

'Snippets Plus' – 23C – February 2008

Starting 15th February

Adelaide Advertiser - SA misses all the rain

Sunshine continues to flood South Australia while the rest of the country soaks up much-needed rain. Every state has had substantial falls in the past week, with the rain band virtually stopping at all points of the SA border, apart from four small areas that have had only between 1mm and 5mm. Parts of other states, including Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia, have recorded between 100mm and 400mm of rainfall for the same period. Soaking rains have helped freshen up home gardens in each of the other six states but SA home owners are still waiting for a break in the weather while having to deal with tough water restrictions. Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald this week ruled it "too early" to allow mid-week watering following calls from Independent MP Bob Such to ease water restrictions. No rain has been forecast for Adelaide over the next six days and temperatures are expected to top 30C for each of those days. The longer Adelaide's dry spell continues, the greater the chance restrictions will be toughened. The weather bureau has blamed a dominant high-pressure system in the Great Australian Bight as the major reason why SA has missed out on rain in the past week. Only 0.2mm of rain has fallen in Adelaide this month while the average for February is 14.1mm. Last year, no rain fell in Adelaide during February. By this day last year 39.4mm of rain had fallen in Adelaide but only 9.2mm has been recorded so far in 2008. The last decent rain recorded in Adelaide was 30.2mm on Christmas Eve last year. Since February last year, Adelaide has had 434mm of rain compared with the average of 549.6mm. Ironically, one place that has received decent rain this month and did not need it is Lake Gairdner in the state's Far North. The rain has softened salt pans in the area leading to the postponement of Dry Lakes Racers Australia speed trials between March 3 and 7. **17th**

NEWS.com.au - Painting the town green

The Solar Cities Congress that starts in Adelaide tomorrow has been described as a "feel-good" gathering that will accomplish little. "My concern is that events like the Solar Cities Congress help paint the town green while business as usual continues," said Professor Peter Droege, who is Asia Pacific chairman of the World Council for Renewable Energy. "The fact is, while we have a coal and fossil fuelled Australia, we can't really talk about sustainability. "So the solar panels and the solar cities efforts are commendable but they are also dangerous because they make us look like we did something. It's like Earth Hour, it makes us feel good but it's not tackling the main issue." Tomorrow he will speak at the third International Solar Cities Congress in Adelaide but he remains skeptical about the solar city concept. He was coming to Adelaide with "excitement but also with a sense of ambivalence". "We need a state and national renewable energy program designed not to meet emissions targets but to get rid of the coal dependency," he said. "Until we squarely focus on that as a target we are, a bit, fooling ourselves, I think." In his book *A Renewable City*, Professor Droege argues that the transition from fossil-fuel dominated cities to an urban future marked by a radically new, renewable energy infrastructure requires entirely new tools and frames of decision-making. Former Adelaide Thinker in Residence Herbert Girardet will give the keynote address on "solar cities of tomorrow" at the congress today. He spent eight weeks thinking about how to help Adelaide become a solar city in May 2003. Many of his recommendations have been adopted, but some still have not, including solar hot-water systems on all new buildings and making waste water recycling and storm water reuse "a central plank of water policy".

SA misses all the rain

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FarmOnLine - SA irrigators facing more tough times

South Australian irrigators could face more difficult times, with the possibility of 75pc less water available in the Murray-Darling Basin in June than in the previous water year. River Murray Minister Karlene Maywald this week said minimum inflows into the Basin created planning difficulties for the future. "The Darling River is flowing for the first time in many years but there has been absolutely no recovery in the Murray system itself," she said.

"However, compared with 14pc this time last year, the basin volume is at 20pc. But it still a critical issue." Mrs Maywald has also outlined ways the Government was improving water security within the State. "We are leading the nation with recycling and stormwater projects, but we still need to do more," she said. "SA needs the Federal National Plan established to ensure basin sustainability in the long-term; look at desalination as the State's insurance policy; look at better catchment management; increase storage capacity; and manage demand better with more incentives to encourage people to be waterwise." Other water security actions outlined included: drought community liaison managers above and below Lock 1; Level 3 water restrictions continued; advanced water pumping into the catchment last year when water quality was higher; fast tracking filtrations plants in country towns; emergency dredging; standpipes to cart water for livestock purposes; \$5m pipeline Milang to Clayton pipeline; financial relief from transfer fees and levy payments; resealing barrages to prevent leakage; micro-managing weir pools above Lock 1 to prevent river degradation; the temporary weir - as a last resort; a drought recovery project, which includes the Lower lakes; and temporarily disconnecting wetlands and backwaters. SOURCE: *Stock Journal*, SA's weekly rural newspaper, posting news updates on *FarmOnline*. **Study claims biofuels could worsen global warming**

The journal *Science* has published a study that says clearing land for the production of biofuels would produce twice as much greenhouse gas as the use of biofuels would reduce. The United States 25x'25 Alliance responded to the study and coverage from mainstream media, saying they failed to cover the fact that there are ways to avoid problems and have biofuels give both a renewable energy source and reduced greenhouse emissions. The National Corn Growers Association agrees and says that land use changes cannot be looked at in the singular context of increased biofuels production. The impacts and interplay of numerous global economic, social and political factors on land use also need to be considered. Environmentally sensitive lands should not be exploited for renewable fuels, according to 25x'25. Instead the increased demand for energy, food, feed and fiber can be met through technology. The development of cellulosic ethanol will not only minimise land use changes but help the environment. A recent study of the use of switchgrass for ethanol by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln showed that it produced 540pc more energy than it took to grow it. Switchgrass offers many environmental benefits such as preventing run-off, putting organic material back into the ground improving soil and requires no pesticides or fertilizer. "Analyzing the impact of increased biofuels production on domestic and international land use change is a complex process and a relatively new area of study for the scientific community," says NCGA Director of Development Tim Brackman. "The scientific community should be discouraged from 'rushing to judgment' on these issues simply to satisfy political timetables. "All serious scientific efforts and approaches must be given an opportunity to contribute." SOURCE: *FarmProgress*, USA.

The Australian - Map reveals human toll on oceans

Almost half of the world's oceans have been badly damaged by humans and no region has been left untouched, the first global map of humanity's impact on marine ecosystems has revealed. The ambitious project to chart the changing ocean environment shows that humans have exacted a much heavier toll on the seas through fishing, pollution and climate change than had been thought. The **world map**, which was created by dividing the oceans into kilometre squares, shows that 41 per cent have been affected strongly by 17 human activities, a much higher proportion than expected. Some of the worst affected marine areas are found around the British Isles. Parts of the North Sea, the Channel and the North Atlantic off the Irish and Scottish coasts have all been assessed as suffering very high ecological damage. The map is the first to combine information on how different human influences are affecting the oceans. It examined indicators of environmental health, including coral reefs, fisheries, kelp forests and water quality. Ben Halpern, of the US National Centre for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS), who led the study, said: "This project allows us to finally start to see the big picture of how humans are affecting the oceans. Our results show that when these and other individual impacts are summed up, the big picture looks much worse than I imagine most people expected. It was certainly a surprise to me." David Garrison, the biological oceanography program director at the US National Science Foundation, which funded the initiative, said: "This research is a critically needed synthesis of the impact of human activity on ocean ecosystems. The effort is likely to be a model for assessing these impacts at local and regional scales." The map, which was presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in Boston yesterday, was produced by drawing up human impact scores for each marine square. A paper describing the map has been published in the journal *Science*. Each type of human influence fits one of four categories: climate change, pollution, fishing and shipping. Climate change has had the greatest impact, particularly though rising sea temperatures and its effect of acidifying the oceans. The effect of fishing is the next most important, especially the damage that has been caused to coral reefs from trawling and stock depletions from over fishing. In many regions the effects of these are combined with pollution, particularly run-off of fertilisers from agricultural land and invasive alien species that are often introduced in the ballast tanks of ships. "Clearly we can no longer just focus on fishing or coastal wetland loss or pollution as if they are separate effects," said Andrew Rosenberg, a professor of natural resources at the University of New Hampshire, an independent scientist who was not involved with the study. "These human impacts overlap in space and time and, in far too many cases, the magnitude is frighteningly high. The message for policymakers seems clear to me: conservation action that cuts across the whole set of human impacts is needed now."

