the overwhelming majority of countries are progressive, they're pushing for a deal, and the (US) administration was out on a wrecking mission," said Hans Verolme of conservation group WWF. "Yes, we're launching negotiations and they have an end date," he said. "What they don't have is a clear reference to the best available science that should inform these negotiations and that is because the (US) administration was baulking, baulking, baulking." He and other activists said, however, that the process launched in Bali would provide a seat at the next table for President George W. Bush's successor. "The Americans have actually climbed down on things that 12 months ago they fundamentally rejected," said Steve Sawyer, secretary general of the Global Wind Energy Council (GWEC), a Brussels lobby group for the wind industry. Previously, the US had refused to re-engage in global climate talks, set an end date for a future treaty or be included in a process essentially driven by the format of the Kyoto Protocol, rejected by Bush, he said. "So, on a procedural level, the Americans are being coaxed back into the fold. But they still have bedrock opposition to legally-binding obligations of emissions reduction." Elliot Diringer, director of international strategies at the US environmental group, the Pew Center on Global Climate Change, said the Bali deal was "the best possible under the circumstances." "Two years ago, governments could barely reach agreement on staging a dialogue. Here, there is agreement on a global accord in 2009." But, he cautioned, "we shouldn't fool ourselves about how extraordinarily hard it's going to be to meet that goal." He said the Bush administration could easily block or slow progress in negotiations throughout 2008, "and without US concessions, developing countries won't follow suit."

Herald Sun - Neighbours dob in water cheats

Almost 1000 Melburnians face \$429 fines after being given final warnings for wasting water. And many can blame neighbours who are dobbing in those splurging on diminishing supplies. Water wasters are being threatened with fines and disconnection in a bid to manage storages. Figures obtained by the Sunday Herald Sun reveal there are 969 Melbournians on second and final warnings. If caught again they will become the first people in Melbourne to be fined or convicted for water waste, the State Government says. Water authorities have issued 756 first-warning letters and 114 final warnings over the past month. Offenders could have their water turned off and face charges in a crackdown on people flouting 3A restrictions. Since the restrictions were introduced in April, more than 5180 water cheats have been caught. Among the cases:

HUNDREDS of people have been found watering lawns and gardens outside dedicated hours.

NEIGHBOURS dob in each other for washing cars and using sprinklers.

Water authorities and the Government have until now focused on education rather than punishment. But with water storages below 40 per cent and dry months ahead, Water Minister Tim Holding said tough measures were needed to protect reserves. Only Mark Raymond Hogan, of Cranbourne, has been convicted of a breach of water laws, but he was charged with theft, not breaches of waste laws. He admitted siphoning off millions of litres to fill a dam and received a suspended sentence with no fine. The Government has funded more than 140 patrol officers and 90 vehicles to oversee restriction breaches. Melbournians are using 28 per cent less water than they were 10 years ago. Stage 3A restrictions are expected until at least the end of June.

Adelaide.now.com - Australia brokers climate deal

The world has agreed to a historic Australian-brokered agreement to tackle climate change after the US made dramatic concessions at the United Nations summit in Bali late yesterday. After 13 days of tortuous, sometimes all-night negotiations, the US agreed at the last minute to demands from developing nations allowing them to water down their commitments to cut greenhouse gases, amending a deal put together by Australian Climate Change Minister Penny Wong. As the deadline for the summit – and the prospect of failure – loomed, Australia and Argentina were nominated by the UN to push through a draft text that met the conflicting concerns of developing nations, led by China and India, and the US on the other. After Friday's talks stretched into the early hours yesterday, Senator Wong presented the draft to the 190-nation summit yesterday morning. But at the last minute, India demanded that the US, in particular, accept changes that would lessen the emission burden on Third World countries struggling to catch up with their industrialised counterparts. A pessimistic Senator Wong broke from the conference to declare that the chances of consensus looked grim. As developing country after developing country attacked Washington for resisting the Indian proposal, US delegation leader Paula Dobriansky held firm against any change, arguing that developing nations also had to bear the economic burdens of cutting greenhouse gases. She held her line in the face of unprecedented booing from delegates. There were

dramatic moments as conference secretary Yvo de Boer fled the hall, overcome by emotion after being attacked by China. He later returned. A series of developing countries then condemned the US for failing to show any flexibility. The assaults culminated in sustained applause when the Papua New Guinea delegate told Ms Dobriansky that if the US "could not lead it should get out of the way".

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Both the Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, and the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, made unscheduled appearances pleading with conference delegates to come to a consensus. "The world is watching us today," Mr Yudhoyono told his audience. "History will be judging us tomorrow." Just when all seemed lost and the summit appeared to be about to break down, Ms Dobriansky suddenly asked for permission to speak again, uttering the words the rest of the world had been waiting for. "We will go forward and join consensus," she said, sparking a long round of relieved applause. The sticking point was the inclusion in the Australian draft of a commitment from developing nations to "measurable, reportable and verifiable" national reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. That matched the pledge in the document by developed nations to the same conditions as well as to additional "quantified emission limitation and reduction objectives". But India wanted a reference only to "appropriate mitigation commitments" from developing countries while strengthening the "measurable, reportable and verifiable provisions" to cover technology and financial aid from First World countries. This was the position finally agreed to by the US. The agreement acknowledges that "the warming of the climate change system is unequivocal" and that "deep cuts in global emissions" will be required to address the crisis. There is no specific mention of 25 per cent to 40 per cent cuts in developed country emissions by 2020 – a target advocated by the European Union at one stage and Green groups but resisted by the US. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has refused to embrace these targets, saying that while Australia was committed to 60 per cent reductions by 2050, the Government would await the economic findings of the Garnaut Report, due in mid-2008, before deciding on any medium-term targets. But the final document does acknowledge the UN's key scientific document on climate change – the so-called IPCC Report – which proposed the 25 per cent to 40 per cent cuts by 2020. While not specifically mentioning the numbers, the European Union is now satisfied they will form the backdrop to the next phase in negotiations. The Bali Summit was never designed to set new targets for all countries, only to set up the basis for continuing negotiations on a roadmap for climate change action beyond the Kyoto agreement, which expires in 2012. The deadline for setting the next round of negotiations has now been set at 2009.

US says climate deal not good enough

The Americans have no right to comment they won't sign a agreement

The United States has voiced "serious concerns" about a deal reached at the UN climate conference in Bali, emphasising the need for major developing countries to be included in greenhouse gas emissions targets. In a statement following the end of the global conference, in which the United States found itself isolated in its stance against new emissions goals for developed countries, the White House said big developing economies also had to be covered by specific emissions targets. And it said that any new agreement to succeed the UN Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012, must acknowledge a country's sovereign right to pursue economic growth and energy security. While there were positive aspects to the conference's deal to seek a new treaty by 2009, the "United States does have serious concerns about other aspects of the decision as we begin the negotiations", the White House said. "The negotiations must proceed on the view that the problem of climate change cannot be adequately addressed through commitments for emissions cuts by developed countries alone. "We must give sufficient emphasis to the important and appropriate role that the larger emitting developing countries should play in a global effort to address climate change," it said. The White House also said coming talks need to differentiate between wealthier emerging countries and those with smaller economies in the commitments made toward reducing emissions. "In our view, such smaller and less developed countries are entitled to receive more differentiated treatment so as to more truly reflect their special needs and circumstances." The statement was a reiteration of the adamant US position toward the Kyoto Treaty and the Bali talks that large, rapidly growing economies like China, India and Brazil must themselves commit to emissions cuts if efforts to slow climate change are to be equitable and effective. The US position nearly scuttled the Bali deal before a last-minute compromise allowed Washington's negotiators to sign on. Washington had said it would not accept a joint statement agreed by nearly all of the 190 nations present as it wanted developing countries such as China to make tougher commitments. But on an unscheduled 13th day of talks, the United States - the only major industrial nation to reject Kyoto - reached a last-minute compromise with the European Union to avoid mentioning any figures as a target for slashing greenhouse gas emissions. Despite finally going along with the Bali pact, in its statement Washington insisted that the agreement has "not yet fully given effect to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities that is a pillar of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change". "Empirical studies on emission trends in the major developing economies now conclusively

establish that emissions reductions principally by the developed world will be insufficient to confront the global problem effectively," it said. "Accordingly, for these negotiations to succeed, it is essential that the major developed and developing countries be prepared to negotiate commitments, consistent with their national circumstances, that will make a due contribution to the reduction of global emissions."

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The US statement stressed that any successful negotiations on reducing global emissions had to accommodate the national economic interests of those taking part.

While they talk in Bali, we fiddle in SA

As world statesmen strut the stage in Bali seeking global answers to climate change, the State Government continues to fumble with a key solution – public transport. Revelations that Adelaide's train doors have been malfunctioning on average more than 10 times a week for the past decade are the latest in a litany of public transport debacles which the *Sunday Mail* has highlighted in recent months. More than one in 10 trains are late; train travel fell by 100,000 trips last year; poor track conditions have seen speed restrictions at more than 100 points in the rail system; peak period buses are regularly jam-packed; guards have been posted on some trains because doors fly open mid-journey. Wearingly, the list goes on. Little wonder Adelaide has the dubious distinction of being the most car-dependent city in Australia, with 75 per cent of commuters choosing their car over public transport. Lines of smoking vehicles clogging our roads are stark evidence commuters are voting with their car keys and telling Transport Minister Pat Conlon the public transport system is just not up to scratch. Thousands who rely on public transport are fed up with faulty, full or failing services. They could also be forgiven if they regard the Government's attitude as bordering on insouciant at times. We have said it before and will keep doing so until somebody listens – the Government needs to fundamentally commit funding and resources to ensure we have plentiful, reliable and safe services with world-class public transport enshrined as a basic principle of the clean, green, smart city that Adelaide aspires to be. At a time petrol prices are sky-high and there is deep community concern over climate change, the Government must not treat public transport as some sort of optional extra rather than an essential part of our social fabric. Around the world, governments are grappling with the immense challenges of public transport. We acknowledge the massive infrastructure, costs, technical issues, bureaucracies, unions and more are enough to make the most competent transport minister feel akin to Sisyphus, who was condemned to roll a rock uphill forever. However, excellence is the only option. Mr Conlon says we have a "good public transport network". Many exasperated commuters would challenge that assertion.

17th

FarmOnLine

PIRSA ignored local advice on bush fire management

Peter Davis is determined that a natural disaster of this scale will not happen again on Kangaroo Island. Mr. Davis, chairman of the Kangaroo Island Bushfire Prevention Committee, said the burn-off policies of the Department for Environment and Heritage and the Native Vegetation Council were largely to blame for the severity of the crisis the island had faced in the past week. "We used to use fire as a management tool but new rules and attitudes have stopped us from doing this," Mr. Davis said. "Creeks and roadside vegetation are the wicks that carry fire into farming properties and cause it to jump into properties. "If we'd burnt more previously we wouldn't have the situation we have now. "I have been working closely with the DEH for some years and they are trying but they are not listening to locals. "They don't burn enough in their burn-offs and they do not do it strategically to protect farmers." Mr. Davis is the deputy chief of the CFS on Kangaroo Island and has also served on the Premier's Bushfire Prevention Advisory Committee since 1992. He dates his experience and understanding of bushfires back to the 1958 Flinders Chase fire that burned for 16 weeks. He said people sometimes took his position wrongly. "I am a conservationist. Large back-burning during a bushfire is not good fire management," he said. "We can control grass fires quite easily if appropriate burning off has been maintained." He said Kangaroo Island farmers would support his position and that it as "about time someone started listening". Mr. Davis's outspoken views have brought him into conflict with senior CFS officials. The DEH declined to comment on Tuesday, saying it was a matter for the CFS. SOURCE: *The Islander*, Kangaroo Island, SA, a Fairfax Media publication.

