

Murray-Darling Rivers swell after downpours

Monster downpours in both the Murray and Darling catchments were a cause of celebration on the weekend. The tropical monsoon rains which brought widespread flooding to western Queensland have travelled farther south than is normal. In Victoria's Goulburn Valley, dairy farmers have received some of the best rain in years, with many reporting more than 100mm over the weekend. To the north, in NSW, the Darling flow is now passing Pooncarie. It is expected to reach the Wentworth weir pool in NSW in the next 10 days, and there have been further flooding rains in the upper reaches of the catchment. The Paroo and Warrego rivers, Qld, are in flood again, which suggests further flows to boost the Menindee storages and eventually the Murray system. There were falls for up 100mm in the Murray catchment as well on the weekend. Water continues to be released from Weir 32 while the Menindee Lakes area remains under the control of New South Wales, whose current plan is to release a total of 70 gegalitres of water over the next few months. The NSW Department of Water and Energy has increased its estimate of the expected inflow to Menindee Lakes from 300 to 400GL. However, there is still some uncertainty to this volume due to the difficulty in estimating river losses along the Darling River and the potential impact of the most recent rain, according to River Murray Water. Meanwhile, Mallee farmers in northern Victoria have been waiting seven years for rain – and down it came last week. The downpour delivered Walpeup's wettest day in five years with 40mm on Friday. SOURCE: Sunraysia Daily, Vic

Rain big wins for farmers, but some need more

Despite this week's flooding in many parts of Queensland, some areas in the southeast of the state still await heavy and consistent wet season rains. The Queensland Farmers Federation says all major water storages in the Burnett, for instance, in the district west of Bundaberg and Maryborough, remain below 20pc of capacity. The Bureau of Meteorology says the low that soaked central Queensland and the Channel Country has now dissipated to scattered showers, after moving into NSW and then on into Victoria. SOURCE: Bureau of Meteorology and *FarmOnline*

Environmental water allocated for Murray-Darling

The Murray-Darling Basin Commission (MDBC) today announced it would start releasing up to 4.6 gegalitres of environmental water this month to protect critical drought refuges in South Australia. The water is needed to prevent irreversible damage to the environment. MDBC chief executive, Dr Wendy Craik, said critical refuge areas on the Chowilla Floodplain, which is one of the icon sites of The Living Murray, would receive up to 2.6 GL. Another 2 GL would go to mitigating the risk of acidification at a number of environmentally significant wetlands below Lock 1 on the Murray River. "The MDBC partner governments agree these are among the highest priority sites for use of the very small volume of environmental water available in the River Murray system this season," Dr Craik said. "The water, available through the MDBC's Living Murray program, is part of 12.8 GL carried over from last water year for environmental use. "This water is not available for irrigation use. "So the allocation will not impact on the availability of water for consumption by communities." Dr Craik said two of the areas in critical need of water, Werta Wert Wetland and Twin Creeks, would be watered immediately, while watering at another three areas would be deferred until early autumn. "The river red gums, black box, and many other species that occur in this system are threatened by these prolonged drought conditions and need some respite," Dr Craik said. "The maintenance of these drought refuges is critical for the recovery of wildlife and vegetation at Chowilla, including nationally threatened species such as the southern bell frog. "These species are particularly vulnerable because this drought has been preceded by many years of 'human induced' drought, which has significantly reduced flooding events in the lower Murray. "This has reduced the ability of many floodplain species to withstand extended dry periods." South Australia's Minister for Environment and Conservation, Gail Gago, says, "I welcome the life supporting environmental flow of the Chowilla Floodplain - SA's largest area of river red gum woodland containing some trees up to 200 years old and part of the Riverland Ramsar site (Ramsar recognises internationally significant wetland sites)." "Unfortunately, there will still be large areas that will continue to decline through lack of water, but we hope the area to benefit, will provide a vital life support for important species," said Minister Gago. Dr Craik said that, in addition, downstream of Lock 1, there is the risk of acidification in some wetlands, caused by drying after long periods of being continuously wet. This announcement brings the total environmental water provided by MDBC this season to 10.6 GL. This includes the recent announcement of 6 GL of water for the Wakool River and Merran Creek to protect critical fish habitat. SOURCE: MDBC

Senator Wong to attend major climate meetings

Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong, today said she would participate in the Major Economies' Meeting on Energy Security and Climate Change to be held in Honolulu, Hawaii from January 30-31. The Major Economies Meeting is a forum established by the United States to foster constructive discussion on a global response to climate change and reports to the United Nations. "Australia sees this meeting as a key part of its engagement with the United States on climate change issues," Senator Wong said.

"We believe this forum can make an important contribution to the United Nations climate change negotiations "The Major Economies Meeting will bring together Ministers and senior representatives from 16 major economies, along with the United Nations. "This is the first Ministerial meeting on climate change since the UN Conference held in Bali last December. "It provides an early opportunity to discuss how the major economies can contribute to the key elements of the Bali Roadmap. "The meeting brings together Australia, China, India, the European Union, the United States and other key players in one room to discuss future action on climate change. "Every opportunity that we have to encourage key players to find common ground is vital given the 2009 deadline the world set itself at Bali to forge a new global outcome on climate change." The first Major Economies Meeting was held in Washington DC, USA, in September. The United States has proposed that a series of Major Economies Meetings be held in 2008, including a leaders' summit. SOURCE: National rural news, Rural Press Canberra Bureau

Water meeting wants unity outcome

Newly appointed Queensland Irrigators Council (QIC) chair, Chad Prescott, says he's looking forward to a "constructive engagement" with the new Federal Water Minister Penny Wong. They'll meet to discuss irrigation issues in Brisbane on Thursday. Conceding the new QIC team is "still finding its feet," the St George irrigator is especially keen to hear how the Rudd Government plans to implement the National Plan for Water Security within the Murray Darling Basin - more especially its statewide implications. QIC has already flagged a number of key issues likely to unfold during the course of the year ahead, namely:

- The long-awaited Resource Operations Plans (ROP) for the Condamine Balonne and the Border Rivers
- Continuing roll out of national water reforms
- Implementation of a modernisation program for SunWater schemes

QIC is anxious to cement a workable relationship with Water Minister Wong, believing a unified approach is critical if Queensland's embattled irrigation community is to achieve successful outcomes. "We very much want to work with Ms Wong and the (federal) government in establishing the new national water agenda – just like we worked with the state Government in getting the ROPs done here in Queensland," Mr. Prescott said. "As an irrigator, it's pretty hard when we cop something from the 'top-down' – especially, as sometimes happens, we're the last people to be consulted," he added. The contentious issue of Queensland's Murray Darling Basin extraction rates is sure to surface at the water meeting in Brisbane with QIC keen to emphasise that point that South Australia's woes are not related to the amount of water taken by Queensland. "It's very, very minimal," Chad Prescott said. As well, he will bring to the attention of Ms Wong, the "national disgrace" which is NSW's storage facility at Menindee Lakes reservoir, east of Broken Hill. "There's been continuous talk from the governments about farmers becoming more efficient but there's been no talk about deficiencies within our river systems," Mr. Prescott said. "More water evaporates out of Menindee Lakes than Queensland consumes and if we (collectively) address that, then it will put significant amounts of water back into the system." Closer to home, the QIC, plus the state and federal governments continue to wait on the CSIRO's Sustainable Yield reports for the Condamine/Balonne river systems, due within the next month or so. "It's one of the key ROPs and has been under the microscope for a long time," Chad Prescott said. In urging the CSIRO to release its findings, he says all the objectives outlined in the original Water Resource Plans were met and validated, as irrigators implemented extraction cutbacks during the system's last flow event. "They (CSIRO) should now put it out," Chad Prescott said. The new QIC irrigator team is also keen to address other water-related issues farther north of the Murray Darling basin catchment. "Our new team's still on a bit of a learning curve with respect to what's happening in the rest of the state," Chad Prescott said. "We're keen to get out and about and see how things are, first hand," he added. At a grassroots level, and for the first time in six to seven years, Mr. Prescott, a St George irrigator, and many of his neighbours, are working "flat-out" on a late summer planting programme. As a result, the distinct possibility of a year delivering very little in the way of income has been completely turned around by the best season in years and the real prospect of filling the farm's 5,000ML Balonne Plains storages. "Obviously it's too late for cotton but we've planted some soybeans and may do some mungbeans," Chad Prescott said. All the property's storages have water and while some still have "a fair bit of space in them," others are getting close to being filled. Footnote: The Queensland Irrigators' Council's deputy chair is Mary Annand (Border Rivers) while other committee members are Tom Siddens (Lower Balonne), Geoff Cavanagh (Fitzroy) and Dean Sgroi (Burdekin). SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*

News.com.au - Queensland's one billion dollar big wet

Queensland is facing a damage bill of hundreds of millions of dollars as flood waters surge through the state, cutting roads, swamping coal mines, destroying agricultural stock and forcing people from their homes. Emerald, in central Queensland, was last night bracing for major flooding, with the rising Nogoa River forcing more than 1000 residents to evacuate their homes. Premier Anna Bligh warned that the situation in Emerald – declared a disaster zone – and Charleville had become critical. The state's booming mining industry expects tens of millions of dollars in coal production to be lost from the Bowen Basin. Already one company has stated it will not meet its export targets.