Beyond British waters the regions that are most affected are in the South and East China seas, the Caribbean, the East Coast of North America, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Gulf, the Bering Sea and several parts of the western Pacific. The areas near the poles have been affected the least but these regions are at risk of damage through global warming. “Unfortunately as polar ice sheets disappear with a warming global climate and human activities spread into these areas there is a great risk of rapid degradation of these relatively pristine ecosystems,” said Carrie Kappel, of NCEAS, a principal investigator on the project. Dr Halpern said that while the picture was grim, it could be reversed by urgent action. “There is definitely room for hope,” he said. “With efforts to protect the chunks of the ocean that remain relatively pristine we have a good chance of preserving them. “My hope is that our results serve as a wake-up call to better manage and protect our oceans. Humans will always use the oceans for recreation, extraction of resources and commercial activity such as shipping. This is a good thing. Our goal is to do this in a sustainable way so that our oceans remain in a healthy state and continue to provide us with the resources we need and want.” British scientists welcomed the study but said that the poor scores for British waters could reflect better recording of environmental problems. Emma Jackson, of the Marine Biological Association, said: “The unsustainable way in which we exploit the goods and services that marine eco-systems provide are shown in this paper and, as a nation, we should be concerned. “But we should consider that the UK human impact hotspot, which Halpern and colleagues have highlighted, is partly due to the fact that we are fairly good at recording our human activities. It is also down to a legacy of historical pressures, which we are now beginning to do something about by protecting our marine areas.” John Shepherd, of the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton, said: “This is a bold attempt to make a global map of human impacts on the ocean. The high impact shown for UK waters is probably due to heavy fishing, intensive exploitation of oil and gas resources, shipping and tourism. Not all of these lead directly to ecosystem damage but there is no doubt that mankind’s impact is significant.” Chris Frid, of the University of Liverpool, said: “As the management of human impacts on the environment seeks to be more holistic and ecosystem-based it is critical that we have means of assessing the sites of human impacts. “Spatial mapping of the ‘footprint’ of human impacts is a useful way of doing this as different impacts — fishing, oil exploration, aggregate dredging — can then be superimposed. The results confirm the fact that coastal seas close to populous and industrialised areas are most impacted. “The major limitation of this approach is the pseudo-precision of the maps. The original scientists did not score the impact of each activity in each square but their responses were transferred by the authors to these grids and then aggregated. “The resulting broad patterns will be correct but the detail in terms of footprint and intensity will be approximate and must not be used as the basis for management decisions, for example on where to allow development.” *The Times*

Warming will bring sharks to Antarctica

Global warming could make Antarctic waters more inviting to crabs and sharks that would threaten the frigid continent's unique ecosystem, biologists in the US warned today. Antarctica's waters remain too cold for crabs, sharks and other fish to survive in, but global warming has already caused temperatures to increase by one to two degrees celsius over the past 50 years, said University of Rhode Island biology professor Cheryl Wilga. Few predators capable of crushing shelled animals live in Antarctic waters, Wilga told a news conference in the old US whaling town of Boston, Massachusetts. “As a result, the Antarctic seafloor has been dominated by relatively soft-bodied, slow-moving invertebrates, just as in ancient oceans prior to the evolution of shell-crushing predators,” she said on the sidelines of the annual conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. “The water only needs to remain above freezing year round for it to become habitable to some sharks, and at the rate we're going, that could happen this century,” Wilga said. “Once they get there, it will completely change the ecology of the Antarctic benthic community,” she said. Crabs have already gotten very close to the Antarctic ecosystem, said Sven Thatje of the National Oceanography Centre in Southampton, Britain, who warned of a potentially catastrophic situation. “That would be a tragic loss for biodiversity in one of the last wild places on Earth,” he said, warning that global warming could destroy Antarctica's marine life if greenhouse gas emissions are not curbed. *AFP*

Plan to slash emissions is 'optimistic'

Claims by a leading business consultant that Australia can afford to cut greenhouse emissions by nearly 40 per cent in 12 years were "very optimistic". Reserve Bank board member Warwick McKibbin yesterday said the development of an aggressive greenhouse emissions abatement plan by international consultants McKinsey and Co placed a remarkable confidence in the range of policy options available. McKinsey's analysis says big savings in energy efficiency and extensive forestry programs could help cut Australia's emissions by 39 per cent by 2020 at an annual cost of \$2.9 billion. Professor McKibbin said while it was theoretically possible that the McKinsey modeling might be right, the research was based on a selective list of highly optimistic references and did not consider a range of uncertainties that faced policymakers. "I don't want to say they're wrong. They could be right; that's not the point," he told *The Weekend Australian*. "The point is if everyone says this is the study and this is the truth, that's dangerous. "They're picking technologies and they're picking points on a cost curve when the curve itself is highly uncertain and the technologies themselves may or may not deliver." Professor McKibbin is working with Treasury on macro modeling of the full economic impacts of policies to cut greenhouse emissions. The Rudd Government has committed itself to finalising draft legislation on emissions trading by the end of the year, following the completion of Treasury modeling and a report on the economic consequences from professor Ross Garnaut in September.

The McKinsey report was welcomed by environmentalists as further proof that Australia could deliver deep cuts in emissions by 2020 mainly by saving energy, forestry and renewable energy such wind and geothermal. Professor McKibbin said while it was possible to deliver further savings from energy efficiency, it was naive to assume that business and households continued to ignore these and other opportunities if they were so simple to implement. "There are a lot of problems in relying on fundamental change to people's behaviour as a policy option," Professor McKibbin said. "We're dealing with human beings here who have already revealed their behaviour in their day-to-day actions." The Australian Conservation Foundation said the McKinsey results were consistent with modeling commissioned by the Australian Business Roundtable on Climate Change two years ago, which found deep cuts could be achieved by 2050 while maintaining strong economic growth.

Water cuts to affect flow of premium wine

Drought will force a shortage of some of Australia's premium wines next year, following a deep cut in irrigation water into the McLaren Vale region on the outskirts of Adelaide. Despite improving rains in the Murray-Darling catchment, the South Australian Government has cut irrigation of vines using water from Adelaide's mains network by 38 per cent for the 2009 vintage as part of tough new restrictions to cut consumption. Mains water costs growers \$1160 a megalitre, increasing to \$1650 later this year - 20 times more expensive than conventional irrigation. As a result, it has been reserved for the top 10 per cent of premium grapes from the McLaren Vale region. These grapes can fetch between \$2000 and \$10,000 a tonne - more than 10 times the price of bulk grapes - and are used by winemakers as part of the complex tapestry of flavours used in blending top wines. McLaren Vale premium grapes are used for wines such as Penfolds Grange and most premium labels from the region's top wineries, including Chapel Hill, Coriole, 'Arenberg and Primo Estate. They also find their way into other top wines made in the Hunter Valley of NSW and Barossa Valley of South Australia. McLaren Vale growers face the choice this winter of using their remaining water to keep all of their vines alive or risking the loss of some of their most valuable vines to produce fruit from a portion of their vineyards for next year. Jock Harvey, chairman of the McLaren Vale Grape, Wine and Tourism Association, said grapes from the region were used by winemakers to make up much of the middle palette of many Australian premium wines. "McLaren Vale wine has got that thick, chocolatey, leathery character that has always been used by winemakers in the Hunter and the Barossa, as well. You can throw a blanket over the top wines and it's in there," he said. Chapel Hill chief winemaker Michael Fragos said some of their top shiraz grapes were on mains supply and predicted quantities of their top wines would be affected next year. "You have the decision of either sacrificing 38 per cent of your vineyard and not water it and water the rest or take a massive gamble to cut back everything at the risk of not having enough water to sustain the rest of the vineyard," he said. Grower Dudley Brown said he would be happy to pay a premium for water from other users in Adelaide, but no system existed to allow trading under the proposed restriction.

