

Animal activists enraged by new roo kill code

Shotguns can now be used to kill kangaroo joeys at close range under proposed changes to the Federal Government's kangaroo shooting laws. The proposal has enraged animal welfare groups, including the late Steve Irwin's Wildlife Protection Association and RSPCA Australia, which had called for a total ban on shotguns in the revised National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies. The new code also recommends killing pouch joeys by "forcefully swinging" the head against a vehicle tow bar, despite calls for the Federal Government to fund urgent scientific research to establish more humane ways of disposing of pouch young after the mother has been shot. The previous code did not provide any guidance on dealing with orphaned young at foot joeys aged from nine to 12 months that have left the pouch but are still dependent on the mother for food. The new code suggests using shotguns to kill these joeys, as well as pouch young, at close range if the mothers are shot. "These changes are basically saying the Federal Government believes it's OK to blast a defenceless joey to bits with a shotgun," the president of the Wildlife Protection Association, Pat O'Brien, said. "It's disgusting and reveals a mentality that regards our wildlife as worthless and ultimately disposable." Conservationist and former NSW upper house parliamentarian, Richard Jones, described the new code as "sanctioning the most grotesque cruelty" and warned it would undermine the Rudd Government's efforts to stop Japan's scientific whaling program in Antarctica. "We can hardly take the high moral ground on animal welfare and whale conservation when the Government is prepared to condone barbaric practices regarding our native wildlife. The Japanese will laugh at us as hypocrites," Mr. Jones said. Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett was unavailable for comment, but a spokesman said the new code prescribed "best practice" for humane killing of kangaroos and wallabies, "ensuring minimal pain and suffering to the animals". A ministerial working group was appointed four years ago to review the code of practice after RSPCA Australia delivered a damning report to the Federal Government on the code's failure to prevent animal cruelty during commercial harvesting of kangaroos, pest control culling and recreational hunting. The RSPCA made 14 recommendations for changes, including a ban on shotguns and on shooting female kangaroos and wallabies with large pouch joeys or dependent young at foot. "Any reference to the use of shotguns on any macropod should be removed from the code of practice," the report said. Other recommendations included a night-shooting accuracy test for all shooters, a requirement to establish "a bona fide problem of kangaroo damage" prior to non-commercial culling and phasing out "damage mitigation" licenses allowing farmers to shoot kangaroos on their properties. "The only solution which would avoid the potential of cruelty to pouch young would be to avoid shooting females altogether," the report said. None of the recommendations has been adopted. RSPCA Australia chief scientist, Dr Bidda Jones, said that despite being a member of the working group reviewing the shooting code, she had been unable to influence its development. "We are very much a lone voice for animal welfare within the working group, and only hope that during the public comment phase members of the public will pick up on some of these issues," she said. The Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts posted the draft code on its website this week, without any public announcement. The deadline for public comment is 6 March, but the department warns submissions will not be considered if they propose options that are "technically unfeasible" or "cannot be reasonably and safely applied in the field by kangaroo shooters". The working group has already rejected suggestions that joeys could be transferred to wildlife carers as inappropriate. It also rejected calls for tighter shooting controls as "creating significant compliance issues". The Kangaroo Industry Association of Australia said it was "generally happy" with the new code and defended current killing methods including decapitation of unfurred joeys and a blow to the brain with a metal pipe or vehicle tow bar for larger pouch joeys as "perfectly humane activities". "Animal welfare is precisely what this code of practice is all about," the association's executive officer, John Kelly, said. SOURCE: *The Canberra Times*.

Disaster zone extended in NSW's north

Premier Morris Iemma has today extended the official disaster zone as he toured flood-hit regions in NSW's north. Mr. Iemma was briefed by State Emergency Service (SES) officials in Lismore before he took an aerial tour of the region where swollen rivers have cut roads and highways and inundated rural properties. The floods reached their peak in the towns of Coraki and Woodburn early today and an estimated 3000 people are affected across NSW's north. "I have personally seen the extent of the flooding and the large number of families who have been isolated," Mr. Iemma said. "The Government had no hesitation in extending the Natural Disaster Declaration." Natural Disaster Declarations were made for the Tweed and Kyogle local government areas on Saturday. Lismore and Richmond Valley local government areas were added to the list today to enable a range of assistance measures for flood-hit households, businesses, farms and councils. "The SES advises me that there are now more than 3000 people isolated by floodwaters," Mr. Iemma also said.

"I've admired the spirit, cheerful attitude and selfless behaviour demonstrated by flood victims, volunteers and communities as they have pitched in to help each other. "We want to ease their burden and the declaration of a Natural Disaster triggers a range of assistance for residents, business owners and councils whose properties are damaged in the flooding." A Lismore-based Disaster Recovery Coordinating Committee has also been established, Mr. Iemma said, bringing together government and welfare agencies. "This committee ensures an efficient and speedy return to normal for the region, slashing the unnecessary duplication of services and drawing on a vast pool of experience and knowledge," he said. The Premier also praised the efforts of SES volunteers, many of which had given up their holidays to pitch in. The SES has more than 200 volunteers in the region along with more than 100 volunteers from the Hunter, Sydney, Illawarra, Namoi and Oxley regions.
SOURCE: AAP

High country on fire: lightning starts blaze, more on way

Lightning has sparked the first summer fire in the high country around the NSW and Victorian border and fears abound that more are likely this week. Firefighters say lightning storms are predicted for the next five days as the forest fire danger continues to escalate. The fire at Bluerag-Basalt Knob, about 20km southwest of Mount Hotham, was seen about 7.30pm on Saturday. Late yesterday rappel crews had been dropped onto the fireground estimated at about 10ha and aerial bombers were being used to quell the flames. The blaze was burning in country previously scorched in 2003, raising fears of further fires during the summer and greater danger for firefighters. "We have had 39 strikes in the past week and they are talking storms for the rest of the week," Gippsland DSE regional duty officer David Rash said yesterday. "There has been a bit of rain in the high country but it hasn't been uniform. "Clearly there are areas that are ready to burn. "This is country that was burnt in 2003 and that poses an even greater risk for the firefighters. "A bit of flame at the base and these trees are toppling over, it is a precarious position and firefighters have to be very careful." Yesterday afternoon Mr. Rash was confident the blaze could be brought under control ahead of a significant wind shift. "We have the change in the La Trobe valley and the wind is gusting at about 50kmh from the south-west," he said. "We really don't need that to get to the fire. "A dozer is being used to create a break at one end of the fire while a hand trail is being put in by the rappel team." Yesterday DSE fire manager for the North East Peter Farrell said they too had been concerned at lightning strikes in the area. "We have had a reconnaissance plane up over the valleys today but there is no sign of fire," he said. "We also have two crews at Dinner Plain helping with that fire. "A rappel crew has been dropped into the fire and a retardant and mixing crew is also on the scene." Mr. Farrell said the fire danger was on the rise. "In the past week the indices have begun to climb," he said. "This fire shows there is simply no cause for complacency." SOURCE: *The Border Mail*, Albury, NSW.

Soaked, and it's not over yet in northern NSW

The floodwaters swamping northern NSW edged their way south last night, with no quick end in sight to a crisis that has left thousands of residents and holiday-makers isolated and caused millions of dollars damage. With large areas covered by a natural disaster declaration, NSW Premier Morris Iemma was due to tour the region this morning. The Federal Government has also said it was ready to offer whatever help was needed to ease a catastrophe stretching from South East Queensland deep into NSW. The Bureau of Meteorology's flood warnings last night referred to flood danger as far south as the Hunter Valley. The Bureau last night issued a thunderstorm warning - including the threat of large hailstones, flash flooding and strong winds - in the Northern Rivers, Northern Tablelands and parts of the Mid North Coast. The State Emergency Services warned people in Kyogle, Coraki, Bungawalbin, Swan Bay, New Italy and low-lying rural areas that they could be isolated for up to three days. Farmers were told to move pumps, other equipment and livestock to higher ground. Residents and SES members began sandbagging storefronts in the town of Woodburn, where the Richmond River was predicted to peak near 4.5 metres this morning. The Bureau of Meteorology forecasts the Richmond River will peak at 6.9 metres when it passes through Coraki some time on Sunday night or early Monday. "About 6.9m looks to be around what the peak is going to be, which is the second highest on record for the town," meteorologist Michael Logan said. Torrential rain of 300mm in a 12-hour period on Friday night caused widespread flooding and forced the evacuation of hundreds of people to higher ground in the northern regions. Inland, the Richmond River reached 18.1 metres on Saturday as it passed through Kyogle at the base of Fairy Mountain. "That's the second highest level on record and hasn't been seen in the town since 1954 when floodwaters reached 18.9 metres," Mr. Logan said. "We do think that the widespread heavy (rain) that gets all the major rivers running is over but there is more showers and storms expected on Sunday afternoon. "There will be showers for the next few days but because the low has weakened we've beat the potential for more heavy, widespread rain." The Insurance Council of Australia said it was yet to estimate the extent of damage to homes and properties because many were still inundated but reports from individual towns offered a hint of the damage bill to come. In sodden Kyogle, Mayor Ernie Bennett estimated the damage bill for infrastructure at between \$10 million and \$15 million.

About 10 bridges had been washed away or were impassable. Livestock and fences had been carried off by the water, which was receding to reveal that the asphalt on many roads had also slipped into the tide. The NSW Minister for Emergency Services, Nathan Rees, declared the Tweed and Kyogle local government areas natural disaster zones on Saturday, and was considering declarations for the Richmond Valley and Lismore. Last night flood warnings were current for the Wilsons, Richmond, Tweed, Bellinger, Clarence, Orara, Bogan, Paroo, MacIntyre and Warrego rivers. SOURCE: *Sydney Morning Herald* and AAP.