Some of Queensland's biggest coal mines – including those run by giants BHP Billiton, Rio Tinto and Xstrata – were last night expecting more flooding. Emergency Services Minister Neil Roberts said damage to federal and state infrastructure would be at least \$50 million. The flooding has caused massive stock losses for some farmers, while irrigation infrastructure and crops have also been destroyed. "We are getting reports of up to \$500,000 worth of cattle being lost on individual properties," AgForce chief executive Brett De Hayr said. "Some reports on irrigation properties are for \$1.5 million to \$2 million worth of infrastructure and crop losses. "You would probably be looking at (state-wide losses) in excess of \$1 billion in this sort of rainfall." About 780 Emerald homes were expected have been evacuated by late yesterday even though rain has mostly cleared. Ms Bligh said the disaster declaration was needed to enable authorities to use all measures to ensure residents' safety. "It's only natural that the major focus has been on the major population centres affected, such as Emerald and Charleville, but we know now that there are many, many, many properties that have been isolated," Ms Bligh said. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has pledged all necessary assistance.

Gums get life-saving drink – Cara Jenkin

Drought-stricken wetlands and the Riverland's struggling Chowilla floodplain will receive water this week to try to prevent irreversible environmental damage. The Murray-Darling Basin Commission has decided to release 4.6 gigalitres of water to the important drought refuges. Two gigalitres of water will be used to reduce the risk of acidification of wetlands below Lock 1 at Blanchetown as they dry out from the lack of water in the River Murray. The remaining 2.6 gigalitres will be used to water the Chowilla floodplain north of Renmark – home to hundreds of dying River Red Gums. The environmental water is about one-third of the 12.8 gigalitres which was supposed to be used on the environment last year but was suspended because of the drought. It is now available under the same deal which allowed irrigators to carry over their water this season. MDBC chief executive Dr Wendy Craik said the New South Wales, Victorian and South Australian governments agreed the sites were among the highest priority sites at which the small amounts of environmental water should be used. "By providing this small but crucial amount of water now, we hope to avoid irreversible damage in the future," she said. She said if the wetlands dried out, the soil damage would have "long-lasting impacts" on water quality and the environment. Environment and Conservation Minister Gail Gago said the environmental flow at Chowilla would be "life-supporting" for many 200-year-old trees. "Unfortunately there will still be large areas that will continue to decline through lack of water, but we hope the area to benefit will provide a vital life support for important species," she said.

ABC News on line – Lifestyle changes can curb climate change: IPCC chief

Don't eat meat, do ride a bike, and be a frugal shopper - that's how you can help put the brakes global warming, the head of the United Nation's Nobel Prize-winning scientific panel on climate change said. The 2007 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued last year highlights "the importance of lifestyle changes," chairman Dr Rajendra Pachauri said. "This is something that the IPCC was afraid to say earlier, but now we have said it." A vegetarian, the Indian economist made a plea for people around the world to tame their carnivorous impulses. "Please eat less meat - meat is a very carbon intensive commodity," he said, adding consuming large quantities was also bad for one's health. Studies have shown that producing one kilogram of meat causes the emissions equivalent of 36.4 kilograms of carbon dioxide. In addition, raising and transporting that slab of beef, lamb or pork requires the same amount of energy as lighting a 100-watt bulb for nearly three weeks. In listing ways that individuals can contribute to the fight against global warming, Dr Pachauri praised the system of communal, subscriber-access bikes in Paris and other French cities as a "wonderful development". "Instead of jumping in a car to go 500 metres, if we use a bike or walk it will make an enormous difference," he said. He says another lifestyle change that can help was not buying things "simply because they are available". He urged consumers to only purchase what they really need.

Grim picture

Since the Nobel was awarded in October to the IPCC and former US vice-president Al Gore, Dr Pachauri has criss-crossed the globe sounding the alarm on the dangers of global warming. "The picture is quite grim - if the human race does not do anything, climate change will have serious impacts," he said. However, he said he was encouraged by the outcome of UN-brokered climate change negotiations in Bali last month, and by the prospect of a new administration in Washington. "The final statement clearly mentions deep cuts in emissions in greenhouse gases. I don't think people can run away from that terminology," he said. The Bali meeting set the framework for a global agreement on how to reduce the output of carbon dioxide and other gases generated by human activity that are driving climate change. Pachauri also sees cause for optimism in the fact that, for the first time since the world's nations began meeting over the issue of global warming in 1994, "nobody questioned the findings of the IPCC". "The science has clearly become the basis for action on climate change," he said. In 2007, the IPCC issued a massive report the size of three phone books on the reality and risks of climate change, its fourth assessment in 18 years.

US stance

Dr Pachauri said it was too late for Washington to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the sole international treaty mandating cuts in CO2 emissions. The United States is the only industrialised country not to have made such commitments. But he remained hopeful the US - under a new administration - would be a "core signatory" of any new agreement." With the change that is taking place politically in the US, the chances of that happening are certainly much better than was the case a few months ago," he said. At 67, Dr Pachauri said he has not yet decided whether to take on a second five-year mandate as IPCC head. Elections take place in September. Dr Pachauri said on the one hand, the experience he has acquired would serve him well. But the advantage of retiring, he said with a smile, is that his carbon footprint - the amount of CO2 emissions generated by all his travels - would be greatly reduced. – AFP

23rd

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Fairbairn will transform central Qld irrigation, after the floods subside

The cascading Fairbairn dam just south of flood-hit Emerald, central Qld, is providing something of a bittersweet backdrop for the fortunes of central Queensland producers. The upside is of guaranteed water security for district irrigators for the next two years, especially for the numerous cotton growers in the region. But there is a downside, too. Large swathes of this season's cotton and sorghum paddocks have been inundated, along with expensive farm machinery. The Fairbairn is Queensland's second biggest water storage, the biggest being the mighty Burdekin dam in the far north. For nearly a decade, until the recent rains, the Fairbairn has stubbornly remained below capacity. Now it has a torrent of water pouring out for the first time in 17 years. SunWater spokesman Tom Vanderbyl said water was now 4.39m above the spillway crest, with around 253,000 megalitres pouring over each day. "With the dam now full, farmers can expect a full allocation for a couple of years and towns and mines for at least four to five years," he said. "We only have to look back a few months ago to when the dam was at extremely low levels and farmers had no allocation, to really appreciate the extent to which this recent rainfall has benefited the region," he said. SunWater says the inflows are the highest on record for the dam. SOURCE: Extract from full report of the Qld rain in *Queensland Country Life*, January 24

Old floodwaters to boost Murray-Darling Basin

Crops and livestock in the Murray Darling Basin will benefit from widespread flooding in Queensland's southwest. Murray-Darling Basin Commission's Wendy Craik, said the widespread flooding would enable graziers to have a good start to this year. "It'll enable broadacre farmers to get water supplies for their next crop, so in that sense it'll set them up well," she said. Floodwater from the Warrego River will reach the Murray River within days. Some 400 gegalitres of water is expected to flow into the Menindee Lakes, with 70 gegalitres to be released in coming months, with the first flows expected to reach the Murray River in the next 10 days. Dr Craik said the inflow would encourage drought-stricken animal species in the basin to breed. Indeed, bird breeding has already improved in the basin after rains last year. "In the longer term, a lot of the organisms that live in these areas survive because there is a flood periodically," she said. SOURCE: Extract from report in *The Land*, NSW, January 24, on the impact of the widespread rains and flooding.

Rain too late for cotton crop, but big help in other ways

While the widespread rains across south west Queensland and parts of NSW will help get the cotton crops that are in the ground through the season, they have come too late for many growers as the planting window has closed, according to Cotton Australia chief executive, Adam Kay. "However, the rain has come as welcome relief for cotton growers who have started planting alternative crops such as corn and sorghum to give them a summer income - particularly on the Darling Downs, St George, Dirranbandi and Bourke where some growers haven't seen a decent crop in three or four years," he said. "The good news is that on-farm storages are filling up, and left over water will be used to plant a cotton crop next season which we hope will be a vast improvement on the situation over the last few years," Mr. Kay said. SOURCE: Extract from full report of the Qld rain in *Queensland Country Life*, January 24.

Rain to cut need for high-cost sugar irrigation water

Commenting on the return of wet seasons of old in the far north Queensland sugar coast, the chief executive of Cane growers, Ian Ballantyne, says the conditions look to have provided the foundations for a solid 2008 season. "Unfortunately for some cane growers, particularly in the Burdekin district near Townsville and in NSW, cane cut very late in the harvesting season would suffer," he said. "But on the whole, recent rains have been generally welcomed by sugarcane growers." Cane growers says sugarcane is a hardy crop which can withstand heavy rain and limited periods of inundation, provided it is not prolonged and it is not a newly planted or newly cut crop. However, immature or late cut cane cannot survive immersion. Mr. Ballantyne says the big wet will defer the need for growers to draw on high-cost irrigation water. SOURCE: Extract from full report of the Qld rain in *Queensland Country Life*, January 24.