Minister rapped by court over coastal project

The NSW Government has been accused of failing to take climate change seriously in the wake of a decision by Planning Minister Frank Sartor to approve a development on a flood plain. While the federal Government has asked all councils in Australia to review their town plans against a detailed assessment of risks posed by rising sea levels, the NSW Government appears to be resisting the need to plan for climate change. Mr Sartor has launched an appeal against a decision by the Land and Environment Court after it overturned his approval of a retirement village and residential development on a flood plain at Sandon Point on the NSW south coast. Judge Peter Biscoe ruled in November that Mr Sartor had failed to consider "whether climate change flood risk was relevant to this flood-constrained coastal plain project" when signing off on a planned development in the area. But Mr Sartor is appealing the decision. Planning Department director-general Sam Haddad said the appeal would help the Government develop a unified approach to coastal development. The case highlights the inconsistent approach and lack of information on the risks faced by coastal areas. As reported in The Australian yesterday, Climate Change Minister Penny Wong is accelerating plans through the Council of Australian Governments for a framework under which all jurisdictions will have to examine their planning systems. The federal Government is planning a national coastal vulnerability assessment to evaluate the risk to the environment and communities, as well as critical infrastructure in the coastal zone. It is also organising a national summit on the risk to coastal areas and will give local councils \$2 million to help them identify and prioritise climate change risks and develop management plans. The federal Government's action was welcomed yesterday by local councils, which said they were bewildered by conflicting information on rising sea levels and the lack of hard statistics on the impact of climate change. Sydney Coastal Councils Group executive officer Geoff Withycombe said they had been seeking a consistent national approach for years without success. "There has been limited information," he said. "There isn't the guidance we need for better planning."

AdelaideNow.com - Work on carbon 'free' city begins

The world's first carbon-neutral city will be built in Abu Dhabi. Masdar will be a car-free, zero-waste metropolis that will house up to 50,000 people. The \$22 billion project is scheduled to be finished in 2016. Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan presided over a ground-breaking ceremony on Saturday. The city will use a fraction of the power of normal cities, and that power will come from clean, renewable sources such as solar power. Planners hope to achieve zero waste through the reduction, re-use, recycling and recovery of waste material.

Masdar City will be designed to ensure residents do not need personal vehicles. Instead there will be an emission-free public transport system. Water will come from a desalination plant. Masdar chief executive officer Dr Sultan Al Jaber said the city would "lead the world". "We are creating a city where residents and commuters will live the highest quality of life with the lowest environmental footprint," he said. "Masdar city will become the world's hub for future energy. "By taking sustainable development and living to a new level, it will lead the world in understanding how all future cities should be built." The 6.5 sq km city is expected to create more than 70,000 jobs and attract sustainability experts. It will also contain the world's first graduate school dedicated to renewable energy. It estimated it will save the equivalent of \$2 billion in oil over 25 years. The Masdar project is an initiative of the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company, which is owned by the Abu Dhabi Government. The city Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, is already home to 900,000 people. Meanwhile, Adelaide is set to consider its own green future this week. The Green City Festival on Sunday will demonstrate the principles of sustainable living. The inaugural annual festival will be held in Elder Park. Visitors will be able to learn what they can do in the areas of water, waste, energy, transport and food to save precious resources. See www.greencityfestival.com.au for more information. Sunday is also the first day of the 3rd International Solar Cities Congress. More than 90 speakers, including Robert F. Kennedy, the nephew of the late U.S. President John F. Kennedy, will converge on Adelaide to discuss renewable energy.

The Murray Valley Standard - Pressure to solve water crisis

Narrung and Meningie communities continue to pressure the Coorong council to help solve their desperate need for stock and domestic water. Business owners and farmers from Meningie and Narrung spoke to the council at the meeting on Tuesday, while about 30 people filled the usually empty gallery to listen. The public was kept roped-off from the council and staff while the deputations were being made. Coorong council chief executive officer Tim Drew said it was important there was no interaction between the council and public during the meeting. Narrung dairy farmer Melanie Treloar was one of the four speakers and said she was happy with how council responded to the deputations. All councilors made comments after the deputations supporting the farmers in their battle to get a pipeline. "I still hope through your (the community's) enthusiasm and council we can hammer home that (without fresh water) it would be the death of the community," councilor Alison Jaensch said. Mrs Treloar said it was ironic that a town in South Australia should be without fresh water when even her sponsor child in Ghana could access clean, fresh drinking water. "If we had a pipeline we would never go back to lake water again," she said. All Land and Livestock owner Andrew Dawes spoke to emphasise the need for the pipeline. "(I'm here) to reinforce the request to pipe water to our river and lake users," Mr Dawes said. "I was told the water is taking up too much of the council's time, I would just like to say you are not alone." After the deputations the council committed to lobby the State and Federal Governments for subsidisation of water carting, declaration of the region's disaster status, to conduct a study into the drought's impact on the region, establish what long-term water supply solutions are in place and to seek rate relief subsidies for Exceptional Circumstances areas.

Carbon neutral by 2020

The South Australian government will become carbon neutral in all its operations by 2020, Premier Mike Rann announced today. Opening the third international Solar Cities Congress, Mr Rann outlined a timetable to offset all the greenhouse gas emissions produced by government activities. "This government is one of the largest greenhouse gas emitters in the state," Mr Rann said. "By ramping up its purchase of green power, the government will encourage demand for renewable energy which should lead to greater installation of sustainable energy generators. "We hope that our determination to reduce our carbon footprint will, in turn, inspire and encourage industries and other governments to follow our lead, thereby increasing demand for green energy. "In other words, from little things, big things grow." The government's timetable included a provision to offset 30 per cent of the government's greenhouse gas emissions by 2010 by purchasing green energy, or energy produced from renewable resources and through other carbon credits. By 2014 that would need to rise to 50 per cent and by 2020 the government must be carbon neutral. Mr Rann said the government's commitment to buying carbon offsets would also act as a catalyst for the early development of a carbon offsets industry in South Australia. - AAP

19th

FarmOnLine - \$5.85m raised by Woolworth's drought day

The generosity of shoppers at Woolworths stores on Friday has helped to raise more than \$5.85 million for drought relief. Profits from Friday's trading in all Woolworths and Safeway stores nationally were donated as part of its second Drought Action Day. The day exceeded expectations and a target of \$5 million, with two-thirds of the money donated to the Country Women's Association for financial drought relief and the remaining third to LandCare for sustainable farming projects. CWA National President, Lesley Young, was moved by the response from Australian shoppers. Last year the money was used to help with telephone, electricity and gas bills as well as insurance and school expenses -this year it would again go to many immediate needs of rural families. "In 2007 we were able to help more than 2500 farming families across Australia," Mrs Young said. "The generosity of the Australian people this year means we can help even more families to cope with the burden of household bills." Mrs Young said while the rains were giving hope to many people, more than half the country was still in drought. "There is still an enormous need and we are extremely grateful to see that Australia still cares about its farmers," she said. Woolworths CEO, Michael Luscombe said the large amount raised demonstrated "how much farmers mean to Australia". "The efforts of community and farming groups, corporations and individuals have all contributed to the success of Drought Action Day 2008.

"Our farmers are not only a vital part of the Woolworths business, they are a vital part of our national community, which is why we need to lend a hand," he said. SOURCE: *The Land*, NSW, weekly rural newspaper, posting breaking news updates on *FarmOnline*. For more on this story see the February 21 issue.

Rudd delivers \$1B aid for drought and equine influenza

Federal Parliament has approved a \$1 billion emergency funding package for drought-stricken farmers and those affected by equine influenza.

Minister for Agriculture, Tony Burke, says the funding is urgently needed to ensure farmers and those in the horse industry continued to receive support.

The total package of \$1.052 billion is outlined in two appropriation bills which were passed last week, including:

- * \$691.3 million for on-going Federal funding for families and farm businesses affected by the drought, including those in Exceptional Circumstances-declared regions;
 - * \$7.8m for interest rate subsidies to support small businesses that depend on business from farmers in Exceptional Circumstances-declared regions;
 - * \$97.2m to reimburse the States and Territories for funds they spent fighting equine influenza, most of which will be recovered from industry; and
 - * \$255.7m for financial aid to individuals and businesses in the horse industry following the equine influenza outbreak.
- The equine influenza assistance has been extended for those in restricted zones until 14 March 2008 or until movement restrictions are lifted.

"I have been meeting with farmers across Australia and have seen first-hand how much they are still suffering from this terrible drought," Mr Burke said.

"We will continue to support working families in the bush and help them survive the hard times, because they are a vital part of Labor's vision for a modern Australia."