AWA

1. PM Kevin Rudd plans to hold one-on-one talks with each of the State Premiers over the Federal Government's Water Reform package. The talks aim to resolve outstanding disagreements, particularly involving the government of Victoria on the \$10 billion Murray-Darling program.
2. Several federal working groups have been announced by the PM Kevin Rudd at the press conference following COAG. Federal Minister Penny Wong will be the chair of a special working group on 'climate change' and water and South Australia its deputy chair.
3. National Water Commission head Ken Matthews has criticised inadequate planning and poor water management by state governments and urban water authorities for the severity of the current drought. Mr. Matthews told *The Australian* that investments in climate-independent sources should have been made earlier.
4. Two new CSIRO Reports on the availability of water on the Gwydir and Namoi Rivers as part of the Murray Darling Basin Sustainable Yields Project have been released and can be downloaded from the NWC site.
5. Australia's two largest cities had contrasting fortunes when it came to rainfall in 2007. At 1499mm, Sydney had its wettest year since 1999 and its dams increased from about 36% to 60.1%. On May 15, 2007, Melbourne recorded its driest 365 days on record, with just 316.2mm of rain, less than half its average of 652mm.
6. Victoria's Planning Minister Justin Madden has announced that the desalination plant near Wonthaggi will be subject to an Environment Effects Statement (EES) with preliminary analysis indicating there is a need for further investigation of potential loss of native vegetation and impacts on landscape, flora, fauna and marine ecology.
7. Rebates for audits on domestic water use are now available to help South Australians further reduce water consumption. The new Home Water Audit rebate of up to \$110 allows homeowners to receive reimbursements on low-flow showerheads, waterwise garden products, dual-flush toilets and efficient washing machines.
8. Widespread storms and rain across south east and west Queensland have continued to deliver benefits for rural communities and the environment over the Christmas-New Year period, with the QLD Minister for Natural Resources and Water declaring it a promising start to the wet season.
9. A conservation group is calling for the release of a Federal Government report it says has information that could potentially damage the Queensland Government's attempt to build a dam in the Mary Valley. The Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council says the Commonwealth's draft audit should detail the effectiveness of strategies to protect lungfish at Paradise Dam on the Burnett River.
10. Sydney Water presented Canterbury Girls High School with a \$4,000 cheque as their prize for winning the Streamwatch Water Conservation Award for Overall Excellence. The award recognises the school's reduced ecological footprint over a three-year period, with particular attention to the school's water use.
11. An outbreak of toxic blue-green Algae in the Gippsland Lakes has prompted health authorities to warn people to stay out of the water. The hot weather has caused an outbreak of algae on Lake Victoria and Lake King.
12. A solution to increased flood risk due to climate change in the Netherlands looks to controlled flooding. The government plan 'Room for the river' will see the protective outer dike to the Noordwaard polder lowered by 2m in 2015 to allow the area to flood, easing the pressure on more populated areas and lowering the risk of flooding elsewhere.

13. Italy's farmers are demanding that the government invest billions of euros in improving water management and erosion control. 70% of towns are at high risk of floods or landslides and risks are expected to rise as Italy's outdated system of reservoirs and canals comes under increasing pressure from global warming and rapid urbanization.

14. Water restrictions on irrigators, graziers and industry have been eased in parts of western New South Wales after much needed Christmas rain. In the Macquarie Valley 100 percent of water entitlements have been reinstated for towns, high security licence holders and stock and domestic users, and domestic restrictions eased for the Barwon Darling River region.

15. Storms and reduced losses from river systems have boosted water allocations for irrigators in southern New South Wales.

16. The levels in parched southeast Queensland have risen from 20% to > 24% this past week to add a fortnight's supply. The rain also means the ground is now saturated so more runoff to the dams is likely.

17. A national survey has found the billion-plus litres of water saved since restrictions started to be introduced nationwide in 2001 has in some cases not kept pace with reduced rainfall.

ABC - Global river study brings more bad news for Murray

A new study of major river systems worldwide predicts that waterways that have not been dammed are more likely to withstand the effects of climate change. A network of scientists from Germany, Sweden, the United States and Australia studied 200 of the world's major rivers, including the Nile, Amazon, Yangtze and Mississippi rivers. The Climate Change and the World's River Basins report has been published online by the Ecological Society of America. Monash University's Professor Sam Lake says the predictions are grim for Australia's dwindling Murray River. "So the Murray, for example, we predicted between 1960 to 2050, that the Murray River system - dam-impacted as it is - would probably suffer about a 15 per cent decrease in water availability, let alone what's already been extracted," he said. "It would effect the people in the Murray-Darling Basin and the people of Adelaide." The scientists are calling on government agencies around the world to act now to minimise the effects of climate change. The global study has found that nearly 1 billion people live in river basins where management will be needed to counter the effects of climate change. Professor Lake says rivers that are already impacted by damming will need far greater management than those that are free-flowing. "If you are going to have a decrease in the water availability, you may want to buy up areas of the floodplain to allow the floodplain to be restored," he said. "You may want to modify dam outlets to produce high quality water and limit extraction. "You may want to increase water retention in the catchment by allowing more increased filtration and retention of water and uplands and wetlands." Professor Lake says the wild rivers of northern Australia are likely to better withstand the effects of climate change than those in the south. He says planning will still be needed to address the effects of climate change in the tropics. "Adaptation for that would be to possibly retreat from activities [on the] seaward side of floodplains," he said. "It may be that these floodplains may well be irreversibly changed." Professor Lake says building new dams is a risky undertaking. "The trouble with... building dams is that they are virtually irreversible, once you have put them in," he said. "Be very, very hesitant at putting in new dams and barrages." He says although it is almost impossible to fully reverse the effects of damming rivers, some governments overseas are being forced to do so. "Removing dams is something which we haven't had in Australia, but certainly in United States," he said. "It's a fairly long and lengthy process to take out a dam and to mitigate the ecological effects of doing so, because dams store lots of silt and sediment and things behind them. "You don't want to release that slurry from the bottom of the dam down the river straight away."

Climate resilience planning

Dr Stuart Blanch from environment group WWF-Australia says the findings of the study highlight the need for all state and territory governments to make climate resilience a much higher planning priority. He says climate change must be considered before making any new decisions about changing free-flowing wild rivers or clearing land. Dr Blanch says proposed dams should not go ahead in tropical Queensland, the Northern Territory or the Kimberley region of Western Australia. "There are dams proposed for around Cairns, on the Adelaide River here for Darwin's water supply, and on the Fitzroy River," he said. "What this report shows is that if we go down that path, we will destroy a lot of what makes those rivers important. "I don't know anyone who would like to see the Adelaide River turned up a bit like the Murray River or the Fitzroy River ruined."

Extracts from ALGA News article - Climate change - how local government can respond

Climate change and its implications for local government was the topic of a thought-provoking session at the recent National General Assembly of Local Government in Darwin.

It is essential that governments and communities fully appreciate the social, environmental and economic implications of climate change, including strategies such as the introduction of a national carbon emissions trading system. This year's State of the Region's report discusses climate change and the potential implications of carbon pricing estimating the upfront costs to Australia's households from climate change at \$14 billion - \$17 billion annually. Nick Rowley, climate change consultant and former senior policy adviser to former UK Prime Minister, provided a detailed insight into the extent of the problem, the need for new forms of collaboration and what elements make up an adequate response. In a similar vein to the address by Australian of the Year Professor Tim Flannery, Nick Rowley's presentation, while sobering and reflective, offered hope. "Climate change is a problem, a problem unlike any problem facing humanity," he said. "But problems have solutions." Rowley said one of the issues was how economies could grow in a responsible way. A global response needed to focus on the cause and effect of the problem. For local government this would most likely be the effects on infrastructure, particularly coastal infrastructure, and adaptation measures. To deal with the cause would involve a fundamental shift in the dynamics behind economic growth. Rowley said, "Local government can make a significant difference." "Governments need to work collaboratively with business and build a wider public engagement."

ABC - Climate change raising insurance premiums

Residents of some parts of Victoria are still mopping up after a series of brief but intense rainstorms overnight. There was flash flooding in Melbourne and Geelong, and it isn't over yet. The storms, predicted to be some of the worst this year, will arrive just as many holidaymakers hit the road for their Christmas break. Collapsed roofs, smashed windscreens, and sodden carpets are just a few of the things insurers fork out money for after a storm. The more they pay out, the more we pay them in premiums. The insurer Suncorp Metway yesterday announced that three separate extreme weather events since July had cost the company between \$230 and \$260 million. Suncorp's chief executive is John Mulcahy. "In July we saw some storms in New Zealand, which accounted for approximately \$20 million, then there was the Lismore storm in October, where the cost to the group was approximately \$60 million," he said. "When you add those two events to the Sydney event [severe storms], then you can see that the cost of the group is in the range of \$230 to \$260 million." Earlier this week, Suncorp's closest rival, Insurance Australia Group, blamed bad weather when it slashed its profit forecasts by \$150 million. Mr. Mulcahy says the cost of insurance premiums will have to rise to recoup the losses. "There's no doubt that prices will increase - I think that will probably escalate even further now that you'll see more price increases," he said. Worsening climate Dr Penny Whetton from the Centre for Australian Weather and Climate Research says the weather is only expected to get worse as greenhouse gas emissions rise. "As the atmosphere warms up and can hold more moisture, heavy downfalls, when they occur, have the likelihood of being more intense, so that increases the risk of flash flooding events," she said. It is thought global warming may also ramp up the intensity of tropical cyclones and hail storms. Dr Whetton says it is difficult to accurately predict the intensity of future storms. "The main way that we can predict the future changes in climate due to the enhanced greenhouse effect are the results that come from our global climate models," she said. "But they produce information which is fairly broadscale, like hundreds of kilometres between the points where we have information, and severe weather can be much more local than that. "So, we actually have to use more indirect techniques to interpret what the climate models are saying to be able to say something about extreme weather events." Insurance companies are running their own set of figures, but just how much extreme weather events will push up the premiums is unclear, even to the insurers. The banking and insurance analyst at Commsec, Carlos Castillo, says the unpredictable weather conditions are making it difficult for insurers to plan for catastrophes. "The insurers definitely point to the fact that we've had a much higher frequency of natural disasters, particularly storms, in the last few years," he said. "They pin that on climate change, so they're trying as best they can factor that into the pricing of their policies. "But it's hard for them to do that when they don't have the historical information, because a lot of the pricing in insurance generally is based on historical performance, and when you've had such a large change in the frequency of storms, it can play havoc with their pricing model." The only thing that is certain is that premium holders will be paying more.

Climate change 'will increase health risk' to rural Australians

Mounting evidence of global warming has led experts to warn of greater health risks for Australians who live in rural and remote areas. A paper from the Department of Public Health at the University of Adelaide warns altered weather patterns will bring changes in the distribution of diseases. The paper predicts climate change will mean variations in the rates of hospital admissions and the use of ambulance services. National Rural Health Alliance executive director Gordon Gregory says global warming could make people in remote regions more vulnerable. "What we've got here is a paper which is very timely in terms of reminding us that we must have health work force on the ground to enable us to prepare for a new pattern of disease," he said. "We must also have public awareness that change is afoot, so that we can be ready and willing on every front."

"Disease patterns vary according to climate conditions because some vectors for diseases can't survive in the hot, or in the cold, or in the wet, or in the dry. "It's clear that if there is any change in the pattern of weather, of climate, of the incidence of climatic events, there will be a change in the distribution of illnesses and disease."

9th

FarmOnLine

Old season starts well for some but drought not over

Parts of south-east Queensland are mopping up after severe flooding and most coastal regions have received good rain during the past few weeks indicating a good start to the year for some - but the drought is far from over. AgForce vice president, John Cotter, says floods in the Beaudesert area have caused loss of crops, fencing and livestock and the Maroon Dam is now believed to be about 44pc full. Mr. Cotter says much of Qld's south and central west received good rain in December causing flooding in Cooper Creek, the Barcoo, Thompson, Warrego, Paroo and Bulloo rivers but the areas further west of Quilpie have not fared as well. The northwest of Queensland has experienced some normal pre-monsoonal wet season storms but is still waiting for the real wet season to start while the far north has had a good start but is also waiting for the monsoon. Meanwhile, other part of the State including the south Burnett and Brisbane Valley (catchment for the Wivenhoe Dam) have had only light falls in December and January despite overcast weather and drizzly conditions. "At Goomeri, we've had only 10mm in January, although there have been pockets of good rain in other parts of the Burnett," Mr. Cotter says. The Darling Downs and central Queensland have had some good falls but they have also been patchy and more is needed to boost the summer crop. "Many parts of the state have had the most positive and hopeful start to the summer season for more than seven years but more widespread and ongoing rainfall is needed before the country will rejuvenate."

