

FarmOnLine - Garnaut report: Australia well placed to deal with climate change

Australia is relatively well placed to do well in a world of comprehensive global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, Professor Ross Garnaut said today. Releasing his interim report in Adelaide, Professor Garnaut said Australia should promote strong global action on climate change and be prepared to match the commitments of other developed nations. It has recommended emission reduction targets for both the years 2020 and 2050 - the Federal Government has currently committed to a 60 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. "Contrary to the conventional wisdom which has dominated Australian debate over the past decade, comprehensive global efforts to reduce emissions will play to Australia's strengths," Professor Garnaut said. "It is in Australia's interests for the world to adopt a strong and effective position on climate change mitigation." The interim report provides early insights from the Garnaut Climate Change Review's work to date as a basis for community discussion, before recommendations are finalised for the final reports due in September. The interim report states that Australia's interest in strong global action stems from its "exceptional sensitivity to climate change", and its "exceptional opportunity to do well in a world of effective global mitigation". "We have many resources and skills that will allow us to convert strong global action into an economic opportunity," Professor Garnaut said. "We have a first-rate skills base in areas related to innovation, management and financial services. "We have rich renewable energy resources. We are among the world's largest exporters of uranium and natural gas which can benefit from the low-emissions' efforts of other nations. "And our agricultural sector emits less than other developed countries. "By contrast, Australia would be a big loser – possibly the biggest loser among developed nations – from unmitigated climate change. "Australia is more vulnerable to climate change than most other developed nations as we are highly sensitive to climate variation, and we are surrounded by mostly developing nations, which are likely to be adversely affected by rising temperatures," he said. The Review has been commissioned by Australia's Federal, State and Territory Governments to examine the impacts and opportunities of climate change. It will put forward a national framework for action, with recommendations for medium to long-term policy options to minimise the environmental and economic impacts of climate change. The interim report states that Australia should make firm commitments this year to both 2020 and 2050 targets that reflected "similar adjustment cost to that accepted by other developed countries". Submissions are invited on the interim report and any issues related to the review by 11 April 2008. SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

Irrigators to form national alliance

A meeting of irrigator representative groups from across Australia will be held in Sydney in March to discuss the formation of a national council. NSW Irrigators Council chief executive officer, Andrew Gregson, says the time is right for a single national voice for irrigators. "We believe that growing federal interest in water policy makes it vital for irrigators to have a unified voice to protect our businesses and communities," Mr Gregson said. NSW Irrigators Council determined at its November meeting to invest significant resources to assist in establishing a national body. "We've spoken to groups across Australia about the proposal. The response has been overwhelmingly positive," Mr Gregson said. Federal Minister for Water, Senator Penny Wong, has accepted an invitation to address the meeting. This will be the first opportunity for many irrigator groups to meet and hear from Minister Wong. The meeting will be held on March 7. Invitations to attend have been forwarded to irrigator representative groups across Australia. "Water is an issue in every State and territory in Australia. The ramifications of federal policy are far wider than just the Murray Darling Basin," Mr Gregson said. Further information on the meeting – and invitations for groups that may not have been contacted – is available from the offices of NSWIC. SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra.

SA Lakes farmers leave as water hopes evaporate

More than 40 farmers along the Narrung Peninsula may go out of business in the next year as water in the Lower Lakes drops below sea level, making it physically impossible for some producers to access stock and domestic water. In some areas along the coast, farmers have to extend pipes 3 kilometres to reach the water's edge. Carting water from nearby standpipes is an option some landholders have chosen, but at \$1000 a day for freight and no emergency water-carting assistance from the State Government, some have been forced to drastically destock. Several proposals have been submitted to State and Federal Governments on how to resolve the Lower Lakes (Albert and Alexandrina) issue, including a River Murray Wellington weir proposal that suggests returning the lakes and Coorong "back to their former estuarine state". Last week, representatives from the Lower Lakes and Coorong regions were allocated only a half-an-hour with Premier Mike Rann, Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald and Barker MP Patrick Secker, to tour the region and give a first-hand snapshot of the devastating impact of declining water access and quality on the Narrung Peninsula (Meningie North - pictured left). Landholders spoke of the need for a pipeline to Narrung, rebates for emergency water carting, and the collapse of the region if the proposed weir goes ahead. Lower Lakes dairyfarmer Clem Mason, Meningie, says people's livelihoods depend on the pipeline. "There is no fresh water around the Lakes area and some don't have access to mains water," he said. "Not so long ago, we had about 22 dairyfarmers in the region - now there are only eight." Mr Mason said that in addition to the pipeline, the Government should buy-back water licenses at market price tax-free, after the Government admitted to over-allocation.

The survival of the lakes was also paramount because they worked like a desalination plant for the whole river. "The lakes are where all the solids of the river end-up where it is mixed up and oxygenated and used for our irrigation," he said. "We use it only for stock water now as it is hard to access, and we are even struggling to do that due to its high salinity levels. The water I pump from my windmill is green with massive particles, it smells and people have to use this for household purposes. "We have been given no solution by the governments because they have allocated all the water out and have left none for dilution flows. We were told dilution flows would be sent down the river to prevent algal blooms but I was told that those flows would stop at Wellington, and that we were on our own." University of Adelaide water economics and management's Mike Young said if the Basin regions continued to stay dry then a comprehensive and thorough review of all the options for downsizing the River Murray system needed to be finalised quickly. "Someone needs to be appointed to conduct a thorough assessment of all proposals submitted in an apolitical process," Prof Young said. "The system needs to be looked at as a whole and how we're going to downsize it to bring an end to the continual avalanche of proposals. All options need to be carefully reviewed with a view to making a decision. "All of this then needs to be explained and documented in a report that can be made available to everybody and done quickly." SOURCE: Extract from full story in *Stock and Land*, Victoria, published Thursday February 21, 2008.

Cotton starts its recovery

Alternative crops have taken a big bite out of the cotton plant this season, with low water allocations pushing a lot of growers towards sorghum and corn. However, with the season having improved since planting and many crops having received a good soak of rain, those growers who did take a punt on cotton are set to be rewarded with good yields. The current low global demand for cotton coupled with high ending stocks compared to many grain commodities, has kept the market relatively bearish, but prices are still solid compared to last year. The Namoi Cotton Co-operative, Toowoomba, reported Australian cotton prices at \$409 a bale on Tuesday, compared to \$383/b this time last year. Steve Dalton, Ecom Commodities, Narrabri, said lacklustre demand had coupled with lower water allocations this season to influence many growers in planting alternative crops. "The market is volatile at the moment - there is very low mill demand, and the Chinese New Year break hasn't helped," Mr Dalton said. "The fundamentals will have to come in, as the mills simply aren't buying at these prices." Mr Dalton said the market had also been influenced by the recent reports from the US Department of Agriculture and the National Cotton Council, which had detailed the lower consumption and higher ending stocks in the global cotton market - a reversal of the grains situation. SOURCE: Extract from full story published in *The Land*, NSW, February 21, 2008.

NEWS.com.au - Carbon emissions cuts must be realistic

With less than two years to implement an emissions trading system, a leading point of interest in the business community is how the Rudd Government will keep the economy competitive under the scheme, as the aim is to increase the cost of energy. The expectation was that this would be high on the agenda of the Garnaut review. Following the preview Ross Garnaut gave yesterday of his interim report for state premiers, they will now not be so sure. Garnaut first sent a signal that he considers the European Union aim to reduce emissions by between 20 per cent and 30 per cent by 2020 a good move. He also indicated support for Al Gore's extreme proposition that by 2050, emissions should have been cut by more than 80 per cent. Labor's platform requires a 60 per cent cut by 2050, a difficult enough target as it is. He also made clear that he believes Australia should make serious cuts in emissions, even though he believes the Bali process will not produce overall reductions in emissions in the foreseeable future. And he gave no indication that he considered strong cuts would generate any problem in international trade, despite the sharp focus on this in Brussels and Washington, DC, during the past month. Garnaut's leading interest evidently is in how Australia can be a world climate-change leader. He thinks cuts by Australia will encourage developing countries to make cuts, and argues that regional collaborative arrangements between Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea would set global precedents. But he is making the same mistake European Greens made over the Kyoto Protocol. They believed developing countries would follow the example of industrialised countries and make cuts. They didn't, and they demonstrated at Bali that they expect to increase, not reduce, emissions in the future. China has been clear: it accepts the effects of climate change, it will adapt to them, but economic growth will remain the priority. The impact on competitiveness has been highlighted by developments in Brussels and Washington during the past month. Emissions trading in Europe is harming competitiveness. In a bid to get business on side, the EU environment directorate argues that the EU should restrict trade with countries that don't cut emissions. And a US congressional energy committee has just released a white paper on emissions trading. It considers that commitments by developing countries to reduce emissions should be a precondition to the implementation of emissions trading in the US. Anybody who thinks the World Trade Organisation multilateral trading system is important should be concerned. Such EU trade bans would generate extreme tensions and encourage proposals to amend the WTO in ways that could seriously weaken it. And before anybody starts to muse "Why not amend the WTO?", consider applying that approach to agricultural trade. Rather than insisting the EU and the US align their agricultural policies with WTO principles, the approach here is to change WTO rules to legitimise their policies. The risk of trade conflict nicely brings the competitiveness question back to the centre.

Until now, the attitude in Canberra has been that the impact on trade rules will be sorted out after the emission trading rules have been settled. This is the wrong approach, as there is prospectively an inherent conflict between the free-market philosophy of the WTO and the cap element of emissions trading. The cap means government directs and regulates an economic activity: the production of energy. It is an economic command and control tool. When governments try to protect capped activity from cheaper products from uncapped jurisdictions, you get conflict with WTO rules. This is why the trade and competitiveness dimension needs to be an integral part of the planning for the emissions trading system, not something considered after the fact. The ideal result would be a system with measures that preserved competitiveness and were consistent with WTO rules. Garnaut needs to give priority to developing a system that protects Australian competitiveness. We have put competitiveness in second place in the past, to our cost. A little more than 100 years ago, justice H.B. Higgins ruled that higher wages were more important in the Sunshine Harvester case. This drove Australia's first globally competitive manufacturer out of business, and manufacturing did not regain competitiveness until the tariff reform in the 1980s, in which Garnaut played a key role. *Alan Oxley is chairman of the APEC Study Centre at Monash University.*

Adelaidenow.com - Labor must act to save the Murray

In April, 2003, then Labor opposition leader Simon Crean said the River Murray was dying. If we did not restore the health of the Murray, he said, there would not be a river system capable of supporting farmers into the future. It was time for action – not passing the buck, he said. That was five years ago. Since then Labor has been claiming it can save the Murray, that it can do better than the \$10 billion Coalition plan to restore the river system. In more recent times the River Murray has largely dropped off the political agenda. Yet there is no greater problem facing Australia than the decline of the Murray-Darling river system. It is almost 100 days since Labor came to office in November, 2007. Sadly for South Australia, the state has not received even a fraction of the torrential rain that has fallen in Queensland. Sydney has been consistently drenched and enough rain has fallen in Melbourne to rejuvenate domestic gardens. Amid all this rain, the Murray has dropped from the national agenda. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has pledged to end the blame game between states. It is time for action, not talk. It is time for Climate Change and Water Minister Senator Penny Wong and Mr Rudd to overcome the interstate rivalry that has stymied action on the Murray. Reviving the Murray is in the national interest. However, it is of particular importance to SA, for which the river is a lifeline. During last year's election campaign, Labor fiercely resisted the Liberal charge that SA would have diminished influence in a Labor Cabinet. It is time for the new Labor Government to demonstrate that national issues of particular importance to this state, such as the Murray, receive the political attention they deserve. Reviving the Murray is in the national interest. It is time for action, to end the blame game and to save the Murray.