AWA

1. The Queensland Government has introduced the Water Fluoridation Bill 2008, which aims to deliver long-term dental health benefits. The bill will place a statutory duty on public water suppliers to add Fluoride to the public water supply under their management or control.
2. After months (or years) without rain, a year's worth of rain has already fallen in some Queensland communities, resulting in widespread floodwater inundation and damage. However water deficits still remain in parts of the state.
3. The Tasmanian Premier has announced \$80 million in funding to drought proof the State. 5 major water projects around the State will get a share of the funding. Paul Lennon announced the funding package at the opening of the Meander Dam in northern Tasmania.
4. A cutting edge modeling project to study the Victorian coastline promises to help provide an accurate understanding of how future storm surges and rises in sea levels may impact areas along Victoria's shoreline. The project Future Coasts: Preparing Victoria's Coast for Climate Change is envisaged to be an invaluable for local government planning, and the management of assets and public land.
5. The Metropolitan Water District, which serves 18 million southern Californians, has adopted a new 'drought-management' plan spelling out how water will be allocated among cities and water agencies in case drought and legal restrictions on imported water supplies continue.
6. Four northern emirates in the United Arab Emirates plan to invest the equivalent of US\$15 billion to increase power and water supplies over the next decade. The construction of eight 100-megawatt gas turbines, each accompanied by a desalination facility, will go out for bids in May.
7. AECOM Technology Corporation, provider of professional technical and management support services has acquired Earth Tech, Inc, a Tyco International business for \$510 million US. The transaction will strengthen AECOM in its key end markets. AECOM plans to divest Earth Tech operations that are not in consulting, engineering & DBO services areas.
8. The University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) are considering introducing a new postgraduate qualification in Environmental Sustainability. To gauge interest in the proposal, a short survey is being conducted. To take part, go to (Website)
9. Drought will force a shortage of some of Australia's premium wines next year, following a deep cut in irrigation water into the McLaren Vale region on the outskirts of Adelaide.
10. Sydney's water storage is over two-thirds of capacity and nearing a six-year high after more than two months of regular rainfall.
11. Residents at Western Creek in northern Tasmania say they fear for their health and the health of local waterways after the aerial spraying of tree plantations near the Meander Dam.

Pederick says both governments failing the Lower Lakes

Speaking in state parliament this week, local MP Member for Hammond Adrian Pederick criticised both state and federal governments for failing the people of the Lower Lakes. Mr Pederick said that, despite the state government trumpeting its \$2.5 billion plans for SA's water security, there was no mention of the plight of the communities around

the lower Murray and Lakes. “I acknowledge the modest assistance made available to other irrigators in the region but pipelines to supply water to Langhorne Creek and the Narrung Peninsula must be fast-tracked immediately,” he said. During another visit to the Narrung region on Friday February 8th, Mr Pederick met with 60 or 70 local landholders and was shown numerous projects they had undertaken to alleviate their dependence on the River Murray. “These projects demonstrate the resilience and courage of some of the state’s best farmers. The fact that they have had little or no assistance or support from government underlines their almost complete neglect of the region,” Mr Pederick said. In his address to parliament, he referred to a surprise visit to the region by Premier Rann on the same day.

“The Premier turned up last Friday unannounced and unexpected, long after the horse has bolted. Some locals were offended by this belated visit. They also wondered at the secrecy which left them in some ways unprepared for such an opportunity to speak with the one person they hold ultimately responsible for their fate. What was the purpose of this sudden and apparently hasty visit by the Premier and other members of his cabinet? Was it actually to do something - or to be seen to be doing something? “Mr Pederick went on to say, “Mr Rann and his colleagues would have seen first-hand how resilient, creative and courageous these forgotten South Australians are. He might have even felt a sense of pride in the determination of fellow South Australians to prevail in the face of adversity. Those people will tell you that Mr Rann can take no credit for their survival to date. They will undoubtedly be grateful for any future assistance, but left to wonder why it has been so long coming—if it ever comes.”

Mr Pederick also expressed his disappointment and disgust at the response he received from new Federal Water Minister Penny Wong to his invitation to join him on a tour of the region. He said in the response declining the invitation, one of Minister Wong’s staff replied that the minister would not get there before late this year – if at all. “It sounds like the Federal government is treating the region with the same belated half-interest shown by State Labor. They might get there one day to see what damage has been done by their neglect and indifference. “I call on both governments to acknowledge the extreme hardship caused these people by the river’s continuing mismanagement, exacerbated by the drought.”

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond)

I wish to make some comments on water security in the Lower Lakes and on ministerial statements about water security made earlier this week. Premier Rann's visit to Narrung last week typifies the government's inaction on the severe problems faced by thousands of people in the Lower Lakes and Coorong region. Anything the government does now is a rearguard action. There has been no proactive forward thinking or planning for the area. Many people have already sold up their dairy herd or land and families have left—uprooted after generations of endeavour. The Premier turned up last Friday unannounced and unexpected, long after the horse has bolted. Some locals were offended by this belated visit. They also wondered at the secrecy which left them in some ways unprepared for such an opportunity to speak with the one person they hold ultimately responsible for their fate. What was the purpose of this sudden and apparently hasty visit by the Premier and other members of his cabinet? Was it actually to do something or to be seen to be doing something? As it happens, I was present again that day on one of my many visits to the area. I was on another trip with about 70 people who would love to have heard from the Premier. Those visits back up countless conversations I have with landholders and others in the region, who have received little or no acknowledgment by government of their plight, let alone assistance. How many times have I raised their plight in this house, often to the empty seats opposite? Mr Rann and his colleagues would have seen first-hand how resilient, creative and courageous these forgotten South Australians are. He might have even felt a sense of pride in the determination of fellow South Australians to prevail in the face of adversity. Those people will tell you that Mr Rann can take no credit for their survival to date. They will undoubtedly be grateful for any future assistance, but left to wonder why it has been so long coming—if it ever comes. On that trip the other day I first called in at Clem Mason's property, *Masondrina*, and he showed how many hundreds of metres he had had to extend his pipeline out into the lake. He also has a camp ground there, which is frequented by many people from the city and elsewhere. Then we went to Richard and Alison Hancock's property, where they have had to extend off-takes, way, way, way out into the lake whereby their normal pump cannot take up water. At Yalkuri they are spending tens of thousands of dollars installing 225,000-litre tanks so they can pump the water 13 kilometres, and then it goes through another 55 kilometres of pipeline, to service the thousands of cattle they have on their property. They have to have the tanks because the pumps will not keep up the water flow otherwise to the many cattle that they need to water. Then we get to the property at Tauwitchere, David Harvey's property, where there is a bit of forward thinking. He will not just survive the drought but he is thinking forward to the years ahead, and has spent over \$200,000 installing a desalination plant. Then we get to the shores of Lake Albert, which have receded up to 2 kilometres from where they normally are, where people go out on ropes so that they will not sink into the mud, so they can access water just for stock and domestic, because the dairy herds have long gone. And where was Rann? He was not out with me on the 4-wheel motorbike having a face-to-face inspection of what was going on out there. There are two pipeline projects that need to crank up on the Lower Lakes, and I will acknowledge the government's work on the feasibility study in assisting with the funding of the Langhorne Creek project to get water to the vineyards and others down there, and the domestic pipe in from Strathalbyn. But out of the two and half billion dollars of projects named this week there is no mention of water security in the Lower Lakes. These plans need to be fast-tracked because these people are running out of water just to exist. Kevin Rudd's national water policy, which came out before the November election, says that he wants equity and access to all.

Well, let's see that enacted. I would also like to make a comment about Penny Wong, the new federal water minister, who happens to come from Adelaide, I believe. I wrote a letter to the minister several weeks ago, inviting her to the Lower Lakes and to show her around, and her message to my office on Friday morning from one of her staff was: no; I will not be there until the end of the year, if I get there at all. What sort of action is that from the federal Labor government?