NEWS.com.au - SA's carbon-neutral Cabinet

South Australia's 15 Cabinet ministers are about to become "carbon neutral" - the first in the nation and possibly the world.

Under a plan announced today by Premier Mike Rann, the Government will buy enough carbon credits to offset all the greenhouse gases created by ministers during their working week. Mr Rann hopes other MPs will follow their lead. The Government will tender for local providers of certified Greenhouse Friendly carbon credits from one of the abatement projects approved by the federal government. These include gas, reforestation and landfill projects interstate. There are 20 listed on the federal government's Greenhouse Friendly website. 'I am told that our 15 ministers use an estimated 3000 tonnes of greenhouse gases a year in their use of electricity in both their electorate and ministerial offices as well as car and air travel,' Mr Rann said. 'The total cost to offset that volume of greenhouse gas for 2006-07 is about \$60,000.' Mr Rann said that in his job he had to travel interstate about once a fortnight and all of this travel had been included in the calculations.

'I also intend offsetting my own private travel from now on and have already personally purchased carbon offsets for my recent overseas holiday at the end of last year,' he said. Mr Rann said the Government was currently working to gain Kyoto compliance for its Three Million Trees and River Murray Forest projects so they could be registered under the Greenhouse Friendly program. Opposition Leader Martin Hamilton-Smith said state Liberals were working on their plans to make MPs carbon neutral.

Big dry endangers native fish

More than half of the state's known freshwater fish species are endangered, vulnerable or rare because of prolonged drought. They need help, says ecologist Jason van Weenen from the Environment and Heritage Department. 'Only now are we starting to recognise that water-reliant ecosystems require management at a much greater scale than before,' he said. 'Unfortunately, the drought has exacerbated many of the threats facing freshwater fish and has caused numerous populations to drop to critically low levels.' A five-year plan to save the state's threatened freshwater fish has been released for public comment. The Action Plan will make it easier for the community and land managers to consider freshwater fish during conservation planning. Emergency responses have been undertaken for two species, the Yarra pygmy perch and the southern purple spotted gudgeon, where it has been necessary to rescue populations from the drying wetland habitats of the lower Murray. It is hoped action now will reduce the need for emergency responses in the future.

Irrigators likely to miss out on water more often

Water market reform, pricing restructures and a Murray-Goulburn pipeline are being assessed by the State Government as possible solutions to secure northern Victoria's water supplies. The reform push comes as figures in a government discussion paper show flows into Victoria's key irrigation rivers could be cut by up to 58 per cent if current climate predictions eventuate. The Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy discussion paper, to be released by Water Minister Tim Holding today, also raises the prospect of Murray River irrigators being hit with zero allocations up to five years out of 100 if flows decrease. The 50-year plan will look at how to manage the impacts of climate change and other environmental factors on key rivers, including the Murray, Goulburn, Ovens, Campaspe and Broken. 'The Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy will ultimately secure water supplies for households, industry, irrigators and the environment,' Mr Holding said. 'This process will open discussion about the most appropriate solutions to managing our water supplies to meet the needs of everyone.' Northern Victoria has suffered through more than 10 years of drought with irrigators on some systems receiving a zero water allocation this season. CSIRO climate scientists have predicted rainfall will decrease by up to 5 per cent by 2030 across southeastern Australia.

Other proposed solutions include:

FURTHER modernisation of the distribution system.

FURTHER water conservation including on-farm water efficiency.

EXPANSION of the water grid through interconnecting supply systems or construction of the Murray-Goulburn Pipeline.

ACCESSING new sources of water including groundwater, recycled water and stormwater.

A committee made up water authorities, catchment management authorities, local government and stakeholder groups including the Victorian Farmers Federation, Murray Darling Basin Commission and Environment Victoria will consult farmers, irrigators, local communities and businesses. 'I would encourage communities to participate in the debate on the best ways to secure water supplies for future generations,' Mr Holding said.

Written submissions to the plan are due by the end of February with the draft strategy to be released by the middle of this year.

Vic Govt highlights climate change impact on rivers

Victorian Government climate change figures show water levels in the Goulburn and Murray rivers, in the state's north, could nearly halve in 50 years. The Goulburn River will drop by up to 55 per cent by 2055 and the Murray River by up to 40 per cent. The Government is preparing a strategy for the state's north, to ensure there is enough water for people and irrigators. Water Minister Tim Holding says climate change is serious. 'That's the facts of life, that's the reality of climate change, it's the reality of 10 years of very difficult and sustained drought, but we know if we continue doing what we've always done, then we will not be in a position to respond to the challenges of the future,' he said.

A discussion paper is open for public comment until the end of February.

24th

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Aust food prices inquiry underway

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) inquiry into grocery prices is underway. It will investigate retail food prices, which have risen by 17.8 pc in the four years to June 2006. That's much higher than inflation. Prices received by farmers have risen by only 2.3pc in that time. Peak horticulture organisation, Growcom has welcomed the announcement that the ACCC will begin a formal inquiry into grocery prices. Chief advocate Mark Panitz said that federal Labor had foreshadowed the inquiry in July last year as an election promise. Mr. Panitz said, "With only two major supermarkets in Australia, it is important that the process of setting food retail prices is transparent. "Authorities, too, need to be able to regulate supermarkets where there have been shown to be excessive mark-ups of fresh produce." Mr. Panitz said he would like to see fruit and vegetables included in the survey of grocery prices as a discrete category. "Fresh produce is the most important component of a family's diet and should be the most affordable item at the supermarket," said Mr. Panitz. "Governments, both federal and state, are encouraging increased consumption of fruit and vegetables by Australians to tackle health issues such as obesity and diabetes. The price of fresh produce clearly plays a significant role in a consumer's decision at the supermarket whether or not to buy more. "Growers often complain to us that the prices for fruit and vegetables that they are paid at the markets or by supermarkets are in no way reflected in supermarket prices to the consumer which can be more than five times as high." Mr. Panitz said he awaited with interest the decision of the ACCC regarding the need or otherwise to include the supermarkets under the provisions of the mandatory Horticulture Code of Conduct, which to date, had been targeted at improving the business relationship between growers and wholesalers. SOURCE: Growcom and *Queensland Country Life*

Anna Bligh says Old floods probably worst ever

Could this be due to 'climate change'?

Queensland Premier, Anna Bligh, has described devastating flooding across central Queensland as some of the worst in the state's history. Premier Bligh told ABC radio on Wednesday morning that the flood damage in towns, mining centres, farms and lost livestock could nudge \$1 billion. Ms Bligh yesterday toured the worst hit areas again, as the federal and state governments made flood aid available to the Mackay region in north Queensland, taking the total area of the state, eligible for disaster relief, to 70pc. Floodwaters peaked on Tuesday in Emerald, where more than 2,000 people left their homes and another 550 outlying properties evacuated as the swollen Nogoa River edged higher, fed by rains from a now-departed monsoon low. A school and the town hall were full of evacuees and a local cotton gin was preparing to take in families last night. Weather bureau hydrologist Jeff Perkins said the Nogoa was at 15.28 metres at 1pm (AEST) on Tuesday and would have a long, flat peak around that level. "But in terms of flooding, it's not going to get much worse, because it's got absolutely no rise left in it," Mr. Perkins said. Upstream, the Fairbairn Dam was still 4.5 metres over the spillway and rising slowly, he said. Further to the south, the emergency flood barrier, brought in to plug two gaps in Charleville's levee bank held floodwaters from the Warrego River at bay. The river peaked earlier than was expected at 6.02 metres at 8am (AEST) on Tuesday, below the earlier expected level of around 6.5 metres. Early on Tuesday afternoon, the Warrego had fallen slightly to 5.98 metres but the floodwaters were expected to stay high for at least another couple of days, Mr. Perkins said. But he said the city of Rockhampton may be next to deal with the flooding. The Nogoa is a tributary of the Fitzroy River, which flows through the city of Rockhampton, close to the coast. "The Fitzroy is going to have moderate to major flooding later this week," Mr. Perkins said. "The main floodwaters will arrive in Rockhampton between January 25 and January 29. River levels are expected to reach above the major flood levels of seven metres around January 28 or 29, with further rises likely. "But we are not making a final prediction for Rockhampton until we see some upstream peaks." Queensland Nationals leader, Lawrence Springborg, will tour Emerald today (Wednesday). Meanwhile, authorities have appealed for aerial sightseers over the Fairbairn Dam near Emerald to clear the area for safety reasons. A statement by police urged air traffic to stay away from the area southwest of Emerald unless they had a valid reason to be there, leaving the airspace clear for emergency aircraft. SOURCE: AAP

Drought figures plummet in NSW

Flooding rains across NSW in late December have helped drought figures drop to just over 52pc - the lowest figure in more than 18 months, Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald said today. Another 19.5pc of NSW is marginal, up from 14.9pc last month. And 27.9pc of the State is satisfactory, up from 15.7pc. "While this news will bring a smile to the faces of farmers in many parts of NSW, our thoughts go out to those farmers in the Central West and North Coast who have suffered devastating floods in recent weeks," he said. "This certainly is the land of droughts and flooding rains. "This time last year 93pc of NSW was drought ravaged and the outlook was bleak - now, as clean up operations continue, there is renewed hope that 2008 will be the year that we see the worst drought in living memory break."