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Penny Wong determined to bring Victoria into Murray-Darling Basin agreement

Climate Change Minister Penny Wong says she's determined to bring Victoria into a Murray-Darling Basin water agreement. Queensland, NSW and South Australia last year agreed to hand over to the federal government their responsibilities for managing water in the parched basin, known as Australia's food bowl. But Victoria has resisted signing up to the \$10 billion scheme, announced last January by former Prime Minister John Howard, because the state does not want to cede some of its water rights. Senator Wong told a Senate estimates hearing today she had discussed the issue briefly with Victorian Premier John Brumby at December's climate conference in Bali and had since met with Mr Brumby and Water Minister Tim Holding. "I have a further meeting with Mr Holding scheduled on Monday," she said. Senator Wong said the Rudd government was keen to achieve a national consensus on water resources in the Murray-Darling Basin, Australia's greatest river system. "The Murray River for too long has been a political football and we absolutely need arrangements between the commonwealth and the basin states that deliver an outcome for the river," she said. "I'm not here simply to make announcements. I'm here because I want to get outcomes." Senator Wong would not discuss details of her upcoming talks with Mr Holding but said the meeting would cover all the issues on which former environment minister Malcolm Turnbull was unable to get Victoria's agreement. "There are a range of matters on the table and, in the interests of ensuring the integrity of those negotiations, I am not going to go into the detail," she said. Critics of the Victorian state government say it has refused to sign up to the commonwealth scheme only because to do so would thwart its plans to pipe water from the Goulburn River system to Melbourne. Today's Senate estimates hearing turned acrimonious after Liberals Simon Birmingham and Ian Macdonald pressed Senator Wong on whether Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had held talks with the Victorian government over the water issue. Senator Wong was unable to answer, prompting an angry response from the two Liberals. Their interjections prompted Senator Wong to retort: "Senator Macdonald, do you only interrupt women this much, or is it generally you're rude?" Senator Macdonald denied this was the case. "You're a person to me. The fact that you happen to be a woman is quite irrelevant," he said. Senator Wong said any questions for the prime minister's portfolio should have been asked earlier. "Do not verbal me to try and make a political point," she said.

The Australian - Nuclear not on the table: Wong

A day after economist Ross Garnaut warned the Rudd Government it would have to cut Australia's carbon emissions more sharply than previously envisaged, Climate Change Minister Penny Wong reasserted Labor's opposition to nuclear power, promising to press for greater use of alternative energy sources.

"We don't need to go down the path of nuclear energy," Senator Wong told the Nine Network. "What we do need to ensure is that we look at renewables, and the Government has a 20 per cent renewable energy target by 2020 to drive investment in the renewable energy sector. We will also be investing in carbon capture and storage so there is a clean coal future for Australia." Last year, Labor ran a strong scare campaign against the Howard government's plans to allow the construction of nuclear power stations. However, Labor is in favour of increasing exports of uranium to nations that do use nuclear power. Professor Garnaut's interim report into the economic implications of climate change for Australia, released on Thursday, said the Rudd Government should go beyond its target to reduce carbon emissions by 60 per cent by 2050. Warning that the world faced high-risk implications from climate change sooner than had been previously thought, Professor Garnaut called for the establishment of a 2020 reductions target to be set this year, and backed the need for the creation of an emissions trading system. Yesterday Senator Wong continued to avoid embracing the report in full. She said the Government was awaiting economic modeling from Treasury before finalising its position, and promised to keep "a very clear eye" on the impact of its actions on the Australian economy. Meanwhile, the natural gas industry called for greater use of gas in power generation. The Australian Pipeline Industry Association said the Government should expand its renewable energy target to include a clean energy target, allowing energy producers to use natural gas as part of their clean energy options. "Gas used to produce electricity in a co-generation facility creates about half the greenhouse gas emissions of an equivalent coal-fired power station," association chief executive Cheryl Cartwright said. "Power generation by natural gas is generally around half the cost of power generation by renewable energy sources." Trade union leaders welcomed the report, despite the possibility of job losses in energy-intensive industries. Construction Forestry Mining and Energy Union mining and energy division president Tony Maher described it as "pretty sensible". "If by 2050 you can hit targets of 60 per cent, you can probably do 80 per cent," he said. Former national secretary of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and senator-elect Doug Cameron said he was optimistic about the impact emissions targets would have on jobs.

Smart money goes on trees

Ross Garnaut's push for incentives for business to capture and store greenhouse gases in forests will provide a windfall for Andrew Grant and his fledgling company CO2 Australia. Large companies including Qantas, Woodside and Origin Energy have already begun investing in large-scale forest plantations across Australia in anticipation that these carbon sinks will be included in a future trading scheme. About 90 per cent of the growing business for fledgling carbon sink provider CO2 Australia is to plant trees under contract for major companies looking to hedge their carbon risk. The company was established four years ago to take advantage of what it anticipated would be a growth industry when a Japanese power company was looking for someone to plant trees in Western Australia. Foresters such as Aaron Soanes have planted for the company more than 5000ha of mallee eucalypts across pastures near Wagga Wagga in southern NSW, which will remove about 2.5million tonnes of greenhouse gases when they are fully grown in 30years. Mr Grant said the trees were chosen for their longevity, ability to handle climate change and rejuvenate after fire, their unpalatability to stock and because they did not need watering or fertilising. On the back of the aggressive cuts being flagged by Professor Garnaut in his interim report, Mr Grant said the company was anticipating a major expansion of its planting program, with strong interest from overseas as well as other Australian companies. He said some environmentalists' criticism of carbon offsets was unfounded and claimed Australia was well placed to reliably capture and store millions of tonnes of greenhouse gases at low-cost. This was supported in a report by McKinsey and Company last week, which said Australia could cut more than 10 per cent of its emissions by 2020 from forestry and avoid deforestation. "It's not an ecological challenge, it's an administrative challenge," Mr Grant said. He said forest sequestration had the potential to grow as fast as the plantation forestry industry but cover a much larger section of inland Australia.

Proposal blind to political realities

Ross Garnaut was in Bali last December for the UN climate change conference. He saw first-hand the ferocious opposition of developing countries to being roped into anything that remotely resembles emissions targets as part of a global trading scheme. Two months later, in his interim report to the Rudd Government, he has constructed comprehensive thesis for a global response to climate change that completely ignores this realpolitik. He is proposing that we use the impossible to solve the impossible. Garnaut says that for any hope of an effective global response to climate change, major developing countries will need to be included in a post-Kyoto deal from 2012 and all other countries will need to be given a target and included soon after. The reasoning for this is simple enough. Rich countries such as Australia are going to need to rely on getting their hands on lower-cost greenhouse abatement opportunities in these developing countries if they have any hope of making the even deeper emissions cuts that appear necessary based on the current best read of the science. Garnaut says the Rudd Government's commitment of a 60per cent cut in emissions by2050 is in no danger of overshooting the mark. Try 70 to 90 per cent. The only way to do this will be to work with developing economies, starting with neighbours such as Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, to reap the low-cost credits that come from halting and reversing deforestation, which alone accounts for 20per cent of global greenhouse emissions. The sticking point for poor countries is understandable. Alleviating poverty is and should be their No1 priority. Energy is the golden ticket to delivering this.

They are opposed to anything like a price on carbon that stands in their way. So Garnaut has suggested the best way to get them in is to offer a deal they can't refuse. Carve up the remaining budget of greenhouse emissions on a per capita basis. That's a sweet deal for China, India and Indonesia. For Australia it is brutal. So the trick is to get developing countries into the game to enable rich countries to access their low-cost credits and make even deeper cuts less painful. It's a catch-22 on a global scale.

Energy innovators to reap reward

There will be winners and losers in the battle to contain climate change, with the uranium industry and owners of windswept land close to urban centres standing to reap substantial gains. Professor Ross Garnaut said people with engineering and management skills relevant to innovation in the resources and energy industries would also be among the biggest beneficiaries, as would owners of good agricultural land. The executive director of the Australian Coal Association, Ralph Hillman, said the coal industry would face challenges from a global shift to greenhouse abatement, but he said Australia was tackling that by demonstrating the potential of low-emission coal technology. He said Australia would have the potential to export the technology to major coal customers. "We are pleased that Garnaut recognised that the Government needs to contribute to the research and development of the process and that, when we come to deployment, the Government will also need to intervene to subsidise some of the industrial-scale plants," Mr Hillman said. The gas industry is an obvious beneficiary from the adoption of a greenhouse emission abatement scheme. The executive director of the Australian Pipelines Association, Cheryl Cartwright, said it was vital that the Government made up its mind about what sort of targets and emission reduction scheme it would introduce as quickly as possible. "The challenge will be for the Government to make a decision sooner so that the private sector can make the necessary investments." The executive director of the Australian Uranium Association, Michael Angwin, said the contribution of nuclear power to reducing greenhouse emissions worldwide had been endorsed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "If you expand Australia's uranium exports, then you not only give the world greater flexibility and options to deal with climate change, but you also help offset the cost of the structural adjustment that Australia would face," he said. He called upon Western Australia, Queensland, NSW and Victoria to remove their political bans on uranium mining.

24th

AdelaideNow – Migrant plan warning

I have been saying this for years; I hope they listen to the Professor

Renowned scientist and author Tim Flannery has fired a broadside at the State Government's push to attract more migrants to South Australia. And he said the water crisis made any government's policy of increasing population unsustainable. He questioned why the Government was bringing professional migrants to the state instead of training SA's unemployed to fill skilled-job vacancies. "Why is it you would want to bring in more people when there are chronic unemployment problems in parts of Adelaide which must be addressed – (especially) in the northern suburbs towards Elizabeth?" said Prof Flannery, the 2007 Australian of the Year and former SA Museum director. "In my view there should be more emphasis on helping those who are already there in the state than just bringing more people in." Prof Flannery, who is principal research scientist at the Australian Museum in Sydney, said the policy of "aggressive population recruitment" had already been tried and failed. He said the pockets of chronic unemployment – sometimes stretching across three generations – were created by bringing in people to fill jobs in a manufacturing industry which had proved unsustainable, as shown by the closure of the Mitsubishi car plant this month. "I think South Australians should ask themselves whether that (migration policy) is the right model for the future," he said. But Premier Mike Rann – who aims to increase SA's population to two million by 2050 – said a record low unemployment rate meant there were jobs opportunities for locals as well as migrants. "The expansion in the mining, defence and advanced manufacturing sectors will mean significant jobs growth across the whole state economy and this will mean many more job opportunities for people not currently in the labour market," he said. Prof Flannery said water scarcity, exacerbated by the drought and over-consumption, discounted the "populate or perish" mantra of business and government. "Any responsible politician needs to consider that (water scarcity) first before they can consider increasing the stress on the water situation by increasing the population," Prof Flannery said. Mr Rann said policies were in place to tackle the water crisis, including plans for desalination plants and a \$24 million rebate program to help households save water. Business SA chief executive officer Peter Vaughan said population growth was the key to the future prosperity of SA given its "ageing population and an exodus of highly qualified young adults". Prof Flannery, however, warned SA must prepare for a different environment in the future if global warming continued at its present rate. He predicted a greater threat of disease, fewer species and harsher living conditions on the land in the next two decades. Mosquito-borne diseases such as Ross River virus would rise, as would the advance of invasive weeds, insects and pests, he said. He believed there would be major shifts in rural production from crops to cattle as summers became hotter and wetter and winters drier.