NT farmers irate as Daly clearing ban extended

Farmers in the Northern Territory's Douglas Daly region are irate at what they say is a betrayal of science by the Government, which yesterday announced it would extend its ban on land clearing in the area for another two years. Located just a couple of hours south of the Port of Darwin, the region's excellent soils and abundant water mean it has the potential to be major export food bowl. But Chief Minister Paul Henderson and Environment Minister Len Kiely have decided to extend the moratorium while more scientific research is conducted. "This is the right decision for the Daly and we must ensure further development in the region will be subject to the

principles of sustainable development and informed by the best available science," Mr. Henderson said. "Although much work has been done, an additional two years will allow more comprehensive scientific research to be carried out." It is that scientific work that has already been conducted which has farmers fuming. The decision ignores the advice of the Daly River Management Advisory Committee, which has found that further development of the region can be conducted sustainably.

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Douglas-Daly farmer and DRMAC committee member, Dan Thomson, is "bitterly disappointed" with the decision. "A lot of work's gone on in the last couple of years to get some science in place with the DRMAC committee," Mr. Thomson said. "We've tried to get some guidelines together that would allow the moratorium to be lifted and some low level development to continue in a sustainable way. "Clearly the government hasn't taken the advice of the committee and we're stuck down here with no way forward for another two years." DRMAC has now been asked to investigate the impact of further development on local aquifers, which feed into the Daly River system. SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*, weekly rural newspaper, posting updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

Emerald, Qld, irrigators receive increase to water allocations

Christmas has come early for irrigators at Emerald, Qld, with SunWater increasing allocations from 34pc to 67pc thanks to more than 155,000 megalitres flowing into Fairbairn Dam in the past three weeks. Widespread wet weather across the Central Queensland Highlands has continued to provide more than 8600ML on average per day into the storage, bringing the dam to 27.8pc capacity. SunWater corporate strategy manager, Tom Vanderbyl, says Fairbairn Dam is currently storing 353,213ML, prompting the water provider to review announced allocations for water users within the Nogoa Mackenzie Water Supply Scheme. In the last 24 hours the dam has received 11,415ML lifting the capacity by 0.9pc. "This is certainly more good news for water users in the scheme and will ensure they move into 2008 with some renewed optimism after witnessing what can only be described as a very dry year in 2007," Mr. Vanderbyl said. SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*, weekly rural newspaper, posting breaking news updates on *FarmOnline*.

State of emergency looms over SA fires

Firefighters battling a resurgent blaze on South Australia's Kangaroo Island are bracing themselves for an overnight weather change. Temperatures soaring into the high 30s Celsius and strong wind gusts have fuelled the fire in the island's Flinders Chase National Park, which broke containment lines and jumped the Playford Highway late Wednesday. Police and the Country Fire Services (CFS) have evacuated residents near the national park ahead of a weather change, while firefighters began back burning northwest of the blaze. Authorities had earlier considered declaring a state of emergency on the island, but have shelved the decision until Friday morning. The Rocky River visitor information centre was also threatened with authorities estimating about a third of the 120,000-hectare park has been burnt. CFS chief officer Euan Ferguson said a "finger of fire" that crossed the western front had sparked the latest emergency as conditions worsened. He said it was critical that backburning succeeded in maintaining the fronts overnight to avoid having to declare a state of emergency. "We have identified a number of trigger points," Mr. Ferguson said. "When those trigger points are reached that may lead to discussions that may end up in some form of declaration." Mr. Ferguson said during the day the wind had shifted dramatically to "all quarters of the compass". The Bureau of Meteorology has predicted an easing of conditions today but Mr. Ferguson said the fire authorities remained concerned. "If the wind change eases in the late evening or overnight that will be in favour of the fire fighters but if it comes through in a vigorous fashion in the mid to late afternoon that will be very difficult," he said yesterday. A CFS spokesman said the Flinders Chase fire had burned down to the coast on the island's west side and, although it had not been confirmed, it was likely the Destrees fire on the island's south-east had done the same. The central fire, on the south central coast, again broke containment lines. The fires have so far claimed one life, with the body of a man who had been assisting firefighters found in his burnt out truck near Vivonne Bay, on the island's south coast last week. Three fires are still burning on the island after lightning sparked 12 outbreaks more than a week ago. More than 700 volunteers from five states are now involved in the island emergency with firefighters from Western Australia joining colleagues from SA, Victoria, NSW and Queensland. "This is probably one of the largest incident management teams that we have ever seen in South Australia and for one of the longest periods," Mr. Ferguson said. SOURCE: AAP

The Australian - Bali 'only first step': Rudd

Kevin Rudd has shifted further away from the US position on climate change, strongly backing the new Bali agreement as the White House expressed "serious concerns" about the weak commitments placed on major developing economies such as China and India. White House press secretary Dana Perino said in a statement yesterday the new climate deal to be negotiated over the next two years needed to do more to cut greenhouse gas emissions from these major developing countries. The Prime Minister said the historic framework for negotiations on a new global climate deal after 2012 - hammered out at the weekend in a tense and emotional

finale to the UN's Bali conference - was a compromise agreement but it represented a "step forward" in imposing commitments on emerging economies. "We now have a commitment on the question of developing countries for them to engage in measurable, reportable and verifiable, nationally appropriate mitigation actions," he said. "This is a step forward. Is it as much as the international community would have liked? It is not quite there."

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The Bali conference was deadlocked for more than two days over the terms of commitments required by developed and developing countries to tackle climate change. In the end, the Bali Roadmap, which will frame two years of negotiations on a post-Kyoto climate accord, says rich countries will be required to make measurable commitments or actions to cut emissions. These include quantified "objectives", which still leaves the door open for binding targets such as those imposed by Kyoto. According to the road map, developing countries do not need to commit to quantified targets but will be required to take measurable and verifiable actions that are "in the context of sustainable development, supported by technology and enabled by financing and capacity-building". China's rapid economic growth will make it the biggest single greenhouse gas emitting country in the world by the end of the decade, with the International Energy Agency predicting developing countries will account for three-quarters of the increase in global greenhouse gases by 2030. Although developing nations will not have to make the same binding emissions cuts as developed nations, they have recognised the need to tackle climate change and, unlike the Kyoto Protocol, will now be part of the next global pact. The UN, which hosted the Bali conference, wants to wrap up the negotiations on a new agreement in the Danish capital of Copenhagen in December 2009. Mr Rudd yesterday formally endorsed senior bureaucrats leading the Australian delegation in Bali, who have come under repeated personal attack from some activists claiming they were advocating a Howard government strategy. "Last night in Bali the world community decided to take a bold step into the future," Mr Rudd said. "But it is only one step and we have got a long, long way to go." UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who flew to Bali for a late appeal for flexibility from the 189 countries represented, praised the agreement as a "pivotal first step" to tackle what he called "the defining challenge of our time". British Prime Minister Gordon Brown called the deal "a vital step forward for the whole world", while German Chancellor Angela Merkel said the road map opened "the way to real negotiations on effective measures" for climate protection. "The road to an agreement to succeed Kyoto is still paved with obstacles," Ms Merkel said. The White House statement indicates it will seek to negotiate different terms for poor countries based on the size of their economy and the scale of their emissions - a move that could create a wedge in the Group of 77 bloc of developing countries. "The negotiations must adequately distinguish among developing countries by recognising that the responsibilities of the smaller or least developed countries are different from the larger, more advanced developing countries," the US statement said. "In our view, such smaller and less-developed countries are entitled to receive more differentiated treatment so as to more truly reflect their special needs and circumstances." The revised White House position follows the dramatic last-minute backdown by US negotiators in Bali, who eventually agreed to a key clause proposed by poor countries linking actions to cut emissions with access to clean-technology transfers and financing from rich countries. The European Union's attempt to introduce a reference to non-binding targets for developed countries of between 25 and 40 per cent by 2020 was knocked out on Friday following stubborn opposition led by Russia and the US. UN Framework Convention on Climate Change executive secretary Yvo de Boer said the new agreement had broken down old barriers between rich and poor countries. "What we're seeing disappear here today is what I would call the Berlin Wall of climate change," he said. The Bali deal also included important progress on slowing deforestation, exchange of clean energy technologies and the creation of a fund to help poor countries adapt to the impacts of climate change. *Additional reporting: Michael McKenna*

Real climate work on horizon

ALL year there has been such expectation the Bali conference would kick off a new post-Kyoto climate deal that it would have been more remarkable if delegates had been unable to craft a road map from these talks. In the end they got there, first ponderously, then exhaustingly, then dramatically, with the Americans first blocking a crucial point at the end game of these negotiations, only to mysteriously reverse their position half an hour later. Even more curious was the White House decision to post a clarifying statement yesterday flagging its "serious concerns" about the deal the US helped broker. The final text of the Bali Roadmap is pretty close to the original deal the UN convention on climate change had been pushing for to move beyond the flawed Kyoto process. Europe's unheralded insertion of text talking about developed countries being guided by emissions cuts of between 25 and 40 per cent by 2020 was an attempt to elevate the aspirations of an agreement. It nearly backfired, distracting debate away from the main game: the text binding the level of greenhouse gas-cut commitments by rich and poor countries. The new Bali Roadmap broadly frames what a new global climate change deal - to replace Kyoto when it expires in 2012 - will look like. It is significant despite the rush to trivialise, requiring the US along with other developed countries to take real and measurable actions to cut

emissions, including quantified reduction targets. The word "target" isn't formally in the text, replaced by its weaker diplomatic derivation "objectives". But the intent is the same. It represents a significant concession for the US, the sole Kyoto holdout, given the challenges it has faced in its Congress to deliver anything substantial along these lines.

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Developing countries have made substantial concessions, agreeing to undertake "measurable, reportable and verifiable" mitigation actions, with the critical India condition that they be supported by technology and money from rich countries. Such actions, tailored to the circumstances of individual nations, mean developing nations such as India and China will escape the same binding targets imposed on developed nations. This is not quite up to the commitments on India and China demanded by the Rudd Government as a result of its mid-campaign pirouette, but it's close. US lead negotiator Paula Dobriansky said she changed her mind on the floor of the convention and agreed to the final text because she realised the developing countries were serious about addressing climate change. The Bali meeting made progress on funding arrangements for projects to help the world adapt to climate change, reducing deforestation and increased technology transfers, although the devil remains in the detail. Now the real work begins. The negotiations to agree on a negotiating text will be nothing compared with what it will take to finalise an actual climate change agreement, in particular what these "objectives" and "actions" will look like. The UNFCCC meeting in Copenhagen in 2009 will be the grand finale for the agreement, but it will be mainly brokered in meetings between leaders and ministers over the next two years.

Let's be fair about climate targets

AS representatives of the world's peoples wrestled in Bali with the greatest challenge to human co-operation we have ever known, different ideas of what was fair and what wasn't threatened to tear them apart. They still do. Environmental lobbyists keep insisting we can't make progress without goodwill. True enough. Then they join the developing countries to wag their finger at the West saying, "You created the problem. You take the lead in fixing it." But though the West hasn't been perfect, Europe and Japan did take the lead, back in Kyoto. And goodwill from the West won't solve the global problem on its own. Here we are a decade after Kyoto. China will shortly overtake the US as the earth's biggest carbon emitter and the story's the same. If we could wait a decade at Kyoto we can't wait that long again. A clearer conception of fairness, to both developed and developing countries, might help our progress. It's a cliché that level playing fields between countries and between industries within them improve efficiency. But they also provide a basic kind of fairness. Paradoxically, the greatest objection to excusing China and India from vigorous climate change effort is not its inefficiency, as unfortunate as that is, but its unfairness. Right now Australians bear the cost and inconvenience of water restrictions. One might argue for some special help to the poor in this situation, but it's hard to imagine anyone arguing for simply exempting them from water restrictions. Ditto for higher petrol prices. Likewise, if developed countries take concerted action to reduce emissions only to watch aluminium smelters decamp to China and India in order to continue emitting as before, political support for our effort will evaporate. Without tolerably level playing fields, action on climate change will become farcical, and thus politically unsustainable. But if bringing the developing countries properly into an abatement regime is the only way of being fair to the developed world, it can be done in a way that's more than fair to the developing countries. Ultimately the only fair way to allocate the world's rights to emit is the way we allocate votes in a democracy. Each person has equal value. If we divided global emissions entitlements between countries this way, with equal per capita emissions entitlements, China's population would entitle it to 66 times our own and over four times America's entitlement. Of course, once allocated between countries such entitlements should be traded to ensure their most efficient use. It beats me why the developing countries are not playing this card more forcefully now, rather than the delaying game we're seeing. If citizens of developed countries are too greedy to transition to per capita emissions entitlements quickly, let's hope we're not too stupid to do it gradually. Because I can't see any other way of making the deep engagement of the developing countries politically sustainable. A gradual transition to such a regime of per capita emissions entitlements would enable developing countries to continue expanding their emissions for some time as they must to continue developing their economies. So we'd have to be prepared to reduce developing countries' and our own entitlements accordingly. That's how the developed countries got engagement from Russia back in Kyoto. Russia was given more emissions entitlements than it needed as a bribe. But rather than the kind of fairness we're dishing out to the developing countries now, entitling them to delay real action, it was the right kind of bribe. Russia had the same stake in immediately abating carbon as the countries facing tougher targets because it could sell its permits to them. So as we navigate the new road map that was agreed at Bali we should be both warm-hearted and cool-headed. We can do so by valuing fairness to both developed and developing countries. We should be unapologetic about continuing our own relatively token actions unless and until all major emitters - including as a minimum the US and China - are fully engaged. And we should focus on

the goal and the benefits of carbon abatement, not just its costs. As with tariff cuts there'll be big winners as well as losers. And some will surprise us. Providing the US and developing countries are engaged, carbon emitters such as gas production and even aluminium will be winners wherever their consumption reduces emissions by more than the emissions used in their production.