Tony Burke's bush comments spark unease

There's unease about the new Federal Government's relationship with the bush in the wake of comments made by Labor's Agriculture Minister who is now touring country Australia. The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, described Tony Burke as "one of our brightest and best rising stars" when he accompanied him on a recent fact finding mission to Roma, Queensland, in a bid to forge close partnerships with rural organisations like AgForce. However, the Sydney-based Agriculture Minister's comments about supporting existing exceptional circumstance arrangements but wanting to improve the scheme, made in Hay, south western NSW, have been seized on by the Opposition. "What I don't want to see continue is a situation where some people can go into the system of relief and have no incentives during that time to actually improve the property to better deal with the climate change in future droughts that they will be facing in the years to come," Mr. Burke told Sydney's 2UE radio station. In response to whether this meant there would be conditions attached to future relief programs, requiring producers to work towards lessening the impact of the next drought, Mr. Burke said: "Yeah, there's different ways of building those sorts of incentives in to improve the system. "And it's one of the issues I'm talking to farmers about as I'm traveling around at the moment." Similarly, on Sky News, the Agriculture Minister underscored the importance of incentives in combating the effects of climate change, adding he was "working out" different ways of tackling the debate. "There's not going to be some primary industries Minister coming down from on high telling people what they can and can't farm, or what they're allowed to do with their land," he said. But the Leader of The Nationals, Warren Truss, contends the thrust of Mr. Burke's remarks will prompt fears the Rudd Government is embarking on a new bout of "slash and burn" with its "anti-farmer and anti-country vendetta" – especially when linked to its earlier criticism of the contentious Regional Partnership Program. "When Kevin Rudd was 'running Queensland' he closed 13 country rail lines, removed more than 2000 hospital beds, sacked 600 Department of Primary Industries staff, took 400 teaching jobs from regional schools and slashed services across regional Queensland," Mr. Truss said. "In case Labor hasn't realised, much of Australia has been caught in a cruel drought that in many places stretches back seven years. "It is simplistic to claim that all the problems confronting the rural sector can be solved by more research into climate change," Mr. Truss said. Meanwhile, lobby group AgForce is one of many rural organisations keen to forge relationships with Canberra. But its chief executive officer, Brett de Hayr, says Labor's plans to address climate change must be done in conjunction with those living and working in rural and regional Australia. "People are worried that if government sees it's raining, then all of a sudden the drought's over and it's reinforcing that, obviously if drought recovery takes a good while, they (Government) shouldn't make any rash decisions," he said. As well, he made the point it was important for the incoming Environment Minister Peter Garrett and the new Minister for Climate Change, Senator Penny Wong, to work closely with farmers. "AgForce and its members have been vocal on key issues such as climate change and we urge the new Rudd Government to consult closely on this issue as it is already having a major impact on Queensland primary producers who are largely responsible for Australia meeting its Kyoto targets," Mr. de Hayr said.

A spokesman for Minister Burke said the National Farmers Federation, NSW Farmers Federation, Victorian Farmers Federation have all provided support on the comments made by the Minister last week. "There's plenty of support around for it because there are all sorts of issues that do need to be sorted out," he said. "It's a priority for the Minister when he does meet with all the state's Agriculture Ministers in the next month or two," the spokesman said.

NSW bio-diesel plant hits hurdles

Plans to develop a \$5 million bio-diesel plant at Goulburn on the NSW Southern Tablelands capable of producing 12 million litres a year are awaiting finalisation of subdivision issues. Developer Paul Menere, of City and Industrial Group, said once the owner of the land solved those issues, a development application to construct a 600 square metre Colourbond factory and eight stainless steel tanks able to store 800,000 litres of biodiesel would be lodged with Goulburn Mulwaree Council. Mr. Menere, who is no stranger to Goulburn developments, said environmental responsibility was fuelling his aim to establish four factories throughout Australia, the Goulburn plant being "the centrepiece". "Because Goulburn is on the highway and main rail link, the city is perfectly positioned for a plant such as this," Mr. Menere told the Post. SOURCE: The Goulburn Post, a Fairfax Media newspaper.

Drought hits shack living

Twelve months ago water lapped outside the front of the shacks at Milang, providing perfect conditions for holidaymakers. But the drought has caused the water to recede from the banks of Lake Alexandrina, leaving a sandy beach and mudflats for holidaymakers. The level of Lake Alexandrina has fallen below sea level in the past month due to evaporation and the lack of much river flow. Small jetties in front of the shacks are no longer at the water's edge – because the water has receded 20m into the lake. Holidaymakers at the popular shack community are used to relaxing in the water a few steps from their shacks at the end of a hot day. The hot riverbank yesterday provided little relief. Sarah Lancaster, 12, from Wollongong, said she and her cousins last year sailed and swam in the water outside the cousins' Milang shack but were doing different activities this year. "We'd rather be splashing around in the water than lying in the sun, it's too shallow," she said. "We used to be able to dive off the jetty into the water but if we did that now we'd break our necks. "Normally the water would be over my head but by the pier it is only up to my ankle." However she said the receded shoreline has not stopped them from having fun this summer and they still enjoyed some swimming in the shallow water. Milang resident Di Teasdale, 60, said many shack owners had commented on how low the lake levels had dropped in the past 12 months. "There's been a zillion people here over New Year and the shack people in particular noticed how far it had gone down," she said. "I think it is not as grim as a lot of people think – little kids can go out and build sandcastles and do things they don't normally do." She and husband Ray, 64, believe the barrages should be opened to allow more sea water to flow back into the lake – which would have been natural for drought conditions and would increase the level of the lake. Mr Teasdale said it would be an unpopular move with farmers but would help restore some environmental balance.

Last summer you could swim here and now it's a beach.

Twelve months ago water lapped outside the front of the shacks at Milang, providing perfect conditions for holidaymakers. But the drought has caused the water to recede from the banks of Lake Alexandrina, leaving a sandy beach and mudflats for holidaymakers. The level of Lake Alexandrina has fallen below sea level in the past month due to evaporation and the lack of much river flow. Small jetties in front of the shacks are no longer at the water's edge – because the water has receded 20m into the lake. Holidaymakers at the popular shack community are used to relaxing in the water a few steps from their shacks at the end of a hot day. The hot riverbank yesterday provided little relief. Sarah Lancaster, 12, from Wollongong, said she and her cousins last year sailed and swam in the water outside the cousins' Milang shack but were doing different activities this year. "We'd rather be splashing around in the water than lying in the sun, it's too shallow," she said. "We used to be able to dive off the jetty into the water but if we did that now we'd break our necks. "Normally the water would be over my head but by the pier it is only up to my ankle." However she said the receded shoreline has not stopped them from having fun this summer and they still enjoyed some swimming in the shallow water. Milang resident Di Teasdale, 60, said many shack owners had commented on how low the lake levels had dropped in the past 12 months. "There's been a zillion people here over New Year and the shack people in particular noticed how far it had gone down," she said. "I think it is not as grim as a lot of people think – little kids can go out and build sandcastles and do things they don't normally do." She and husband Ray, 64, believe the barrages should be opened to allow more sea water to flow back into the lake – which would have been natural for drought conditions and would increase the level of the lake. Mr Teasdale said it would be an unpopular move with farmers but would help restore some environmental balance.

Call to ease water curbs as dams fill

Gold Coast Mayor Ron Clarke has urged the Queensland Government to ease water restrictions on the coast, partly to counter the possibility of flood damage this weekend. The coast's main water storage, the Hinze Dam, has been overflowing for the past two days in the wake of the same weather system that triggered flooding across the border in NSW. There was little rain yesterday, but more falls are forecast for this weekend. Despite the copious flow of water, the Gold Coast, like the rest of southeast Queensland, is still on level six water restrictions, which only allow watering of gardens with a bucket on alternate days between 4pm and 7pm. Mr Clarke has called for the state Government to put the Gold Coast on level three restrictions. He said yesterday that while the possibility of rising floodwaters damaging low-lying parts of the coast such as the canal estates was "remote", it had to be taken seriously. But he said he saw little need for tight restriction on the coast. "It just seems a bit silly at the moment," he said. "Everyone's been tightening their belt and cutting back on the water they use in a very responsible way, but at the moment there's water all around us. "I don't think it would be too much to allow Gold Coasters to water their gardens or let us have showers at the beach." Hinze Dam was at about 60 per cent capacity last week but nearly 400mm of rain on the weekend pushed it to more than 100 per cent two days ago and it has stayed that way since. Mr Clarke said there was some concern that the rain predicted for the weekend could lead to floods in parts of the Gold Coast. The region has its own water supply separate from Brisbane and the rest of southeast Queensland, but that will change in March, when a pipeline connecting the Gold Coast with the rest of the grid is due to be finished. "I support the water grid and letting water from the Hinze Dam flow to outside the coast, but after we're linked in we won't be able to have a separate water regime," he said. "This is the last chance that we can have to be separate, so I don't see why we can't do it. "There's already other places like Noosa which have separate water restrictions because they're not yet connected, so why shouldn't we? "You could even put a time frame of just this month on it." Gold Coast resident Pauline English said level six restrictions were ridiculous. "It hasn't stopped raining for the past two weeks. The one thing we don't need here is restrictions on water," she said. But Acting Premier Paul Lucas said: "Very soon the Gold Coast will be part of the grid, and it's just not good policy to have people see-sawing backwards and forwards from one to the other. The water that you use in terms of water restrictions is minuscule. "If you've got to reduce the level of a dam really quickly, telling people to turn on taps in their kitchen is not something that deals with an immediate safety issue with a dam." Mr Lucas also said that if the Gold Coast Council was concerned about possible floods, it had the power to let more water from the Hinze Dam go in the next few days before the rains struck again. Mr Clarke said council engineers always had that option, and that might happen. "But if it does, then there's just going to be more water going over the dam and straight down the river into the sea. At a time when you can't have a shower when you get out of the surf because of water restrictions, it seems a bit silly."

10th

FarmOnLine

La Nina starts to ease the big drought

An established La Nina event contributed to above average December rainfall across much of the country, especially in the east, which eased short-term rainfall deficiencies in many areas. While some deficiencies still remain, especially in South Australia and Western Australia, these are not as extensive or severe as they were at the end of November. Short-term deficiencies have eased in eastern Australia, excluding Tasmania, but long-term deficiencies remain, especially in Tasmania, southeast Queensland, the southwest coast of WA and central Victoria into southern NSW. The worst of the long-term deficiencies are likely to remain for some time, for example, above average (decile 8-9) rainfall is needed in the rainfall deficient areas over the next 12 months to elevate totals since January 2006 out of the lowest decile. Furthermore, the combination of heat and drought during the past 5 to 10 years over the Murray Darling Basin and southeastern Australia is outside the typical range of variability experienced during the previous 100 years.