News.com.au - Carbon emissions cuts must be realistic

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The expectation was that this would be high on the agenda of the Garnaut review. Following the preview Ross Garnaut gave yesterday of his interim report for state premiers, they will now not be so sure. Garnaut first sent a signal that he considers the European Union aim to reduce emissions by between 20 per cent and 30 per cent by 2020 a good move. He also indicated support for Al Gore's extreme proposition that by 2050, emissions should have been cut by more than 80 per cent. Labor's platform requires a 60 per cent cut by 2050, a difficult enough target as it is. He also made clear that he believes Australia should make serious cuts in emissions, even though he believes the Bali process will not produce overall reductions in emissions in the foreseeable future. And he gave no indication that he considered strong cuts would generate any problem in international trade, despite the sharp focus on this in Brussels and Washington, DC, during the past month. Garnaut's leading interest evidently is in how Australia can be a world climate-change leader. He thinks cuts by Australia will encourage developing countries to make cuts, and argues that regional collaborative arrangements between Australia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea would set global precedents. But he is making the same mistake European Greens made over the Kyoto Protocol. They believed developing countries would follow the example of industrialised countries and make cuts. They didn't, and they demonstrated at Bali that they expect to increase, not reduce, emissions in the future. China has been clear: it accepts the effects of climate change, it will adapt to them, but economic growth will remain the priority. The impact on competitiveness has been highlighted by developments in Brussels and Washington during the past month. Emissions trading in Europe is harming competitiveness. In a bid to get business on side, the EU environment directorate argues that the EU should restrict trade with countries that don't cut emissions. And a US congressional energy committee has just released a white paper on emissions trading. It considers that commitments by developing countries to reduce emissions should be a precondition to the implementation of emissions trading in the US. Anybody who thinks the World Trade Organisation multilateral trading system is important should be concerned. Such EU trade bans would generate extreme tensions and encourage proposals to amend the WTO in ways that could seriously weaken it. And before anybody starts to muse "Why not amend the WTO?" consider applying that approach to agricultural trade. Rather than insisting the EU and the US align their agricultural policies with WTO principles, the approach here is to change WTO rules to legitimise their policies. The risk of trade conflict nicely brings the competitiveness question back to the centre.

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25th

FarmOnLine - Burke believes young farmers unaware of climate change

Young Australian farmers are not as clued up on climate change as their older counterparts, Agriculture Minister Tony Burke believes. That was one of the surprises for the city dweller on his tour of rural Australia in the past few months. Coming from a background in small business, industrial relations and State MP in the former NSW Carr Government, Mr Burke makes no secret of the fact he had no farming experience before taking on his portfolio last year. "I guess the biggest issue, from the city, you tend to have a perception of farm as lifestyle rather than farm as business," he said. "(But there are) some really impressive, growing, profitable businesses out there." The Victorian Farmers Federation has criticised the Minister for neglecting the State and not meeting with the VFF during his visit to the State's Sunraysia region on January 4. Mr Burke will return to the State next month to attend a Farm Business Awards Luncheon, hosted by the Royal Agriculture Society of Victoria. "I could have got through meetings with every single peak body ... by locking myself in a capital city for four weeks or five weeks and doing back-to-back meetings and at the end of it I wouldn't have learnt much," he said. The two issues most worrying for farmers are water and soaring costs such as grain feed, fuel and fertiliser, he said. "In the north of Australia, there is a degree of optimism about the rain that has just started to come and continues, but certainly not that same level of optimism as you head further south." The 38-year-old said he found younger farmers had more doubts about the realities of climate change, than the older rural generation. He said in the cities, young people were more likely to be convinced about climate change than their older counterparts. "I kept finding that reversed in the land. On family farms, there was consistently the older generation who were saying that something is really going on that is different to what we've seen," Mr Burke said.

"Often - not always but often - the younger farmers would be making comments about, you know, 'oh there's been drought before,' you know, 'it might not be that different.'

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"So the skepticism has actually had a generation reversal to what you'd find in the cities." The May Federal Budget will include \$130 million for research and climate change adaptation measures for farmers, which will get underway from July this year. Mr Burke said ethanol and other biofuels were a significant part of the climate change debate but would not comment on whether or not Australia should have a national biofuel mandate. Following the Garnaut interim report, the biofuels industry has urged the Rudd Government to set a national mandate to speed up the adoption of ethanol and biodiesel. SOURCE: AAP

Climate report delivers for Australian farmers

The Interim Garnaut Report, released yesterday, has successfully addresses some key concerns raised by agriculture, according to the National Farmers' Federation. NFF chief executive Ben Fargher says the report acknowledges several calls from the peak farmer lobby, including the need for a global approach. "While it is crucial to get the policy settings right at home, we agree with the Interim Report that ultimately, it is what happens globally that will make all the difference," Mr Fargher said. "This is especially true for Australian agriculture which is intrinsically exposed to the global market-place. "Professor Garnaut correctly states that Australian agriculture emits less than other developed countries. "Therefore it is in the best interests of the global community to see more of the world's agricultural production needs met from countries like Australia, where modern farmers are implementing cutting edge technologies and greenhouse efficient farm systems." Mr Fargher says the introduction of ill-informed domestic policies that result in production moving offshore would be disastrous and would only add to the overall global carbon footprint. "It is absolutely vital that targeted research and development that is relevant at local and on-farm levels is undertaken, and the Government provides commercially viable tools and mechanisms for farmers that help them to make a contribution in the global mitigation effort," Mr Fargher said. "Incentives must also be put in place as early as possible to realise the vital sequestration potential of agriculture." The NFF believes an appropriately designed emissions trading scheme is the most economically efficient mechanism for reducing the nation's emissions. However, questions remain as to how such a scheme would be structured, with Independent MP Tony Windsor yesterday pressing Agriculture Minister Tony Burke for details. Mr Windsor is concerned that agriculture may not be being viewed as having a significant role in the carbon market. But in answer to Mr Windsor's question, Mr Burke indicated that the Government did want agriculture to be part of the carbon market. "The Agriculture Minister was quite positive about wanting the agriculture sector to play a significant role in the development of the carbon market," Mr Windsor said. "The Minister said that a lot of focus has been put, at different times, on carbon emissions and land clearing. "He said that it was also the case, though, that the different methods of soil use have a significant impact on carbon emissions. "The Minister further mentioned the Government's 'Australia's Farming Future' programs which he believes can advance farming practices to make sure that farmers are well prepared for the carbon trading scheme." National rural news updates daily from *FarmOnline*.

Flows too low for Murray irrigation increase in SA

Irrigation allocations will remain unchanged at 32pc in South Australia, after State Minister for the Murray, Karlene Maywald, declared flows too low for any increase. "Despite widespread rain and flooding in some parts of Australia, the inflows to the Murray-Darling Basin shared system in January and early February 2008 have only marginally increased and we are still experiencing an incredibly dry period that is impacting on our water supplies," Mrs Maywald said. In total, South Australia has now been allocated 1052 gegalitres of water from the River Murray system, with 350GL allocated to critical urban needs and irrigation, and 702GL allocated for dilution, reserves and losses. Based on the latest assessment from the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, from January 10 to February 13, the volume of water to be shared between South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales has only increased by 48GL. "The MDBC has advised that the current inflows and river operations are at the limits of the monitoring and modeling currently available to them, which has created difficulties with the timely release of information, particularly with regard to flows to SA," Mrs Maywald said. "Under normal circumstances, water monitoring equipment would be measuring much greater volumes. "However because of the small volumes of inflows being received, the commission is continuing to check and re-check its measurements to ensure accuracy." The SA Government is continuing to seek clarification on the imbalance in water allocated to each State and the volume that remains to be paid back by South Australia. Irrigators who require additional water for use in 2007/08 or for carryover have until April 30 to buy in water from inter-state. SOURCE: *Stock Journal*, SA's weekly rural newspaper, posting news updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

Coalition offers conditional support for climate plan

The Federal Opposition has offered the Government bipartisan support on tackling climate change, but only if it adopts several Coalition policies. The Opposition last week tentatively accepted Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's offer of joining a joint policy commission on improving the lives of indigenous people. Asked if the Opposition would also be part of a climate change "war cabinet", Coalition frontbencher Greg Hunt said the Government would first have to scrap its renewable energy target in favour of one which included low-emission fossil fuels. "I'm happy to offer my bipartisan support if they pick up our proposal for a clean energy target and try and drive forward cleaning up of the coal and gas-fired power stations," Mr Hunt said. "We'll work with anybody at anytime, but it has to be genuine bipartisanship.

"I won't make false promises.

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"They need to make sure that low-income families are protected (from higher energy costs), that coal and gas clean-up is brought forward and they stop ignoring the great rainforests of the world - they're the grounds for bipartisanship." Mr Hunt's comments follow the release of economist Ross Garnaut's interim report for the Federal and State governments on climate change. Professor Garnaut warned the global warming threat is greater than previously thought and suggested Australia adopt a greenhouse target beyond the Federal Government's goal of cutting emissions 60pc by 2050. His report suggests cutting per-capita emissions by about 70-90pc to avoid global carbon dioxide levels considered dangerous by science. "These numbers are purely illustrative, as the exact allocations would depend on the rules adopted for emissions rights, the trajectory of emissions through time, future population growth in Australia and globally, and other variables," it says. Prof Garnaut says under future international emissions trading, Australia could buy permits from developing countries as part of meeting such targets. But Climate Change Minister Penny Wong indicated the Government would not be changing its 2050 target. "The Government's commitment is the one we made prior to the election and that we took to the Australian people, which is a reduction of 60pc by 2050," Senator Wong said. "That is the approach the government will take." Mr Hunt said the Opposition would not set any targets until after the final Garnaut report is delivered in September. SOURCE: AAP

Irrigation storages are full promising better times for cotton

Queensland on-farm irrigation storages are generally in their best state in two to three years, with many of them full after recent rain. From Central Queensland, down to St George and Mungindi, most of the on-property storages are full or in a reasonable state. On the Darling Downs, storages adjacent the Condamine River and North Branch are likewise healthy, although most of the overland flow dams remain dry. At Mungindi, on the border, local irrigator Rob Harpham spoke to *FarmOnline* last week as the Weir River flowed in a torrent near his homestead. With his on-farm storage full, he is looking forward to a good year, with plans for irrigated wheat and probably cotton next summer. He said it would be a massive boon for the district, which had been one of the hardest hit by the drought and has almost no cotton planted this year. SOURCE: *Australian Cotton Outlook*, out March 13.

NEWS.com.au - National \$10bn water plan scrapped

John Howard's \$10 billion national water plan will be scrapped and replaced with a more aggressive redistribution of the resource. Under the plan to drought-proof the Murray-Darling basin by leading water economist Mike Young, the 10-year Howard plan to hand out nearly \$6 billion to irrigators for efficiency improvements would be scrapped. Instead, \$5 billion of this would be spent during the first term of the Rudd Government to compensate the 15,500 irrigators in the basin for the permanent restructuring, and in most cases cutting of their permanent water entitlements. About \$1 billion would be spent on efficiency upgrades but only after the reallocation of water to deliver equal property rights to irrigators, the environment and all other direct and indirect users of water in the system. The new plan includes the water being diverted from the system for managed investment scheme (MIS) forests and other related activities, and will formalise trading in the resource between different states and catchments. Professor Young and his co-author, Jim McColl from the CSIRO, have been working on the plan since the election last year.