Minister Macdonald said many dams are now filling up, soil moisture levels are improving and pasture is kicking along in some areas. "The rain's impact is particularly noticeable in parts of the western division, where Rural Lands Protection Boards (RLPB) such as Walgett have been classified satisfactory for the first time since the first half of 2001," he said. "Bourke has moved partially into satisfactory – the first time since August 2001. "Hopefully this wet start to the year signals more prosperity for our farming families who have struggled for close to six years in some areas to cope with this difficult drought. "While we know the drought is not over for everyone, and recovery will be tough and challenging, the Lemma Government remains committed to helping the rural sector get back on its feet and will ensure necessary assistance measures remain in place." Mr. Macdonald said the Lemma Government's commitment to drought assistance now exceeds \$365 million. SOURCE: National rural news bureau, Rural Press, Canberra

The Australian - Farmers in fight over floodwaters

The NSW Government is reviewing irrigation licences amid evidence that cotton growers are siphoning off as much as 80 per cent of flood flows from the heaviest rains to hit Queensland's portion of the parched Murray-Darling Basin in a decade. Following several weeks of above-average rain in southern Queensland, the Warrego River north of the Toorale cotton station in northwest NSW this week was flowing at a rate of between 2400 and 3000 megalitres a day. A series of dams have been built on Toorale across the Warrego to divert and store water. NSW Water Minister Phil Koperberg said 600ML a day were being discharged from pipes at the southernmost dam into the Warrego, shortly before it joined the Darling River. With Queensland floodwaters taking time to reach Toorale, Mr Koperberg said the volume would increase as flows spilled over the floodplain next week, finding their way to the Darling after bypassing the storages. He said licence conditions would be reviewed as water-sharing plans for the Warrego and Darling-Barwon rivers were developed. "Given we are now likely to experience less rainfall and higher temperatures due to climate change, some of these conditions may no longer be sustainable for the future," he said. Tilpa grazier Justin McClure, whose property on the Darling is 100km downstream from Toorale, said governments had been too generous with cotton growers. "The lower Murray system is still in crisis and it is morally wrong that cotton is allowed to take so much water," he said. "Tens of thousands of megalitres are rushing down the Warrego but not much gets to us." Wilcannia farmer Arthur Davis said people downstream from Toorale who depended on the Darling often got no benefit from flows in the Warrego. "It's not right that a foreign-owned cotton farm can use as much water as it wants," Mr Davis said. John McKillop, managing director of British-owned Clyde Agriculture, which operates Toorale, said the property could divert water only when the Darling was flowing at adequate levels downstream. "The amount of water we take is minimal," Mr McKillop said. "The people who complain would like no development at all upstream of them so they could have it all." Mr McKillop said Toorale had released more water from its storages in past flows than was required by its licence conditions. Toorale manager Tony McManus said the water that was being diverted was badly needed. "We've had to (bring in feed for our livestock) for seven or eight years. We haven't had a summer crop in years." Australian Floodplain Association vice-president Mark Etheridge said cotton growers were bottling up other Murray-Darling tributaries. Farmers downstream of Queensland's giant Cubbie cotton station, which is licensed to store 450,000ML 300km northeast of Bourke, say they are also missing out on flows from recent rains. Peter McSwan said flows in the Culgoa River on Brenda, his property across the border from Cubbie in NSW, were one-third what they should be. "The river basically stops at the border," Mr McSwan said. "With all the rain upstream, it's not much more than a trickle here. The Murray-Darling is missing out on a very large amount of water." Cubbie manager John Grabbe declined to comment. Cotton Australia chief executive Adam Kay said despite the rains, this year's cotton crop would be the smallest in 30 years. "We have water-sharing plans in place for the rivers and for the first time in a while we've got water to share," Mr Kay said.

La Nina breaks back of drought

She hadn't been seen for years and when she did arrive she was a little late and took a while to warm up, but the drought-breaking La Nina will stay around for a while yet. The Bureau of Meteorology yesterday confirmed the weather pattern had been the main factor behind the heavy rains in eastern Australia since November. All the computer models are predicting La Nina conditions until at least the middle of autumn. Grant Beard, from the National Climate Centre, said the La Nina was "going to be there for a while yet". He said the La Nina was a late starter. Usually they begin in winter. "About August to September we were confident, but the typical La Nina impact most definitely did not kick in until November." One of the key indicators, the warming of the waters across the north of Australia, was slow to develop. "They remained significantly cooler than average during at least the first two months of spring and the late part of winter. That seemed to be the main reason why the typical La Nina impacts just didn't occur." That water has since warmed, and clouds have formed over those warm waters. In other key indicators, the Southern Oscillation Index has been high - averaging +18 over the past 30 days - and the trade winds have been enhanced, resulting in a low-level convergence of air over northern Australia. "If you think of a column of air which is getting pushed in at the bottom, it tends to force air upwards.

At this time of year when there is a monsoon trough, which aids the convergence in the low levels, that results in rising air. "Rising air equals clouds and rain, essentially." La Nina has brought floods to central Queensland, central-west NSW and northeast NSW. But so far, the Murray-Darling Basin and southern Victoria have had below-average rainfall. Past La Nina events have brought average to above-average rains to the region. "La Ninas give you your best opportunity of that happening," Mr Beard said. "Whether it comes to pass or not, only time will tell." He said that during a La Nina, the eastern 40 per cent of the continent "tends to get above-average rainfall with the northern Queensland area most favoured". The last La Nina event was in 1998-99. It regenerated in late 1999-2000, more weakly in early 2000 and more weakly again in late 2000. The area of NSW drought-declared has been reduced to 52 per cent, down from 69 per cent last month, and more than 90 per cent one year ago. NSW Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald said the news would bring a smile to the faces of many NSW farmers. "There is renewed hope that 2008 will be the year that we see the worst drought in living memory break," he said.

Europe to slash greenhouse emissions

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso last night unveiled sweeping new plans to slash greenhouse gas emissions, which he said would cost just E3 (\$5) a week per head. The EU plans to cut greenhouse gases by a fifth by 2020, eventually imposing E50 billion a year in costs on major polluters and rapidly scaling up how much energy it draws from windmills, solar panels and energy crops. But Mr Barroso bowed to industry worries that extra costs would lead to a fall behind other regions, warning Europe would look at import allowances if trade partners failed to strike a global pact to cut carbon emissions. "If our expectations about an international agreement are not met, we will look at other options such as requiring importers to obtain allowances alongside European competitors, as long as such a system is compatible with WTO requirements," he told the European parliament, whose MPs must vote to back the project. The EU program was good for the planet, good for the economy and good for EU citizens, he said. "There is a cost, but it is manageable. The additional effort needed ... would be to less than 0.5per cent of gross domestic product by 2020. This amounts to about E3 a week for everyone." The price of not doing anything would be more than 10 times that, he said. "And every day the price of oil and gas goes up, the real cost of the package falls. Instead of costs, we really should be talking about gains for the EU." The EU executive will set caps for how much greenhouse gas each EU nation can release to hit the target of cutting levels by 20per cent below 1990 levels in 2020 - or 14 per cent below 2005 levels. Richer EU nations will have to go further, while some poorer countries, such as EU newcomers Romania and Bulgaria, will be allowed to increase emissions by nearly a fifth as their economies expand. Denmark, Ireland and Luxembourg face the deepest cuts, of 20per cent. Europe plans to draw a fifth of its overall energy from renewable power by 2020. Many European countries will have to rapidly ramp up their amount of wind, solar or hydro power by 2020 to hit new binding targets. Kevin Rudd has committed to only a 60 per cent reduction by 2050, but has reserved the right to delay a decision on short- and medium-term action until he receives a report from economist Ross Garnaut this year. The Australian target on renewables matches Europe's: 20per cent by 2020. The centrepiece of the EU program, a carbon cap-and-trade program for heavy industry, will carry a much more expensive price tag as it is likely to hike electricity bills and may cause the cost of manufacturing in Europe to soar above other regions. But the EU insists that will be balanced by a E50 billion reduction in the EU's bill for oil and natural gas imports, while a low-carbon revolution within Europe generates "first mover advantage" for a wave of energy-efficient goods and renewable power technology for export. Environmentalists claim that the EU plan, while the first of its kind to reduce CO2 emissions, won't go far enough to limit rising world temperatures. Industry worries that the price of going green will see them give way to rivals elsewhere. EU employers claimed last week that higher energy costs and paying more to pollute could make them less competitive. EU trade unions said they were worried by the risk of job losses if companies moved abroad, claiming 50,000 jobs in the steel sector were at risk. EU Enterprise Commissioner Guenter Verheugen, standard-bearer of the interests of heavy industry, said: "I am all for setting an example for the rest of the world. But I am against committing economic suicide." Business has sought to soften the emissions-trading reform, demanding special protection for energy-intensive industries facing global competition such as steel, cement, aluminium and possibly chemicals and pulp and paper. "If we were to relocate our industries outside Europe we would then have to transport steel to Europe, adding emissions," said Philippe Varin, president of the European Confederation of Iron and Steel Industries. But the EU executive talked up business benefits. EU Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas said the plan "gives Europe a head-start in the race to create a low-carbon global economy that will unleash a wave of innovations and create new jobs". AP, Reuters

The Australian - Climate change to raise security risk

Security forces around the world will face tough new challenges as climate change unleashes violent storms, raises sea levels and causes floods and famines, a new report warned today. Up to 200 million people could become environmental refugees by the middle of the century, bringing to one billion the number of people displaced by conflicts, natural disasters and large development projects, the Oxford Research Group report said.