Heraldsun.com.au - Controversial Sugarloaf pipeline route revealed

The Victorian Government has revealed details of a controversial pipeline planned to siphon 75 billion litres of water from the Goulburn River for Melbourne. The proposed route largely follows the Melba Highway and will be constructed on private land according to information contained in a project impact assessment report, released today. The report describes a 2-4km wide corridor the pipeline would travel from the Goulburn River south to the Sugarloaf Reservoir, and includes several alternative routes – one of which follows Steels Creek near Kinglake National Park. The pipeline has triggered fury in the Goulburn Valley region, with protestors blocking access to the project early this month. Part of the anger came from the government's decision to avoid a fully-fledged environmental effects statement (EES) into the plan. The project is part of the Brumby Government's plan to safeguard Melbourne's water supplies by upgrading infrastructure in the Goulburn Valley, while piping the savings to the Sugarloaf Reservoir to the south. Planning Minister Justin Madden has said a full environmental study was not needed because the "flexible" alignment of the pipe meant any potential environmental problems could be avoided or mitigated. But Plug the Pipe group spokeswoman Jan Beer said today it would not matter which route the pipeline took. "It'll have exactly the same impact on the environment and the stressed Murray Darling environment wherever they put it. It should not be happening," she said. Ms Beer has previously attacked the project from an EES as showing "first-class contempt" by the Government for northern Victorian communities. Ms Beer claims there is "simply not enough water" for the government to take from the region.

The Australian - Mild for the time of year

After the hottest Australian January on record, large parts of NSW are headed for the coolest February in 50 years. The NSW central west has been up to 6C cooler this month, with not one day yet to reach the long-term average of 32C in the region's main town, Dubbo. "Every day this month they have been below 32 degrees. The highest they had had is 30," said Bureau of Meteorology forecaster Jane Golding. At Observatory Hill in the heart of Sydney it has been a similar story, with the average for the month 24.3C, compared with the long-term average of 25.8C, which if sustained will make it the coldest February since 1957. And the mild Sydney summer has been scorcher-free, with the highest temperature so far being 30.6C. "We have only had one day over 30 degrees, and that is the lowest since 1952," Ms Golding said. Further west at Parramatta, the average for the month so far is 24.1C. The average is 27.8C, making this year the coolest since records started there in 1968. But Grant Beard, from the National Climate Centre, cautioned that "cool weeks come by every now and then". "That is just a reflection of the fact there has been a lot of cloud and rainfall, particularly across the northern areas of the country and also down the east as well," Mr Beard said. He said La Nina events tended to bring cooler temperatures to the northeast and along the coast. But La Nina events tended to bring hotter than average summers to Victoria, and that is what they had been enduring. "We have definitely had a hotter than average summer in Victoria, way, way above average," Mr Beard said. He pointed out the average temperatures used to calculate temperature anomalies, or differences, were a combination of the maximum and minimum temperatures. "Where it had been raining, the overnight minima were higher than normal, because the extra cloud and humidity made the temperatures higher than average overnight in some areas," he said. The Bureau of Meteorology reported December temperatures were near normal, with warmer overnight minima offsetting cool daytime maxima. Averaged across the country, December was 0.12C below the long-term average. "Even the areas which were really wet in December tended to be cooler," Mr Beard said. "That is a function of the fact that the days were so much cooler. "When the cooling started overnight, it was starting off a much lower base." But January this year was the hottest Australian January on record, with a mean temperature 1.23C above the long-term average. It was, however, cooler than normal across much of eastern and central Queensland and northeastern NSW. "We had large areas more than one degree warmer than average, and even sizeable areas two-to-three degrees warmer than normal," Mr Beard said. He said the last well-developed La Nina was in 1998-99.

AdelaideNow.com - Solar plan for Coober Pedy

Coober Pedy will have Australia's largest off-grid solar power station by the end of 2009 under a joint state and federal government plan. The announcement of the project was made Tuesday by Federal Environment minister Peter Garrett and state Premier Mike Rann prior to Mr Garrett's keynote address to the Third International Solar Cities Congress. Under the plan 13 per cent of Coober Pedy's electricity would be provided by the \$7.1 million project. The Federal Government has committed \$3.55 million to the scheme with the state government contributing \$635,000. The remainder of the project will be funded by private enterprise and the Coober Pedy District Council.

Painting the town green

The Solar Cities Congress that starts in Adelaide tomorrow has been described as a "feel-good" gathering that will accomplish little.

"My concern is that events like the Solar Cities Congress help paint the town green while business as usual continues," said Professor Peter Droege, who is Asia Pacific chairman of the World Council for Renewable Energy. "The fact is, while we have a coal and fossil fuelled Australia, we can't really talk about sustainability.

"So the solar panels and the solar cities efforts are commendable but they are also dangerous because they make us look like we did something. It's like Earth Hour, it makes us feel good but it's not tackling the main issue." Tomorrow he will speak at the third International Solar Cities Congress in Adelaide but he remains skeptical about the solar city concept. He was coming to Adelaide with "excitement but also with a sense of ambivalence". "We need a state and national renewable energy program designed not to meet emissions targets but to get rid of the coal dependency," he said. "Until we squarely focus on that as a target we are, a bit, fooling ourselves, I think." In his book *A Renewable City*, Professor Droege argues that the transition from fossil fuel dominated cities to an urban future marked by a radically new, renewable energy infrastructure requires entirely new tools and frames of decision-making. Former Adelaide Thinker in Residence Herbert Girardet will give the keynote address on "solar cities of tomorrow" at the congress today. He spent eight weeks thinking about how to help Adelaide become a solar city in May 2003. Many of his recommendations have been adopted, but some still have not, including solar hot-water systems on all new buildings and making waste water recycling and storm water reuse "a central plank of water policy".

How to use less power

Householders will get help to use less power under a new State Government scheme to be announced today. The initiative goes beyond appealing to residents to be power conscious and puts the responsibility on electricity and gas retailers to work with their customers. Premier Mike Rann said the new Residential Energy Efficiency Scheme, would be available to all households – with a particular focus on those on low incomes. Mr Rann will announcement the new plan ahead of his opening address to the International Solar Cities Congress at the Convention Centre this morning. "Low-income households, in particular, face significant barriers to energy efficiency," he said. "Retailers may choose to simply purchase low-cost items such as replacing inefficient light globes for households or offer vouchers or special installation deals on more expensive incentives, such as improving insulation or replacing old, inefficient whitegoods. "We also want retailers to be innovative in designing new measures in partnerships with welfare agencies, energy efficiency businesses and other service providers." Retailers would be required to conduct audits of up to 5000 homes a year, especially low-income households, to advise on energy saving practices. A consultation paper to help raise awareness of the scheme and to seek feedback can be accessed at climatechange.sa.gov.au The REES scheme will be administered by the Essential Services Commission of SA. Details of how it will work will be decided over the next two months, in consultation with gas and electricity retailers. Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith welcomed the initiative, but added a note of caution. "Any action that reduces greenhouse emissions and aids our long-term climate change strategy is welcome," he said. "But what guarantee is there that the retailer won't pass on these extra costs to the customer?" "The Rann Government looks to have again off-loaded responsibility." Greens MLC Mark Parnell said: "In principle, anything that helps people to reduce their carbon footprint is a good idea."

Turning our homes into suburban powerhouses

Adelaide's suburbs can be power stations within five years when solar roof panels and special glass windows become cost-effective, a former Adelaide thinker in residence says. Urban ecologist Herbert Girardet says if three conditions are met each house can become a solar power station where houses produce more energy than they consume. These conditions are electricity prices going up, solar technology prices going down, and supportive policy in place, such as the State Government's new feed-in laws that pay for excess electricity fed in to the grid. "I think it is a matter of maybe five years before people see it is a cost-effective investment to put solar on houses on a very, very large scale," he said. "That is then your solar power station in the suburbs." Many households in SA already have solar power. The Federal Government rebate has given the industry a boost and the state feed-in laws will make solar more attractive." Meanwhile, Mr Girardet said the price of silicon used to make solar panels is coming down and there is a "massive increase in production capacity worldwide", particularly in China and India. Founder and chief executive of China's largest solar company Suntech, Dr Zhengrong Shi, said solar was not expensive. He predicts the cost of solar will soon match coal, not in 50 years time but in five years or less. And when solar achieves "grid parity", the market he says will be "boundless". Anticipation is growing around thin film solar cells, which are manufactured overseas. Dr Shi said a thin film of polysilicon could be wedged between two sheets of glass to make "tinted power windows". "It's ideal for a city rich in sunshine like Adelaide," he said. Japanese Kaneka thin film solar panels are a favourite with Solar Shop Australia. Electrician Aaron Bryant helped install 20 60W panels on a suburban home at Greenacres yesterday. "Since the rebate increased to \$8000 we've just been so busy, extremely busy, it's been fantastic," he said. "I'm sure there will be more interest now the feed-in law has been passed. Customers will be paying off their systems twice as fast." Ibrahim Iddrisu said he was "very happy" with the new 1.2kW system.