Murray-Darling stand-off far from over

It will take several months yet to end the standoff between Victoria and the Federal Government over the Murray-Darling Basin, Victorian Premier John Brumby says. Federal Climate Change Minister Penny Wong is to meet Victorian Water Minister Tim Holding today for the second time, in an effort to reach a deal to which other states have already agreed. Queensland, NSW and South Australia last year agreed to hand over to the Federal Government their responsibilities for managing water in the parched basin regarded as Australia's food bowl. Victoria has resisted signing up to the \$10 billion scheme, announced in January last year by then Prime Minister John Howard, because the state does not want to cede some of its water rights. Today Mr Brumby said he expected negotiations to continue for some months. "It's a problem which is 100 years in the making," he said. "It's not a problem that happened in the last few weeks, it's not a problem that's going to be solved in the next few weeks. Mr Brumby said Victoria was still not prepared to hand over certain powers to the Commonwealth, but supported a national scheme. Senator Wong would not say what the Government would offer Victoria but said her approach would be co-operative. "We know that the Federal Government can't go it alone. We need to get the co-operation and the agreement of all the basin states for the good of all the basin states, so that's the basis on which these discussions are proceeding," she said.

Ross Garnaut is Rudd's green monster

Is Ross Garnaut becoming Kevin Rudd's green Frankenstein? Rudd picked Garnaut to examine the economics of responding to global warming. The conservative economist's report was supposed to buy Rudd time. During the election campaign Rudd sidestepped tough questions by saying he would wait for Garnaut's report. But has Professor Garnaut unleashed a Frankenstein's monster Rudd can't control? Judging from Garnaut's interim *Climate Change Review*, you would think so. Garnaut has done something really dangerous. He's applied logic to the problem of global warming. Already the Government is distancing itself from the report. Garnaut is becoming just another advisor whose input will be considered. In asking a respected, conservative economist to report on climate change, Rudd seems to have got more than he bargained for. Garnaut shows up the flaws in each political party's climate policies. First,

Garnaut takes on the doubters who deny climate change. How should they respond when scientists are almost unanimous in predicting catastrophe?

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Should they wait and do nothing? According to Garnaut, a real conservative would act now. Prudent risk management would suggest that it is worth the sacrifice of a significant amount of current income to avoid a small chance of a catastrophic outcome. Next, Garnaut takes on John Howard's old line that Australia should not reduce its greenhouse emissions with reductions by big developing countries, such as China. Morally, I think people have always doubted Howard's line, but thinking logically, it was hard to deny Howard he had a point. And here is where Garnaut gets really clever. He explains that Australia needs to commit to emission reductions not because we can actually solve the problem ourselves, but because taking action will help us persuade others. Maybe Howard was half right. We should not just wait for China. We should persuade China to take action with us. Garnaut wants us to be leaders not laggards because Australia playing its full part in international efforts on climate change can have a positive effect on global outcomes. Such action might be a bridge too far for Rudd. Garnaut acknowledges that climate action costs. It won't ruin the economy, but neither will it come free. With inflation already a problem, no PM wants to push up the price of power, petrol and food. Yet we cannot sit on our hands. Garnaut wants Rudd to take immediate action to catch up with the cuts other rich countries have already made, and has set targets for 2050. But Garnaut then says we are toast if we haven't made serious progress by 2020. Toast. Yet Garnaut, who has been an economic adviser to both sides of politics, is no wide-eyed greenie. Where Bob Brown wants deep cuts (70 to 90 per cent by 2050) Garnaut argues going it alone would be stupid. Instead Australia should identify deep cuts and promise to implement them only if other states do so. Yet, this interim review leaves no doubt that taking action is in our economic interest. This is because of Australia's exceptional sensitivity to climate change and our exceptional opportunity to do well in a world of effective global mitigation. Garnaut's logic is so strong it creates headaches for the Prime Minister. It is a call to real action and leadership, but in politics this kind of long-term thinking might not be worth the political cost. *Dr Jon Symons is a researcher in politics at Monash University*

Mercury – Tasmania - Plug pulled on water export bid

Treasurer Michael Aird has all but ruled out exporting Tasmania's water to the parched mainland. Mr Aird, who is leading a radical change to tackle the state's \$1 billion water and sewerage crisis, said the state's water was a "powerful lure" for investment. "My view is that we need to use our water for Tasmanians," he said. "And it would only be after we were satisfied that we were putting all the water to optimal use that we need in Tasmania before we consider any export of water." Four to five companies have approached the state wanting to ship fresh water interstate. One of the companies, Bass Pipelines, last year announced a proposal to pipe water from Lake Mackintosh in the state's west to Victoria and South Australia. The company said it could build the pipelines by about 2010, and supply at least 500 gigalitres of water. And it said about \$400 million a year could be paid in royalties to the state, the only place in Australia with water to spare. The State Government recently announced an \$80 million plan to help "drought-proof" the state as part of the biggest water program since the hydroelectric dams. The five irrigation projects are expected to increase irrigated water supplies by more than 250,000 megalitres a year. Mr Aird said the state could use its water to become an attractive place to invest, live and holiday. "You know our farmers can really thrive if water is in the right places," he said. Swansea, which is on a permanent boiled water alert and struggles to cope with an influx of summer visitors, will be the first place to benefit from Mr Aird's plan to establish three regional bodies to take over water and sewerage from local councils. Mr Aird said the Government had offered to pay the interest on a loan to build infrastructure to provide a reliable and good-quality water supply. Work could start once the council decided what option to take. But he said places with serious and complex water and sewerage problems, such as the southern beaches near Sorell, would have to wait until the new authorities and their expanded borrowing capacities and expertise were up and running next year. "It is a big project, that is why we need to have these regional authorities set up to deal with these big projects," he said. The southern beaches require tens of millions of dollars in investment to put in conventional sewerage and water infrastructure. The beachside communities put up with empty water tanks and failing septic tanks that produce pollution severe enough to shut beaches. Cabinet will consider Mr Aird's water and sewerage model today. **It was a stupid idea anyway.**

The Australian - Birds in rare wetlands nesting, but still at risk

Water birds are returning in huge numbers to nest in the wetlands of western NSW and Queensland for the first time in a decade. However, experts warned that the siphoning off of floodwaters by irrigators upstream of the breeding colonies could drain the wetlands before the birds finish breeding. Aerial surveys by University of NSW scientists of the Narran Lake Nature Reserve in recent days have revealed nesting activity by between 30,000 and 40,000 pairs of straw-necked ibis. Smaller numbers of white ibis, glossy ibis, royal spoonbills, pink-eared ducks and several tern and cormorant species were also nesting. "This is a big breeding event," said university biologist Richard Kingsford. "It is truly an astounding sight. The number of birds is considerable and still growing. "For most of these birds, this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience." New arrivals are busily constructing stick nests. Those that arrived at the lake last month are feeding chicks or sitting on eggs. Further west in Queensland, on Lake Wyara in Currawinya National Park, between 10,000 and 15,000 pelicans have gathered to nest. However, Professor Kingsford said the sites for other

traditionally big water bird nesting colonies, notably the Macquarie marshes and the Gwydir wetlands in NSW, remained dry. "Our concern is that the big floods are not getting into some of these wetlands any longer," he said.

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Professor Kingsford said that although the nesting at Narran Lake was encouraging, the waters could recede before most birds had finished nesting. "The storages upstream, particularly those of the cotton growers in Queensland's lower Balonne River region, are only now filling," he said. "It may well be that not enough water will get through to allow the birds to finish nesting." The Australian reported last month that the NSW Government was reviewing irrigation licenses amid evidence that cotton growers were siphoning off up to 80 per cent of the Queensland flood flows to the Murray-Darling Basin. A 2004 audit commissioned by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission concluded that cross-border flows in the Condamine-Balonne river system were 26 per cent of what they were before the development of the Queensland irrigation operations, mainly for cotton. Cotton Australia chief executive Adam Kay declined to comment yesterday. Queensland Water Minister Craig Wallace said maintaining environmental flows was a priority in the state's water allocation management. "Last year, Queensland irrigators took just 2.6 per cent of the Murray Darling's water compared with 44per cent taken by NSW and 40 per cent by Victoria," Mr Wallace said. He said Queensland irrigators had been forced to reduce their take from floodwaters by 10 per cent this season for environmental reasons. Narran and Wyara lakes are listed under the RAMSAR international wetlands convention. **I wish the same could be said for the Lower Lakes and the Coorong.**

Australia 'on track for Kyoto targets'

Australia is on track to meet its greenhouse gas emissions reduction target under the Kyoto Protocol, Climate Change Minister Penny Wong says. Senator Wong today released a report card showing the Federal Government's policies would trigger greater emissions reductions than forecast under the former government. "By 2020, Australia's emissions will be 120 per cent of 1990 levels," Senator Wong said. "That is a reduction of 38 million tonnes on the 2006 forecast of 127 per cent, 20 million tonnes more than if we hadn't expanded the renewable energy target." Senator Wong said Australia was on track to have emissions at 108 per cent of 1990 levels for 2008 to 2012. Total emissions compared with 1990 were still expected to go up in future because of Australia's growing population. "We recognise there is much more to be done," Senator Wong said. "A national system of emissions trading will establish a platform to help us achieve further reductions in greenhouse emissions," she said. The report card, Tracking to the Kyoto Target, is usually released annually, but Senator Wong asked her department to include the impact of the new Government's policies to bring the information up to date. The Rudd Government ratified Kyoto in December as its first act. The protocol will take effect for Australia from next month. - AAP

AdelaideNow - Farmers raid water from Murray-Darling flood plains

NSW farmers are stealing water from flood plains and threatening to undermine the \$10-billion Murray-Darling Basin rescue plan. The authors of a report on flood plain development on the lower Macquarie River say state and federal governments have turned a blind eye to water theft through flood plain harvesting. The report says inappropriate development has continued for decades, despite guidelines on flood plain development, an official cap on water extraction, and the Macquarie marshes being listed as a wetland of international significance. In an analysis of 5000 sq km of flood plain in the northwest of the state, University of NSW experts Celine Steinfeld and Richard Kingsford found more than 2000km of earthworks, some of which divert water away from the environment. "Most of the levees and constructed channels are legal, although often guidelines to maintain free passage for floods have been breached," Professor Kingsford told Fairfax newspapers. "While the earthworks on the Macquarie flood plain may not be illegal, taking part of the share of environmental water is a very different matter." Professor Kingsford said an environmental flow for the marshes was released from Burrendong Dam in late 2005 and "just disappeared down people's channels". He fears that unless flood plain harvesting is tackled, the billions of dollars about to be spent returning more water to the environment in the Murray-Darling Basin will also be wasted. Macquarie irrigators deny there is a serious problem with their earthworks stealing environmental water. The state and federal governments are spending \$400,000 on an audit of development on the Macquarie flood plain.

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1. The \$10 billion Howard Government Water Plan, which included nearly \$6 billion to irrigators for efficiency improvements, will be scrapped. Under a revised plan to drought-proof the Murray-Darling basin by water economist Mike Young, \$5 billion would instead be spent during the first term of the Rudd Government to compensate the 15,500 irrigators in the basin for permanent restructuring and many cuts in permanent water entitlements.
2. The route for the controversial \$750 million north-south pipeline, which takes water from the Goulburn system in Victoria to supply townships of Bendigo and Ballarat, will affect 170 private and crown landholders. The Victorian Nationals party has agreed to support the scheme despite initial objections.
3. A yearlong study of the Macquarie Marshes by University of NSW academics argues that levees, channels and dams are depriving downstream users of water. The study blames inappropriate development and lack of effective action in restraining diversion of waters for enormous environmental damage.