“It is crucial that governments begin to take steps now towards developing effective policy solutions for the police, security services and military to help them adapt to the new and changing demands,” said author Chris Abbott. “However, they must resist the temptation to use force to try and control insecurity and maintain the status quo. In this instance, prevention really is the only cure.” The Oxford Research Group is an independent think-tank that regularly issues reports on global security issues. Abbott's report is titled *An uncertain future - law enforcement, national security and climate change*. While climate-related events will put new strains on the security services, governments' responses to global warming could give rise to militant environmental groups using terror tactics to make their points, the report said. “In the US, the FBI ... currently consider 'eco-terrorism' to be one of the most serious domestic terrorism threats,” the report said, noting an upsurge in violent rhetoric among a small group of environmental extremists. It said the melting of ice caused by rising temperatures could raise sea levels by at least 1m this century and that more than 17 million Bangladeshis lived in that danger zone. Key military bases such as the major US base on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean could also be swamped by rising sea levels. The report said food, water and energy - essential for human survival - were already in short supply in many parts of the world and shortages would worsen as populations grew and weather patterns changed. Scientists say global average temperatures will rise by between 1.8 and 4.0 degrees Celsius this century as a result of the burning of fossil fuels for transport and power generation. The developing world insists that the rich developed nations which have caused most of the pollution do most to reduce the harmful emissions. Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni has on several occasions referred to climate change as an act of aggression by the rich against the poor, the report notes. But climate change also has the potential to change the world in both geographical and political terms as coastlines retreat, island nations are swamped and national borders are put under pressure, it said. New disputes may also arise as melting ice opens up viable shipping routes through the Arctic such as the Northwest Passage, where there is already tension between Canada and the US, the report said. *Reuters*. **This is not something new as when the Commissioner of the Federal Police Mike Kealty made this point at the inaugural Ray Whitrod Oration in September 2007 I pointed out it had been part of my 'climate change' presentation since the beginning. This is the brave new world though the figure of 200 million is way short of the total that could be affected over the next 50 to 100 years as pointed out in Tim Flannery's the Weather Makers.**

If anyone would like a copy of the Commissioner's address let me know.

NEWS.com.au - Gums get life-saving drink

A grim picture of future water flows into the River Murray under climate change is starting to take shape, with the release of another CSIRO report on sustainable water yield. The report on the Ovens catchment is one in a series of 18 about current and future water availability in regions of the Murray-Darling Basin. Even though the Ovens Catchment in Victoria covers a small land area, it feeds a lot of water into the river. But by 2030, the best estimate from the CSIRO is a 13 per cent decrease in flows, or 231 billion litres a year lost to the system. The report shows the situation would be even worse if the climate patterns of the last ten years continue in the long term, with average inflow to the Murray reduced by 27 per cent by 2030, or 473 billion litres a year. Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong said the CSIRO work would be a key input to future decision making. "The Rudd Government is committed to securing water supplies as we deal with the challenges of climate change," she said. "To do this, we must have a strong body of scientific evidence on water availability to inform our decisions for the future."

25th

FarmOnLine

Flood damage could reach \$1 billion

AgForce president, Peter Kenny, says many cattle have now been standing in water for more than four days. Many are likely to perish. It has been estimated up to 100,000 cattle have been lost. It is also likely there will be a major problem with insect pests - particularly sand flies - once the floods waters recede, he said. Up to 20,000 hectares of high production farmland has been severely damaged. Earlier, Qld Premier, Anna Bligh, said the damage bill from the floods could reach \$1 billion. The huge losses in the towns, to infrastructure, mining, damaged crops, inundated farms and lost livestock have yet to be totalled. Premier Bligh said, "All government agencies will continue to "work around the clock to predict flood impacts, plan for inundation and protect communities as the flood waters move through Queensland's swollen river systems. "We're also doing the work to ensure that recovery and rebuilding work can get underway as soon as the flood waters recede across the affected regions." On Wednesday afternoon, Mr. Kenny showed Federal Agriculture Minister, Tony Burke, the extent of the flooding on the Central Highlands of Queensland. Mr. Kenny and Mr. Burke flew out of Emerald by helicopter to gain an appreciation of what is being described as some of the worst flooding in Queensland's history. The massive clean up effort faced by Central Qld flood victims cannot be overstated, he said afterwards. Livestock losses are particularly hard to estimate at this stage with a large number of properties reporting stock losses of up to 90pc but how many of those stock were drowned or just washed downstream would not be known for at least a week.

"There have already been reports of cattle being washed 40km downstream while unfortunately, larger numbers of younger calves have perished," he said. "Our immediate concern is that significant numbers of cattle remain stranded and will die in the coming days without emergency fodder drops.

"A massive effort is already underway but AgForce is concerned that military helicopters may be needed urgently to deal with the scale of deliveries required." Premier Bligh today announced the creation of a new disaster relief appeal to help victims of flooding in regional Queensland. The Premier said the funds would be distributed by the Red Cross and the State Government would provide \$100,000 to kick it off. She said from tomorrow, members of the public would be able to make donations to the Premier's Disaster Relief Appeal through any branch of the Commonwealth Bank, Westpac, ANZ or National Australia Bank. "Many people have expressed a desire to dig into their own pockets to help out their fellow Australians who are suffering because of the flood crisis," the Premier said. "To make sure this money reaches those that need it most, the Red Cross has agreed to distribute the funds on behalf of the Government." Premier Bligh said the appeal would remain open for at least three months and no donation would be too small. "A lot of Queenslanders in regional areas of the State are doing it tough at the moment," she said. "However, they will get back on their feet and money donated to this appeal will help that happen." SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*, updated on *FarmOnline*

Groundwork starts on water plan for northern Vic

Communities throughout northern Victoria will work with the Victorian Government to develop a new long-term strategy for securing water supplies, Vic Water Minister, Tim Holding, announced today. Mr. Holding launched the consultation process for developing the Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy. The northern region takes in key agricultural and urban centres including Bendigo, Shepparton, Mildura, Swan Hill, Wangaratta and Wodonga as well as some of Victoria's most important river systems including the Murray, Goulburn, Campaspe, Loddon and Broken. The discussion paper describes future challenges to water supplies and identifies a range of possible measures to face these challenges. Mr. Holding said, "With climate change, 11 years of drought and the lowest streamflows in our history, planning for long-term water security has never been more important for this region." The climate scenarios, used in the Discussion Paper, have been developed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment – using inputs from CSIRO data. The draft will be released mid-year for further public comment before the final strategy is released early next year. Mr. Holding said, "Whether we like it or not climate change is now a fact of life and we are all going to have to make do with less water. "Rather than simply putting our heads in the sand we need to look at the facts and plan accordingly." Some of the key options explored in the Discussion Paper include:

- Greater use or further reform of the water market
- Improving and modifying the allocation and management of water to benefit farmers, industry, towns and the environment
- Further modernisation of the distribution system
- Further water conservation including on-farm efficiency
- Refining environmental management
- Pricing
- Further expansion and integration of the Water Grid and
- Accessing new sources of water including groundwater, recycled water and storm water.

A consultative committee has been established to consider community submissions. Key milestones for the water strategy are:

- Written submissions to the discussion paper are due by February 29.
- Draft strategy released mid-2008.
- Community consultation period.
- Final strategy released early 2009.

SOURCE: Vic Government

26th

Adelaide Advertiser - Flood won't help SA

South Australia will miss out on the floodwaters feeding the Murray-Darling Basin because of existing water sharing arrangements. The Australian Conservation Foundation says the rules must be changed for the sake of the dying Coorong. ACF healthy rivers campaigner Amy Hankinson says SA is being short-changed by upstream states. "Most of the water taken from the current floods in Queensland and northern NSW will be used to flood-irrigate crops," she said. "SA will not see much water from these floods, from some of the heaviest rains in Queensland in a decade. "Up to 80 per cent of the water is being taken by upstream cotton farms. "If only one-third of this water were allowed to be taken, SA and the Coorong would receive valuable river flows."