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Given a tolerably level playing field in our region, the pain of quite deep cuts will be dwarfed by the usual process of economic growth. Indeed adjustment to deep cuts over the next 12 years would be slower than the adjustment we've just been through since petrol prices shot up, and that didn't slow us down much. And the overriding point of what pain we do experience is to achieve a greater benefit, in this case to reduce the risk of much higher costs from climate change (including the slim but real chance of really catastrophic warming). If we can focus on securing the basic fairness that is the precondition for political sustainability, we should be unafraid to sign up to the kinds of aggressive carbon reduction target the UN has spruiked. If we can't, perhaps we should stock up on sunscreen for our kids and grandkids. Things will probably hot up. *Nicholas Gruen is chief executive of Lateral Economics*

Small but essential steps at Bali

LIKE medicine, the first rule of diplomacy is to do no harm, which makes the UN climate conference in Bali a success, of sorts. After 800 meetings over two weeks, the diplomats and politicians, bureaucrats and scientists agreed that what we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is more hot air. Talks will now continue according to a road map that will lead to Copenhagen in 2009, where the world will supposedly agree to nation-specific targets on carbon reduction. This may not sound like much, with the undertakings written in the arid argot of international diplomacy, but the fact signatories also agreed to set quantifiable targets to reduce the impact of greenhouse gases means the Copenhagen meeting will have a framework to work within. Under the Bali agreement, nations in the developed world promise to consider specific objectives to mitigate climate change, including quantified emission reductions. Developing countries agreed to consider mitigation measures, but without any mention of their setting targets. This is a long way short of the 25 per cent to 40 per reductions in carbon output environmentalists want to see from the world's richest economies. And it will not end the US complaint that the big Asian emitters are not being called on to pull their weight. But at least it signals to China and India that they cannot free-ride forever while the West is blamed for global warming. Other Bali decisions include asking the World Bank to work out ways to pay poor countries to stop chopping down their forests and for a green-technology transfer fund. More important, the conference made positive noises about carbon markets, which put a price on emitting the gas, as an incentive to encourage polluters to reduce emissions. For people who believe the world has precious few decades left to avert a climate catastrophe created by human activity, this is all too little, too late, but the Bali meeting was never going to sign off on deep cuts to greenhouse gas emissions. Even ignoring the question of what level of cuts need to be made, a matter on which the science is not settled, the debate on who should make them, and how, has a long way to go. Bali was based on national delegates thinking globally, but inevitably acting locally, looking to protect their various countries' economic interests. Like the Europeans, who having largely exhausted their own coal deposits and have always piously demanded fossil fuel rich nations such as the US, and Australia should adjust their economies to suit Europe's circumstances. The initial European position was for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the developed economies of up to 40 per cent by 2020. This was not a problem for the big carbon emitters of the developing world, especially rapidly industrialising China, as long as it only applied elsewhere. As with many other developing countries, China argues it should be allowed to "catch up" with the developed economies and improve the standard of living of its people in the process. This is an argument that relies on mock morality rather than economics or science. Australia could rely entirely on windmills for electricity and abandon coal exports altogether but it would not make a dent in planetary emissions unless the Chinese cut back on the amount of coal and oil they burn for power and transport. It is also an argument that the US will not accept, at least while George Bush is President. With his country's relatively low energy costs, Mr. Bush will not sign up to cuts for the US that leave other countries to pump as much carbon as they like into the atmosphere. This inevitably leaves the US open to accusations that it is an environmental vandal, too selfish to take responsibility for its own emissions. The Americans at Bali certainly did not do anything for their nation's image by fighting deals that they believe put almost all the emphasis on their cutting emissions and by declining to accept targets set at the beginning, not the end of the journey to Copenhagen. But while the US stance looks like a case of an arrogant post-industrial power dictating to the countries that now smelt metals and cheaply manufacture everything the West wants, it is entirely understandable. No matter how many activists it annoys, the brutal truth is that global warming will not be contained unless China and India play a big part. At the end of the Bali conference, many greens are undoubtedly annoyed. While the climate scientists who work in the world of practical politics will see Bali as a step forward, the carpetbaggers of the environmental movement, who use

climate change as a stick to beat the developed world for being richer than sub-Saharan Africa, will lament the meeting did not demand enormous emissions cuts for the West. Others will use the outcome to berate the US for protecting its national interest. The sound of a Papua New Guinea delegate, with a North American accent, criticising the US demonstrates how Bali became an arena for Bush-bashing.

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But the greens can denounce the conference all they like, the reality is that the market, not manifestos, is the way the world will reduce greenhouse gases. And the Bali conference made some, albeit unspectacular, progress on the issue of how carbon trading can work and how the world should divvy up the cuts that are ultimately agreed to. As such, Bali confirmed the sense of the Rudd government strategy. In signing on to the Kyoto agreement, Kevin Rudd demonstrated how his Government took global warming seriously. But Mr. Rudd and Climate Change Minister Penny Wong also did well in Bali by protecting Australia's economic interest. Australia relies on coal for \$25 billion in export income and almost all its electricity and the Government is right to commit to nothing until economist Ross Garnaut reports on the costs of cutting greenhouse gases next year. The debate on how to practically reduce carbon emissions is occurring all over the world. The Bali conference produced no quick and easy answer to global warming but anything that gets us closer to a plan that will work in the real world is no bad thing.

Cheers as climate deadlock broken

After two weeks of stonewalled climate change negotiations in Bali, the first signs of real progress started to emerge on Friday afternoon. Meetings until 3am the previous night had failed to break a deadlock on the content of the so-called Bali road map - a statement from the UN conference setting out the priorities for negotiations on a new post-Kyoto climate change pact. All week, the US had been adamant it would not wear the European Union's insistence that the statement refer to the need for greenhouse gas cuts of 25-40 per cent by 2020, even if the targets were non-binding and merely a guideline for further talks. The US had some support among the 189 countries represented in Bali, with Russia, Japan and Canada similarly opposed to the wording. By Friday lunchtime, with the talks going nowhere, the conference hosts, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, tried to speed things up by calling a special meeting of the warring parties. To be co-chaired by Australia's Climate Change Minister Penny Wong, it was the diplomatic equivalent of locking them in a room and not letting them out until they had resolved their differences. And, despite Senator Wong's brief hold on the Climate Change portfolio in the new Rudd Government, it appeared to work. Later that afternoon German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel briefed journalists, talking in glowing terms of the US, saying the Americans had become more accommodating and were making real efforts to broker a deal. EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas agreed that there had been "good progress". But as one problem was being solved, another was emerging. Late on Friday night Pakistan ambassador Munir Akram, representing the group of 77 developing countries, the G77, warned that "deep differences" remained between developed and developing countries. He said poor countries were opposed to a new deal, preferring to manage climate change under the existing rules of the Kyoto Protocol, which places emission mitigation obligations on only rich countries. Negotiations went on until 3.30am on Saturday without resolution and resumed after most delegates had grabbed only a couple of hours' sleep. "We were cautiously optimistic last night about the progress that was being made," Senator Wong said then. "Unfortunately that progress has not continued this morning." By Saturday morning, however, the reference to the 2020 targets had been removed and the main disagreement focused on the two paragraphs that outlined the specific obligations of developed and developing countries. India had sought to amend the road map document to strengthen requirements for richer nations to help the poorer with technology to limit emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. To encourage a resolution, debate was brought back into the public plenary meeting of the convention. But by this stage delegates were exhausted and tempers soon frayed. After lengthy delays waiting for closed-door negotiations to conclude, Indonesian Environment Minister and conference president Rachmat Witoelar reconvened the plenary meeting, even though key members of the G77 were still outside trying to thrash out a compromise. The Chinese delegation then launched an angry attack on UNFCCC head Yvo de Boer, accusing the organisers of deliberately convening a decision-making plenary session while closed-door talks were going on with developing nations. A clearly exhausted de Boer was offended, and when he was given the opportunity to reply a few minutes later, broke down and left the auditorium to supportive applause. To help break the deadlock, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon made an unscheduled return to address the convention. Joined by Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, he implored delegates to compromise. Mr Ban, who attended the conference earlier in the week, returned to the Indonesian island after a visit to East Timor. "I come before you very reluctantly," he said. "Frankly, I am disappointed by the lack of progress." He added: "Seize the moment, this moment, for the good of all humanity. I appeal to you to make the necessary agreement now, to not risk all that you have achieved so far.

The scientific realities affecting our planet demand a high level of ambition." Dr Yudhoyono urged delegates to live up to the world's expectations. "The worst thing that can happen is for our great project, for the human race and our planet Earth to crumble because we cannot find the right wording," he said. "The world is watching. I beg you to not let them down."

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The EU soon announced it would withdraw its opposition to the new form of words proposed by India. And with most countries coming on board, it appeared agreement was at hand. Then the head of the US delegation, Paula Dobriansky, spoke. "We are not prepared to accept this formulation," she said, setting off loud, long boos in the hall. This was the cue for delegate after delegate to take aim at the US. Australia remained silent. But South Africa's delegate called Ms Dobriansky's intervention "most unwelcome and without any basis". "We would like to beg them" to relent, added the Ugandan delegate. The delegate from Papua New Guinea leaned into his microphone. "We seek your leadership," Kevin Conrad told the Americans. "But if for some reason you are not willing to lead, leave it to the rest of us. Please get out of the way." The UN climate conference exploded with applause. The US's isolation was complete. No one spoke in support. And Ms Dobriansky capitulated, withdrawing the US objection. "We've listened very closely to many of our colleagues here during these two weeks, but especially to what has been said in this hall today," she said. "We will go forward and join consensus." Throughout the hall, the boos turned to wild cheering. The deal was done at 5.30pm. And a two-year negotiation for a new global climate change agreement after 2012 has begun. "This is the beginning, not the end," Mr Ban said, adding ominously: "We will have to engage in more complex, long and difficult negotiations."

Adelaide Advertiser - Sea level rise could be double - warning

The world's sea levels could rise twice as high this century as UN climate scientists have predicted, according to researchers who looked at what happened more than 100,000 years ago, the last time Earth got this hot. Experts working on the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have suggested a maximum 21st century sea level rise - a key effect of global climate change - of about 0.8m.

In-depth: Climate change

But researchers said in a study appearing yesterday in the journal *Nature Geoscience* that the maximum could be twice that, or 1.6m. They made the estimate by looking at the so-called interglacial period, some 124,000 to 119,000 years ago, when Earth's climate was warmer than it is now due to a different configuration of the planet's orbit around the sun. That was the last time sea levels reached up to 20 feet 6m above where they are now, fuelled by the melting of the ice sheets that cover Greenland and Antarctica. The researchers say their study is the first robust documentation of how quickly sea levels rose to that level. "Until now, there have been no data that sufficiently constrain the full rate of past sea level rises above the present level," lead author Eelco Rohling of Britain's National Oceanography Centre said. Mr Rohling and his colleagues found an average sea level rise of 1.6m each century during the interglacial period. Back then, Greenland was 53C to 5C warmer than now - which was similar to the warming period expected in the next 50 to 100 years, Mr Rohling said. Current models of ice sheet activity did not predict rates of change this large, but they did not include many of the dynamic processes already being observed by glaciologists, the scientists said.