4. The Black Mountain Declaration on Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals in Australian Waters 2007 has been published jointly on CSIRO and Land & Water Australia web sites.

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5. Two Spanish led consortia - Acciona Agua Australia Pty Ltd / United Utilities Australia Pty Ltd and Technicas Reunidas S.A / Valoriza Agua, S.L have been short listed for the Southern Seawater Desalination Plant in West Australia. The same competitive alliance process that delivered the Kwinana desalination plant would be used for the DBOM new plant north of Bunbury. The project's environmental approval process has also advanced with the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) approving the Environmental Scoping Document.
5. Victorians are being invited to have their say on the scope of the Wonthaggi Desalination plant project Environment Effects Statement (EES), following the release of the draft scoping requirements by the Planning Minister Justin Madden.
6. Increases in the inflows to the Murray-Darling Basin shared system in January and early February 2008 from Queensland have only marginally increased available water and with continuing dry weather, water supplies and allocations for irrigators will remain at 32% in SA.
7. A tour by 50 AWA Victoria Young Water Professionals of the Goldfields Superpipe Pipeline on the weekend highlighted the severity of Ballarat's water crisis. While focusing on the pipe, the tour also looked at some of the other demand management measures being implemented in the region.
8. A Victorian Government buyback of irrigator entitlements to underpin a guaranteed minimum irrigation allocation are among options put forward to help manage forecast declining water availability in the state's key northern irrigation districts.
9. The March issue of Water Journal will contain detailed features on membrane technologies, odour management, desalination and energy minimisation as well as reports on UV disinfection and reservoir cleaning. For editorial contributions, please email Bob Swinton.
10. Recycled Water Guidelines released Nov 2006. Good value and all at your fingertips. Now in hardcopy as a folder with tabs for ease of use plus index. Price \$115 plus p & h. of \$17.50 within Australia.
11. The official weather forecaster has warned that drenching La Nina rains may soon be over, leaving the drought-hit southern half of Australia to face another dry winter.
12. 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.
13. Widespread rain and flooding in some areas of Queensland and New South Wales won't help irrigators along the River Murray in South Australia, the state government says.
14. Climate Change Minister Penny Wong says she's determined to bring Victoria into a Murray-Darling Basin water agreement.

FarmOnLine - 'Water theft' threatens Murray-Darling

A maze of levee banks, channels and dams is stealing water from NSW's flood plains and threaten to undermine the \$10 billion Murray-Darling Basin rescue plan. A yearlong study by a leading wetlands expert also says environmental water stolen on the flood plain that is home to the iconic Macquarie Marshes has already caused enormous environmental damage. The report says inappropriate development has continued for decades, despite guidelines on flood plain development, an official cap on water extraction, and the marshes being listed as a wetland of international significance. Its authors say State and Federal governments have turned a blind eye to water theft through flood plain harvesting. In what is claimed to be the first comprehensive analysis of flood plain development on any river in the Basin, Celine Steinfeld and Richard Kingsford from the University of NSW, have used satellite imagery and aerial photography taken between 1949 and 2005 to identify development on the lower Macquarie. On nearly 5000 square kilometres of flood plain between Warren and Carinda in northwest NSW they found more than 2000 kilometres of earthworks, some which are diverting water away from the environment. Professor Kingsford said: "Most of the levees and constructed channels are legal, although often guidelines to maintain free passage for floods have been breached. While the earthworks on the Macquarie flood plain may not be illegal, taking part of the share of environmental water is a very different matter." One of the most damaging structures in the marshes, the Northern Bypass Channel, is operated by the State Government agency State Water. It was built in the early 1970s to keep water out of the north marsh nature reserve and deliver stock and domestic supplies to landholders. The State and Federal Governments are spending \$400,000 on an audit of development on the Macquarie flood plain. The NSW Minister for Water, Nathan Rees, said the Government was clamping down on illegal diversions. "We will not tolerate water theft," he said. "Any unlawful structures not already under investigation will be identified through the audit, which should be completed by the end of the year. Any non-compliance will be acted upon." The Federal Minister for Water, Penny Wong, said: "We need to make sure we have strong compliance and enforcement measures in place to deal with illegal diversions." The report identifies earthworks on grazing and irrigation land, but says most of the development has taken place in irrigation areas. "Most development of earthworks occurred between the 1980s and 1990s," the university report says. "There was evidence of increased development subsequent to the implementation of the Murray-

Darling Basin Cap in 1995, designed to halt further diversion of water. "Earthworks alienated large parts of the original flood plain and ... in the northern part of the Macquarie Marshes, one-third of river redgum sites were dead due to upstream river regulation, abstraction and drought.

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"Earthwork developments, such as those identified on the Macquarie River flood plain, are widespread on the rivers of the Murray-Darling Basin. Growth has largely come because of lack of government policies, regulations or enforcement." Professor Kingsford, who has been studying the marshes since 1986, said there was still an old-fashioned view of water management that concentrated on the main river channel and ignored flood plains. "There's no recognition that these rivers are much more complex," he said. "The whole flood plain issue is just a massive legislative black hole. "The water used to be unimpeded going across this [Macquarie] flood plain. "Now ... it's almost like a maze. It's very difficult for the water to get through. "You can't deal with the desecration of the Murray-Darling Basin and not deal with the flood plains." The report uses publicly available information and cost \$20,000. Most of the expense went on hiring a helicopter to check the satellite imagery. Professor Kingsford said an environmental flow for the marshes was released from Burrendong Dam in late 2005 and "just disappeared down people's channels". He fears that unless flood plain harvesting is tackled, the billions of dollars about to be spent returning more water to the environment in the Murray-Darling Basin will be similarly wasted. A State Government flood plain harvesting advice paper stresses that the Murray-Darling Basin Cap "applies to all water diverted from inland NSW catchments and rivers ... flood plain harvesting can no longer be left outside of the State's water management and compliance system." A lower Macquarie Valley flood plain management plan that took years to develop went on public exhibition more than a year ago but has still not been gazetted. A consultant's report drawn up to help develop that plan identified more than 150 "hot spots" like levees and channels - most on private land - that had to be dealt with to improve floodwater flows. Between them, the State and Federal governments have allocated just over \$200 million to save NSW wetlands like the marshes by buying back water allocations and doing flood plain engineering works. Nearly 14,000 megalitres of water allocation have so far been bought from irrigators on the Macquarie. State Water acknowledges the Northern Bypass Channel is a problem and wetland recovery money is being used to look at alternatives. Tony Wass is a cotton grower and chairman of Macquarie River Food and Fibre, which represents about 600 irrigators. He said that if water was sent to the right areas of the marshes and marsh graziers did not use earthworks to steal water, water would not be an issue in the marshes, because they were still getting 85pc of the historical average flow. Irrigators were being victimised, he said, by a "unholy alliance" of environmentalists, graziers, scientists and government agencies. Mr Wass said he would "be very happy" for any official to inspect the levees and channels on his land because they were not illegal and did not steal flood flow. "We have levees to keep water out," he said. "We have them to protect our land from floods." Under the draft flood management plan, he said, computer modeling showed a greater percentage of floodwater going to the marshes than under natural conditions. Mr Wass said consultation had also seen the mass of hot spots identified on private land reduced to "probably a dozen". Amy Hankinson, from the Inland Rivers Network, released a report in June last year alleging water theft from the environmental flow that went down the Macquarie in 2005, but is unaware of any prosecutions. The policing of flood plain development was inadequate, she said. "They have allowed this development to continue, and everyone's losing out because it affects the security of everyone's water licenses - irrigators and the environment. [Flood plain harvesting] remains one of the biggest loopholes in water management in NSW. "The Government doesn't know what's out there [on the flood plains], how much [water] is being taken, and it's time they dealt with it." Ms Hankinson said she hoped that after years of State Government inaction, the new Federal Government would step in to help tackle flood plain development. * The UNSW report is available at the Wet Rivers website. SOURCE: *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Basin deal with Vics a step closer: Wong

Victoria will work with other states and the Commonwealth on a new governance model for the Murray-Darling Basin. But it says it is months away from reaching agreement on the water-sharing plan. Federal Water Minister Penny Wong met with her Victorian counterpart Tim Holding on Monday in an effort to reach a deal to which other States have already agreed. Queensland, NSW and South Australia last year agreed to hand the Federal Government their responsibilities for managing water in the parched basin, known as Australia's food bowl. But Victoria has resisted signing up to the \$10 billion scheme, announced in January last year by then Prime Minister John Howard because it does not want to give up its power to set irrigation entitlements in individual rivers and catchments. While the State Government is willing to let the Commonwealth set and enforce overall environmental and agricultural water use in the Basin, it wants to keep control of specific allocations in the State and to continue managing land use and farm dams. Senator Wong said Monday's talks were an important step. "A key outcome of the meeting was an agreement to work with Victoria and all Basin States on an appropriate governance model that brings together the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission into a single body," Senator Wong said. Victorian Premier John Brumby has been critical of the previous Federal Government for setting aside \$1 billion under the plan to create a new federal bureaucracy, without delivering extra water. Monday's move is expected to reduce the need for extra red tape. Earlier, Mr Brumby warned that despite the change of government, it would take several months to end the standoff.

"It's a problem which is 100 years in the making," he said. "It's not a problem that's going to be solved in the next few weeks. "If it takes a few months to get it right, then that's a few months I think which is well spent getting it right to make sure that the plans we put in place for the next hundred years are better than the plans we've had in place for the last hundred."

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Federal Liberal environment spokesman Greg Hunt said the meeting was a failure and Prime Minister Kevin Rudd needed to step in. "Today's meeting was expected to produce a national water agreement, in that respect it was an abject failure," Mr Hunt said. "The Prime Minister needs to step in because clearly, after three months, there's been no agreement, no prospect of an agreement and no urgency shown. "The new government promised that they would end the blame game and deliver a result, they haven't." Mr Holding said the meeting provided an opportunity for the Commonwealth to hear the State Government's concerns in detail and he was optimistic about the talks. "Victoria's leadership in water management has ensured a reliable and secure water supply for regional centres, irrigators, business and the environment, and allowed for investment in high value agricultural enterprises," Mr Holding said. "We are looking for an approach that will enable this to continue." Speaking before the meeting, Victorian Opposition Leader Ted Baillieu said the state government needed to "get on with it". SOURCE: AAP

FarmBis axing to hurt rural skilling options

Another cut the bush can't afford

The Federal Government's axing of FarmBis, the assistance program for rural skilling, is set to harm agriculture's battle to overcome labour shortages. The Federal Government has announced that the national program in Victoria, New South Wales, and the ACT will cease immediately while the state-run programs in Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory will cease on June 30, 2008. Nationals Leader Warren Truss has slammed the Government's \$98 million cost-cutting plan, saying it was proof of Labor's city-centric focus. "Labor apparently believes that skills and staff shortages start and finish in the inner suburbs," Mr Truss said. "The Coalition left the Rudd Government with record workforce participation and historically very low unemployment. "This has meant that local communities all over Australia have struggled at times to find the right people to fit into the right jobs. "With many communities emerging from a cruel drought and needing skilled workers, now is the wrong time to be cutting programs that provide skills to tens of thousands of rural and regional workers or make it harder for apprentices to survive financially." Queensland lobby group, AgForce, says the axing of FarmBis is a clear breach of Labor's pre-election Plan for Primary Industries, which stated the FarmBis budget would reduce by \$8m each year for the next three years, ceasing in 2010-2011. In announcing the imminent axing of FarmBis, the Federal Government said the funds would be repackaged into climate change programs currently being developed "but will include initiatives to build the capacity of primary producers to meet the challenges of climate change". AgForce president Peter Kenny said he had earlier received a commitment from Agriculture Minister Tony Burke that the new programs would achieve similar outcomes to FarmBis, but the statement released today does not necessarily confirm that. "It would be a backward step for rural industries, particularly at a time when they are emerging from a prolonged drought and in a position to invest time in training programs, if options to develop better business management skills are truncated," Mr Kenny said. "I am hopeful that Minister Burke will honour the commitment he gave to us, but until further details are announced we cannot be confident because Labor's pre-election commitment on FarmBis has already been watered-down." SOURCE: National rural news updated daily on *FarmOnline*.