SOURCE: Bureau of Meteorology

Stay out of toxic floodwaters, warns SES

Residents have been warned to stay out of toxic floodwaters that have ravaged thousands of homes and businesses in northern NSW. Dead animals and other poisonous materials are languishing in the deluge that has overtaken towns and farmland from Tweed Heads down to Thora, west of Coffs Harbour. The storms hammered the areas last week, causing rivers to swamp Tweed, Kyogle, Lismore and Richmond Valley local government areas, trapping about 3000 residents and visitors. A Disaster Recovery Centre will open at Kyogle to provide flood victims with information, financial assistance and referral services with other community agencies. Located at 57a Summerland Way, it will remain open on weekdays from 9am to 5pm (AEDT) and during those hours for this weekend only. Residents can also ring 1800 018 444 for assistance. Engineers from the local councils attended a meeting and confirmed sewage treatment plants were not in jeopardy from the floods, the

State Emergency Service (SES) said. But debris in the water has made it off limits to anybody wading through it to access their homes or for outdoor recreational purposes. "There's a lot of dead cows and other dead animals floating in the waters," SES spokesman, Phil Campbell, told AAP. "But the sewage treatment plants are working and drinking water is not affected." About half of the 1000 people stranded at a four-day all-ages music festival near Tenterfield were allowed to leave on Tuesday via the only access road that was washed out during the floods. Mr. Campbell said the remaining people, who came by four-wheel drive and bus, will endure the slow departure on Wednesday at first light. The 1500 residents of Coraki may regain access to the outside world after being isolated since the weekend. Emergency and high-clearance vehicles entered the area on Wednesday with essential supplies. Receding floodwaters may allow residents access, pending road assessments by engineers. Another 500 rural properties were isolated by floodwaters in the region but that number is expected to be reduced to 200 by Friday, Mr. Campbell said. The remaining, low-lying properties may remain isolated for up to a week. Freight rail services were restored to the region and passenger services will resume on Wednesday, the Australian Rail Track Corporation said. The Insurance Council of Australia said the damage bill would be clearer by the end of the week but estimates have indicated the total is in the high tens of millions of dollars. The Bureau of Meteorology has forecast isolated showers for the north coast and northern rivers region until Saturday but the SES does not expect higher flood levels. SOURCE: AAP

Kekovich's Australia Day "message" to cause stir

Sam Kekovich - Meat and Livestock Australia's lamb ambassador - takes a swipe at NZ Prime Minister, Helen Clark, in this year's advertisement to persuade Aussies to celebrate with lamb on Australia Day. The irreverent Kekovich - whose Australia Day television advertisements are now eagerly anticipated each January - says Ms Clark does a "passable impersonation of a bloke" in this year's commercial during which he argues that Australia Day should be abolished and replaced with Australia Week. In his 2008 "address to the nation" Kekovich says Australia Week would give people more time to eat lamb. "It is my solemn duty to inform you that it's time to abolish Australia Day. Our annual lamb fest hasn't stopped unAustralianism racing through the land like horse flu through a Japanese jockey club," Kekovich says. "Even APEC gets a week and that's just a bunch of blokes in funny shirts - apart from Helen Clark who does a passable impersonation of a bloke anyway," the former footballer says in the advertisement. "Australia Day has had its day. We need Australia Week - a seven-day lamb-a-thon to properly celebrate our great nation. Instead of one public holiday we need seven. Instead of one lamb barbie, we need 21 lamb meal opportunities - not including snacks." His 90 second address to the nation will be televised in all State capital cities on January 13 soon after 6pm and will continue to be televised until January 26 January and will be supported by online advertising and in-store promotions. His Australia Day campaigns have been hugely popular since he first appeared on our screens to fight "un-Australianism" in January, 2005.

News.com - Push for full ban on plastic bags

Plastic shopping bags may be banned from Australia by the end of the year, under plans being considered by Environment Minister Peter Garrett. The federal government is looking to either impose a levy on each bag, or ban the bags outright, a newspaper report claims. A spokesman for Mr Garrett said he would move to phase out the bags by the end of the year, after consulting with state governments in March. Australia uses about four billion plastic bags a year, with most ending up in landfill. The proposal has been lauded by environmentalists, but major supermarkets are against a ban. "It's just a simplification to contemplate banning plastic bags just because people see them floating in the water," Australian Retailers Association executive director Richard Evans said. A system of voluntary compliance would work better, according to Mr Evans.

China already moves to ban bags

The Chinese Government has announced a nationwide ban on stores distributing free plastic bags from June 1. As it inexorably overtakes the US as the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, China is fighting environmental battles on myriad fronts, the flipside of its soaring economic growth. The Government will ban the production of ultra-thin bags less than 0.025mm thick, and require supermarkets to start charging for any plastic bags they provide. It said in its announcement: "Our country consumes huge amounts of plastic bags every year. While providing convenience to consumers, they have also caused serious pollution, and waste of energy and resources because of excessive use and inadequate recycling. "We should encourage people to return to using cloth bags, using baskets for their vegetables." Much of China's countryside is shrouded in wind-blown plastic bags, which take 1000 years to biodegrade. Nationally, the 1.3billion population uses about 3 billion bags a day, and Beijing alone discards about 2.3 billion bags a year. The production of the bags consumes annually about 5 million tonnes (37 million barrels) of costly imported oil. The bustling new city of Shenzhen, near Hong Kong, was China's bag-banning pioneer, introducing a similar ban on free bags last November, with fines of up to \$8000 for stores that continued to dole them out free. The city of Panyu, not far from Shenzhen, derives much of its income from recycling plastic bags.

Many of them then find their way on to China's formidable export conveyor belt. The country's 500 specialist producers export about \$65 million worth of plastic bags every month, with sales surging by 31.4 per cent in the first 10 months of last year, against the same period in 2006.

Poorer Asian neighbours Bhutan and Bangladesh took a similar step earlier, and Taiwan banned free bags five years ago.

Adelaide Advertiser - Coorong is dying – Cara Jenkin

South Australia's most precious natural asset, the Coorong, has been reduced to a trickle, with fish and birds rapidly disappearing. The condition of the Coorong has reached a new low as a lack of freshwater flowing into the estuary has led to the 140km stretch drying up. Adelaide University School of Earth and Environmental Sciences Associate Professor David Paton said the internationally recognised ecosystem was in the worst condition he had seen. Professor Paton will lead an expedition to the Coorong this month with conservation group Earthwatch. He said information gathered in the past week in the south lagoon had been devastating. Pelicans had recently flocked to the Coorong because it was one of the last sources of water in SA, but Professor Paton said numbers of other bird species had significantly dropped compared with last summer. "We found no fish in the south lagoon at all this year and that's the first time that's happened," he said. "The quality of the ruppia (water grasses) is the lowest it's ever been. "The water levels are the lowest we've ever seen – there's a sand bar just south of Salt Creek which goes right across the Coorong." Professor Paton said the group would investigate northern parts of the Coorong in the next week and he did not expect a better situation. He said years of low flows and drought had caused the dire situation. He criticised governments for not providing environmental flows when it had the water. "This is a good measure of politicians being depreciative of scientists pleas for environmental flows, we've been asking for a decade, but are put off and put off and put off," he said. "(The Coorong) can't do it five, six, seven years in a row without flows." River Murray Minister Karlene Maywald said the Coorong had been deprived of water from natural floods for at least 10 years as water had been over-allocated across the system. She said water in the Murray-Darling Basin must be managed by one overseeing body so that areas at the end of the Murray River receive what they need.

Green can mean job gold

The big job of saving the planet is creating an employment bonanza. Careers in carbon-trading programs, water and environment management schemes and green energy development are just the start of the green jobs boom. Adelaide-based Carbon Planet is staging a nationwide and overseas recruitment campaign for about 60 engineers, scientists, corporate sales consultants and account managers to help develop its advisory and product range of pollution solutions. "All they need is a passion to change the world," founder and executive director Dave Sag said. The eight-year-old company aims to increase employer numbers sixfold to around 300 by the end of the year. In the past year, it has taken the equivalent of 150,000 cars off the road for 12 months by selling 750,000 million tonnes of carbon credits. In SA, scarce water resources are creating jobs in groundwater and waste-water management, particularly in local government. Salisbury Council is a leader in collecting, cleaning and recycling water through 53 wetland areas. Melissa Allery and Letitia Dahl-Helm work for the environmental education program Waterwatch, funded by the Adelaide and Mount Lofty Natural Resources Management Board. Ms Dahl-Helm said it was a very positive program. "Everyone likes to be involved with it and you get to spend a lot of time outdoors," she said, sampling for water bugs.

The Australian - Expert warns of 'rogue' black holes

Hundreds of hungry black holes may be lurking in our Milky Way galaxy, waiting to gobble unsuspecting planets and stars that cross their paths. These "rogue" black holes would each weigh several thousand times the mass of the sun which itself tips the scale at a whopping 10 to the power of 30 kilograms, or 10 followed by 30 zeros. The warning comes from astronomer Kelly Holley-Bockelmann of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, and her colleagues at Pennsylvania State University and the University of Michigan. Worse, after crunching the numbers they concluded that such matter-consuming objects would be very difficult to spot. That's so, in part, as all black holes are regions in space with such powerful gravitational fields that nothing can escape, not even light. But while most black holes remain at the centre of galaxies or inside globular clusters - collections of up to a million stars orbiting a galaxy - rogue black holes are "kicked" into space at velocities as high as 4000 kilometres per second when more sedate black holes merge. "Unless it's swallowing a lot of gas, about the only way to detect the approach of such a black hole would be to observe the way in which its super-strength gravitational field bends the light that passes nearby," Professor Holley-Bockelmann said yesterday from the American Astronomical Society annual meeting in Austin, Texas. "This produces an effect called gravitational lensing that would make background stars appear to shift and brighten momentarily," she said. In Sydney, astronomer Ron Ekers said Professor Holley-Bockelmann's notion of "rogue" black holes was intriguing, though highly speculative. "But she's very open about it in the paper," he said of the group's upcoming publication in the *Astrophysical Journal*. Professor Ekers - a Federation Fellow with the CSIRO's

Australia Telescope National Facility in Sydney - said his major quibble was that the US astronomers based their conclusion on supercomputer simulations of "intermediate mass" black holes whose own existence is controversial. There is good evidence that small black holes less than 100 solar masses are produced when giant stars explode, said Professor Ekers. There is also evidence for the existence of super-massive black holes, weighing about 10 million solar masses. But as the US team acknowledged, the existence of a third class of black holes is based on "observational hints" only. The good news about the bad news of rogue black holes is that if they really are lurking in the Milky Way galaxy they don't pose an immediate threat to planet Earth. "These rogue black holes are extremely unlikely to do any damage to us in the lifetime of the universe," claimed Professor Holley-Bockelmann. "Their danger zone ... is really tiny, only a few hundred kilometres. There are far more dangerous things in our neighbourhood."