Bill water by area

We should all listen to what the Professor is saying

SA Water's billing system should be "scrapped" and replaced with a pricing structure based on residential region, an Adelaide water expert says. Professor Mike Young, a scientist from Adelaide University and member of the Wentworth Group, yesterday released a Pricing Your Water plan calling for a complete overhaul of SA Water's two-tiered water pricing system. "I propose we have a per kilolitre pricing structure where people are charged for each kilolitre they use," he said. "That price would be determined by the region, its water system, the problems associated with that system and the scarcity of water at the time. "The amount in storage would be estimated every quarter and charged accordingly so if dam storage goes down, prices rise." Professor Young said Adelaide householders would then pay a different price for water to those living in the Barossa Valley, Whyalla or Mt Gambier. "Water scarcity is very different in Adelaide to, say, in Mount Gambier, so there is zero logic in having people from two different areas paying the same amount for water," he said. Premier Mike Rann recently announced that SA Water would use a three-tiered system from July next year and that an independent consultant would be appointed to assess the company's pricing model. Under the new system, households will face a 42 per cent increase in water charges over the next five years, paying 71c a kilolitre for the first 120KL. Usage of between 120 and 520KL will cost \$1.38. Under a new third tier, water will cost \$1.65/KL for consumption that exceeds 520KL. Professor Young said this system gave householders little incentive to save water. "People who use well under 120KL are still having to pay the separate supply charge of \$160. "It's another guaranteed revenue source for the Government."

While they talk in Bali, we fiddle in SA

AS world statesmen strut the stage in Bali seeking global answers to climate change, the State Government continues to fumble with a key solution – public transport. Revelations that Adelaide's train doors have been malfunctioning on average more than 10 times a week for the past decade are the latest in a litany of public transport debacles which the *Sunday Mail* has highlighted in recent months.

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More than one in 10 trains are late; train travel fell by 100,000 trips last year; poor track conditions have seen speed restrictions at more than 100 points in the rail system; peak period buses are regularly jam-packed; guards have been posted on some trains because doors fly open mid-journey.

Wearingly, the list goes on.

Little wonder Adelaide has the dubious distinction of being the most car-dependent city in Australia, with 75 per cent of commuters choosing their car over public transport. Lines of smoking vehicles clogging our roads are stark evidence commuters are voting with their car keys and telling Transport Minister Pat Conlon the public transport system is just not up to scratch. Thousands who rely on public transport are fed up with faulty, full or failing services. They could also be forgiven if they regard the Government's attitude as bordering on insouciant at times. We have said it before and will keep doing so until somebody listens – the Government needs to fundamentally commit funding and resources to ensure we have plentiful, reliable and safe services with world-class public transport enshrined as a basic principle of the clean, green, smart city that Adelaide aspires to be. At a time petrol prices are sky-high and there is deep community concern over climate change, the Government must not treat public transport as some sort of optional extra rather than an essential part of our social fabric. Around the world, governments are grappling with the immense challenges of public transport. We acknowledge the massive infrastructure, costs, technical issues, bureaucracies, unions and more are enough to make the most competent transport minister feel akin to Sisyphus, who was condemned to roll a rock uphill forever. However, excellence is the only option. Mr Conlon says we have a "good public transport network". Many exasperated commuters would challenge that assertion.

Green light for Whyalla centre to help cleaner mining

A new research centre at Whyalla will help develop the world's first "Big Dish" solar power generator and other green projects. The Regional Sustainability Centre in Whyalla will focus on solar-based energy for water desalination and air-conditioning and the mining industry's environmental impact. The centre, already backed by several organisations including the University of South Australia, will be boosted today, with the announcement of almost \$700,000 in State Government funding. Project leader Professor Wasim Saman, the Director of UniSA's Institute for Sustainable Systems and Technologies, will be supported by a team of 100. The project was one of seven science research projects to receive funding through the State Government as part of the Premier's Science and Research Funds. Other research projects included the development of:

HIGH powered lasers for use in defence applications.

NEW communications technology.

CUTTING-EDGE medical devices.

Science Minister Paul Caica said an additional \$1.2 million in funding for the Premier's Science and Research funds took the total package to almost \$5 million for the year. Deputy mayor and deputy chairman of the Whyalla Economic Development Board, Eddie Hughes said the centre would help to support several environmentally friendly projects including Whyalla's Big Dish project, the world's first base-load power station. "The mining industry has a lot of serious challenges when it comes to sustainability in reducing greenhouse gas and sourcing water in an environmentally benign way," he said. "This will feed in very nicely with the mining industry and provide a practical research and development component to industry in this region. "We have selected projects that will allow us to deliver transformational investment for South Australia," he said. "The projects being funded from the boosted pool of catalyst funds have given a particular focus this year to key defence and advance manufacturing sectors and also to innovation in the development of renewable energy."

AWA

1. Minister for Water and Climate Change, Penny Wong will negotiate with state counterparts after the Bali climate conference to reach an agreement on managing the Murray-Darling Basin, with confirmation that a National agreement to manage the Rivers will be a priority for the Rudd Government.
2. Brisbane City Council will replace 20% of current annual water usage by the end of 2008, primarily through the supply of recycled water to industry, and through pressure and leakage management. Water engineers have identified, designed and delivered infrastructure projects that have led to it exceeding its current State Government water supply target by 15ML/day.
3. Gold Coast City Council has launched a new website and newsletter with information on the Pimpama Coomera recycled WATER Master Plan.

4. The Victorian Minister for Sport and Recreation has announced a \$200,000 grant to Tennis Victoria through the Drought Relief for Community Sport and Recreation. The grant will be used to treat more than 1,700 clay courts following trials that showed courts treated with either calcium chloride or magnesium chloride demonstrate water savings of up to 80%.

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5. Melbourne Water is hoping steady rainfall across the city will result in a drop in water consumption. Up to 11 millimetres of rain fell across Melbourne and Geelong within 24 hours, but rainfall in the catchment areas was lower

6. Bill Paterson, formerly Deputy Chairman of the NRM Board and a former member of the River Murray Catchment Water Management Board, has been appointed the presiding member for the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board.

7. Glaciers in China's high-altitude western areas have shrunk 7 to 18% over the past five years, according to a new survey by Chinese scientists. A second research that started in May this year on the country's glaciers indicated an average shrinking of 7.4 % compared with the results of the first survey completed in 2002.

8. Richmond Shire Council in northwest Queensland has begun a process to cool the town's water supply. Underground bore water is being diverted into an inland lake using poly pipe, which cools it to 33 degrees Celsius (from 41).

9. The Nationals and a peak farming body have turned on state and federal governments over the omission of the Murray Darling from next week's COAG meeting.

10. Professor Mike Young, scientist from Adelaide University and member of the Wentworth Group, has released a Pricing Your Water plan calling for a complete overhaul of SA Water's two-tiered water pricing system.

11. The river Murray is high in concerns of the new Rudd government as water levels hover around their lowest in six decades.

18th

FarmOnLine

Mixed rainfall outlook for the next three months

There is a mixed outlook for rural Australia's chances of receiving above average rainfall over the next three months, according to the Bureau of Meteorology's latest forecast. According to the Bureau, there are moderate to strong shifts favouring above average totals in parts of eastern and southwestern Australia, while a drier season is favoured in some areas down the middle of the continent. And nearly all of southern Australia also has 65-75pc chance of hotter than average daytime maximum temperatures, while northern Australia has a 50pc chance. The Bureau says the pattern of seasonal rainfall odds across Australia is a result of cooling across the equatorial Pacific in association with La Niña, and continuing higher than average temperatures in the central to southeastern Indian Ocean. The chances of exceeding the median rainfall over January to March are between 60pc and 75pc in a large area extending from southeast Queensland across both the northern inland and east of NSW (see map). The southwest of WA also has similar chances, although it's a seasonally dry time of the year in this part of the country. In contrast, large parts of both the central NT and central SA have a 35-40pc chance of exceeding the three-month median, meaning that these areas have a 60-65pc chance of being drier than normal. Over the rest of the country, the chances of exceeding the three-month median rainfall are between 40pc and 60pc. SOURCE: BOM and *FarmOnline*, delivering up to date weather information for all areas of Australia.

PM to hold separate State talks on water

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd plans to hold one-on-one talks with each of the State premiers over their concerns about the Federal Government's water reform package. Victoria continues to refuse to hand its water management powers to the Commonwealth under the \$10 billion Murray-Darling program announced by the Howard Government in January. During a break in his second cabinet meeting - and the last for the year - Mr. Rudd pledged to meet separately with the Premiers of each State affected by the Federal package. "We will transact outstanding disagreements, particularly involving the government of Victoria, on the Murray-Darling arrangement bilaterally," he told reporters in Canberra today. "I'll be dealing separately with the government of Victoria and, as appropriate, with the governments of NSW and South Australia to resolve outstanding concerns there." While Victoria's objections to the national water plan for the Basin were well documented, each State has individual concerns about the national water takeover. "I believe these (concerns) are best and most productively advanced by separate, one-on-one discussions with those relevant Premiers," Mr. Rudd said. "And those Premiers are in agreement with that approach." The Prime Minister will meet all state and territory leaders at the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) forum in Melbourne on Thursday. SOURCE: AAP

Vic's Goulburn Murray irrigation allocations rise a further 2pc

Irrigators on the Victorian Goulburn and Murray irrigation systems have today been given a further 2pc of their seasonal allocation, as rural water authority Goulburn Murray Water updated allocations. Allocations on the Goulburn rose to 39pc of high reliability water shares, while those on the Murray were lifted to 28pc. The Broken system seasonal allocation increased by 6pc to 29pc. There was no change to the Campaspe or Loddon, which remained on 5pc. GMW is forecasting final allocations on the Goulburn of between 39-51pc and on the Murray of 28-32pc.

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The Victorian Government has approved permanent introduction of carryover of unused allocation. SOURCE: *Stock & Land*, Vic, weekly rural newspaper, posting breaking news updates on *FarmOnline*.

Water transfer fees should be paid by irrigation companies

Water companies say billing them for water transfer fees would be one step towards reducing the turnaround time in processing water trades. Bondi Group secretary and Coleambally Irrigation Co operative chief executive, Murray Smith, said irrigation companies had lodged their recommendations on streamlining water trade processes with the Federal Government last week. Included in recommendations aimed at slashing red tape, which has seen trade turnaround times drag out into months, is a suggestion that transfer fees be billed direct to irrigation companies which can then pass them back to irrigators. Mr. Smith said one of the complaints from State agencies had been that trade applications were often not accompanied by the relevant fee. "It's silly that a \$150 fee can hold up a trade worth half a million," he said. "The simple solution would be for the state agencies to bill the irrigation companies direct. "We want to knock these things on the head." Mr. Smith said he had already had positive feedback from the Murray Darling Basin Commission and hoped constructive discussion would lead to an improved process. "We've asked them to engage with stakeholders to develop solutions," he said. SOURCE: *Stock & Land*, Vic, weekly rural newspaper, posting updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

Carbon market could outstrip foreign exchange

The carbon trading market is forecast to be even bigger than the foreign exchange market, with brokers pushing to make Melbourne a hub of activity. The newly installed Rudd Government has made a commitment to introduce a carbon-trading scheme by 2010 and existing carbon traders are shuffling for position in preparation. Ken Edwards, who runs Australia's biggest trader of carbon credits, Nextgen, said carbon markets were established in Europe and in the US, but in the Asia-Pacific time zone, the market was fragmented. As such, companies involved in voluntary carbon trading are pushing to make Melbourne the country's carbon trading capital. "If you think about the way the market has gone, it's all started in Melbourne," Mr. Edwards said. Additional players in the carbon trading market include the Australian Climate Exchange, which uses the Australian Pacific Exchange trading platform, and the Asia Carbon Exchange, based in Singapore. Mr. Edwards said that, at the moment, individuals created much of the demand for carbon credits in the over-the-counter market. They were offsetting their personal carbon emissions, and purchased carbon credits in small volumes. But in future carbon trading would attract institutional buyers and become a much bigger market. "We expect that market to be as big, if not bigger, than the foreign exchange market," Mr. Edwards said. Besides lobbying the Victorian Government for support, Mr. Edwards has also joined with Green Plumbers International (established by The Master Plumbers and Mechanical Services Association of Australia) in an initial public offering called Green Invest. The disparate companies that are categorized in the "green" basket aim to work at both ends of the carbon credit supply chain. Green Plumbers will help create carbon credits by selling environmentally friendly products to consumers, which Nextgen will then be able to sell. Between 3 million and 5 million shares are available, at \$1 a share, in an offer that closes on Christmas Eve. However, a maximum of 15pc of the combined company will be offered, with the remaining 27,440,000 shares to be held by the underwriters and company founders. The prospectus claims combined revenue for the two companies of \$5,029,000 for 2006-07, and net profit after tax of \$528,000. It also notes additional corporate costs including directors' fees and audit fees of \$400,000 will likely be incurred as a listed entity. SOURCE: *The Age*, Melbourne, a Fairfax Media publication.