Queensland's Warrego River, which flows past Charleville and Cunnamulla before it joins the Darling, is criss-crossed by seven dams. Water can flow to the Darling River through pipes in dam walls, or spill over on to the flood plain. River Murray Water general manager David Dreverman said very heavy rainfall in the northwest of the basin over the past week caused major flooding in both the Warrego and Paroo River catchments. "But only a small fraction of this is expected to make its way to the Darling River and then into Menindee Lakes," he said.

"Most of the water will spread out over the floodplain, including spilling over to the lower reaches of the Paroo River, where it will be soaked up by parched soils or evaporate." Water from heavy rain that fell before Christmas is now making its way down the Darling, past Wilcannia in NSW, towards Menindee Lakes. The amount of water stored in the lakes is expected to rise from 240GL to 400GL over the next few weeks. Total capacity is about 1700GL. Murray-Darling Basin Commission chief executive Wendy Craik said the Menindee Lakes were now under the control of New South Wales. "Until it gets to 640GL in volume it doesn't come back to commission control," Dr Craik said. "Right now, NSW is releasing about 70GL of water for irrigators, stock and domestic in the Lower Darling. Some will make it down to the Murray, but not much." A spokeswoman for the NSW Department of Water and Energy said water released from the Menindee Lake into the Lower Darling would be used to partly meet flow requirements to South Australia. "The Murray is still in the grip of a severe drought," she said. "This is not a major flood in the Darling River, but the flows are providing immediate benefits for stock and domestic users and graziers along the rivers, as well as providing water for irrigators in the Barwon-Darling and Lower Darling Rivers." The department predicts Menindee storages will reach 22 per cent of capacity, which means they would remain under the control of NSW. SA Wilderness Society campaign manager Peter Owen said the time was right for the Government to start buying back water for the environment. "There's water flooding down the system," he said. "The whole basis of water trading is you can buy it from anywhere. "So why isn't the Government buying it for the water's health? Let's buy the water and flush it through the system." Cotton Australia chief executive Adam Kay said that despite recent rain, the 2008 cotton crop would be the smallest in 30 years. "Recent widespread rain across southwest Queensland and parts of NSW will help get the cotton crops that are in the ground through," he said. The rain has also come as a relief to growers who had planted alternative crops such as corn and sorghum for summer income. "The good news is that on-farm storages are filling up and left over water will be used to plant a cotton crop next season, which we hope will be a vast improvement on the last few years."

The Australian - Brazil targets Amazon stripping

Brazil announced a series of measures today aimed at stopping an alarming rise in deforestation of the Amazon over the past five months. The initiatives reinforced a number of actions unveiled a month ago and called for stepped-up police vigilance, a ban on using deforested areas, and the suspension of public funds for any group or individual found to be breaking environmental laws. Cattle ranchers and loggers are targeted in the move, which was worked out today in a cabinet meeting between President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, his ministers in charge of the environment, agriculture, justice, defence, and science, along with the country's police chief. "What we want to do is install in the Amazon a permanent process of checks," the secretary general of the environment ministry, Joao Paulo Capobianco told reporters. The issue has become an urgent priority for Brasilia after government figures showed the stripping of trees from the vast Amazon region - sometimes called the "lungs of the world" for its role in producing oxygen - had risen sharply in the last five months of 2007. It is estimated 7000sq km have been devastated, with more than half of that occurring in November and December. The total area deforested is roughly equivalent to the area of Madrid. Such destruction could reverse the gains Brazil has made in the past three years to slow deforestation of the Amazon. The worst historic devastation was between August 2003 and July 2004, when 27,429sq km fell to chainsaws and burning. After that, the government tackled the problem vigorously and managed to reduce the amount of stripping to 11,224sq km between August 2006 and July 2007. Environment Minister Marina Silva yesterday told reporters that half the deforestation in the last five months was concentrated in the central-western state of Mato Grosso. The other problem states were Para and Rondonia. Silva noted that "the typical activities of these states was cattle-raising and soya farming" and said: "I don't believe in coincidences." She suggested the high prices fetched for commodities on the international market were pushing the trend. In 2007, Brazilian soya exports grew 22 per cent over the previous year, bringing in \$US11.4 billion (\$13.07 billion). Meat exports grew 31 per cent and generated revenue of \$US11.3 billion. "The situation is alarming," agreed Paulo Adario, a Greenpeace member in charge of campaigning to save the Amazon. "Demand for soya and meat will stay high, with rises in international prices, and consumption in China and the United States," he told AFP. The matter was all the more urgent because the dry period between May and July during which deforestation traditionally peaked was approaching. If the government tackled the issue right away," maybe it will manage to keep deforestation under control," Adario said. - AFP

Heat put on Stern report

A Productivity Commission paper has criticised the influential Stern review on global warming for making value-laden assumptions that inflated estimates of the economic costs of warming. The internal staff working paper, released as Australia prepares its own version of the Stern review, called the original British review's conclusions "as much an exercise in advocacy as it is an economic analysis of climate change". It acknowledged Nicholas Stern's contribution to the field, but said it was impossible to say whether some assumptions were "definitively right or wrong". The former World Bank chief economist's review had "erred" in not making key value judgments explicit, or testing different parameters in his modelling, the paper said.

The commission paper, originally prepared for internal use in response to the Stern review's October 2006 release, was published yesterday. It was given to the Labor-initiated Garnaut review, which is modelled on the Stern review, over the Christmas break. When then Opposition leader Kevin Rudd announced Labor's review last year, headed by Australian National University economist Ross Garnaut, he said Australia needed its own version of the Stern review. "The Stern report to the British Government sent a clear warning that, left unchecked, climate change will have catastrophic economic consequences," Mr Rudd said. Sir Nicholas found the cost of global warming, estimated at between 5 and 20 per cent of global GDP a year, far exceeded the annual cost of mitigation measures, estimated at 1 per cent of global GDP. But his conclusions have been dogged by controversy since their release, the harshest critics calling them biased and alarmist. The commission paper said some criticisms of the report were justified. The use of high emissions scenarios, pessimistic assumptions on damage costs, and an unconventional method of calculating current and future costs and benefits all tended to "escalate the present value of future costs", it noted. Sir Nicholas last year appealed to Australia to cut emissions by 30 per cent by 2020 -- a call then prime minister John Howard rejected on the basis it would cause thousands of job losses in the coal industry. An Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics report earlier said the nation's GDP would fall by about 2.5 per cent by 2050 if emissions were cut by 40 per cent. Labor has promised to cut emissions by 60 per cent on 2000 levels by that date. The Garnaut review, due to report in draft form in June, is likely to look at the economic impact of shorter-term targets. Climate Change Minister Penny Wong would not comment on the conclusions of the Productivity Commission document, saying only that she welcomed any paper that contributed to Australia's understanding of climate change impacts. "We will draw on a range of analysis in designing the Government's response to climate change -- including modelling from Professor Garnaut and the Treasury," she said.

Rudd to work on Howard's river plan

The Rudd Government will accelerate the pace of the previous government's \$10 billion plan for national water security and seek to buy back water licences in coming months. The move comes amid predictions there will be less water in the Murray-Darling Basin under climate change. New federal Water Minister Penny Wong will today convene the first COAG working group on climate change and water, with plans to force states to adhere to strict deadlines to meet the Rudd Government's election promises on the water program. The meeting coincides with the one-year anniversary of the Howard government's water deal. Senator Wong said she would meet Victorian Premier John Brumby and his Water Minister, Tim Holding, early next month to convince them to sign on to the Murray-Darling plan, which Victoria has so far refused to do. Victoria is happy for the commonwealth to set and enforce overall environmental and agricultural water use in the basin, but wants to retain control over specific allocations within the state and also manage land use and farm dams. Differences also exist between the Howard government's position -- supported by Kevin Rudd -- and Victoria on the role of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in monitoring the water market. Senator Wong said she would outline at today's meeting the broad directions that the Rudd Government would be taking on water and identify four key areas of national leadership. "They will be: first, taking action on climate change; second, using water wisely; third, securing new water supplies; and fourth, supporting healthy rivers," Senator Wong said. "We are determined to provide national leadership on this, but we recognise that leadership is about bringing people together and finding common ground. "We are keen to work with Victoria. The problem with the previous government's approach is that Victoria was not part of the national framework and if we want a basin-wide approach to the Murray-Darling, we have to have all states participating." Senator Wong said she had been "very clear" that the Government wanted to negotiate with Victoria as a matter of urgency. Senator Wong said the states would be asked to participate in getting the scientific and technical expertise to understand what climate change will mean for Australia's rivers. "It will need to address existing over-allocation of water through purchasing irrigation licences," she said.