News.com - Warming to disrupt Outback

Global warming will bring exotic infections, extreme and unpredictable weather and severe crop disruptions to the Australian Outback, a report warns. A paper published today has predicted an increase in severe weather events including droughts, heatwaves, landslides, flooding and cyclones, as minimum temperatures rise. Climate change will disrupt agriculture and food production, as well as increasing transmission of mosquito-transmitted diseases and food poisoning, according to research by University of Adelaide and Charles Sturt University. Writing in the Australian Journal of Rural Health, public health specialist Peng Bi said global warming would heavily affect already disadvantaged Australians. "Studying the effect from climate change in Australian rural and remote regions is extremely important because of the residents' inequality access to health care system there," Dr Peng wrote. "Moreover, most of indigenous Australians live in remote regions, and they could be more vulnerable as a result of global warming." Daily minimum temperatures are rising slowly in Australia, with all climatic models showing a nationwide trend towards warming. A simulation by the CSIRO predicts wetter conditions in central Australia and the Top End, but drier conditions elsewhere. Other research from the Max Planck Institute for Meteorology in Hamburg shows wetter conditions north of a diagonal line from Broome to Hobart, and much drier conditions in the west. "Australian society, especially rural regions, is becoming more vulnerable to natural disasters, at least in terms of economic costs, and these disasters are primarily climate-related," Dr Peng wrote. He said the extreme weather would lead to "loss of farmland, scarcity of fresh water for irrigation, soil erosion, diminishing fertiliser response, problems associated with pests and the emergence of new types and combinations of food parasites, declining genetic diversity of crops, yield losses and damaging heat stress to temperate crops and livestock". "These changes will flow on to Australian economic development, and therefore have a significant impact on population health as well," he wrote. Health effects of climate change included changes in the distribution of mosquito-borne diseases like Ross River virus and increases in food poisoning like salmonella, Dr Peng said.

11th

Academics and organic farmers back Burke's drought review

Academics and organic farmers have lined up in support of Agriculture Minister Tony Burke's planned review of the drought assistance policy. Dean of the Faculty of Science at Charles Sturt University, Professor Nick Klomp, says the review is appropriate in the face of climate change. Prof Klomp thinks it is time for a review because the last comprehensive review was in the early 1990s, when climate change was not an issue, and less, not more, government support to farmers was envisaged. "Since the 1992 Hawke government review, both State and Federal governments have introduced a series of ad hoc, largely uncoordinated drought-relief packages," he said. "The drought support measures should truly be for unforeseen adverse circumstances. "The support needs to be for farms that are viable long-term, but which are harshly affected by drought in the short-term. "The support should not be a subsidy for poor management." Prof Klomp says any review of the drought-relief scheme needs to consider more recent developments such as greater international competition, higher fuel prices, tougher environmental expectations, and the possibility of a permanently altered climate. Professor Kevin Parton, at CSU's Orange campus, said the evolving and dynamic nature of sources of potential farm income should be considered by the policy review. "Newly emerging markets – for example, for water, and carbon trading – could reduce the need for future drought assistance, as water and other farm resources are transferred to more efficient farms," he said. And organic farmers have also backed the review, welcoming comments by Mr. Burke that farmers could be rewarded for protective land stewardship. The Biological Farmers of Australia says organic farmers already practice many of the environmentally sustainable techniques which Mr. Burke mentioned as being able to improve the viability of marginal land. SOURCE: *FarmOnline*.

Acid sulfate soils hit the lower Murray in SA

Acid sulfate soils are the latest concern for the River Murray and Lower Lakes in South Australia, as they pose a threat to the ecology of the waterway as well as humans. With many people using the river and lakes for recreation, users are being warned of the danger these soils pose to the public.

SA Department for Environment and Heritage spokesperson, Russell Seaman, says acid sulfate soil is something that has rarely been seen in fresh water areas, but is fairly common in coastal areas. Mr. Seaman said Murraylands areas are at threat, particularly wetlands that have been dry for some time such as Swanport wetland, and dairy flats could also be at risk. "Acid sulfate soils have already been identified in some areas below Lock 1, and other areas are at risk of developing these soils," he said. Under current drought conditions, water levels in some areas had dropped to the lowest levels seen since the completion of the barrages, locks and weirs in 1940. The soil generally has a strong odour, and is often a wet grey mud, which can have mottled yellow layers in the soil. "If detected and managed appropriately, acid sulfate soils do not pose any major risk," he said. "However, if disturbed and left unmanaged, these soils can pose risks to humans, the environment, stock and development." He said people who found acid sulfate soil on their property should not disturb it and consider management and treatment options, including contacting the council. The Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity said the reason for acid sulfate soils developing is because large amounts of sulfate in the surface or groundwater combine with a lot of decaying organic matter. When water levels drop and these accumulated sulfide minerals are exposed to air, sulfuric acid is formed. SOURCE: *Murray Valley Standard*.

Irrigation limitations lifted for Qld's O'Connell River

Irrigators in Queensland's O'Connell River area north of Mackay can breathe a sigh of relief after current water pumping limitations were lifted this week. State Natural Resources and Water Minister, Craig Wallace, says good rainfall in the area during late December has enabled his Department to withdraw current limitations being imposed on irrigators who take water from the O'Connell River and tributaries including the Andromache River and its tributaries. "From 1 November 2007, the 71 irrigators in the area were limited to pumping water for irrigation between 5pm and 6am seven nights a week," he said. "Now that there has been good rain in the area, those limitations are being lifted from 9 January 2008, so that irrigators can take water at any time in accordance with the conditions of their licence." There are no other surface water irrigation limitations imposed in the Mackay region.

Salinity program slammed in WA

Western Australian farmer, Lex Stone, has called for the formation of a Wheatbelt-based Salinity Council to focus on issues associated with dryland salinity. Mr. Stone says it is time farmers and the WA Government work together on the biggest environmental problem facing WA. "It makes sense to have a Wheatbelt Salinity Council to cover plant base engineering and future systems, while controlling 50pc of Australia's salinity funding," Mr. Stone said. Half the people working on the nation's salinity problem should be moved to where half of the nation's salinity exists, he said. Salinity was not on the coast nor in Northam where the "so-called experts" lived. "With empty farmhouses in the Wheatbelt, each sub-catchments could have a manager that lives and works in the catchment," Mr. Stone said. "If they don't want to relocate to where the problem lies, cull them. "There are enough ex-farmers, retired farmers, young farmers, rural-based university students, landcare officers and unemployed who wouldn't have to relocate and have a real passion when it comes to salinity." Mr. Stone said 98pc of salinity was on the valley floor and therefore 98pc of funding should be invested there. "This is clearly not happening as salinity is not on the hills in the Avon Catchment, but that is where the money was being spent," he said. SOURCE: Extract from *Farm Weekly*, WA, January 10 issue.

Water in Storage

| MDBC Storages | Full Supply Level (m AHD) | Full Supply Volume (GL) | Current Storage Level (m AHD) | Current Storage | | Dead Storage (GL) | MDBC Active Storage (GL) | Change in Storage for the week (GL) |
|---------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| | | | | (GL) | % | | | |
| Dartmouth Reservoir | 486.00 | 3 906 | 410.71 | 676 | 17% | 80 | 596 | +2 |
| Hume Reservoir | 192.00 | 3 038 | 175.01 | 645 | 21% | 30 | 615 | -49 |
| Lake Victoria | 27.00 | 677 | 23.91 | 335 | 50% | 100 | 235 | -19 |
| Menindee Lakes | | 1 731 * | | 73 | 4% | (- -) # | 0 | +34 |
| Total | | 9 352 | | 1 728 | 18% | -- | 1 446 | -32 |

* Menindee surcharge capacity 2050 GL

% of Total Active MDBC Storage = 17%

NSW takes control of Menindee Lakes when storage falls below 480 GL, and

control reverts to MDBC when storage next reaches 640 GL

Monday 7th January - WATER RELEASES FROM MENINDEE LAKES TO RE-START TODAY

Releases downstream from Menindee Lakes will commence today for the first time in months, helping to replenish the Lower-Darling in far Western NSW.

"The drought has been particularly severe in this part of the State and we've had to stop downstream water release from the Menindee Lakes on a number of occasions in order to prevent the Lakes from drying up," said Department of Water and Energy Acting Deputy Director-General Rob O'Neill.

“The first time the water release gates were closed was in October last year, however good pre-Christmas rainfall in the upper Barwon-Darling catchment has generated enough water to secure Broken Hill’s water supply for at least 18 months, provide a 100 per cent allocation to high security and stock and domestic users, and increase the water stored in Menindee Lakes.

“This means we have enough water to re-start releases downstream of the Lakes, which will greatly benefit the community and environment along this stretch of the River.

Mr. O’Neil said that an initial release of 500 megalitres of water would occur today, with this volume increased over the coming days until the maximum release rate of 5,000 megalitres per day is reached.

“This rate will be maintained for four days and then reduced over 10 days to the minimum rate required to maintain flows over Burtundy Weir.

“Under this release pattern, approximately 55 gigalitres of water will be released from the Menindee Lakes by the end of January and approximately 70 gigalitres by the end of March.

“The flow peak in the Barwon-Darling is now near Brewarrina and whilst we expect flows into the Lakes to continue for the next six weeks, these downstream releases can only be maintained until March, unless there is further rain in the catchment.

Mr. O’Neill said that details of the management flows within the Menindee Lakes system will only be provided when inflows can be estimated more accurately, but that high priority is to flood the wetlands in the Lake Wetherall as soon as possible.

Wednesday 9th January - River Murray levels in South Australia

Increased irrigation and losses from evaporation during recent very hot weather have caused water levels to drop in some River Murray weir pools in South Australia. The reach between Lock 2 and Lock 3 had been most severely affected with the weir pool falling up to 10 cm from normal pool level and whilst this fall is well within normal operating limits, the reduced level may cause some irrigators some concern, particularly if wind conditions further reduce the level in certain areas.

The recent impact of increased irrigation and evaporation on the weir pool levels was greater than expected, and the flow into SA has been increased from 3,800 ML/Day to recover the pool levels.

In addition, the flows at each of the weirs have been adjusted in a bid to raise the Lock 2 weir pool as a priority. It is anticipated that all weir pool levels from Lock 1 upstream will return to normal pool level by the end of this week. **(Please note above Lock 1)**

Because of the lag between when flows to the State are adjusted and the impact of these changes on downstream weir pools, there will be times when weir pool levels fluctuate within reasonably small limits.

The river within SA is currently being managed very carefully to conserve water and to ensure there is sufficient water available to maintain weir pool levels throughout the summer.

Under continuing drought conditions, river levels below Lock 1 are expected to continue to fall over the coming months. Lower Lake levels are currently at about -0.1m AHD, or 10cm below sea levels.

NEWS.com.au

Is the drought finally over?

Cyclones off Queensland and a string of lows off the east coast have convinced scientists that Australia at last has a La Nina weather system in place. It should dominate weather patterns until autumn and, hopefully, bring drought-breaking rain. University of Southern Queensland climatology expert Roger Stone said it was the best La Nina conditions Australia had recorded in just on a decade. "We've had La Nina conditions before but they've been weak events. This one is a classic," Professor Stone said. "We should get at least another three months or more of these conditions." He said La Ninas were characterised by warmer than normal water in the Coral Sea and Gulf of Carpentaria and colder conditions in the central Pacific and equatorial regions. It is the opposite of the drought-bringing El Nino pattern. "The bottom line is you've got to get heaps of rain out of weather patterns like this," Professor Stone said. "Drought will inevitably come back so these patterns have to earn their keep. "If we don't get rain in these types of years, we're stuffed."