Rudd pledges to forge 2009 climate deal

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has pledged to work closely with Chinese leaders, India and the US to get a climate-change agreement by the end of 2009. But as the Bali "road map" was broadly welcomed, despite its limitations, the US attacked it for not doing enough to commit developing economies to hefty emissions cuts. Underscoring the lack of consensus, India's Science and Technology Minister, Kapil Sibal, said his country had successfully defended itself against a push to impose binding targets to reduce greenhouse pollution. "It was a hard-fought win, but we have secured India's position in the two-year negotiations," he said. Australian green groups, critical of the Government's caution during the negotiations, welcomed the result as better than they had expected. They were especially heartened by a reference in the separate declaration by Kyoto countries, which do not include the US, to the science that has concluded that aggregate cuts by the developed world of 25pc to 40pc by 2020 are needed. The Australian Government signed up to this but emphasises that it is not a negotiating range nor does it

represent a national target for Australia — which will be set after the Garnaut report. Climate Change Minister Penny Wong said this text was "consistent with Australia's position all along — that the science should be recognised. The reference to numbers is simply a reference to the scientific work already done. It in no way commits any country to those specific targets in the absence of further agreement." Don Henry, executive director of the Australian Conservation Foundation, said there was now "guidance as to the destination".

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Professor Neville Nicholls, a Melbourne environmental scientist who has worked with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said the talks had been an important first step. "The decisions in Bali are very heartening to the IPCC scientists, and make us feel our efforts have been worthwhile," he said. But Oxfam said the language of the road map reduced emissions reduction targets to "guidelines". Oxfam policy director James Ensor said the US delegation did everything it could to undermine binding targets and acted "like a bunch of first-class passengers on a jumbo jet who firmly believed a crash would only affect those sitting in economy class". Mr. Rudd said Australia would make the negotiations over the next two years "a core priority". Australia would be going into them "with sleeves rolled up and prepared to put in the hard yards". In the year ahead, he hoped to spend as much time as possible with China's leaders to get greater consensus on future action. He also wanted to have talks with India. The climate issues would certainly "be forming a part of my discussions with the US Administration". The challenge for Australia now was "to frame our own national targets, which are cognisant of the science". The Bali agreement came amid high emotion at the conference and after a back down by the US, which finally caved in to overwhelming international opinion and agreed to sign up to the road map. While the US is concerned about ensuring developing countries bear enough of the burden, Mr. Rudd said there was now a commitment by such countries "to engage in measurable, reportable and verifiable, nationally appropriate mitigation actions". He said it was a step forward, although not as much as the international community would have liked. Opposition environment spokesman Greg Hunt welcomed the road map for including China, India, and Indonesia. SOURCE: *The Age*, Melbourne, a Fairfax Media publication.

News.com.au - Garrett is in ... er ... a meeting

Peter Garrett is about a metre taller than me and often speaks softly for a man who used to belt out tunes on the rock stage. So when we bumped into each other at a drinks function at the climate change conference in Bali I had to stretch myself to hear him amid the din of chatter, putting my neck at roughly a 90-degree angle. As we talked I began to notice the odd dig from an elbow in my ribs and the occasional unseemly slash at my ankles by pointed shoes. I lowered my eyes to find Garrett and myself surrounded by a largish clutch of people whose forced smiles indicated their belief that the 90 seconds I had gained with the Environment Minister had actually been their 90 seconds and would I please push off and give them a turn. Garrett was immensely popular and instantly recognisable at the conference, certainly within the hippie-tendency groups where his music was well known, but also among diplomats interested in where the new Labor Government was going. Not everyone considered him a household name. The head of the European Union delegation, Stavros Dimas, told reporters he had told an Australian delegate that Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had missed an opportunity to speak out in favour of tough energy consumption cuts. Asked who the person had been the balding European said he didn't know. But he was "tall with as much hair as I have or even less". Kevin Rudd has used the UN climate change conference on the Indonesian resort island of Bali over the past week to show off five of his ministers, and his Government in general, to the region and the broader international community. It was a conference of convenience. Australia was involved in the excruciating negotiations on a post-Kyoto agreement to be decided in 2009 in Copenhagen, of course. But Rudd also used the gathering to make first-time contacts with regional leaders, particularly Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who seemed more than pleased to help. Treasurer Wayne Swan was delighted to find himself introduced second, after the Indonesian host, at a meeting of finance ministers in Bali. It was sign of high rank, remarkable for a bloke who by that stage had been a minister for less than a week. There was no reason for the presence on Bali of Foreign Minister Stephen Smith, except for the opportunity to meet his regional peers. Smith did have a role, however, in helping renew ties with Papua-New Guinea which had been shut down at a ministerial level by a spat the previous foreign minister Alexander Downer had with Sir Michael Somare. PNG usually has had close personal ties with the Australian prime minister, but John Howard was the exception. Maybe that will change between Rudd and Somare, whom he calls The Chief. There were even less compelling reasons for Trade Minister Simon Crean turning up for a few days on Bali. Again, it was a good opportunity to get a bit of name recognition spread through the region. The climate conference also was the stage for Rudd to make small but telling changes in Australia's international diplomatic direction by steering closer to Asia. He made this clear enough by ratifying Kyoto in the first place, something the US continues to refuse to do. But he then used his address to the conference - the second national leader to speak after the host president - to make it known he would be siding with the region to insist the US be a party to the new Kyoto coming into force after 2012. The climate change conference was a megaphone through

which Rudd announced another movement in Australian property. The shift closer to our Asian neighbours and slightly away from the all-Anglo priority of the US could not have been hurt by giving the job of Australian negotiator to Climate Change Minister Penny Wong, a young woman of Chinese extraction. Rudd clearly felt his job was done after meeting the leaders we wanted to - plus Al Gore. And through it all was Peter Garrett. He had no direct involvement in the negotiations and had to defer to Wong when comment was sought on progress. But Garrett was miffed at suggestions he had no job.

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He did have a string of meetings and accompanied Rudd to the talks with Al Gore and other senior or well-known figures, and visiting organisations. As he said: "I've been busy".

The Australian - \$50bn lost as crunch hits

The global credit crunch broke out of the financial sector yesterday for the first time, sending Australia's second-biggest shopping centre owner into crisis and wiping more than \$50 billion off the stock market. Shares in Centro Properties Group collapsed by 76 per cent after the company admitted it had been unable to refinance \$3.9 billion worth of maturing debt in the risk-averse credit markets. Investors carved \$5 billion off the value of Centro's two stock market-listed company arms as the group said it could guarantee its solvency only until February, when an extension to refinance the debt expires. The company, which ranks second to Westfield in the Australian shopping mall market with 124 centres containing 7000 individual stores, said it had suspended withdrawals from its unlisted property trusts, freezing almost \$2 billion worth of investors' funds. Centro, whose debt levels rose to 70 per cent as chief executive Andrew Scott pursued an aggressive expansion strategy, is expected to be forced to sell assets, including its recently acquired US mall business. The company is talking with potential white knights, such as other property trusts that might be interested in injecting funds or buying some of its shopping centres. Centro's problems represent the first time the global credit crunch, which was caused by the crisis in sub-prime mortgages in the US in July, has affected an Australian company outside the banking sector. International investment banks such as Citigroup and JP Morgan have been forced to write off billions of dollars' worth of poorer-quality loans as financial markets have closed to riskier debt. In August, shares in the newly listed RAMS Home Loan Group collapsed when it could no longer refinance its loan book. The company was forced to sell its brand and distribution channels. A handful of local hedge funds have been caught by the sub-prime collapse and some Australian institutions have lifted their lending rates to recoup the extra costs of raising funds on the international debt markets. But the scale of Centro's problems caught investors off-guard yesterday, despite the company's shares having been suspended since Thursday. Centro Property Group shares slumped by \$4.34 to \$1.36, with Centro Retail Group shares falling 57.5c to 85c. Other property trusts, usually considered blue-chip investments, were also hit, with Goodman Group down 25 per cent to \$4.13. The S&P/ASX 200 index plunged 228.2 points - or 3.5 per cent - to 6263.5 in its biggest fall in four months. The value of Mr Scott's personal shareholding in the Centro company crashed by \$27 million. Centro chairman Brian Healey said yesterday the company "never expected nor could reasonably anticipate that the sources of funding that have historically been available to us and many other companies would shut for business". But big investors yesterday damned Centro's management and called for resignations, including that of Mr Scott, who came to Centro from Coles Myer. "This is shocking. A 73 per cent drop is shocking. It's as bad as it gets," said ING director of listed property and infrastructure Justin Blaess. "The architects of this should be held accountable." Centro, which controls \$26.6 billion worth of shopping centres in Australia and the US, went on a spending spree when debt was cheap, culminating in a top-of-the-market \$US3.7 billion acquisition of US shopping centre owner New Plan Excel in February. Centro has ploughed \$US8.72 billion into US shopping centre acquisitions since April 2005, some bought from Frank Lowy's Westfield Group. Less than five months after Centro's New Plan Excel deal, the US sub-prime mortgage rippled through the financial system, prompting massive write-downs on bundled portfolios of US housing loans and raising the cost of debt worldwide. Centro, through its web of funds and syndicates, owns almost 700 mostly neighbourhood shopping centres in the US. In Australia, it owns the Glen at Glen Waverly in Melbourne, Galleria in Perth, Toombul shopping centre in Brisbane and Bankstown Square and Roselands in Sydney. Mr Scott said yesterday the company had suspended its distribution for the December half year and downgraded its full-year distribution guidance by 14 per cent from 47c to 40.6c a share. The retail owner also froze withdrawals from two of its managed funds - Centro Direct Property Fund and Centro Direct Property Fund International - affecting small investors and do-it-yourself superannuation funds with investments of \$1.84 billion. Centro's unlisted property funds and syndicates have about 20,000 investors. A complete review of its complicated and interwoven structure would also be undertaken. The refinancing and restructure will cost \$40 million.

Happiness is a lush green paddock

THE grass on Craig Mitchell's property near Cooma in southeast NSW is over the fence - and he's "over the moon". "It's unbelievable, just unbelievable," said the wool grower, standing amid the lush grass on his property, Gaerloch. Mr Mitchell's area has been in and out of drought since 2002 and was most recently drought-declared

in March last year. But a week ago, after the rains, the tag was lifted from Cooma, along with 12 per cent of NSW. Mr Mitchell called the recent rains the best Christmas gift farming families could receive. Winter brought snow and rain to the Monaro region, but in such a cold climate grass only really begins to grow in October. Spring was dry. Then it started raining in November. "We've had 136mm in November, and since then we've had 55mm in December, so it has been very good," Mr Mitchell said. "At this stage we have a couple of spots where the grass is over the fence. We're usually struggling to get it over the bottom wire, let alone across the top wire.