AdelaideNow -Rann fails to set greenhouse target

The State Government has failed to introduce an interim 2020 greenhouse emissions reduction target - seven months after the Premier committed to one. An interim target was not included as part of a Government law to reduce emissions in South Australia last year after the Liberals and Greens blocked the measure, claiming Mr Rann's proposed target actually allowed an increased emissions output. When the interim target failed to pass through Parliament Mr Rann said he would regulate for a staged reduction. Greens MLC Mark Parnell today said Mr Rann should have accepted tougher targets, proposed by the Greens last year. "The Rann Government's refusal to accept strong 2020 greenhouse reduction targets in Parliament last year now looks incredibly short-sighted," he said. "Mr Rann said at the time an interim target similar to the one Professor (Ross) Garnaut says is appropriate for Australia, would be unrealistic. Now, less than seven months later, he must accept he has badly misjudged the science and the need for urgency, and act immediately to insert a science-based 2020 greenhouse reduction target into state law. "When it comes to 2020 greenhouse targets Rann hasn't even done the baby step he promised seven months ago." But Mr Rann attacked the Greens and said he remained committed to an interim target. "It's a bit rich for Mark Parnell to be complaining about our legislation not having an interim target when he joined with the Liberals to oppose an interim target enshrined in law," he said. "I was stunned by the bizarre blue-green alliance in Parliament last year and I'm even more stunned now that he's calling for something that he opposed." Mr Rann said he would work co-operatively with the Federal Government to establish a national 2020 target.

Solar cells power home sales

Home energy systems are fast becoming a real estate selling point, the Real Estate Institute of South Australia has found. President Robin Turner said buyers would soon demand energy and water-saving features. "It's like safety equipment in cars," he said. "Now people are demanding those things in their cars, whereas before people just wouldn't

pay for them. "I think it will come and will come quickly. There is a market for it." The price difference between a home with solar power and one without can be more than the cost of the system, Toop & Toop managing director Anthony Toop says. "From a sales point of view it creates a point of difference," he said. "If you have two properties that are similar, competing on similar attributes, it could make one property more desirable than the other."

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ZEN Home Energy Systems chief executive Richard Turner aims for an elite market with his complete branded and fully integrated solar grid-connect system. "Many properties are sold with branded kitchens and home theatres as a key selling point," he said. "I can see a ZEN Home Energy System becoming a 'must have' home appliance of the future." Each ZEN system comes with its own wireless solar-powered home monitor, so the homeowner can see how much power the system is generating. Statistics can also be downloaded to the home computer. The aim is to become self-sufficient and take "zero energy" from the power grid. Karen Zola, from Maylands, said her new ZEN Home Energy System was a talking point with friends and neighbours. The solar panels were like an environmental "badge of honour". "We thought it was important to do something for the environment," she said. "I guess it does say to people that we are making an effort." She said her adolescent daughter thought it looked "pretty cool" from the street.

Couriermail.com.au - Level 6 water restrictions may be eased next week

Anybody would think our troubles are over!

Level six water restrictions could be a thing of the past for southeast Queensland as early as next week as dam levels edge towards 40 per cent. Monsoonal rain has boosted the combined levels of the Wivenhoe, Somerset and North Pine dams to 38.49 per cent and the weather bureau has forecast more rain. Queensland Water Commission (QWC) spokesman Gerald Tooth said the southeast would move from tough level six restrictions, with a usage target of 140 litres a day, to new restrictions with a 170 litre target, when the dams reach 40 per cent. SEQWater, which owns and runs the Wivenhoe, Somerset and North Pine dams, said dam inflows had slowed to a trickle in recent days but the forecast rain could soon push the dam levels over the line. "It's likely we will slowly get to that 40 per cent by early next week because we've got to allow anywhere from one to three days for water to flow into the system," SEQWater spokesman Mike Foster said. "But if we get heavy enough falls over the next day and a bit, that could well be enough. "Our catchment is still very wet and has been essentially since New Year." The one and a half per cent needed represents 25,000 megalitres or two months worth of supplies, Mr Foster said. The bureau has forecast rain at times today, easing to a shower or two tomorrow and becoming fine on Thursday before rain develops again late in the day. Rain was forecast for Friday. Regardless of whether the southeast reaches its 40 per cent dam level target before the weekend, residents will still be allowed a so-called "wet weekend" on March 1 and 2. Residents of odd-numbered homes will be allowed to hose cars, houses and gardens for one hour from 4pm to 5pm on Saturday and those in even-numbered and unnumbered homes will be permitted to do the same on Sunday afternoon. At present, all hosing is banned and watering of gardens is allowed for three hours on alternate days only, using watering cans and buckets, with no watering on Mondays. But under the QWC's Drought Exit Strategy, once 40 per cent is reached, limited hosing and car washing will be permitted for half an hour on Saturdays and Sundays on the odds and evens basis. Restrictions would be further wound back when dams reached 50 per cent combined capacity, with a new target of 200 litres per day. Once the dams reached 60 per cent, 230 litres per day would be permitted and the drought would be considered over, but with permanent water conservation measures in place.

The Australian - Natural changes blow hot and cold

Natural variability in weather rather than climate change accounted for cooler February temperatures across most of Australia straight after record hot temperatures in January, a leading climate scientist said yesterday. The Bureau of Meteorology estimates the nation is likely to record its coolest February since 2002 and 12th coolest since 1951 after recording the hottest January on record. While many commentators blamed the high temperatures on climate change, CSIRO research fellow in atmospheric science Barrie Hunt said the succession of hot days were "not unusual for January". "It's just year-to-year variability," Dr Hunt said. "Underneath that variability is this insidious slow warming, which is the greenhouse effect, but it's not big enough to stop natural variability, and it's going to take a long time before it is." Dr Hunt said if the drought had been caused by climate change, as claimed by some in the media, then it would have indicated current modeling had grossly underestimated the impact of change on temperatures and rainfall. Cooler temperatures and above-average rainfall across much of the heavily populated eastern seaboard of Australia are being driven by the La Nina effect, which has been operating since December. Neil Plummer from the National Climate Centre said the weather this month was similar to previous La Ninas. "It's always very difficult to disentangle things on a monthly basis and we will always have natural climate variability operating and we have a climate change signal on top of that," he said. Federal Climate Minister Penny Wong said Australia was back on track to meet its Kyoto target of 108 per cent of 1990 emissions only three months after taking office. A re-calculation of Australia's climate budget has incorporated Labor's 20 per cent renewable energy target by 2020, which is projected to shift the emissions trajectory back under the Kyoto target. In the lead-up to the election, the Howard government came under attack from environmentalists, who rejected its projections that Australia was on course to meet its Kyoto target.

Yesterday, Australian Conservation Foundation climate spokesman Tony Mohr said the numbers were too close to call as there was "a little bit of up and down in the numbers depending which side of the election you are on". Opposition environment spokesman Greg Hunt said the new estimates confirmed Australia was always on track to meet its Kyoto target as the Rudd Government had not made any new contribution to reducing emissions.

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AdelaideNow - Victoria holds rejects \$50m buyback deal

Fifty million dollars is to be put on the table to buy backwater licenses from irrigators in the Murray Darling Basin from today. The Federal Government is set to announce details of the scheme using money drawn from the Government's \$10 billion Murray Darling Rescue plan. Through it, the Government hopes to buy backwater entitlements as part of an overall plan to return environmental flows to the parched system. Water Minister Penny Wong described the money as "a down payment on the future of the Murray". It is the first time the Federal Government has bought water directly back from licence-holders. Irrigators with water allocations they can exist without will be invited to bid for the money by offering their licenses at a fair price. "Purchasing water from willing sellers is crucial to addressing the over-allocation of water in the Murray Darling Basin," Senator Wong said. She said the buy-back was central to the broader plan to rescue the system which included addressing wastage by modernising irrigation infrastructure along the rivers. The initiative comes as pressure to achieve progress on the stalled Murray Darling rescue plan continues to mount. Crisis talks between Senator Wong and Victorian Water Minister Tim Holding yesterday ended without a breakthrough. Victorian Premier John Brumby warned it could take several months to resolve the issue. "It's a problem which is 100 years in the making," he said. "It's not a problem that's going to be solved in the next few weeks." Without concrete progress to point to, both sides expressed optimism about progress "over the coming weeks and months". That brought condemnation from the Opposition's environment and urban water spokesman, Greg Hunt. "After three months of inaction, today's meeting was an abject failure and in particular it was a real blow to South Australians and to the Coorong," he said. "After three months, on what should be the number one, real national priority, there has been no effective work." Mr Hunt called on Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to step in to resolve the impasse, saying Senator Wong had now clearly failed.

27th

FarmOnLine - Govt \$50m buyback of Murray-Darling water underway

The Federal Government is to begin a process to buy \$50 million worth of water from irrigators in south-east Australia today (Wednesday), despite farmers' concerns it will hurt rural communities. A tender will open this morning calling for "willing sellers" in the basin to sell water entitlements to the Federal Government, in a plan that could see about 20,000 megalitres of irrigation water secured for environmental flows. The move is part of the \$10 billion national water plan aimed at reviving the parched Murray-Darling Basin. Federal Water Minister Penny Wong said the public tender process allowed irrigators who wished to sell their water entitlements to submit offers at a fair market price. The \$50-million buyback would reduce the problem of over-allocations in the river system, and would see water taken only from those willing to sell it. She said the water would be used to preserve the environmental assets of the River Murray and other waterways in the basin. "This is a down payment on the future of the River Murray," she told reporters in Murray Bridge, South Australia. She described it as the first-ever direct purchase of water out of the Murray-Darling by a Government. The purchased water would be used to protect wetlands, help keep the Murray mouth open and protect against algal bloom outbreaks, salinity and other water quality risks. "We recognise it is only a first step but it is the first time in the nation's history that the Commonwealth Government has directly purchased water," Senator Wong said. "We are going to have to re-engineer a lot of the basin in order to cope with the reduced inflows that we predict will come from climate change." That process included modernising irrigation infrastructure and setting a cap on the amount of water taken from the basin. The purchase will go ahead despite Victoria having yet to join other Murray-Darling states in ceding powers over the basin's water resources to the commonwealth. It is the first of several planned rounds of entitlement purchasing under the Labor Government. It will see the purchased water put under the control of the soon-to-be-established Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder. The Australian Conservation Foundation (ACF) said buying water from willing sellers was an efficient and cost-effective way to restore rivers and wildlife. "The purchase of these entitlements means that when it does rain, water will flow through rivers to flush them clean and provide good-quality water for communities and farmers and give our wildlife a fighting chance," ACF healthy rivers campaigner Amy Hankinson said. SOURCE: AAP and Peter Ker in *The Age*

The Advertiser - 10-years to save the Murray

It will take at least 10 years to save the River Murray and South Australians cannot expect it to occur sooner, says the state's Independent Murray-Darling Basin Commissioner Ian Kowalick. Mr Kowalick, who grew up at Berri in the Riverland, said Adelaide residents needed to take on some of the responsibility for water security and not leave all the action up to governments. His warnings came as Federal Water minister Penny Wong revealed Adelaide University's Professor Mike Young's advice to the Federal Government on river management would be considered. Mr Kowalick last year replaced John Scanlon as the state's independent voice on the Murray-Darling Basin Commission. He said South Australians should do more as individuals to address water security themselves, such as installing rainwater

tanks, rather than wait for water to be provided. "There is no good, easy option – it would take a 1956 flood to be a quick fix," he said. "We need to accept it's not a quick fix and we can't throw a few million dollars at it, we have got to look at what's going to happen in the long run." Mr Kowalick said the biggest problem would be the increased variability in weather conditions caused by climate change. It would cause more dry periods which would force water allocations to be reduced more often.