Development a drought buster

A \$170 million business park to be built in Adelaide will use a "black water" treatment plant and hi-tech design which developers say will slash mains water consumption by 90 per cent a year. The development is being marketed as the first "water-neutral" business precinct in the nation. The Worldpark:01 project – a green business concept being tested in Adelaide – will be finished by the middle of 2009. A key feature of the development, on Richmond Rd, Keswick, is SA's first on-site black water treatment plant. Black water – waste water contaminated with human waste – will be treated to Class A standards using state-of-the-art technologies. Developer Axiom Properties state manager Paul Rouvray said black water and grey water treatment plants, rainwater and stormwater collection, waterless urinals and low-flow fixtures and fittings will ensure "not a drop" of water is wasted.

"The development will be 100 per cent water neutral, with no demand on mains water supply," Mr Rouvray said. He said on-site production of Class A water will be exported from the site and made available to the community. "This export of water will offset water sourced from the mains, creating a net water balance of zero," he said. The concept has been welcomed by Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald, who yesterday applauded the development for its innovative water-saving design. "This type of development helps reduce demand on our water resources, which is particularly important with the unknown quantity that is climate change," she said. "South Australia is a leader in water use efficiency since we are the driest state in the driest continent, so it is fitting that the nation's first water-neutral development is in Adelaide." The precinct will incorporate three office buildings, yet use just 7500 litres of water a day. A conventional building uses more than 77,000 litres. Colliers International office leasing director Nick Shinnick said preliminary negotiations were underway with government and private organisations to move into the precinct.

Adelaidenow.com - 'Bore War' looms

Residents in some of Adelaide's most affluent suburbs are sinking record numbers of backyard bores to dodge water restrictions. The trend has experts predicting "water wars" between the rich and poor and comes as Adelaide registered 500 well permits last year – four times more than the previous year. Professor Mike Young, from the Wentworth Group of Scientists, says State Government policy allowing unlimited access to bore water, amid the toughest restrictions on record, is unfair. "We're in a situation where the very affluent can escape regulation, but the regular mums and dads of Adelaide are being denied the opportunity to buy their way out of water restrictions," said Professor Young, who is also Adelaide University's research chair of water economics and management. "It draws a clear line between those who are affluent and those who are needy. It's actually creating water wars in Adelaide when it's unnecessary." Latest figures reveal that many of the top 10 suburbs to sink bores are high-income areas, including Unley Park, St Peters, Toorak Gardens and Malvern. Unley Park, in which 35 well permits were issued in the 14 months to November, has a median weekly household income of \$1637. Suburbs such as Findon and Gepps Cross, which have median weekly household incomes of around \$700, secured only one permit each. Last month, the Government announced a temporary ban on new backyard bores to stem the explosion in numbers which is ravaging underground water supplies. At the time, Environment Minister Gail Gago said restricting the water those households with bores could extract from the aquifer was not necessary, as there were no signs of abuse. Professor Young says a fair scheme requires the regulation of bore water and the introduction of a water-trading scheme. "I think it's time for the Government to be introducing a pricing regime that enables more people to be able to access this water rather than the very, very affluent," he said. "We really need a market in Adelaide which enables people, who decide willingly to go without water, to sell it to those willing to pay for it, then all people benefit." Some of the suburbs featuring in the top 10 which might be considered more mortgage belt – North Haven, Largs North and Largs Bay on the LeFevre Peninsula – have access to shallow groundwater. Grant Phillips, of Town and Country Drilling Services, who has a backlog of around 200 bores to drill, agrees the most popular areas he works in are affluent suburbs. "Most of the people are well off and they'd be sorry to see their gardens die for the sake of the drought and Government policy," Mr Phillips said. "They've got the money to afford to take matters into their hands – to take control of the situation themselves." While bores can cost up to \$20,000, drillers can hit water in Unley Park at about 20m. That costs around \$6000. Uniting Care Wesley spokesman Mark Henley also called for the regulation of bore water. "It's essential that we have fairness in water so that we don't have the water rich and the water poor," he said. "The notion of unlimited access to bores is not fair, it's not reasonable and it's inequitable." The Government, however, remains firm on its policy to allow unlimited access to water from bores. Acting Environment Minister Jay Weatherill said in an emailed statement: "The State Government has already imposed a temporary moratorium on the drilling of new domestic bores in Adelaide to ensure that groundwater levels in the shallow aquifer don't deplete significantly during the current drought. "This will be reviewed next spring before anticipated summer demand but there are no plans to apply domestic water restrictions." He ruled out a water trading scheme for Adelaide saying the bureaucracy and administration would be cost prohibitive.

12th

The Daily Telegraph - Sydney's toxic beaches

Dangerous levels of raw sewage have been found at more than half of Sydney's beaches over the past 12 months - putting swimmers at risk of disease. An alarming 58 of 100 sites tested for two dangerous bacteria found in sewage failed safe-swimming standards for at least one month in 2007. This was despite a NSW Department of Environment spokesman saying it was the second cleanest year for Sydney's beaches since records began in the 1980s. The cleanest was in 2006. Some of Sydney's most popular locations reached potentially hazardous levels of bacteria for four or five months of last year. The swimming areas with the highest detection rates for the disease-causing pathogens were netted enclosures in Middle Harbour and Botany Bay. Darling Harbour, which hosts water sports, was the most polluted site across the city, failing the standards during seven months in 2007.

Malabar in the southeast also failed enterococci guidelines for five months last year. NSW Government Beachwatch field officers test for bacteria at each swimming spot every six days. Faecal coliforms and enterococci - both found in faeces - indicate the presence of sewage, which is likely to carry disease-causing pathogens. The bacteria can cause gastroenteritis, skin, eye and ear irritations and infections. June 2007 was particularly bad for water pollution. The storms that lashed the Hunter region also overloaded Sydney's vast underground sewerage network. When the system reaches capacity, raw sewage is diverted to stormwater pipes and ends up in the ocean. Almost half - 47 - of the 100 beaches tested in June showed unsafe concentrations of one or both bacteria. November, which had record rainfall, was also a bad month. A total of 22 beaches failed one or both tests. Mother of three Elaine Sweet, who was at Malabar yesterday with her children, said people should be told when bacteria reached dangerous levels. "They should close the beach when there is a danger," Ms Sweet said. Despite the figures, the NSW Department of Environment (DECC) said massive improvements had been made to water quality, with last year being the second cleanest year on record. In the last decade, ocean beaches had gone from complying with swimming safety standards less than half of the time to more than three quarters of the time, a DECC spokesman said. He said the Northside Storage Tunnel, which redirects waste water overflows to the North Head Sewage Treatment Plant, had slashed by 87 per cent the amount of contaminants in the Harbour. The Northern Beaches were the cleanest in 2007. Palm, Whale, Avalon, Bilgola, Newport, Mona Vale, and Dee Why beaches all passed both water safety tests. Popular Eastern Suburbs like Bondi and Coogee were relatively safe. At both sites enterococci levels were deemed too high for safety in just one month of 2007.

Adelaidenow.com - Desal plant open by 2011

Adelaide's planned desalination plant now is expected to be operational by the end of 2011. A tender for the \$1.1 billion desalination plant at Port Stanvac shows the first delivery of water is expected for December that year. The State Government previously said the project would be completed in 2012. Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith said he was "perplexed" the project could not be completed sooner. He spoke to *The Advertiser* yesterday from the United Arab Emirates where he is inspecting desalination plants. He said such projects there were being completed faster than in SA. "I have just inspected a plant in Abu Dhabi built by Arabian Power and was briefed on another development, called the Al Fujairah Number 2 plant," he said. "It's five times the size of Adelaide's and features co-generation technology and wastewater re-use projects alongside desalination. "They started work on the idea after we did and will finish it more than a year before we do. "I'm perplexed as to why it is going to take us so long to build a small plant in Adelaide." The SA tender shows the project will receive financial approval early next year. The contractor will be selected in June, 2009. Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald said the State Government already was fast tracking the desalination plant. "Desalination plants are incredibly site specific so it is not surprising the Fujairah 2 plant could take less time than building a plant in Adelaide," she said. "There are many environmental, engineering and planning factors which impact how long it takes to build a desalination plant. "We are starting from scratch in determining environmental impacts, engineering and planning approvals and acquiring the necessary infrastructure."

The Australian - River of death where water turns into acid News.com - Murray River water becoming like battery acid

Stretches of the Murray River are turning into the corrosive equivalent of battery acid, in further evidence the devastating drought is causing more harm to the nation's iconic watercourse. Scientists are warning that acid sulphate soils are turning river banks and billabongs into death traps for fish and birds and hazards for humans. It is impossible for animals to survive NSW's Bottle Bend lagoon, which now has a pH -- or acidity -- level dropping as low as 1.8 -- equivalent to the sulphuric acid found in car batteries. And it is corrosive to the touch. The waterway is just one of dozens of sites throughout South Australia, NSW and Victoria which falling water levels have turned into aquatic graveyards. Paula D'Santos, project officer for the NSW Murray Wetlands Working Group, says the alarm was raised at Bottle Bend, upstream from Mildura, when the lagoon's pH fell from a healthy seven to a deadly three after it became cut off from the river's main flow. Fish died in their thousands, the banks were lined with toxic aluminium and manganese salts and the gnarled red gums on its banks began to die. "It is like a scene from the apocalypse. It's just incredible," Ms D'Santos says. University of Adelaide, CSIRO and Wentworth Group scientist Mike Young sees it as a final warning to revive the Murray before it is too late. "Bottle Bend's nightmare is the first sign we are now changing the River Murray system irrevocably ... "Irrigators and environmentalists both need to be alarmed. This is the time to radically change the way we manage the River Murray system from top to bottom." NSW's Tareena Billabong -- where acid-sulphate soils have also been found -- recently suffered a fish kill that left nine tonnes of fish rotting in the mud. The acid-sulphate problem -- caused by nutrient-rich submerged banks being exposed to air for the first time in decades -- is already rivalling salinity, overextraction and blue-green algae as threats to the river. Senior CSIRO scientist Rob Fitzpatrick, who is leading a team looking at acid-sulphate soils, says the problem has been found in large

stretches of the river in South Australia around Renmark, Blanchetown and Murray Bridge, as well as in lakes Albert and Alexandrina, near the mouth. Dr Fitzpatrick says the conditions exist for acid-sulphate soils to form right along the river, but it is occurring mainly in areas that had been inundated for decades but are now slowly drying out. The sulphuric acid is produced when naturally occurring iron pyrite in the river bank -- a by-product of decaying organic matter -- reacts with oxygen. The problem can be prevented by raising the water level to inundate banks. The acidity can be absorbed and counteracted by the slightly basic river water, but toxic metallic salts created during the process are also washed into the main stream. Raising the water level in South Australia also creates a catch-22. "You might save the river, but then the lakes, which are a much bigger area, might be affected," Dr Fitzpatrick says.