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It's just amazing how it has grown in the last five weeks." The rains have come at a good time for the wool growers. The wool selling year closed on a high last week. "It's been fantastic," Mr Mitchell said. "We're getting grass and good seasons and good wool prices. I feel pretty confident about farming. There is a little bit of money to do the things you want to do, like fixing up the drive up to the house." Blair Trewin, from the National Climate Centre, said that over November and December, southeastern Australia had enjoyed consistent above-average rainfalls. "Queensland has been doing OK since June, although as the wet season picks up the totals involved have got bigger," Dr Trewin said. "November was above average over most of NSW and also most of Victoria and eastern South Australia." This month NSW reduced the area drought-declared from 81.9 per cent to 69.4 per cent. Last week 16 areas were moved from the drought-declared list, including parts of Bombala, Braidwood, Casino, Central Tablelands, Cooma, Coonabarabran, part of Goulburn, part of the Hunter, Kempsey, Molong, Mudgee, northern NSW, part of the northern slopes, the south coast, Tamworth and part of Yass. In Queensland, 62.4 per cent of the state, plus five individual properties, were drought-declared at November 30, slightly more than in October. The National Climate Centre's outlook for January to March is for a good chance of above-average rainfall for southeast Queensland, northeast NSW and southwest Western Australia. But for the rest of the continent, including the Murray-Darling Basin, the outlook is for a drier than normal three months. Dr Trewin said the outlook was consistent with a La Nina event. He pointed out southeast Queensland was wettest over summer. Dr Trewin said that during La Nina events, there tended to be a lot of easterly and northeasterly systems over southeast Australia in summer and autumn. "That is very good for rainfall on the east coast and areas that get moisture from that direction, but by the time the easterly-to-northern flow gets as far as Victoria and South Australia, it has often lost quite a bit of its moisture," he said. The outlook for the tropics, which had a summer wet season, was "leaning slightly to the dry side". The forecast temperature is above average for much of the country, with an expectation of much warmer temperatures over southeastern Australia. Dr Trewin said southern Australia, below the line between South Australia and the Northern Territory, would have its warmest year on record this year. "The reason why we are not going to set a record nationally is temperature across the tropics have been fairly close to normal," he said. For Australia as a whole, it is expected to be between the third- and ninth-hottest year on record. The La Nina rains have been filling Sydney's dams, which are up to 60 per cent. But Brisbane's dams are still low, on 20 per cent, Melbourne's are on 39 per cent, Canberra's dam is nearly 44 per cent full and the Murray River storages (Dartmouth, Hume, Lake Victoria and Menindee Lakes) are at 20 per cent. Victoria and South Australia do not produce state drought declarations. In Western Australia, those in the shires of Bruce Rock, Chapman Valley, Carnamah, Coolgardie, Coorow, Cue, Dalwallinu, Dundas, Greenough, Irwin, Kalgoorlie/Boulder, Kellerberrin, Koorda, Merredin, Meekatharra, Menzies, Mingenew, Moora, Morawa, Mt Magnet, Mt Marshall, Mukinbudin, Mullewa, Murchison, Narembeen, Northampton, Nungarin, Perenjori, Shark Bay, Three Springs, Trayning, Upper Gascoyne, Westonia, Wongan-Ballidu, Wyalkatchem, Yalgoo and Yilgarn are eligible for dry season assistance.

Rudd praises US climate 'flexibility'

Kevin Rudd has again praised the US for its "flexibility" to deliver a global climate change road map to trigger two years of intense negotiations for a new post-Kyoto pact to start in 2012. Mr. Rudd's new conciliatory language contrasts with his more pointed demand last week that the US join other developed countries in embracing targets to cut emissions. It suggests Mr. Rudd is maneuvering to work with the US along with China and other major emitters to work towards an effective climate deal by the time negotiations conclude at the end of 2009 in Copenhagen. "I would commend the flexibility we saw from the Government of the United States in allowing this consensus draft to go forward at Bali." Mr. Rudd said yesterday. "Informally, I had discussions with the American delegation myself in Bali and I do not know, is the honest answer, what the US negotiating position will be during the course of this year." A new global climate negotiation was achieved over the weekend at negotiations in Bali when the US delegation dramatically backed down after holding out on terms proposed by developing countries. Subsequently the White House issued a statement saying the negotiations would need to differentiate between the responsibilities of fast growing major developing economies like China and India and the rest of the developing world. On Sunday following the announcement of the successful deal negotiated in Bali Mr. Rudd made a point of recognizing the role played by both developing countries and the US in delivering the historic deal. "I believe the world community has taken a positive step forward here, developed countries and developing countries and there has been movement on the part of our friends in the United States

as well, which needs to be recognized," he said then. "I hope to spend as much time as possible with the Chinese leadership acting on that and with the objective of achieving a greater agreement and greater consensus with our friends in China on future courses of action for them." One of the first key meetings in the two-year road to "implementation-land" will be a second meeting of major emitting countries in Hawaii convened by President George W Bush at the end of January.

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Climate reporter for Ten

Network Ten has created a national environment reporting unit and boosted resources dedicated to covering climate change in a reflection of the growing importance Australians are placing on the issue. Emily Rice, 28, a former Adelaide Advertiser journalist and most recently a general reporter in Ten's Adelaide bureau, will be the face of Ten's environment coverage. She has been given a dedicated producer, a travel budget and a brief to cover, investigate and break stories on the environment front. Ten news director Jim Carroll said the network would treat the environment as a dedicated round, on a par with state politics and police. "This is a network role, like our Los Angeles or UK correspondent," he said. "From our viewers' viewpoint, it's a critical issue. "(Rice) will be breaking stories in that area. She'll have the time and the scope to do investigations if appropriate." Heather Loomes will be the unit's producer. Rice, who earlier this month was named rural journalist of the year at the South Australian Rural Media Awards, said the most pressing issues nationally were climate change and water. "While climate change and water are at the top of everyone's agenda, this role gives us the opportunity to explore a lot of the issues that have been ignored by mainstream media, (such as) biodiversity and species loss," she said. Rice, who has been in Bali covering the UN conference on climate change, said that while Australians had given the Rudd Government a "mandate for change", grappling with environmental issues as they arose would be a big challenge. She said an interim emissions target for 2020 and whether Australia could help bridge the gap between developing and industrial nations would be the Government's first big environment tests.

Adelaide Advertiser - States still at odds on Murray

Confusion reigns over whether the future of the River Murray will be discussed at this week's meeting of federal and state leaders. Although Prime Minister Kevin Rudd yesterday said issues to be discussed will include water and climate change, the River Murray remains a separate and more contentious issue. Mr Rudd said he will hold one-on-one talks with the premiers of Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales to work through concerns about the Federal Government's water reforms. Victoria refuses to hand its water management powers to the Commonwealth under the \$10 billion Murray-Darling program announced by the Howard government in January. Victorian Premier John Brumby yesterday said the River Murray would not be discussed at the meeting because it was not a "top priority issue". However, acting Premier Kevin Foley yesterday said water is on the agenda and "let's just see what occurs on Thursday". "At the end of the day there is fundamental disagreement between two states," he said. "Hopefully over time we can resolve those issues." State Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith said Mr Foley "does not have the guts" to stand up to Victoria. "Victoria is trampling over South Australia and Kevin Foley does not have the guts to stand up to them and fight for the ailing River Murray," he said yesterday.

Hotter, drier summer predicted as drought grinds on

Meteorologists are predicting a hotter and drier January and February than previously forecast, and no end to the drought in sight. The latest seasonal outlook for January, February and March, released by the Bureau of Meteorology today, shows that since last month's outlook, the chance of a wetter summer than normal has decreased and the the chance of higher temperatures than usual has increased. It predicts only a 35 to 40 per cent chance of above average rainfall being recorded in South Australia in the next three months, compared to a 45-50 per cent chance forecast last month for December, January and February. The 65 per cent chance of higher-than-average temperatures predicted last month was today upgraded to 75 per cent. A Bureau of Meteorology spokesman said the outlooks did not reveal how hot the next two months could be. "We need the rainfall at the right time so it is not too bad not to have rainfall now," he said. "Last January and March, much of the state had well above-average rainfall, but the winter months were pretty poor as far as rainfall goes. "Hopefully, further down the track it becomes good for the farmers."

You can save the planet

Installing solar panels and downsizing cars are some of the steps that will have to be taken to help Australia cut its carbon emissions, experts say. More than 700 businesses and industry bodies have already joined the Australian Government's Greenhouse Challenge Plus, which is a voluntary scheme. The costs vary depending on the size and nature of the business but are typically in the order of tens of thousands of dollars. Householders can spend hundreds or even thousands upgrading electrical appliances and installing other energy-efficient features but these up-front costs pay off in the long run, with cheaper electricity bills and other savings. University of Adelaide head of climate change Professor Barry Brook said in the long-term Australians would "not be poorer"

from helping to combat climate change. "In Australia overall, with some simple off-the-shelf technologies, people could on average reduce their energy bills by about 30 per cent," he said. Debbie Hulme recently moved into a five-bedroom, three-bathroom home in Hope Valley with her partner to accommodate the couple and four adult children. She said the last power bill was "horrendous" so the family started to find ways to reduce its energy demands and save money. "I rang AGL (and) they went through what equipment we have in the house," she said.

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Among the changes she was making was moving from old-style light bulbs to more efficient fluorescent globes, which cost more but last longer. The Australian Greenhouse Office said over its lifetime, a typical compact fluorescent lamp saved about one third of a tonne of greenhouse gas and \$45. Roger Carthew spent tens of thousands of dollars at his printing and design company to cut its carbon footprint. The Adelaide businessman also spent \$30,000 installing solar panels to run the company's digital printers, saving about \$3000 a year on energy bills and reducing carbon emissions by 4.5 tonnes annually.

Australian Climate Change Institute chief executive John Connor said Australia was one of the least energy efficient nations in the developed world. For example, 4WD's had lower import tariffs than hybrid vehicles - a situation Mr Connor said should be reversed through "proper reforms". Adelaide Brighton managing director Mark Chellew said the cement and lime company was also taking steps to reduce its carbon footprint.

Fixing the river system

ON November 15 Premier Mike Rann said he was deeply disappointed that the Howard Government had not spent a cent of the \$10 billion it had allocated for the restoration of the Murray-Darling river system. Mr Rann was right, although he didn't mention that the Victorian Labor Government had refused to endorse the plan. Since Mr Rann made his criticism, a Labor Federal Government has been elected. It is critical that Thursday's Council of Australian Governments meeting in Melbourne tackles the appalling condition of the Murray Basin as a matter of urgency - despite apparent resistance from Victoria. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd says he intends to speak with each state premier individually - an apparent concession to the reluctant Victorian Government. The Australian Conservation Foundation's Arlene Buchan warned earlier this year that, even with the rapid implementation of the rescue plan, virtually no additional water would be returned to the river system in the next three years. The Murray system must not suffer further delays. The money is there. What appears to be lacking is the will. With Labor in power in every state and in Canberra, there can be no excuse - political, financial or geographical - for further procrastination or delay.