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The environment would also have to be the foremost priority and receive extra water first in any re-allocation of water. "Below Lock 1 we can see the problems caused by the lack of environmental flow. "If there's not enough water flowing out to sea, not enough water in the wetlands, acid leaching occurs and salinity increases. The environment makes the system sustainable for all purposes and if we don't watch out, we could ruin it for everybody." He said governments had to assist the irrigation industry to restructure itself, which would take several years to implement. Federal Water Minister Penny Wong said a \$50 million buy-back of water from willing sellers was the "first step" to improving river health. She said Adelaide University researchers, which include Professor Young, had presented her with a plan to "future proof" the basin that had merit. "I had a very good discussion with Professor Young . . . and I've asked for some detailed advice from my department about it," she said. Mannum to Wellington local action planning committee project manager Kathryn Rothe said the community was keen to put plans into action. "In my area alone I have so many magnificent people who are willing to get on and do the work now," she said.

28th

FarmOnLine - Autumn rainfall outlook positive for much of eastern states

A wetter than normal autumn is forecast over large parts of Queensland, especially in the north, over much of NSW and in parts of SA. But in the WA wheatbelt and in much of Tasmania, chances of median rainfall from March-May fall below 50pc.

The pattern of seasonal rainfall odds across Australia is a result of:

- Cooler than average waters across the equatorial eastern Pacific in association with La Niña.
- Continuing higher than average temperatures in the central to south-east Indian Ocean.

The chances of exceeding the median rainfall in the autumn in the three months March to May are:

- 60-70pc over most of north Queensland.
- 60-65pc in a band extending from central SA to the far west of NSW.
- 55-60pc in south-west Qld and much of western NSW.
- 50-55pc in south-east Qld, north-east NSW, and much of the wheatbelt in Vic.
- But most of the WA wheatbelt and Tasmania have below 50pc chance of exceeding median rainfall. BOM says confidence in these forecasts is related to how consistently the Pacific and Indian Oceans affect Australian rainfall. During autumn, history shows this effect to be moderately consistent across much of the north and west of Australia. Elsewhere, the effect is only weakly or very weakly consistent. So BOM warns that swings in the chances of below or above average rainfall outside of Queensland need to be viewed with caution - the confidence level is lower. A La Niña event is in progress across the Pacific Basin and computer models indicate it is likely to persist until the end of autumn in the southern hemisphere. The 30-day value of the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) was +20 as at February 23. The national outlook for average autumn maximum temperatures (March to May) shows a moderate shift in the odds favouring cooler than normal conditions in southern Queensland and northern NSW. SOURCE: National Climate Centre, Bureau of Meteorology

But it's too early to forecast a repeat La Niña

A leading climatologist says it's still too early to say whether this year's La Niña weather pattern will reappear next summer. The University of Southern Queensland's Professor Roger Stone, who also is director of the Australian Centre for Sustainable Catchments, says the current La Niña weather pattern normally "winds-down" during mid to late autumn. But we're entering autumn next week with the 30-day value of the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) at +20, as at February 23 - a positive sign for ongoing above-average rainfall for many areas in the eastern States. Noting that consecutive La Niña events are fairly rare, Prof Stone concedes that one US weather model – and the only one to date, but an important one – is hinting of a possible reappearance of just such a scenario. "But at this time of the year, the golden rule is: 'It's too early to say'," Professor Stone said. "In another six or eight weeks or so, we might know the answer." Meanwhile, there's no sign of the present La Niña weather pattern breaking down, he says. The prognosis for the next few months is of "much increased rainfall probabilities around coastal areas," – especially in Queensland's south-east. While the pattern will not be as intense further inland, Professor Stone still talks of "slightly above normal" rainfall probabilities. This will be of concern to producers currently out harvesting the state's massive sorghum crops. "On the positive side, that can enhance soil moistures a little for the coming winter season," Professor Stone said. SOURCE: *Extract from seasonal update in Queensland Country Life, February 28*

\$50m water buyback 'will distort water market'

Victorian Farmers Federation president Simon Ramsay says the proposed \$50 million buyback of Murray-Darling water will damage rural communities. "Taking water out of an already stressed system will distort the water market, and will ultimately hurt rural communities," he said. "Water given for environmental use should be taken out of

savings from the upgrading of ageing irrigation infrastructure. "Saving water should be the government's first step rather than a band aid solution that the minister herself has termed an 'interim measure'. "Farmers are already stressed and the temptation for them to sell water which has been allocated for agricultural use will prove too great for some, to the detriment of farming properties and Australian food production." The NSW Irrigation Council said once the program was expanded it could cause some basin communities to decline dramatically.

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"Probably \$50 million over a wide area isn't going to have a huge impact but this is only the beginning," council chairman Colin Thomson told ABC Radio. Under the national plan introduced by the former coalition government, \$3.1 billion would be spent over 10 years to address over-allocation of water. "There is certainly a great deal of angst out there in those rural communities, how they're going to handle this productive base (being) taken away from them," Mr Thomson said. Victorian Opposition spokesman for Country Water, Peter Walsh, said the policy was to the detriment of agriculture along the river and could prompt water prices to rise. SOURCE: AAP

AdelaideNow - Growers learn new tricks

Changing environmental practices among the Barossa Valley's grape growers and winemakers have put the region in a good position to battle global warming. This is according to newly crowned winemaker of the year Troy Kalleske. Better water use and soil management already are making inroads into the valley's grape and wine production. And the next step is an increasing awareness that some grape varieties requiring more water than others are not suited to the region. "The environmental future of the region is bright," Mr Kalleske said. "People here are changing their ways. And now we realise how critical water is, we have to start growing varieties that use a lot less of it." The change in the varietal makeup of the Valley has begun already, with Mr Kalleske's own family block supporting fewer white varieties, replacing them with more of the region's most famous grapes, shiraz and grenache. "They don't need as much water as other varieties," he said. The Kalleske family wines also are certified organic, and their grapes have been grown biodynamic ally for the past five years. Soil vitality is a key factor in using available water more efficiently, Mr Kalleske said. "Our old vines are looking the best they've ever done." His vision for the valley as climate change impacts is mirrored by the grand master of the Barons of the Barossa, Stephen Henschke, who's own family business sources grapes from the valley floor and Eden Valley. "Down the track, even with warming and climate change, organic and biodynamic production is the only way we can go," Mr Henschke, said. "I'd like to think that in 10 years time most of the Barossa and Eden Valley will be organic and biodynamic. "It has to go in that direction – it's happening in practice now. It's a lovely turn around." Mr Henschke agrees with Troy Kalleske's prediction that the valley will soon be growing a greater range of exotic varieties sourced from southern Europe, where water has always been scarce. "There'll possibly be fewer grapes on the valley floor or we'll be moving to tougher varieties that can handle heat and drought conditions." Mr Kalleske remains positive the Barossa will always be big red wine country. "That's what the region is all about," he said. "It's just that we may be drinking less traditional red wine in the future, and more of the new varieties, like tempranillo, durif and zinfandel."

The Australian - Groundwater from hell

Each day about 100 million people are being poisoned with one of the deadliest substances known. In India and Bangladesh, China and Southeast Asia, even in countries such as Australia, the silent tragedy of arsenic poisoning continues to unfold. Arsenic is not merely a favourite resort of medieval or Victorian murderers and crime novelists. It causes cancer of the skin, lung, bladder, kidney, liver and uterus, is implicated in several skin diseases, nerve disorders, diabetes, lung disease and heart disease, and is suspected of causing birth defects, liver and blood disorders. In South Asia, women and girls who contract the symptoms are often expelled from their families, inflicting social and personal tragedy as well. Arsenic poisoning for the most part results from human activity and is therefore preventable. In the case of Bangladesh and West Bengal, the source is chiefly the millions of household tube wells that aid agencies caused to be dug, so families could avoid polluted surface water by obtaining ostensibly clean well water. This arsenic is geogenic: silt eroded from the Himalayas is high in arsenic which, through the millenniums, has accumulated in the sediments of the Gangetic Delta from which these wells supply household water for drinking, cooking and growing vegetables. An estimated 70 million people are exposed to arsenic in India and Bangladesh alone, part of what must surely rate as the worst case of mass poisoning in history. Other countries with similar geologies, such as Burma, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, are also affected, though global awareness about these is lower. The human toll of death and sickness from arsenic is unknown but certainly runs into the millions. The US National Research Council estimates that drinking a litre of water containing 50 micrograms of arsenic a day will cause 13 deaths out of every 1000 people. Often household wells have many times this level. In countries such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Argentina the main sources of arsenic are anthropogenic: the hundreds of thousands of century-old livestock dips scattered across the landscape and the residues from former gold mining tailings that leach arsenic into surface and groundwater. Old railway lines, treated timber plants, cotton farms and certain factory sites also contribute a toxic legacy on which suburbia often innocently sprawls. Many Australian scientists have worked on different aspects of the arsenic problem and AusAID has run programs to provide safer water in several countries. In some cases the answer may be as simple as a rainwater tank. But for all the efforts of Australians and international agencies the problem remains intractable, only pecked away at the edges. A recent development with some promise is the discovery by

Megharaj Mallavarapu of the Co-operative Research Centre for Contamination Assessment and Remediation of the Environment and University of South Australia of a naturally occurring soil bacterium that oxidises the highly toxic arsenate to much less toxic arsenite. Megh says the microbe can be used not only to remediate badly contaminated soils but possibly also incorporated into a filter to cleanse household water from affected wells. Other researchers, such as Ging Khoe at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation, have devised different kinds of water filters using physical or chemical techniques.