Stage-four bans kick the bucket

After years of drought and severe water restrictions, towns in northern Victoria are heading in a different direction from most of the nation and having their water restrictions eased rather than tightened. A dozen towns near the Murray and Goulburn rivers will receive a belated Christmas present as a result of the rains that hit Victoria days before the festive season. Increased flows in the Murray and Goulburn rivers have allowed local water authorities to allocate more water for consumer use and ease water restrictions from stage four to stage three. Residents in northern Victorian towns including Echuca, Rochester, Gunbower and Cohuna will get a reprieve for their gardens. They are now allowed to water their plants twice a week for two hours in the morning and evening. On stage-four restrictions, gardeners had been allowed to water only twice a week, for one hour from 7pm to 8pm. Coliban Water managing director Geoff Michell said it was decided to ease the restrictions after the authority was allocated more water and had purchased some temporary water. "There has been more inflows into the Murray and Goulburn rivers resulting from quite heavy rains just before Christmas," Mr Michell said. "The current river allocations and the additional temporary water we've purchased means we now have enough water to achieve that objective and to also meet stage-three demands for customers in these systems."

Mr Michell said the extra water meant the authority was even able to bank some water for next year. He said the towns in the Murray and Goulburn system had been on stage-four restrictions since July last year, when they were increased from stage one. "The inflows to the Murray and the Goulburn were absolutely abysmal and significantly below expectations," Mr Michell said of the rapid increase in restrictions. He said the affected towns would stay on stage-three restrictions for the coming months and further easing or increasing of restrictions would depend on the inflows into the Murray this winter. Rochester resident Vanessa Hocking said she was relieved to see a reprieve from the tough stage-four restrictions. "We do enjoy our gardens but we don't have the water to water them, so we have lost quite a lot of plants," she said. "We have established plants dying on us, which is a real shame." Her family had used greywater for the lawns, but watering for only an hour had taken its toll on the garden, Ms Hocking said. "The extra bit will make a big difference."

Study the first step in water scheme

The CSIRO has found the contribution of the Ovens River to the Murray River in northeastern Victoria would be reduced by 13 per cent under its best estimate of climate change. The body's Sustainable Yields project also found that the contribution of the Ovens River has fallen by 27 per cent over the past 10 years, because of drought. The Ovens River generates 6 per cent of the runoff within the Murray-Darling Basin. Since 1997, rainfall has declined by 11 per cent, while runoff has declined by 26 per cent. Under the extreme climate change scenario, the Ovens River's contribution to the Murray would be reduced by 45 per cent. Compared with other basin rivers, only a small percentage of the flow of the Ovens is extracted for use: just 25 billion litres, or 1.4 per cent. In the Gwydir River, in northern NSW, 41 per cent of flows are extracted. Because the water take from the Ovens is so low, the best estimate of climate change would have a negligible effect on water use. The project was commissioned by the Coalition government in 2006. The information provided will underpin the \$10billion National Water Plan, announced in January last year. A member of the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, Peter Cullen, said the sustainable yields studies all showed rainfall decreasing, with stream flow decreasing further, because of climate change, interception of water from farm dams, plantations and groundwater over-extraction. Competition from the cities of Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide will also come into play. He said the study was an important first step in the National Water Plan. "You can't manage water resources without knowing what they are," he said. But he said "sustainable" was a misnomer. "It is the physical water yield they have done, but it does not address the issue of what is sustainable in terms of the river health-type issues." Professor Cullen said the law covering the National Water Plan was "not a bad act, but it can't go forward until they get regulations that embrace the states". He said it was important Victoria join up, "but Victoria had ... legitimate questions and they still need to be answered". Under the plan, the commonwealth would take control of the Murray-Darling river system, now controlled by the states.

Economic cooling may soften tough talk

Just two years ago, the world had yet to be convinced about the urgent need to address climate change. Nicholas Stern changed that. Released in October 2006, a review by the former World Bank chief economist was significant in defining climate change as an economic problem. He argued that the costs incurred in the future if no action were to be taken now would far exceed the cost of immediate action. Almost as soon as it was released, the review was criticised for exaggerating the risks of climate change and basing its analysis on the very worst case scenarios. These critics included respected environmental economists including Richard Tol and Robert Mendelsohn, who did not question the threat posed by climate change, only the methodology used by Stern and therefore the scale of his warning. This latest critique of the Stern Review is not an official position by one of the federal Government's harder-headed economic agencies, the Productivity Commission. But it is a portent of what is to come in the lead-up to the release later this year of the Australian version of the Stern review, led by Ross Garnaut. At its heart, the choice facing the Rudd Government is the scale and pace of its policy response, defined by the scale of the national greenhouse emissions targets it will set in response to the Garnaut review. As the Productivity Commission paper notes, the Stern review was ordered by the British Government and was as much an exercise in advocacy for an urgent response as economic analysis. Recent announcements by the British Government have reflected its pro-Stern position. Its recent commitment to massive expansion of wind energy and the revival of its nuclear program reflects a government that has decided to move now. But the relative costs of energy reform in Britain are markedly different from those in Australia and the chill winds of a global economic slowdown are already beginning to howl. Tough pre-election talk by Labor on climate change may quickly soften in the face of economic global cooling.

2008 critical for shrinking ice cap

Paris: The Arctic ice cap has shrunk by an area twice the size of France's land mass over the past two years, the Paris-based National Centre for Scientific Research said yesterday. "The year 2008 promises to be a critical year on every level," said Jean-Claude Gascard, the body's research director and co-ordinator of the European scientific mission monitoring the effects of climate change across the Arctic. Measurements in September last year show ice covering 4.13 million sq km, down from 5.3million sq km in 2005. "Melting could result in the loss of another million in one (2008) summer," Mr Gascard said.

"Summer 2007 was marked by a major retreat in the ice cap, one we were not anticipating. The decline is also two or three times faster than (observed) beforehand." International models used to predict retreating ice have some "catching-up" to do, he said. Over the past 20 years, 40 per cent of the ice cap has melted, with the average thickness halved from three to 1.5 metres. Year-round ice coverage has reduced, with summer melting also lasting longer, the centre reported. The team highlighted the role of ocean currents, namely in the northern Pacific, behind the warming of waters. Mr Gascard's research colleague, Gerard Ancellet, also spoke of recently-formed Arctic mist, pollution clouds that "trap" Earth's naturally emitted infrared rays, thereby raising temperatures. In last year's summer, the Northwest Passage, historically an ice-jammed potential shortcut between Europe and Asia, was "fully navigable" for the first time since monitoring began in 1978, according to the European Space Agency. It lasted five weeks, according to Canada's environment ministry. - *AFP*

Climate threat to human health

Climate change will have a huge impact on human health, and despite the focus on its economic implications, is already undermining the earth's natural life-support systems. An Australian academic warns in the latest British Medical Journal that human-induced climate change is far from being merely an economic or technological challenge - it threatens the systems humans depend on for survival. Tony McMichael, from the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University, says the health dangers include direct threats such as heatwaves, cyclones, floods and storms, and the spread of tropical diseases as well as more complex effects such as the disruption of the ecosystems and food chains on which humans ultimately depend. "For example, one of the things that a build-up of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is doing is acidifying the world's oceans, and scientists are concerned it will interfere with the ability of tiny zooplankton to make their shells out of calcium carbonate," Professor McMichael told The Australian. "That would pull the rug out from underneath the whole marine food web. That's an example of how we can weaken these life-support processes." Another challenge was the loss of biodiversity, which Professor McMichael said would not strike many people as being relevant to health. "But increasingly we are losing pollinating insects - not just bees, but other insects, and birds and so on - that maintain the fertility in plants," he said. "Climate change isn't just another environmental health hazard, like air pollution and pesticide residues. This ... is threatening the processes underpinning our economy, social stability and life processes."

28th

FarmOnLine

Bligh accelerates Toowoomba water pipeline

The Qld Government today committed \$20 million to accelerate the investigations into and design for the development of a 40km pipeline to ensure water security for Toowoomba, on the Darling Downs. The Government's new bulk water authority, LinkWater, will be responsible for the project. Premier Anna Bligh said the proposed Toowoomba pipeline - linking with the South East Queensland Water Grid - is now expected to be complete by late (Dec) 2009. The original plan was for this to happen in 2012, after completing Stage 1 of the Traveston Crossing Dam. "The Garden City's situation is no better, however, and we must now accelerate our plan," said Ms Bligh. They said that following a preliminary business case, which included involvement with the Toowoomba City Council; a pipeline from Lake Wivenhoe to Lake Cressbrook is the preferred option. "Toowoomba's water supply situation is critical with some indications the current supply sources will be exhausted by early 2009," said the Premier. "Current dam levels are about 11pc and Toowoomba is currently on Level 5 restrictions." Toowoomba currently relies on its water supply from surface water from three dams - Perversion, Cooby and Cressbrook. These dams supply 85pc of demand. Groundwater from bores into the Toowoomba basalt aquifer, supply the remainder. Since 2006, the Toowoomba Water Futures Taskforce consisting of State Government, Toowoomba City Council and local community representatives have considered water supply options. Ms Bligh said that in the intervening period, before the pipeline's completion, the search for other ground water supply measures would continue. Late last year, the State Government announced it would provide \$11.8 million for the drilling of bores into the Great Artesian Basin as an emergency measure. SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*, January 24. 29th

NEWS.com.au - Worst breeding season threatens pelicans' future

Alarm bells are sounding for the future of the Australian pelican after the worst breeding season in history at the most important rookery in South Australia. Not one chick hatched from 350 nests on the key breeding island of Pelican Point, off Adelaide's Outer Harbor. Dismal flow-on effects are predicted for other states. A lethal combination of drought, storms and foxes wiped out the many hundreds of eggs laid in the pelican breeding season, between May and October last year. Adelaide Zoo senior research scientist Greg Johnston said: "The ones that weren't killed off by the storms were killed off by the foxes." The disaster has national implications as birds born on the windswept, narrow and lonely strip of sand colonise the entire continent and beyond; some have been found in New Guinea. Low Murray River flows and chronic salinity have also hastened the demise of pelican rookeries in the Coorong, south of Adelaide - scene of the classic movie adaptation of Colin Thiele's book *Storm Boy* - making the failure at Pelican Point even more worrying.