Human energy key to greener state

Boasting 90 speakers from 30 countries and with the word international in front of the title, the 2008 Solar Cities Congress in Adelaide sounds impressive. A representative of the defacto U.S. royal family, Robert F. Kennedy Jr, will even give a keynote address. "Exciting", "insightful" and "visionary" is how the politicians have billed the weeklong event at the Adelaide Convention Centre.

But turning talk into action requires tenacity and a long-term plan, according to those who organised the first event, in Diego, Korea, in 2004, and the second, in Oxford, England, in 2006. Dr Jong-dall Kim says so much energy went into organising the Daegu congress that maintaining enthusiasm has been difficult. "The problem is ourselves and the energy we spend on the congress because since the congress it has been hard to maintain that energy," he says. Dr Kim says public awareness of the role of renewable energy and climate change was one of the biggest benefits of the congress - and would be this time too. "Adelaide should develop action and implementation projects when the congress is finished and try and drive the business sector to make sure they are implemented," he says. "Leadership from these events is very important." He argues that while Adelaide has a good reputation as a green city, it is a poor consumer of green energy. "The congress is Adelaide's opportunity to move from being known as a clean city into the green energy area because Adelaide is not good in that area compared to its environmental image," he says. "You have a very good image as a green and clean city throughout the world, now you can upgrade to being recognised for environmental energy alternatives." Dr Susan Roaf chaired the organising committee for the Oxford event and says the city is now a national leader in energy efficiency. "The congress changed the mindset and self-image of the city," she says. Adelaide, she maintains, has made a good start. "This sort of event gets into the bloodstream and becomes part of what the city is, and Adelaide is already in that process of change," Dr Roaf says. One expert who has been at the forefront of capitalising on the opportunities solar energy provides is Origin Energy's Georgine Duncan, who was the inaugural project manager of the Adelaide Solar City project. Ms Duncan argues that with significant obstacles to the uptake of alternative energy at a grassroots level - such as Australia's relatively inexpensive mainstream electricity - events like the congress are essential to foster leadership. "We are in a culture in which people don't care about the issue of where electricity is coming from because prices are so low and we must get people excited about alternative energy," she says. "As practitioners we are also at these events to try and see what has worked around the world and what hasn't. There is value at a broader level, for example an Australian organisation like Origin tapping into international expertise." But Greens MLC Mark Parnell says an analysis of the papers to be delivered at the congress shows very few initiatives that would apply to Adelaide. He points out that one of the Adelaide environmental success stories to be showcased at the event, Mawson Lakes, was criticised by ETSA last year as Adelaide's most power-hungry community during peak summer demand because of poor building design. Mr Parnell says South Australia will continue to have very high carbon dioxide emissions, caused by a low-housing density capital city, poor public transport and large-scale agriculture. "Having said that, there are enough people at the congress who are doing enough good stuff on the ground that there must be some good come out of it," he says. One of the invited speakers, BP Solar regional director Brooke Miller, says businesses welcome events like the congress as a forum for debate and networking. BP manufactures photovoltaic technology, used by an increasing number of Adelaide households to capture solar energy for the electricity grid. "One of the things that businesses look for in terms of investing in alternative energy is a long-term plan and a long-term outlook from policy makers," she says. "Events like this bring together people of a like mind, policy makers, manufacturers, people with new technologies, people who want to debate issues and people with different view points of how the future should pan out."

Free markets protect the environment

Contemporary concerns about global warming and climate change were first raised by the conservation movement, gained momentum in public debate and were finally adopted by governments. Ironically it is private industry – driven by corporate responsibility and market pressure – which is now taking a lead in seeking and implementing solutions. The endorsement of the Kyoto Protocol on global warming by the Federal Labor Government and driven by the Minister of Climate Change and Water, South Australia's Senator Penny Wong, has been largely symbolic. Australia now has a seat at the table although governments have become bogged down in the detail of implementation. In the same way the State Government has set an example of the use of alternative energy sources by installing solar heating and windpower devices on a few public buildings. It offers energy rebates, has set targets for emission reductions and offered incentives to industry. The gestures are commendable. But a State Government, however well intentioned, cannot achieve the same dramatic change in market forces spurred by public demand. It is private industry which is beginning to make the real difference. A variety of companies offering a wide range of goods and services have recognised that there is a genuine market sympathy for so-called green initiatives. Whether it is organic food production, low-emission fuel or products which conserve water, a significant and growing section of the consumer marketplace is prepared to pay more for anticipated environmental benefits. There is a growing appreciation that South Australia has many inbuilt advantages – natural sunlight, open space near major urban areas to establish solar and wind power facilities and world-class research institutions. Many companies, like *The Advertiser's* One Degree of Change campaign, are setting new standards in energy conservation. The energy producer Santos is exploring with the Federal Government geo-sequestration – the harnessing and underground disposal of damaging carbon dioxide, a by-product of energy production. These initiatives are being undertaken without the need for legislative regulation. They are, in a real sense, evolutionary – the product of market forces and commonsense.

The outlook for farm production and income has improved following summer rainfall across much of Australia in the past three months, according to the February NAB rural outlook report. NAB is forecasting an increase in farm production of around 26pc in 2008-09. Winter crops following on from autumn rains are forecast to drive recovery in farm production. Early forecasts for farm production point to an above average rebound from drought in 2008-09 — an increase of almost 30pc, following a fall of over 20pc during the past four years. This is largely driven by a forecast 65pc increase in winter crop production. Grain prices are to remain high, with wheat production forecast to increase by around 74pc. But NAB warns that, in some areas, poor soil moisture profiles and the potential for dry conditions to re-emerge remain a key downside risk later in the season. The Bureau of Meteorology, on a more positive note, however, is forecasting at least average rainfall during the next three months. The NAB points out, the latest Bureau of Meteorology seasonal outlook for February through to April, is for above average rain across much of Western Australia, and for eastern states there remains a 50pc chance of above-average rainfall. But the outlook for irrigated agriculture remains in the balance, with further inflows into key storages in the lower half of the Murray Darling Basin required before increased allocations can be ensured to irrigators this year. SOURCE: ABARE, NAB Group Economics.

Adelaide Advertiser - Dry Tears – Our river can't survive government inaction
Murray dying for a drink

The new federal Labor Government is being accused of "sitting on its hands" while the River Murray continues to die. Environment and farming groups are calling for an immediate \$511 million to be spent on more water for the ailing Murray, amid accusations it has fallen off the Rudd Government's agenda. They have questioned the Government's commitment to the Murray and pointed to a lack of progress in getting Victoria's support for the \$10 billion national plan to save the river. Since taking office Labor has established another working group to look at water reform. Climate Change and Water Minister Penny Wong has had one meeting with Victorian Premier John Brumby. This related to support for the former government's \$10 billion Murray-Darling package. Parts of Lake Alexandrina are dry at the Mundoo Channel barrage near Goolwa, where former Prime Minister John Howard a year ago promoted his Murray rescue plan. Senator Wong said the Government recognised "the need to act urgently" but stressed it was important, for the river's long-term viability, to "get it right". But SA Farmers Federation president Wayne Cornish yesterday said there were "a lot of people sitting on their hands at the moment when the money has been budgeted for". "It beggars belief that saving the Murray has apparently been allowed to slip off the agenda," he said. "Our expectations were that regardless of who won the election, it (the rescue package) was going to proceed but it seems to have been put on the backburner." The Australian Conservation Foundation is asking for \$1.6 billion in funding for water reform to be brought forward "as a matter of urgency" to ensure the restoration of 1000 billion litres of water to the Murray and 170 billion litres to the Darling River by 2010. "The pace of implementation has been too slow, worsening the crisis facing the Murray-Darling Basin and calling into question the future of communities." Senator Wong told *The Advertiser* the Murray had been used as a "political football" for too long and the Government now had to "repair the damage after years of neglect". We recognise the need to act urgently. At the same time, we understand that for the long-term viability of South Australia's major water source, we have to get it right," she said last night.