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The CRC CARE team has also mapped the spread of arsenic through the Bangladeshi food chain. Another important approach to the problem is one in which Australians are experienced and well qualified: catchment management. By planning and managing surface water better, there is scope to clean up contaminated surface water, which would reduce household dependency on toxic wells. There is also scope to reduce the arsenic content of the food supply by not irrigating with groundwater. From these examples it is abundantly clear that Australians have the ideas and scientific capability to overcome this human crisis. What is missing is the large-scale vision to pull all these elements into a cohesive program. When Howard Florey developed penicillin as a useable drug, when Frank Fenner took on the task of banishing smallpox from the world and when Fred Hollows tackled eye disease in Australia and Africa, it required vision. In the case of the world's worst poisoning episode, the vision to tackle and terminate it through a comprehensive scientific and aid program so far has not been forthcoming. If Australia aspires to show leadership and to put its scientific skills to work to benefit humanity on the large scale, this is a task worthy of our mettle and within our capabilities and resources. *Julian Cribb is an adjunct professor of science communication at the University of Technology, Sydney and editor of www.sciencealert.com.au.*

Vault critical for Australia's grain industry

A "DOOMSDAY" seed vault in Norway is crucial to the future of Australia's grain industry, an expert said today. Professor John Lovett is part of the Global Crop Diversity Trust which developed the project, designed to provide the world with a Noah's Ark of food in the event of a global disaster. The vault - carved into the permafrost of a remote Arctic mountain 1,000km from the North Pole - can store up to 4.5 million species of food crop seeds. The Australian government was a major financier to the project, donating \$US5 million (\$A5.36 million) to the trust. Prof Lovett said preserving genetic strains of food species is crucial to the future of Australia's grain industry. He said with the exception of the macadamia nut, all of Australia's major commercial crops came from seeds imported from overseas. "The Australian grains industry had a major interest in having these resources conserved," Prof Lovett said. "The reason why is because we are entirely reliant on having access to the plant genetic resource collections around the world." Prof Lovett chairs Australia's Cooperative Research Centre for National Plant Biosecurity. He described the vault as an insurance policy that would enable scientists to build climate-resistant crops and re-establish plants that disappeared because of natural disasters. "The varieties we grow now are probably not going to (grow) very well as the climate changes and we need to have access to as much genetic material as possible to develop new varieties." Millions of species of seeds from around the world have already been placed in the vault, made up of three chambers each measuring 27 x 10 metres. Prof Lovett said it was crucial that countries worked quickly to provide samples of crops. "We have lost already a lot of genetic variation from around the world - we think for some of the major crops we have captured 90 per cent of the genetic variation. "Time is running out for a number of crops in terms of capturing the genetic diversity and we absolutely need to act now," Prof Lovett said.

29th

FarmOnLine - \$69m pipe dream to save SA irrigators

A Christmas deadline has been set to secure crucial water supplies for communities and irrigators in and around Lake Alexandrina, South Australia, including the billion-dollar Langhorne Creek wine industry. The deadline for water access comes as communities around Langhorne Creek band together to form a pipeline group, the Langhorne Creek Water Steering Committee, which comprises of representatives from various industries surrounding Langhorne Creek such as Langhorne Creek Wine Grape Growers Association chairman, Tom Keelan. The committee was formed to push the proposal of a pipeline from Langhorne Creek to White Sands, near Murray Bridge, and enable the community to access good-quality water for irrigation. In the developmental stage, the proposal will request a pipeline to be manifolded into the existing infrastructure and pipelines because there is more than one pipeline that has access to Lake Alexandrina. At present more than 100 Langhorne Creek grape growers are unable to access water from Lake Alexandrina. For those who can, salinity levels sit at about 3700 electrical conductivity which is generally too salty for vineyard irrigation. The original scope of the pipeline would include Langhorne Creek and surrounding districts that may wish to use River Murray water. But cost may be a prohibitive factor and the proposal may not be a viable option for some in the region. The committee has already received \$250,000 from the State Government - \$125,000 will have to be repaid - to fund an initial scoping study and hydrological engineering works. But Mr Keelan says \$250,000 is a long way from the total figure of the project at about \$69 million. He says for a region with a capital value of more than \$1b and an annual turnover of over \$750m, it needed to survive. * From Stock Journal, South Australia's leading farming newspaper.

Wong gives wrong message on water buyback

The NSW Irrigators Council is concerned that Federal Water Minister, Penny Wong, is incorrectly describing the expected results of her recently announced \$50m tender to purchase water for the environment. In her press release Minister Wong stated that the tender was "addressing over allocation". "Purchasing water for the environment does not address over allocation," NSW Irrigators Council CEO, Andrew Gregson, says. "Moving water from one user to another - from irrigators to the environmental water holder - does not change the number of licenses issued. It merely changes the name on the title and what the water is used for. "It is important that Minister Wong correctly describe the process on which the government is embarking.

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"If the government were to address over-allocation, they would purchase licenses and retire them. This would have the affect of increasing the average percentage allocation. In other words, the reliability of all licenses - irrigators, the environment and others - would increase."

Wong on listening tour with irrigators

Federal Climate Change and Water Minister, Penny Wong, has met with irrigators for the first time since the election at a series of farm tours and meetings in Griffith, southern NSW, today. Senator Wong toured rice and horticultural farms in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area and has heard some of the concerns farmers have with the implementation of the \$10 billion national water plan by the new government. Irrigators are pushing for a commitment from Senator Wong to ensure the Government's major focus under the plan will remain on investing in infrastructure and the modernisation of irrigation technology. They have opposed recent suggestions by Wentworth scientists, Mike Young and Peter Cullen, calling for across the board cuts to help return water more quickly to the Murray Darling Basin. While Senator Wong announced a \$50m buy-back of irrigation licenses to return water to the system on Tuesday, she said it was the government's intention to only seek water from willing sellers, not compulsory acquisition. She said she investment in infrastructure improvements was vital to both the continuation of the irrigation and farming sectors, and environmental sustainability in the basin. Several representatives from a range of irrigator and conservation groups flew into Griffith for this first irrigation meeting. Farmers have welcomed the minister's commitment that the Government would only enter the water market, not compulsorily acquire licenses, to achieve water savings. SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service.

Macquarie Marshes audit now funded

Macquarie River Food and Fibre chairman, Tony Wass, welcomed the announcement by NSW Water Minister, Nathan Rees, that \$400,000 had been secured to conduct an audit of water diversion structures in the Macquarie Marshes. "This can't happen soon enough," Mr Wass, "Mt Fosterer", Warren, says. Already his organisation has waited eight months for some finalisation of an environmental flow incident last July. Mr Wass says that in July 2007, a significant percentage of an environmental flow was diverted down the Gum Cowal - Terrigal system. "On being made aware of this, Macquarie Valley Food and Fibre flew by helicopter over the area to record and film some of that diversion. "We sent all of this information to then Minister, Phil Koperberg, who gave a very strong response and indicated he had directed his officers to investigate the legality of these diversions and take firm action. "Eight months later we are still waiting to hear if anybody was charged or if an investigation took place." Mr Rees says a joint State and Federal government funded Wetland Recovery Program has granted the money to the NSW Department of Water and Energy to undertake a strategic compliance audit of the Macquarie Marshes. He says the audit will be done in two phases, one has started and the other will commence later in the year. Mr Rees says a targeted compliance operation into suspected illegal structures within the Marshes was conducted last July. However, the majority of the structures are licensed and being operated legally. "There are a number of structures which appear to be unlawful and we are taking action to remedy this situation," Mr Rees says.

Now Nats bag NSW Govt over Macquarie Marshes

With all eyes on the Macquarie Marshes this week amid claims that flood plain harvesting threatens to undermine the Murray Darling Basin rescue plan and the environment, the Nationals Member for Barwon, Kevin Humphries, has come to the marshes' defence. "The Macquarie Valley has a workable Water Sharing Plan, as is the case for all inland catchments, which commenced in 2004," Mr Humphries says. "As for flood plain harvesting, it was the Labor Government that drove the flood plain process which commenced in 1999, in the first place. "The draft flood plain management plan for the upper Macquarie has been on the table and out for consultation since October 2006, the Department of Environment and Conservation commissioned the process, which was undertaken by Sinclair Knight. "The Government has sat on the report and done nothing and frustrated all within the Macquarie Valley including irrigators, graziers, those living on the flood plain and everybody concerned for the future of environmental outcomes." Mr Humphries says the flood plain plan included Narromine to Oxley and that the plan was not about preventing water getting to the Marshes but rather getting more water to the flood plain and the Marshes. "Professor Kingsford, whilst raising very important issues, undertook the study from Warren to Carinda. "There will be no workable plan for the Macquarie Valley, and indeed a number of important and critical environmental outcomes, while the job remains half done."

Tony Wass blasts NSW Govt on Macquarie Marshes

Macquarie Valley Food and Fibre chairman, Tony Wass, says government would be better off buying land instead of water licenses in the Macquarie Marshes. If Professor Richard Kingsford's controversial analysis of flood plain

development along the Macquarie Valley and in particular, within the Macquarie Marshes, has done anything, it certainly has put the Macquarie Valley Flood Plain Management Plan back onto the agenda. Professor Kingsford, from the University of NSW, has pointed to water theft and illegal channels as a reason for a decline in the Macquarie Marshes downstream of Warren. Macquarie Valley Food and Fibre chairman, Mr Wass, "Mount Foster", Warren, agrees with Professor Kingsford that there has been government inaction on the marshes but differs on what that inaction is about.

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"Professor Kingsford seems to be on a different tangent now, his concern seems to be having a shot at the vegetation on the flood plain," Mr Wass says. "It really appears like he is chucking rocks at the flood plain management plan, just on principle." With only limited reading time of the document Mr Wass says he had already found serious flaws in the information on which Professor Kingsford based his conclusions. And, according to Mr Wass, a few things need to be put into perspective. "At the end of the day, under the terms of the Macquarie Valley Water Sharing Plan, irrigators get use of 25pc of the average annual flow," he says. "Town water, and stock and domestic water is only 2pc.

"That means 73pc of the average annual flow (in the Macquarie River system) is available to the environment." Mr Wass says the flood plain committee first met in 1999 to develop a flood plain management plan for the Macquarie from Narromine to Oxley Station. "This was completed in 2006, objections were received and dealt with and it has sat on the minister or ministers' desks ever since and has not been gazetted." This plan, according to Mr Wass, is the key part of protecting the valley and its environment within the developed area. "It was driven by State government, funded by the State government with external consultants, and we don't know what it cost, but estimate at many hundred thousand dollars. "All the landholder and flood plain graziers on that committee were volunteers, gave a lot of their time freely." Mr Wass says the plans were designed to co-ordinate flood plain development, and to minimise flood risk to occupiers and users of the flood plain while addressing environment, social and economic interests of the Macquarie River Valley. The Federal Government has just decided to spend \$50 million to buy backwater licenses within the Murray-Darling Basin. Mr Wass says that close to 88pc of the Marshes is privately owned. "The State reserve is somewhere around 19,000 hectares," he says. So instead of the State buying backwater from licence holders, it would be wiser to buy the land from willing sellers.

AdelaideNow - PM urges patience with Murray-Darling talks

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd will take responsibility for negotiating the \$10 billion national water plan with Victoria when the deal is closer to being sealed. Mr Rudd, visiting Adelaide yesterday, urged South Australians to be patient while the Victorian and federal governments attempt to agree over the plan, saying he will intervene when it is necessary. Currently South Australian Senator and Water Minister Penny Wong is responsible for the plan. "We believe this is core business it is going to take a bit of time, we have been at it for two months, give us a bit more time," Mr Rudd said. "I think Senator Wong is doing a fantastic job and she has my every support. But the discussions with Victoria will be conducted at her level and in due course at my level once we have narrowed the gap in terms of negotiating positions." Mr Rudd said SA's water crisis was a high priority which would be addressed. "This is difficult stuff, there are competing demands, competing interests but we are not about to leave the people of South Australia in the lurch." Premier Mike Rann, who met Mr Rudd to discuss the River Murray, said he was confident Victoria was closer to agreeing to the plan but said ultimately Victorian Premier John Brumby would have to change his position. "The River Murray was top of the agenda and obviously I have had a series of talks with Kevin Rudd and with Penny Wong," he said. "Penny Wong recently had a meeting with Premier Brumby and I think there has been some progress towards perhaps getting a merger of the River Murray Authority and the River Murray Commission. "I think they are doing it carefully and properly to fix this. It is much better to do good work than to make a lot of noise." State Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith yesterday said Senator Wong had been a "major disappointment". "It has been almost three months of inaction from Labor," he said. "When Labor gets serious it will be on top of the agenda at COAG."