Researchers bag plastic plan

The Rudd Government's plan to phase out plastic bags this year defies independent research that has warned a ban will be four times more expensive than the environmental harm caused. Environment Minister Peter Garrett has said he will pursue a phase-out of plastic shopping bags from supermarkets by the end of the year, imposing a ban if considered necessary. Mr Garrett's decision comes before he receives advice from a working group established by environment ministers last year on reviewing options to reduce plastic bag litter. It is due to report in April. It also defies previous warnings by the Productivity Commission that such bans should not proceed unless supported by "transparent cost-benefit analysis", suggesting tougher anti-litter laws and greater community participation as alternatives. Industry was critical of the Government's announcement yesterday, given the lack of detailed technical work to support the move as the best solution to the problem. Packaging Council chief executive Gavin Williams said the publicity surrounding plastic bags far exceeded their environmental impact, as most of the bags were re-used in the home. "Plastic bags are a visible but minor environmental issue which already have received far more attention, time and effort than is warranted," Mr Williams said. "There are far more important environmental issues for us to concentrate on." The plastics and chemicals industry yesterday described the Government's approach as an over-reaction, saying tougher penalties should be enforced against littering. Plastics and Chemical Industry Association chief executive Margaret Donnan said a ban on plastic bags would only disadvantage consumers and businesses while doing nothing to address littering. "Responsible consumers have almost halved their usage of plastic bags in less than two years and many households also re-use the bags they do receive when purchasing groceries and other goods," Ms Donnan said. Major retailers have warned a phase-out affecting only supermarkets will do almost nothing to address the problem of bags littering the streets. Australian National Retailers chief executive Margie Osmond said the body's research showed the main source of plastic bag litter was from small purchases at corner shops. An Allen Consulting Report prepared for the Environment Protection and Heritage Council in 2006 projected that a ban could cost more than \$1 billion over the next 10 years in slower checkouts and retraining, only partially offset by the environmental benefits. A subsequent Access Economics report commissioned by the major retailers last year said bans on the use of plastic bags rather than strategies to reduce littering were unlikely to be effective and would just add costs to consumers.

Curbs continue as dam spills over

The Gold Coast City Council is still enforcing level-six water restrictions, despite the call from Mayor Ron Clarke to relax the restrictions because the city's dam is overflowing. While the Gold Coast Council is responsible for policing water use, the restrictions are set by the Queensland Water Commission. Water continued to flow over the Hinze Dam yesterday following a 400mm downpour over the weekend. Mr Clarke said he thought it was "a bit silly" to be still cracking down on Gold Coast residents when there was "water all around us". Level-six restrictions allow residents to water their gardens only with a bucket on alternate days and only between the hours of 4pm and 7pm. Mr Clarke called for restrictions to be eased to level three. Acting Premier Paul Lucas has refused to budge on water restrictions, saying: "It's just not good policy to have people see-sawing backwards and forwards from one to the other."

Murray hits record low – Cara Jenkin

The water level of the River Murray has dropped below sea level at Murray Bridge – the first time such a low has been recorded during the drought. SA Water figures show the level at its Murray Bridge station fell 14cm over the weekend and was 11cm below sea level yesterday. On Monday, the level was 9cm below sea level before recovering slightly to be 5cm above sea level on Tuesday. Strong winds on Monday, combined with evaporation and the lack of water being released over Lock 1 at Blanchetown to replenish downstream levels, caused the record low level. Murray Bridge Rowing Club member Mike Brown said rowers no longer could launch their boats from the wharf because of the low level. "It is as low as I have ever known it," he said. The fall is a sign of the drought's severity but there still is enough water in the river for recreational activities and SA Water pumps still can access the river.

In September, it was predicted water levels below Lock 1 would fall to 50cm below sea level by April because of the lack of flows on the vital river system. The latest report of the Murray Darling Basin Commission shows: MORE algal blooms and higher salt levels have been predicted for SA as the drought continues to impact on river levels. **THE** past two years have been the lowest two-year inflow period for the Murray since records began. **TOTAL** Murray storage is about 550 gegalitres lower than this time last year and the lowest for this time of year since 1940 when storage capacity was only about 20 per cent of current capacity. **CONTINGENCY** planning is under way to ensure there is sufficient water for critical human needs in 2008-09. The two-monthly bulletin on the river also has given dire warnings about further cuts in water entitlements next year if the drought persists.

13th

News.com - Brisbane's dams at 25%

The capacity of Brisbane's three major dams will hit an average 25 per cent tomorrow, with the state's other water storage facilities also boosted by recent rain and the forecast of more to come. Somerset Dam increased 17 per cent since Christmas and was just over half full yesterday. Wivenhoe, the largest dam in southeast Queensland, had the same amount of water as Somerset but is still only 17 per cent full. North Pine Dam had a 2 per cent rise since Christmas and was also at 17 per cent. The Bureau of Meteorology predicted that after a weekend of fine weather, rain would return tomorrow and continue through most of the week. "We will be looking for another wet spell," said bureau forecaster Craig Mitchell. "We anticipate a trough to form well off the coast but as it does so there will be increasing south to southeasterly winds developing, which should bring showers." The fine weather caused problems for lifesavers on both the Gold and Sunshine Coasts yesterday with large crowds at most beaches. Surf Life Saving Queensland spokeswoman Linda Svenson said 36 people were pulled from the surf and four others given first aid for surf-related injuries between Noosa and Rainbow Bay. "It was a very busy day on the beach with a bit of sunshine and more people out than we've seen in a while," Ms Svenson said. "There were a lot of rescues particularly on the Gold Coast's northern beaches." Fourteen people were pulled from rips at Southport and eight rescued at Surfers Paradise. Victorian visitors Jason Goldberg and his children Benji, 5 and Jasmine, 7 were careful to stay within the flags at Surfers Paradise yesterday. With more rain expected this week, the State Government will gain some breathing space to complete infrastructure – including the water pipeline and desalination plant – before next summer. The heavy rain has delivered more than five months' supply of water to the south-east. The Gold Coast's Hinze Dam has been filled, with a 42 per cent surge in just over two weeks. But Gold Coast residents have been turning on their taps, consuming almost 30 million extra litres a day since the dam reached capacity. The state's largest dam, Burdekin Falls, 165km south of Townsville, is also full, a 13 per cent increase in water since December 25. Maroon Dam, near Boonah, went from 18 per cent to half full. The controversial Paradise Dam on the Burnett River, which opened in late 2005, reached 16 per cent capacity. Latest figures from the Queensland Water Commission revealed southeast Queenslanders had remained careful despite the rain. Last week's average daily consumption for residents subject to Level 6 restrictions was 132 litres per person. The commission warned homeowners not to fall into the trap of using more water because it had been raining. "Our dams are the lowest of every major city in Australia, despite the recent rain," a commission spokeswoman said.

'Hot rock' energy

Tasmania could be generating clean, renewable geothermal power within five years, say the leaders of the emerging industry. Companies with geothermal, or hot rock, tenements have stepped up their exploration efforts across vast areas of the state during the past month. Industry experts say geothermal energy has the potential to replace coal as the major energy resource in Australia and Tasmania is of particular interest because of its proximity to transmission infrastructure. "Hot rock" energy is generated by pumping water up to 5km underground and harnessing the earth's heat to run steam-driven turbines. KUTh Energy has the largest geothermal exploration lease in Australia, covering 14,000sqkm from south of Hobart to the mouth of the Tamar River. The company plans to spend \$3 million to \$4 million on exploration over the next three years, including its present drilling program in the Midlands. While general manager Malcolm Ward was cautious about making promises, he said the company aimed to have a power station online within five years. It would cost at least \$35 million to get the pilot power station up and running. "If everything goes well we could have a small five-megawatt generating capacity in three to five years," Mr Ward said. That would provide enough to power a town of 5000 people. However, once a resource is found, more power can be generated simply by drilling new holes and adding more turbines. "We don't know how much power we will ultimately generate but we have an ambition to get to 200 megawatts," Mr Ward said. Geothermal Energy Tasmania general manager Lindsay Newnham said Tasmania had huge potential for geothermal power.

His company, which is a subsidiary of Allegiance Mining, has tenements across the North and West of the state. "I think Tasmania is in a unique position and the whole state has tremendous potential for hot-rock geothermal energy," Mr Newnham said. Geological surveys have shown Tasmania has large areas of hot granite which are essential for heating water to the super-hot temperatures required to generate electricity. The extensive high-voltage network also means power could be distributed from anywhere in the state and sold to the mainland via Basslink. Geothermal power is unique because, unlike other renewables like wind and solar, it is capable of delivering an uninterrupted baseload supply. That means it could play a vital role in supplementing the state's growing energy needs. Last week Transend announced a major upgrade of its distribution network because of increased use of power-hungry air conditioners, plasma TVs and "McMansions". "Tasmania has hydro electricity which is good but Tasmania is growing and there are not going to be any more hydro schemes built, so we have a chance to meet that demand," Mr Ward said.

14th

FarmOnLine

Gippsland, Vic, irrigation allocation lifted to 110pc

The allocation to irrigators in Victoria's Macalister region will rise to 110pc after increased rainfall. The rain events during filling and spilling periods in the Macalister Irrigation District have seen an excellent season to date, with promise of a strong finish. Currently the irrigation system is running at peak demand with 100pc water right available, but the rain has led to Southern Rural Water providing an increase to 10pc seasonal entitlement of water right and licensed volume. SRW water supply manager, Clinton Rodda, said there had been an exceptional start to the irrigation season with local irrigators receiving an additional 46,584 megalitres as spill entitlement between the August 15 and November 20 last year. "While we were only half-way through the irrigation season, delivery efficiencies have also increased from a five-year average of 65 to 74pc," Mr. Rodda said. "This increase can be attributed to higher than normal water deliveries to date and the implementation of channel automation. "Channel automation has enabled us to manage water more efficiently. In the past, more water was lost from the system through outfalls. "With much of our irrigation network built over 80 years ago, these positive improvement programs, and future programs such as the MID 2030 project will ensure a sustainable irrigation network that will meet the needs of irrigators now and well into the future." SRW will continue working with its customers in implementing future improvements and modernisation programs, which are important in assisting irrigators to meet future challenges and to ensure a sustainable irrigation district. Macalister Customer Consultative Committee chairman, Graeme Anderson, said local irrigators displayed great community spirit over the prolonged drought period and recent flood events. "We are all thrilled with the current seasonal conditions and look forward to an exceptional season which will assist irrigators and the local community recover from these events," he said. "If irrigators were planning to not utilise their full entitlement this season they should consider trading it to other irrigators in the district to ensure we fully utilise all our resources." SOURCE: *Gippsland Times*, Vic.