Drought has food sales shy of \$10bn

The South Australian food industry struggled to maintain gross sales of \$9.98 billion in 2006-07 but it is poised to rebound strongly when the drought ends. Increased production and higher prices are behind the confidence in the food sector. The annual SA Food Scorecard released yesterday shows gross food revenue in 2006-07 fell only 0.2 per cent below the record \$10 billion achieved in the previous year. Prepared by Primary Industries and Resources SA, the scorecard shows the food sector has fallen far below the growth required to reach the industry's gross food revenue target of \$15 billion in 2009-10. It needs to grow by more than 15 per cent a year to achieve the ambitious target. The drought and the strengthening dollar are expected to limit the food industry's capacity to make satisfactory progress towards either target this financial year. PIRSA director of Food, Agriculture and Wine, Don Plowman, said that after three bad years in the past six, the industry had performed well to maintain its position. "I'm pretty confident that when we do get a decent season we will see the scorecard improve quickly," he said. "If we'd had last year's conditions 20 years ago, farmers wouldn't have taken their headers out of the shed and the figures would have wobbled around like anything. "We've taken \$1 billion from the farmgate value in 2002-03, 2006 and 2007 but the resilience in downstream value-adding is very positive and there is confidence that food prices have reached a new level." Mr Plowman said positive messages from the Scorecard included an increase in research and development and encouraging private infrastructure investment. Agriculture, Food and Fisheries Minister Rory McEwen said he expected a significant bounce-back once the drought breaks but that would not be evident in the 2007-08 Scorecard. "We knew that the drought would continue to cast a shadow over this year's Scorecard performance but the drop in gross food revenue has been limited to less than 1 per cent," Mr McEwen said. The result included a rise of \$149 million, or 6 per cent, in livestock production, while dairy production lifted by \$44 million, or 7 per cent. "Following the availability of better data, the state's horticultural production is estimated to be worth \$644 million, with a number of industries remaining steady despite the harsh conditions experienced in 2006-07," Mr McEwen said. The gross value of finished food increased by 1 per cent in 2006-07, which showed that the SA Food Plan was helping to expand this sector, despite the difficult circumstances of the past year. "The State Government remains committed to working towards increasing the overall value of our agricultural and food products," Mr McEwen said.

Broker says water trading must be regulated

Key online water broker, Waterfind, fully supports calls for government regulation of the industry, saying self-regulation isn't working. And it wants reforms to go one step further to end the practice of some water authorities and private irrigation companies acting in a dual role as both market operators and regulators.

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The Bondi Group of private irrigation companies last week highlighted the risks of fraud in an unregulated industry which due to trade delays and high water prices is this year handling hundreds of millions of dollars without formal requirements for trust accounts or insurance. Tom Rooney, chief executive and co-founder of the specialist online water broker which accounts for a significant share of trade in the southern Murray Darling Basin, says Government regulation of the broking industry is needed, backed by "reasonably large" fines or loss of licence for those who break the rules. As a minimum, brokers should not be buying and reselling for their own profit, should have independently-audited trust funds and professional indemnity insurance. "Self regulation won't work. No self-regulating body is going to punish its own members. We believe it does need to be a separate body." * Source: Stock and Land.

NSW's leaky, creaky town water systems

Regional towns in NSW are losing up to one third of their water a day due to leakage from water distribution infrastructure and household pipes. A study of eight towns in NSW, done as part of the Water Loss Management Program (WLMP) for NSW Regional Water Utilities, revealed varied levels of leakage in each town. "We found an average total leakage rate of some 10 litres per connection per hour in older water systems in these towns," says Stewart McLeod, chairman of the NSW Water Directorate "In a town of 10,000 people, when taking into account unavoidable losses and private property leakage, this is a loss of roughly 480,000 litres per day - or 175 million litres per year. "To put this into perspective, imagine a bucket under every front yard tap in your town and everyone going out and emptying that bucket every two hours ... day and night. This is the scale of the issue." "All water systems leak to some extent and the size of the problem largely depends on the age of the system and pipe materials," president of the Local Government Association of NSW, Cr Genia McCaffery, says. "If a water system is more than about 30 years old and hasn't had leakage control work done then it is most likely to experience significant leakage." Twenty-one councils have now applied to the Water Loss Management Program to help reduce their water losses, with water savings of almost 5000 million litres of water per year expected from them. The WLMP works with these councils to quantify their leakage and provides financial assistance to implement cost effective water saving projects. "The acoustic leak detection equipment and techniques available today has made the identification and location of leaking pipes much more efficient and cost effective than it used to be," says Cr Robert Bell, chairman of the NSW Water Loss Management Program.

The Australian - Consistent rain is a dam relief

For three years, Goulburn in southern NSW endured the tightest water restrictions in the country. But as rains continue to bring relief to swathes of eastern Australia, the town's dams are more than half full, kids are playing on the ovals again and the deputy mayor even has his vegetable garden growing again. Rain has replenished Goulburn's water storages, which were perilously low at less than 13 per cent in June. That has brought an end to the arduous Level 5 restrictions, but Goulburn residents have retained their water conservation mindset. Goulburn Mulwaree deputy mayor Ken Sullivan said: "While it is not back to normal, there has been an enormous uplift in the spirits of the community. But the interesting thing is, people still are not using anywhere near the water that they were using prior to the Level 5 restrictions." Under Level 5 restrictions, residents were allowed only 150litres a person a day, but they were so water conscious many cut their use to closer to 100 litres a person a day. Under Level 3 restrictions, residents are allowed to water for an hour a day by hose, and there is no limit on watering cans. "I have my first vegetable garden for about six years, with beetroot, carrots, beans, potatoes and a few gladioli," Mr. Sullivan said. Sally Nelson, from Goulburn's Gehl Garden Centre, said the business had had a good spring. Townspeople had stopped buying plants during the severe water restrictions, she said, but after the June rain they began to garden again, opting first for vegetable and annual flower seedlings. "They were a little bit hesitant to go and replant gardens completely," Ms Nelson said. "Then, as we got follow-up rain, people got more into the landscaping side of things." She said the question gardeners asked now was: "Is this going to be drought-tolerant?" Playing fields that were rock hard and closed at the height of the drought are now green and in use again. Mr Sullivan pointed out the local racecourse and soccer fields were being watered with recycled water, and there were plans to increase recycled water use on all sports fields. The manager of water services with Goulburn Mulwaree Council, Greg Finlayson, said the town's water supply was at 60 per cent - a far cry from predictions at the height of the drought that the town would run out of water by next May.

An emergency pipeline to Sydney's Wingecarribee reservoir was being discussed, and the city was considering bringing in indirect potable recycling. "That rain changed the urgency," Mr Finlayson said. Regular rain since has allowed the city to draw water from the Wollondilly River, "so our dams have been preserved, but they are not full". Goulburn residents are again proving themselves water savers. 'Our target for Level 3 restrictions is 7.8 megalitres (million litres) per day for the whole city," Mr Finlayson said. "For any week, we haven't averaged over seven." The pipeline will still go ahead, with state, federal and local funding. "We will be ensuring Goulburn will get through the next drought without having to consider the city running out of water," he said.

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Rudd praises US climate 'flexibility'

Kevin Rudd has again praised the US for its "flexibility" to deliver a global climate change road map to trigger two years of intense negotiations for a new post-Kyoto pact to start in 2012. Mr Rudd's new conciliatory language contrasts with his more pointed demand last week that the US join other developed countries in embracing targets to cut emissions. It suggests Mr Rudd is maneuvering to work with the US along with China and other major emitters to work towards an effective climate deal by the time negotiations conclude at the end of 2009 in Copenhagen. "I would commend the flexibility we saw from the Government of the United States in allowing this consensus draft to go forward at Bali." Mr Rudd said yesterday. "Informally, I had discussions with the American delegation myself in Bali and I do not know, is the honest answer, what the US negotiating position will be during the course of this year." A new global climate negotiation was achieved over the weekend at negotiations in Bali when the US delegation dramatically backed down after holding out on terms proposed by developing countries. Subsequently the White House issued a statement saying the negotiations would need to differentiate between the responsibilities of fast growing major developing economies like China and India and the rest of the developing world. On Sunday following the announcement of the successful deal negotiated in Bali Mr Rudd made a point of recognizing the role played by both developing countries and the US in delivering the historic deal. "I believe the world community has taken a positive step forward here, developed countries and developing countries and there has been movement on the part of our friends in the United States as well, which needs to be recognized," he said then. "I hope to spend as much time as possible with the Chinese leadership acting on that and with the objective of achieving a greater agreement and greater consensus with our friends in China on future courses of action for them." One of the first key meetings in the two year road to "implementation-land" will be a second meeting of major emitting countries in Hawaii convened by President George W Bush at the end of January.

Adelaide Advertiser - Adelaide's air 'worst in nation'

Adelaide's air quality is worse than Sydney's, Melbourne's, Brisbane's and Perth's, figures show. High levels of carbon monoxide, ozone and small particles have been found in Adelaide's air in concentrations above those detected in the larger cities. But it is weather conditions rather than pollutant amounts that are believed to be the major cause of the increased pollution levels. Do you think Adelaide's air quality is worse than Sydney or Melbourne? Vote in the box on the right of this page. The Environment Protection Authority also cites bushfire smoke and the mainland's oldest car fleet as contributing factors. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show Adelaide's air has higher carbon monoxide concentrations than the air in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne and is second to Sydney in the highest daily concentration of ozone. Adelaide air-monitoring sites recorded six days of excessive particles, three times as many days of excessive particles than recorded in Sydney and Brisbane, and the third-highest concentration of air particles. Flinders University honorary research fellow, Associate Professor Jorg Hacker, said large amounts of ozone, a poisonous substance, often formed from bushfire smoke after a chemical reaction between air particles and the smoke. He said ozone and other pollution was often trapped over the city by Adelaide's wind patterns and location between the Hills and coast. "If you have a bushfire situation, either in the Hills or on Kangaroo Island, the gully winds or easterly winds will transport that right over Adelaide. "The morning peak-hour traffic generates part of the pollution and that gets blown out to sea by gully winds and blue skies, high temperatures and sunshine help generate smog. "Then the sea breeze brings it all inland to the Hills in the afternoon." People's EPA chair Gary Goland said the results could be the tip of the iceberg and more monitoring was needed to determine peak levels of air pollution. "The EPA is only looking at average levels for the day, but it is actually peak levels that initiate a chemical response," he said. "We need to be looking more closely at the environment and what the measures are."

Adelaide.now.com - No talks on Murray at COAG

Acting Premier Kevin Foley has ruled out making a decision on the future of the River Murray at tomorrow's meeting between state and federal leaders. Speaking at a press conference at Adelaide Airport before he flew to Melbourne ahead of tomorrow's conference, Mr Foley said the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) did not provide the right forum to address the River Murray issues. "Water from our state's position is an extremely important issue and I think it will be dealt with effectively," he said. "But I don't think the COAG meeting

tomorrow is the forum to get a resolution for the River Murray issue. "This is actually a planning meeting, it's about identifying the key issues. It's not about getting outcomes (and) it's not about resolving issues. "I just don't think the Premier of Western Australia or the Premier of Tasmania or the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory are going to be as focused as we would like on the River Murray given that they don't stand to be affected by it." Mr Foley said he would use the time with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to plan a separate meeting early next year to discuss the River Murray issues.

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"What I will be hoping the Prime Minister will agree to tomorrow, and he has indicated that he is open to the idea, is that a separate meeting will be convened very early in the new year involving the Prime Minister, Premiers (Mike) Rann, (John) Brumby and if need be the New South Wales Premier to really resolve what are issues of impasse between the states at this point," he said. "We have to break an impasse between South Australia and Victoria and the best way to achieve that would be a separate meeting involving the affected states and if possible with the Prime Minister."

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FarmOnLine

Australian ag sector can adapt to global warming

It's an old management seminar quip that the Chinese character for "crisis" is made up of ideograms for "danger" and "opportunity"; the same can be said of climate change, according to one of Australia's leading thinkers on the subject. Professor Snow Barlow, a plant scientist at the University of Melbourne, believes that for Australian agriculture, climate change will be a "Darwinian thing" of adaptation. "It won't be the biggest and the strongest that survive," he said. "It will be those who best adapt." The former chief scientist and director of the Commonwealth's Agriculture, Forestry and Quarantine Sciences department, and a member of the Australian delegation at the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, Professor Barlow is skeptical of the "overly pessimistic" conclusions of a recent ABARE report, which forecast possible falls of up to 10pc in farm production over the next 25 years due to climate change. While he considers climate change a real and imminent threat, Professor Barlow also regards the ABARE report as a worst-case scenario that left out two crucial components of the climate change equation. The first is that increasing amounts of CO₂ in the atmosphere might be bad for the Earth's climatic balance, but in the short-term, it is very good for CO₂-loving plants. Since the 1970s, atmospheric carbon dioxide levels have jumped about 10pc, from 330 to 384 parts per million, along the way contributing to bigger crop yields - so-called "CO₂ fertilisation" - and more vigorous weeds. Further rises in CO₂ are likely to contribute to further yield gains that might, on average, offset the drying trends forecast for much of southern Australia. * Matthew Cawood is the science and environment writer for The Land, Stock and Land, Queensland Country Life, Stock Journal, Farm Weekly and North Queensland Register.