Also yesterday:

SENIOR meteorologist Geoff Love said heavy rainfall in the north was likely to dry up without relief for drought-hit southern Australia.

SALINITY levels in the Murray downstream of Lock 1 continue to increase according to the latest Murray-Darling Basin Commission weekly report.

COMMISSION chief executive Wendy Craik described the situation in the lower lakes and Coorong as "particularly grim" and what was needed was "rainfall and lots of it".

ACF healthy ecosystems program manager Dr Paul Sinclair said the foundation remained "very worried" about the apparent lack of action on the Murray. "I am hopeful that Penny Wong will be a catalyst in getting action on the federal water plan," he said. "We still have significant issues with Victoria – there is no doubt about that." Dr Love told a Senate committee hearing in Canberra the chances of rain later in the year had diminished historically. "Our modeling suggests that rainfall in southern Australia will be reduced in a greenhouse world as greenhouse gas concentrations rise," he said. Mundoo Island cattle station owner Colin Grundy, whose property adjoins the Mundoo barrages, said last year he had been optimistic about swift action to repair the river system. "Then Victoria pulled the pin and I thought the Rann Government might try and push some sense into them... "There doesn't seem to be any will by the State Government or the Federal Government to do anything about these low lakes." Wentworth Group scientist Professor Peter Cullen has urged the Federal Government to act swiftly to save the Murray-Darling system.

Professor Cullen said the Government needs to change the priorities of its \$10 billion plan to save the ailing river and adopt a substantial program for buying backwater allocations. "There's \$10 billion available, we've got a Government committed to fixing this problem and I think we've got to find straightforward ways for them to just get on and do it," he told *The 7.30 Report* last night. "We need to make sure our seasonal allocations for farmers are appropriate for what's in the system, over the last 10 years we've run the storages in the Murray- Darling down to virtually nothing. "Really this year we're looking worse than the middle of last year." The Wentworth Group includes Australia's top experts in water management.

Big dry cracking us up

The face of Adelaide is changing as the parklands dry up, trees fall and homes crack. While the drought has had a dramatic effect in the country, urban design expert and ecological architect Dr Paul Downton says it is a hidden problem in the city. "It's very much an invisible issue and maybe that's part of the problem," he said. "We are still using too much water. We have to control our water consumption." Dr Downton says that means making the city more self-sufficient by minimising water use, capturing stormwater run-off, trapping rain, and "greening" the city. "We can still have the parklands (but) we're going to have to move more and more towards indigenous plantings," he said. "And unless grass has a very definite purpose – and leisure and sports are good purposes – if it's just an aesthetic choice then it's really rather silly." One thing that is unlikely to get better is the state of our homes. The latest statistics show almost half of Adelaide's houses are cracking as the soil dries. Goodwood has been the worst hit, with 77 per cent of homes cracking. Archicentre SA state manager Jim Jovanovic says the situation is the worst he has seen, and will get worse before it gets better. "Houses that never cracked before are now cracking, and that's the biggest problem we have at the moment," he said. "With people not watering the garden as often as they used to, the soils are shrinking and the houses are dropping and causing problems." Some cracks can be fixed with a paintjob, while others can cost up to \$20,000. In the suburbs and across the parklands trees are losing their leaves, losing limbs, or dying. In just one day this week the SES had to attend to seven trees that fell, causing a danger to people and property. Experts say a lack of water puts stress on the tree, which can make it vulnerable to insect and disease attacks and more likely to drop its limbs. TreeNet director David Lawry said it was like "starvation". "It affects the whole being once they are unable to extract moisture from the ground," he said. "(Now) we have a very dry environment, trees are becoming stressed . . . you'll see dieback, then they will drop limbs." The Adelaide City Council is planting indigenous trees as the imported versions die off. Council conservation land management officer James Walsh, from the Biodiversity Unit, was yesterday watering a new indigenous tree to replace a dying European pine. "Basically (the pine) died because it is not as well suited to the environment as the local indigenous plants," he said. "The indigenous plants evolved here so they're the most well-adapted."

Corellas invade city's south

Corellas are flocking to Adelaide's south in record numbers – prompting calls from councils and resident groups for "long-term solutions". Onkaparinga council public safety manager Chris Button said the birds, which had gradually migrated south from the Flinders Ranges, had arrived in Old Noarlunga at "two or three times the rate of last year". He is calling for State Government action to stop the birds stripping trees, destroying sporting fields and squawking loudly. "All we can do as a council is try and reduce the impact of the birds – they're quite disruptive to sporting fields," he said. Mr Button said residents work with the council on "scare tactics" including flashing spotlights early in the morning and using balloons as scarecrows. "Earlier in the season when the birds were in smaller numbers we used starting pistols to scare them, but once numbers started to grow it became ineffective," he said. Old Noarlunga Commercial and Residents' Association president Chris Cairns agreed a "better management plan" for the birds was needed, but stopped short of calling for culls. "I'd like to see the birds managed. Culling isn't the option we want, the experts need to work together to come up with some sort of solution," he said. Mr Cairns said that the "very destructive" birds push other animals out of their natural habitat and have led to some residents leaving Old Noarlunga because of the birds' constant noise. Friends of the Little Corellas vice-chairman John Bowman disputed claims the birds are heading south in record numbers, describing the claims as "misleading". "I went and did a count on February 1 and only counted 4400, because of the noise they make and the fact that it's very hard to keep a tally people often believe there are more around than there actually is," he said. "We support the council in calling for State Government support, but culling is never, ever an option." Department for Environment and Heritage senior ecologist Dr Glenn Shimmin said the Government has set up local action groups providing training in the latest lethal and non-lethal techniques for managing Corellas. "An approach to bird control that uses both lethal and non-lethal techniques, such as managing water sources where possible and scaring the birds is most effective," he said.

AdelaideNow - \$5m for greenhouse gas research

Santos will spend \$5 million to establish a research centre in Adelaide to help develop its cutting-edge project to store greenhouse gas underground in the state's Outback. The funding commitment was announced today by chief executive John Ellice-Flint at the International Solar Cities Conference, being held in Adelaide. To stall global warming "we must buy time" by using technology that allows the world to keep using fossil fuels, Mr Ellice-Flint said. "General consensus at the World Economic Forum was that if we are to succeed in reducing emissions and influencing climate change in the next ten years, we must allow carbon capture and storage to work," he said, referring to the forum he attended at Davos in Switzerland last month. Santos is planning a project - likely to cost \$750 million - to store carbon dioxide gas emitted by power stations in SA, Queensland and NSW. Carbon dioxide would be piped to Santos's Moomba facility in the Cooper Basin and pumped into the depleted geological reservoir from which Santos has been extracting oil and gas since 1969. Geothermal energy developers near Moomba have been invited to supply the power to compress and pump the carbon dioxide underground. "Santos believes the Cooper Basin in SA can be a crucible for clean energy incubation with global application," Mr Ellice-Flint said. "We're so confident of this that we're prepared to back it up with research funds necessary to turn that vision into reality." The funding for the Carbon Storage Centre of Excellence is conditional on the first phase of the Moomba Carbon Storage project proceeding.

Santos has committed \$20 million to the school of Petroleum at the University of Adelaide and \$5 million to the Royal Institution of science. "Our actions over the next 10 years will determine whether we respond effectively or otherwise to the generational challenge of our time," Mr Ellice-Flint said.

21st

FarmOnLine - Buyback seen as key to greater Vic water allocations

A Victorian Government buyback of irrigator entitlements to underpin a guaranteed minimum irrigation allocation are among options put forward by the Victorian Government to help manage forecast declining water availability in the state's key northern irrigation districts.

Northern irrigators are being asked:

- Whether they would favour a minimum reliability level and,
- If so, what it should be? and
- What they are prepared to give up to secure it?

Options floated in the Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy discussion paper released last week for public input, were:

- Would they be prepared to give up entitlement to increase allocation reliability?
- Should the Government buy it?
- How would they view a rebalancing of high and low reliability water shares?

The Government also seeks views, by the end of the month, on:

- Differential pricing regimes.
- Lifting the 4pc annual limit on trading water permanently out of a district.
- The 10pc limit on non-irrigators holding water shares.
- Possible introduction of tax breaks to encourage donations of unused water for the environment.