Grower signals lengthy comeback for cotton

It could be 18 months before cotton starts to truly recover, even if summer rainfall persists, according to Moree district grower, Peter Winter. Mr. Winter, who farms with his brother Mark, has just 45 hectares of 289BR planted this season - and this area was planted only because of contract commitments arranged three years ago. Otherwise, he reckons he would be growing more grain. And therein lays the challenge for cotton. "Grain prices are putting pressure on cotton here like they are in the US," he said. "Currently with sorghum at \$300/tonne it is well above prospects for cotton at \$400/bale, and maybe even cotton at \$500/bale. "It's a challenge, because the price has to lift to encourage production." But that's not the end of it. Gwydir irrigators began the season with zero allocations and just bore water supplies. But even with water, Mr. Winter reckons that it may not spell an immediate bounce-back for cotton. "Our bank accounts probably won't allow us to wait around and save all the water for cotton," he said. "We can't wait around until May 2009 for an income, so there will be other crops grown to use the water that could have gone to cotton. "We can't hang back and save all our water for cotton, as the grain price is looking solid, and the cotton price isn't." SOURCE: Extract from *Australian Cotton Outlook*, January 10.

News.com - Lagoon cut off

One of 27 wetlands blocked off from the River Murray to save water, is becoming a salt bowl - concerning conservationists. Ramco lagoon, 7km northwest of Waikerie, has developed a salt crust on its bed as saline water dries on the surface. The lagoon was cut off from the river channel last October to allow it to dry, instead of being constantly recharged with water from the river. This saved 1.7 gigalitres - enough water to supply Adelaide for three days - from being lost through natural evaporation. Ramco Wetland Management group chairwoman Karen Bishop said the drier the wetland, the more degraded it would become.

She said that would make it harder to attract bird life, plants and native fish back to the wetland when flows were restored once the drought breaks. "Ramco is really bad, it's all pretty dim and grim really," she said. "Because it has been abused for so long, it will take a huge effort to restore it to a nice-looking wetland. "In the long run it will make it harder to bring it back to any kind of decent state." Salinity in the main river downstream at Mannum exceeded 800EC this month, the first time during this drought that salt levels have reached such a high concentration. Water with a salinity level of more than 800EC is deemed too salty for human consumption. It can, however, be drawn from the river and used in Adelaide's water supply as it dilutes when mixed with water from reservoirs. Ms Bishop said the groundwater below Ramco lagoon also was saline and, as the water table sits close to the surface, more salt is drawn up to dry on the bed of the lagoon. She said the lagoon had been a disposal basin for excess irrigation water in the region for the past 40 years. That had caused an increase in salt levels in the lagoon itself. Before the drought, salinity had been improved by removing the saline water and refilling the lagoon with fresh water. "But, because of the drought, we had to close it again," Ms Bishop said. "There was a really good response to that and plants came back as well as bird life. "The only thing that can grow there is samphire, which is normally a coastal plant." The State Government is monitoring wetlands disconnected from the river to ensure no long-term environmental damage is caused to ecosystems.

The barren garden

An empty brown lake will welcome spectators to the final Tour Down Under stage in Adelaide in two weeks because of the drought. The Rymill Park lake has been drained and its fountain turned off as part of Adelaide City Council's commitment to water conservation. As the international cycling spotlight is put on the city during the Tour Down Under stage on Sunday, January 27, Rymill Park lake will remain empty. It also is expected to remain empty during Fringe festivities at the Garden of Unearthly Delights in March. The council temporarily has turned off five of its 11 fountains across Adelaide because of the drought and switches off the remaining six on Mondays as part of the Mondays for the Murray campaign. Fountains at Veale Gardens, Pinky Flat, Rymill Park, Grenfell Plaza and Hindmarsh Square have not operated since the start of last year. Water features in Rundle Mall, Crewswell Gardens, Light Square, Victoria Square, North Terrace and Torrens Lake continue to operate because they use recirculated water. The fountain at Moseley Square at Glenelg also is in operation because it uses recycled water. The water feature at the end of the South-Eastern Freeway at Glen Osmond has been turned off. Adelaide Lord Mayor Michael Harbison said it was important the council continued to promote water conservation in the community in the drought. "Some of these measures are practical water saving measures and others, such as switching off the fountains, are to keep reminding people of the importance of saving water," he said. "The water savings that we are making across the parklands are very significant now and are in excess of 300 megalitres per year. "Rymill Park is problematic as it is a very shallow lake and it loses enormous quantities of water through evaporation." He said it would not be refilled for high-profile events. Mel Tomney, 26, yesterday visited Veale Gardens with her son Bailey Clements, 7, and said the fountains should be turned back on as they did not waste much water. "I think they've become a bit of an eyesore, it doesn't look very nice," she said. Meanwhile, thousands of litres of water were wasted as a water tank overflowed for hours in the southern suburbs yesterday. The United Water tank on Grandview Drive at Pasadena started to overflow into surrounding streets early yesterday. Locals with buckets and hoses were catching the water before it disappeared down the drains and gutters.

Massive water wastage

Thousands of litres of water went down the drain as a massive water tank over-flowed for hours in the southern suburbs. The United Water tank on Grandview Drive at Pasadena started to overflow early this morning according to a local resident. Water flowed from around the entire top of the massive concrete tank, down an embankment and into the surrounding streets. Locals with buckets and hoses were catching the precious commodity before it disappeared down the drains and gutters. Louise Kyriacou said, "friends of ours arrived home between 3am and 4am and noticed water running down the road". Ms Kyriacou said her family and neighbours have been bucketing the water onto our gardens and lawns, "we are making the best out of a bad situation". United Water spokesman Jim Tsacallakas said the problem started with a burst water main in the Pasadena area. When a technician shut down the ruptured pipe it caused a valve to open in the storage tank which in turn over-flowed. The water was shut off about 11.30.

Adelaide Advertiser – Surge in Antarctic ice loss

Global warming has caused ice loss from the Antarctic ice sheet to surge by 75 per cent in a decade. In 2006 glaciers spewed 192 billion tonnes of ice into the sea – twice the annual flow of the River Nile, scientists calculate.

Rain tanks saving lawns

Massive in-ground, concrete water tanks are the latest trend for Adelaide households battling water restrictions.

Residents of more affluent suburbs are spending tens of thousands of dollars capturing water for lawns, gardens and tennis courts, Darryn Hopgood, of Adelaide Hills Concrete Tanks, says. "They can't have their lawns and gardens die, because the value of their property goes down," he said. "If the tank is underground it's not too big at all, no one knows it's there." Earthmover Greg White, owner of Earthworx, said he was "flat out" putting in tanks. "You can put them in your driveway and drive a truck over the top," he said. "The beauty of having them buried is they are completely out of sight. You're not losing that ground space and the water stays so fresh and so cool." Mr Hopgood said he had jobs lined up for months on Adelaide Plains. The family-run business, six years ago, concentrated on the Hills, where properties without mains water needed rainwater plumbed into the home. He said the State Government had "got it all wrong" because rebates provided no incentive for people to install larger tanks. A rebate of between \$200 and \$1000 is offered towards the cost of a rainwater tank plumbed into an existing home for indoor use, such as toilet flushing, clothes washing and hot-water supply. SA Water granted 994 rainwater tank and plumbing rebates last year. The rebate applies to tanks with a 1000-litre capacity or more.

A 271,000 litre concrete tank being poured this week at Gilberton cost \$39,000, plus costs associated with earthworks. Since July 1, 2006, new homes and significant extensions or additions to existing homes have had to include a rainwater supply with minimum 100-litre tank. Mr Hopgood said in the Hills, a typical household tank would hold 133,600 litres. Underground water tanks should be compulsory for all new homes, he said. The Government should allow households to use mains water on the garden if rainwater was in use throughout the home, he said.

AWA

1. AWA-IWAA has been succeeded in its bid to manage the IWA Water Re-Use Convention in Brisbane, Australia in 2009. The Event will dovetail with the biennial AWA Water Recycling Conference.
2. Urban Water Authorities have faced growing criticism for failing to invest in adequate water supplies. However, Water Services Association (WSAA) estimates that the largest 27 urban water authorities paid total reported dividends in 2005-06 of \$1.104 billion to their state authorities up from \$930 million the year before.
3. Transfield Services Ltd and Worley Parsons will jointly work on two mobile desalination facilities for the Brisbane River, a special \$125 million project aimed at addressing water shortages in south east Queensland.
4. The Queensland Government has moved to link the Loganholme and Sandgate Wastewater treatment plants to Gibson Island Advanced Water Treatment Plant (part of the Western Corridor Recycled Water Project) to provide a further 44ML of water per day to Wivenhoe Dam.
5. SE Queenslanders' have been asked to continue to save water despite recent rain. Average daily consumption for residents subject to Level 6 restrictions was 132 litres/person because the rain has not been drought breaking with combined dam levels just under 25% and Wivenhoe dam (the largest) still at only 17% capacity.
6. Concerns about potential increases in domestic water prices have been raised about a failure by the Victorian Government to release detailed costing and funding options for the state's controversial new desalination plant
7. The Australian Water Association is seeking an enthusiastic Community Education Coordinator to join the team in Sydney. A position description and application details are available from the following. Applications close 28 January 2008.
8. Water Corporation has released information on new watering days for Perth and the regions but the most noticeable changes relate to water use from garden bores previously largely unaffected by such measures.
9. The Water Services Association of Australia has released a National Waste Water Source Management Guideline for public comment. The guideline has been in development for the past 2 years and is intended to be a complimentary document to the Australian Drinking Water and the National Water Recycling Guidelines.
10. Households in Sydney, the Illawarra and Blue Mountains have cut their annual water use by 75,000 litres since 2002-03 with average consumption for a single residential dwelling falling from 297,000 litres per year in 2002-03 before water restrictions were introduced to 222,000 litres in 2006-07.
11. Melbournians used approximately 69 billion litres less water in 2007 than in 2006 principally through savings, stage 3 and 3a restrictions, amounting to a 16% reduction in water consumption - equivalent to adding three full Maroondah Reservoirs to the water supply system.

12. Australian and US scientists are using an unmanned submersible to locate live and fossilised deep-ocean corals south of Tasmania to track changes in climate in the southern hemisphere. Like tree rings, growth rings in corals indicate age and reflect changes over millennia in ocean chemistry, salinity and biota.
13. Rain has provided a boon for tropical freshwater researchers. The Australian Centre for Tropical Freshwater Research in Townsville have been collecting and testing freshwater run-off during the wet season. Sediment, fertiliser and chemicals flushed out of freshwater catchments have been identified by marine specialists as one the main threats to the Great Barrier Reef.
14. More than 100 tonnes of petrol and kerosene have spilled into a Vietnamese waterway after two vessels collided last week, in the latest case of growing industrial pollution in the country. Environmental experts and the Government have raised concern about the heavy pollution of rivers by industrial parks amid the country's 8.5 per cent annual economic growth.
15. Voting is still open to choose a new name for AWA's recently merged National On Site Systems (NOSSIG) and Integrated & Decentralised Water Systems (I&DWS) Network. AWA members can vote on-line (Website), or visit the AWA website (Website) for more information on the new network.
16. Stretches of the Murray River are turning into the corrosive equivalent of battery acid, in further evidence the devastating drought is causing more harm to the nation's iconic watercourse.
17. Protesters in Victoria carrying black balloons representing carbon emissions gathered at Waratah Bay this Sunday to rally against the state's proposed desalination plant.
18. Residents in the small town of Forsayth, south of Georgetown, say their water supply is so bad it is making people sick. Locals say the water has always been undrinkable, despite a \$500,000 treatment plant installed last year which was supposed to fix the problem.