Where has Gunnedah groundwater study funds gone

The whereabouts of a \$4.88 million Coalition pre-election commitment to fund an independent study of the coal, groundwater and surface resources of the Gunnedah Basin appears to have vanished, says New England independent member, Tony Windsor. Mr. Windsor says the funding was announced by the then Environment and Water Resources Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, on October 5 and had the welcome support of the then Member for Gwydir, John Anderson. "Mr. Turnbull wrote to the chairman and CEO of the National Water Commission, Ken Matthews, on October 8 asking the commission to bring forward a study proposal, under the auspices of the \$52m National Groundwater Action Plan, to assess the potential impacts of mining activities on water resources and groundwater in particular," Mr. Windsor says. "In the letter Mr. Turnbull referred Mr. Matthews specifically to the study proposal prepared by the Liverpool Plains Land Management Committee and ask that the study provide the comprehensive assessment of the groundwater resources in the Gunnedah Basin, any risks to these resources posed by the expansion of coal mining in the Gunnedah Basin and the connectivity between the surface and groundwater systems". "The federal election was then called on October 16 and since then a letter from Mr. Anderson sent to Mr. Matthews dated November 19 set out his understanding of the meeting and the undertaking given by Minister Turnbull that the LPLMC proposal was to be funded as a priority, not as 'co-applicant' or competitor with any other proposals, the project was to be funded from the National Groundwater Action Plan and it was to be managed locally in Gunnedah by LPLMC with a senior representative of the National Water Commission to sit on the Project Steering Committee. "Mr. Anderson's letter was very comprehensive being virtually minutes of the meeting." Mr. Windsor says he is concerned that despite the Minister's pre-election undertaking and confirmation and further representation by Mr. Anderson to the National Water Commission, it appears that the funding for the study may have evaporated. "It is very disappointing that a pre-election commitment given by a Government Minister appears to have evaporated or been overruled by the National Water Commission CEO, Ken Matthews, once the election was called. "The

Liverpool Plains Land Management Committee (LPLMC) put their proposal together and went through all the right channels achieving their desired outcome. "The study that was to be undertaken is a vital tool not only for the Gunnedah Basin but for other locations where mining and agricultural activities have possible impacts on each other which must be better understood through more accurate science."

The Advertiser e-Edition - SA leads water reform

South Australia will lead national reform in water policy and climate change following a historic Council of Australian Government meeting in Melbourne today.

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At the first all-Labor COAG meeting in history, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has just announced that Water Minister and South Australian Senator Penny Wong will chair a special working group on water and climate. Mr Rudd also announced that the State Government would co-chair the working group, one of seven he says will deal with specific areas of national reform. Saying COAG would become "the workhorse of a nation", Mr Rudd said the working groups would put direct responsibility on his ministers to run reform programs which had in the past been "devolved" to senior public servants. After the meeting, Mr Rudd and state leaders said the fact that all state and territories and the Commonwealth were now governed by Labor had created a fresh spirit of co-operation after years of sometimes difficult relationships under the Howard Liberal government. South Australia's representative, Acting Premier Kevin Foley, said what the Prime Minister had described as "a new way of doing business" had already opened the door to genuine reform. "We are actually breaking down the barriers the Howard/Costello government had put in place," he said

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FarmOnLine

Filtered water flows to SA River Murray communities

South Australia's Water Security Minister, Karlene Maywald, says communities at Mypolonga and Wall Flat will start to receive filtered water through SA Water's reticulated system. From last Sunday the newly constructed Mypolonga Water Treatment Plant and Wall Flat Pipeline started operation as part of Stage 3 of the SA Government's Country Water Quality Improvement Program. The \$50 million project to supply 17 communities in the Riverland and Murraylands with filtered water was fast-tracked late last year as part of the Government's drought response. "Over the next few weeks, filtered water will be shandied into the existing distribution system and residents in Mypolonga and Wall Flat will notice the filtered water has an improved taste, smell and odour," Ms Maywald says. "The Mypolonga plant has the capability to treat and distribute 1.5 million litres of water per day to the district. The plant will directly supply the Mypolonga township and will also distribute water through an adjoining 11-kilometre pipeline to Wall Flat. "Before the end of January 2008, another eight water treatment plants and four pipelines will be in operation, delivering filtered water to Swan Reach, Cadell, Blanchetown, Cowirra-Neeta, Palmer, Mannum Country Lands, Pompoota, Monash, Glossop, Kingston-on-Murray, Moorook, Kanmantoo and Callington. "This project has brought three more Murraylands communities on line with filtered water this year. "Tungkillo has been receiving filtered water since October this year thanks to a new pipeline from the Mount Pleasant Water Treatment Plant and now Mypolonga and Wall Flat will also see the benefits of the filtered water."

Rivers run in southwest Qld as summer storms deliver

Widespread storms across southwest Queensland continue to deliver benefits for rural communities and the environment. "This is not the end of the drought but it's a promising start to the wet season," Queensland's Natural Resources and Water Minister, Craig Wallace, says. "Some areas unfortunately have missed out but there appears to be more good news than bad. The highest weekly rainfall total was 79mm at Mulga Downs, 100km south-west of Bollon." Mr. Wallace says significant flows have occurred in the Balonne River at St George with 142,000 megalitres recorded at the Department of Natural Resources and Water (NRW) gauging station in the past week. "At the Cotswold gauging station on the lower Condamine, 15,000 megalitres have passed for the week. This is only a modest figure but it's still great news for farmers," he says. "Decent flows have also been recorded in the Warrego River at Wallen (north of Cunnamulla) with about 60,000 megalitres passing through in the past week and some 420,000 megalitres since the start of December." Mr. Wallace says NRW is monitoring flows and managing the release of water to achieve a broad range of outcomes. Two NSW gauging stations in the vicinity of the QLD-NSW border have recorded flows of 77,000ML in the Warrego River at Barrington and 181,000ML at Cuttaburra Creek in the past week. Cuttaburra is a flood runner of the Warrego River. "In the Central region, the highest rainfall recorded in the past week was 59mm at Taroom. Fairbairn Dam has had significant in-flows with the storage now at around 28 per cent (387,000ML). This is up from 220,000ML prior to the recent rains," Mr. Wallace says. "The entire Dawson River has had great flows in the past three weeks with all the major weirs now overflowing. "It is a similar picture in the Mackenzie River with

all weirs now topping. The Fitzroy River weirs have also filled." The Isaac-Connors River system has had only minor flows over the past two weeks with just 4000ML recorded in the lower Isaac River at Yatton.

Lamb in 2007 - not great but wet weather brings hope

Lamb producers enjoyed a better season for growing out lambs towards the end of 2007, after good widespread rain. Despite the mixed season, there has been a consistent supply of lambs in the 18-24kg cwt range during the second half of the year. The drought and a large offloading of lambs during spring last year resulted in national supplies of trade and heavy lambs last summer being 16pc and 25pc, respectively, below the previous year. The lower national supplies continued into autumn, with trade and heavy lamb offerings 5pc and 25pc, respectively, below autumn 2006.

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However, by winter supplies increased due to milder temperatures. This mild winter assisted lamb growth rates with solid supplies in the 18-22kg cwt range. Subsequently, national trade and heavy lamb numbers were 25pc and 4pc, respectively, greater than the 2006 winter. Good late spring rains provided pasture growth, allowing lambs to quickly reach sale weights in the 18-24kg cwt range. National spring trade and heavy lamb supplies were 25pc and 87pc greater than spring 2006, respectively. Prices for trade and heavy lambs started 2007 below last year. Abattoirs were booked up with supplies over the 2006-07 summer break, resulting in prices for the national trade lamb indicator starting January at the lowest point for 2007, at 291c/kg cwt - 14pc below January 2006. Heavy lamb values were at 301c/kg cwt - the second lowest for 2007 and 13pc below January 2006. Prices improved during autumn, with concerns there would be a lack of supply over winter. This resulted in prices hitting the highest point for 2007 at the start of winter. The June national trade and heavy lamb indicators finished at 377c and 374c/kg cwt - 8pc and 10pc higher than June 2006, respectively. Into winter, the milder temperatures allowed greater access to supply than anticipated. Processors reduced prices and by August the national trade and heavy lamb indicators fell to 313c and 305c/kg cwt, respectively - 8pc and 4pc below the same time in 2006. Throughout spring, prices continued to fall as the traditional young lamb-selling period commenced. Contributing to the reduction in prices for heavy lambs was the Aussie dollar, which crept to its highest point for the year, at US93c in early November. The national heavy lamb indicator hit the lowest point for the year in November at 284c - 6pc below November 2006, while the trade lamb indicator hit the second lowest point for the year, at 293c/kg cwt. On a positive note, there is further widespread rain forecasted throughout summer, which will continue to improve seasonal conditions. Also, with the Aussie easing and hovering around the mid US80c range, this could assist processor margins into the future.

Adelaide Advertiser - Wong in charge of Murray deal

South Australia has assumed leadership of national water and climate change reforms in a symbolic move by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, who also will seek to broker peace between SA and Victoria on the River Murray. At yesterday's historic all-Labor Council of Australian Governments meeting, new Climate Change and Water Minister, SA Senator Penny Wong, was announced as co-chairman of a national working group on climate change and water with Premier's Department chief Warren McCann. Acting Premier Kevin Foley said Mr Rudd would hold talks with Premier Mike Rann and Victorian Premier John Brumby. "Ten billion dollars that John Howard committed to the Murray has been adopted by the Rudd Labor Government but there's an impasse between Victoria and SA," he said. "Importantly, out of today, we're going to get the Prime Minister to meet with the respective premiers to break what has become an impasse and that's a good outcome for SA." Victoria has refused to join the \$10 billion national water plan giving the Commonwealth control of the Murray or to release a reserve supply of water for SA. Senator Wong, who already has emerged as a key senior figure in the Rudd Government, will attempt to steer the effort towards a comprehensive and co-operative approach to "long-term adaptation to climate change." The working group she will lead is one of seven set up by the meeting to look at ways to reform fundamental aspects of the Australian economy. There also was a new federal commitment yesterday of two parcels of \$50 million each for alleviating elective surgery waiting lists and to address drug and alcohol problems in the nation's indigenous community. The new money to address indigenous substance abuse problems could be coupled with tough new laws which could result in complete prohibition of alcohol in some communities in Queensland. The climate working group will manage competing interests in the contentious water reform area including irrigation infrastructure, the development of water markets, and a stocktake of urban water supply. Other groups will look at education, health, infrastructure, housing, business deregulation, indigenous affairs, and skills training. The emphasis is on building the productive capacity of the economy, addressing the inflationary threat, and on removing impediments to economic growth. Mr Rudd said COAG would meet four times next year rather than the usual once a year. The Melbourne meeting, the first COAG to be held outside of Canberra, failed to deliver immediate concrete outcomes or to live up to the expectations established by Mr Rudd during the election campaign. State and territory leaders emerged all smiles from the four-hour meeting at the Victorian Governor's official residence in Melbourne's leafy Botanic Garden.

While Mr Rudd's election commitment to take over hospitals if the states failed to reach certain benchmarks remained in place, there was no discussion of it at the summit. "We're in the co-operation phase," Mr Rudd explained after the meeting. In other aspects of the meeting, states have agreed to conduct an immediate audit of schools to determine the most needy. That audit is to be completed by mid-February as a precursor to the roll-out of federal Labor's \$1 billion computers in schools policy. Mr Foley said the summit was productive and that for the first time, the Federal Government was prepared to discuss actual service delivery issues like hospital waiting lists. He denied that the lack of any formal attention to the Murray Darling Basin represented a snub for SA. "The important point here is that the Murray has been dealt with at previous COAG meetings," he said. However, Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith said it was a disappointing result. "I am very disappointed that the acting Premier has been unable to get the River Murray to the top of the agenda," he said.

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He told *The Advertiser* the summit had produced more talk and politics when urgent action was needed to save the river.