The northern region takes in Victoria's share of the Murray River as well as the Goulburn, Broken, Loddon, Campaspe, Ovens and Kiewa systems accounting for the lion's share of Victorian irrigated agriculture. The paper outlines a range of possible climate change scenarios. These range from status quo to a worst case scenario under which the past 10 year's low inflows become the norm, dramatically reducing the number of years in 100 in which irrigators could expect to receive their full entitlement of high reliability water. A draft strategy will be released mid-year for community consultation, with the final strategy expected early 2009.

Vic water pipeline route 'a kick in the guts'

The Sugarloaf pipeline will carve a 70 kilometre long swathe through crown land and private property affecting 170 farms and homes, with the first pipes expected to be laid as early as May. It will take around 300 megalitres a day from the Goulburn River system during the irrigation season to supply Melbourne. According to details of the preferred route released by Vic Water Minister, Tim Holding, on Tuesday, because of the difficulty of constructing the pipe on narrow road reserves it will pass predominantly through private land, often close to houses in the closely settled agricultural area and in some cases requiring relocation or reconstruction of cattle or sheep yards. A report prepared for the Vic Government said taking the water from the Goulburn is not likely to have a detrimental effect on the river but additional releases may be needed from Eildon to allow extractions during the non irrigation season. Angry Goulburn landholders who were this week blockading drilling work at the proposed site of the pumping station on the Goulburn are now preparing to blockade their land against construction work. Plug the Pipe spokeswoman Jan Beer said the release of the route was a "kick in the guts" and the 170 landowners affected were still in the dark about exactly who they were. SOURCE: Extract from report in *Stock & Land*, Vic, February 21.

If it rains, there'll be water

Irrigators on most northern Victorian systems can expect some water to be available when the season kicks off in mid August, according to forecasts released this week by Goulburn Murray Water (GMW). That is, if it rains. Average winter and spring rains would deliver mid August allocations of 31pc on the Murray, 17pc on the Goulburn, 22pc on the Campaspe and 100pc on the Loddon, but nothing for the Broken. But if it stays dry, there would be zero across the board when the channel runs traditionally start, with all available resources directed initially to meeting essential needs. GMW manager of regulated systems, Mark Bailey, said although Lake Eildon and the Hume Dam were well above their parched state at the same time last year, storages were still very low, particularly on the Murray, and rainfall in recent months had been below average. While heavy rains in Queensland and northern New South Wales are expected to deliver some water into the Darling River and Menindee Lakes it is too early to tell what this will be and whether it will be enough for Victoria to benefit. Next season's allocations would rely almost entirely on inflows over the critical winter and spring months. Around 53,000ML is needed to cover essential needs on the Murray and 49,000ML on the Goulburn before water can begin to be allocated to irrigation. Water carried over from unused allocations this season will play a critical role if allocations are low, but its delivery has been contingent on there being at least an allocation above zero to put water in channels. Dr Bailey said the authority was still finalizing details of how to best manage delivery of carryover water in the coming season.

One option may be that additional inflows be applied first to meeting carryover delivery losses to allow the water to be delivered at the earliest opportunity, before an opening allocation is made. "We're encouraging people to carryover so obviously it is a priority to get that water to people as early as possible," he said. Last year carryover was available at the start of the season on the Goulburn and soon after on the Murray. SOURCE: Extract from report in *Stock & Land*, Vic, January 21

The Advertiser e-Edition - 2020 greenhouse target: report

The interim report of the Garnaut Review on climate change, released in Adelaide this afternoon, says Australia should immediately commit to an aggressive 2020 greenhouse emissions target. "Australia should make a firm commitment in 2008, to 2020 and 2050 emissions targets that embody similar adjustment costs to that accepted by other developed countries," the report's executive summary says. "Some version of the current state and federal targets of 60 per cent reduction by 2050, with appropriate interim targets, would meet these requirements." The report also says Australia would need to go "considerably further" in reduction of emissions as part of an effective global climate change report. "Australia should formulate a position on the contribution that it would be prepared to make to an effective global agreement, and offer to implement that stronger position if an appropriately structured international agreement were reached." The report added that setting up an emission-trading scheme with ambitious objectives would be difficult and make heavy demand on "scarce economic and fine political resources". "The difficulty of the task makes it essential to use the most efficient means of achieving the mitigation objectives. That means efficiency both in minimising the economic costs, and in distributing the costs of the scheme across the Australian community in ways that are broadly seen as being fair." Earlier economist Ross Garnaut - who's the architect of the Federal Government's climate change policy - told International Solar Cities Conference being held in Adelaide, that he backed the adoption of interim emissions targets. Professor Garnaut also said the Government may need to go further than its target of cutting emissions by 60 per cent by 2050, and push other nations to follow suit. "Unfortunately, time is not on our side. I am increasingly of the view that climate change is a problem we must as a global community tackle effectively in the next few years if we are to avoid unacceptable levels of risk," he said. The economist supported the European Union approach of settling interim targets provided other developed countries made comparable pledges. "This sort of approach, which should apply both to interim emission targets and to long-term targets or budgets, is a sensible way of finding a middle ground between doing nothing and doing too much." Prof Garnaut said international agreements on emission reduction would need to be tackled on a per capita basis to ensure developing countries came on board. While a minor contributor overall to the world's emissions, Australia has one of the highest per capita rates of pollution. Prof Garnaut also argued against nations delaying tough measures. "Without strong action by both developed and major developing countries alike between now and 2020 it will be impossible to avoid high risks of dangerous climate change. The show will be over. "Waiting until 2020 would be to abandon hope of achieving climate stabilisation at moderate levels." Prof Garnaut's final report, which will inform the Government's plans for an emissions trading scheme, is due in September. The Climate Institute said his speech struck the right note on tackling global talks for a post-2012 regime. "It's in Australia's interest to take a leadership position internationally but also to take advantage the huge opportunities we have in Australia to reduce emissions to set an example at a global level," policy director Erwin Jackson said.

Adelaide Advertiser - As Penny Wong reads to students about the Murray, a family's lifeline is dying

Climate Change Minister Penny Wong has pledged the \$10 billion Murray-Darling rescue package will remain on the table and be quarantined from any Budget cuts. Her pledge came as Prime Minister Kevin Rudd declared absolute confidence in her handling of the River Murray crisis despite growing calls for action to save the river. A spokesman for Mr Rudd said the Prime Minister believed Senator Wong was "doing a first-class job". In Canberra yesterday, Senator Wong launched Liquid Gold, an anthology of writing and art by children from the Murray-Darling Basin. At the same time, the Dettloff family of Swan Reach was calling for action to preserve their livelihood. Onion growers Peter and Joanne Dettloff moved their water pumps this season to ensure they had continued access to river water - but their reduced allocation has meant only one-third of their normal crop could be planted. Mr Dettloff said the Federal Government had "done nothing" to help farmers while they had been working hard and investing savings to make ends meet. "They are doing nothing. All this money is sitting there and all that is going to consultants and hot air," he said. "There has been a lot of talk and no action. Politicians don't seem to understand the effect it's having on the river and the towns that rely on the people that live on the land - they don't seem to be doing anything to help." Pressure is mounting on the Rudd Government to get the \$10 billion package originally proposed by John Howard last year into operation. Victoria is refusing to sign up to the plan even though SA, NSW and Queensland have agreed. Senator Wong will meet Victorian Water Minister Tim Holding next week and said negotiations were "progressing well". In other developments yesterday: PREMIER Mike Rann supported Senator Wong saying it was "a matter of grave urgency" that Victoria sign up to the Murray rescue package with its plan for a national independent control body. SENATOR-ELECT Nick Xenophon urged Victoria's opposition to the national water plan to be challenged in court. OPPOSITION Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith said there were 2000 megalitres of water available for purchase now at a cost of about \$800,000.

RIVER Murray Minister Karlene Maywald said irrigation allocations in SA would remain unchanged at 32 per cent.

In answer to a series of questions from The Advertiser, Senator Wong said the Government was accelerating the spending of \$400 million to address the over-allocation of water from the system by purchasing water from willing sellers and investing in modernising irrigation infrastructure. "Funding under the plan will not be earmarked for particular states. It will be used to deliver the best outcomes for everyone - including South Australians."