"Birds from this colony pretty much cover all of southeastern Australia," Dr Johnston said. This development, coupled with the decline of nesting sites in Victoria from 10 to just two in recent years, has thrown the species' survival into doubt. The "reproductive failure" was the first since Dr Johnston started studying the Outer Harbor pelicans in 1990. Breeding pairs commonly scrape 800-1000 shallow nests on the island, but a lack of food caused by the drought slashed the number to 350 last winter. Four storm surges on the low-lying island washed away many of the eggs. A fox attack finished off the rest. Jennifer Hayes co-ordinates a team of 10 volunteers who help Dr Johnston record egg numbers, weigh the chicks and tag the birds' wings. She knew last year was unusual when the birds were slow to arrive in February. "We kept coming out and there were no birds, and kept coming out and there were no birds," she said. Then came the storms, and the foxes. "What happens is pelicans sit with their eggs on their feet," Ms Hayes said. "What it looked like to me was the fox ran through ... so the pelicans took off and the eggs got flung everywhere. "We came out one day and they were gone. All gone. It's sad for the birds because you know they feel it from the things you see them do. We've had incidences where babies have died and the adults have sat beside them for more than a day." Last week, a few pelicans cautiously returned to the island to resume breeding for the next nesting season.

The Australian - Pulp mill 'will cost Tasmania \$300m'

A new report concludes the economic benefits of the Gunns Tasmanian pulp mill have been vastly overstated and the controversial project will most likely have an overall negative economic impact. The report by the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, to be released today, finds Gunns's estimate of a \$3 billion-plus positive impact to be based on flawed modelling. Taking into account these "flaws" and factors such as risks to the tourism industry and alternative higher value uses for Tasmania's timber, NIEIR concludes the mill will most likely cost the economy \$300 million. The report, prepared by the NIEIR's executive director Peter Brain, was commissioned by The Wilderness Society, a staunch opponent of Gunns's plans to build the \$2 billion mill in the Tamar Valley, north of Launceston. Gunns executive chairman John Gay dismissed the report as "claptrap from The Wilderness Society". TWS said the high standing of Dr Brain and his Victorian-based institute made it difficult for backers of the mill to dismiss the report as green spin. TWS pulp mill campaigner Paul Oosting said: "This research confirms that Gunns's proposed pulp mill will be a bad investment for Tasmania's economic future. "The financial costs it highlights sends a clear message to both the state and federal governments that they should rethink their support for the pulpmill." Dr Brain's report is critical of Gunns's economic claims, including those in a report commissioned by the company from Allen Consulting in May 2006. That report, which formed part of Gunns's draft impact statement on the mill, concluded the project would add \$3.3 billion to Tasmania's economy to 2030, create 1617 jobs and add \$6.7billion to gross state product. Dr Brain concludes these findings are "not credible" and that the earlier study had incorrectly assessed the amount of expenditure that would be generated from the project. His report says the results could be explained only by modelling errors or else "unjustified adjustment of the model results that make the case for the pulp mill more favourable". Dr Brain also factored in the cost from the loss of agricultural land to grow the plantations that will feed the mill, particularly after its first 10 years of operation. Dr Brain said the \$300 million loss was the "mid-point" of his expectations. "If everything went wrong with the mill, the negative impact could be as high as \$3billion and if everything went right the best outcome could be positive \$1.3billion," he said. Allen Consulting could not be contacted yesterday. Gunns stood by its economic modelling, which has been repeatedly used by the Tasmanian Government to sell the virtues of the mill. Mr Gay defended the Allen report. "I think the economics of this mill are fantastic," he said. However, the economic benefits of the mill were "no one else's business". "Gunns owns its own resource and it's going to own the mill," he said. "That's a company decision, whether it's economical or not. The (Gunns) board wouldn't approve the mill unless it met its economic parameters." Mr Gay said the profitability of the mill was underwritten by the growing demand for paper in developing countries. However, a recent report to the federal Government suggests the mill will face stiff competition from low-cost South American pulp producers.

Experts tip emission targets of 13 to 15pc

Climate experts predict Kevin Rudd will opt later this year for a greenhouse gas reduction target of 13-15 per cent by 2020 after he reviews modelling from the Treasury and the report by Ross Garnaut. The Andromeda Group, a climate change consulting business, said a target of this scale - 13-15 per cent below the 1990 emission levels - would set the right balance between limiting harm to the economy and stimulating changes in energy use across industry. However, Andromeda's chief executive Robert Clarke said Australia was already about 8 per cent over the 1990 emission levels, in line with its generous Kyoto target. And this meant total emission cuts from current levels of more than 20 per cent by 2020, or 2 per cent a year. Mr Clarke warned that about 90 per cent of Australian companies were still under-prepared to manage the commercial risks associated with future cuts in greenhouse emissions. He said Australian negotiators who brokered the generous Kyoto target of 108 per cent on 1990 levels might not have done Australia any favours, because they only delayed the scale of the reforms required. While most focus to date has been on Professor Garnaut's Australian version of the Stern Report on the cost and effects of climate change on the economy, industry sources have indicated detailed.

Treasury modelling on the costs of different targets is expected to be more significant in determining the final goal. A 2020 emissions target will be crucial in setting the cost of greenhouse permits under an emissions trading scheme expected to begin about 2011. A spokesman for Climate Change Minister Penny Wong said yesterday the Government would set its target for 2020 later this year after extensive consultation based on the Garnaut report and Treasury modelling. Labor is committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 60 per cent by 2050. But at the Bali climate change negotiations last month, the Prime Minister backed away from emission reduction targets of between 25 and 40 per cent by 2020, saying the Government would not make any decision until full costing of the economic impacts had been carried out. The European Union last week released details of its plan to deliver a 20 per cent emissions reduction target by 2020. The chair of the major energy users forum, Mark Gell, said such cuts could be achievable but would have different effects on different sectors of the economy. Senator Wong will tomorrow lead a downsized Australian delegation at a US-sponsored meeting on global warming in Hawaii. She will be Australia's sole ministerial representative at the negotiating table, alongside the US, the European Union, China, India and 12 other nations, at the Major Economies Meeting launched by US President George W. Bush last year. The UN negotiations in Bali attracted a heavyweight contingent of Mr Rudd and four of his cabinet ministers. *Additional reporting: Siobhain Ryan*

Heraldsun.com - The end of the world is coming to Melbourne. Again.

In the 1959 film, *On the Beach*, Gregory Peck and Ava Gardner waited in Melbourne to die from radiation poisoning. Now, according to friends, life as we know it will end soon for the rest of us. Let me explain. I hang out with engineers. They're strange folk. I'm married to one, so I know. They do calculations in their heads. My husband doesn't yell at us to turn off the lights. He lectures us on how many mega watts will be consumed over a 20-year period. The family tends to turn lights off just to shut him up. My friends and some esteemed institutions are hot and bothered about power outages. Summer has been hellishly hot. Power consumption hit a record in Victoria on the 10th January. It was, admittedly, a 40C scorcher, but schools and many businesses were shut. In the meantime, folks are rushing out and buying airconditioners but each new swishing, hissing unit adds a strain. There is no power crisis, says the Government, while advising Victorians to turn off airconditioners. There is no power shortage, say suppliers, while explaining recent blackouts as problems with individual electricity companies. You can believe them or work it out yourself. Victoria has a supply capacity of around 10 million kilowatts. Let us assume Melbourne has one million households, a conservative figure, and that we all want to be cool, which we do. If every household installs a mid-range, 10 kilowatt unit, at peak demand these airconditioners alone will use up the power supply. Some time soon, bang, the system will be overloaded, the power will fail, life as we know it will end and we will be propelled back in time, way back to a pre-digital, pre-automated, pre-programmed existence. I've lived through a power failure in my bit of suburbia and it's an ugly sight. It looks like the end of the world. Latte addicts sit dumbstruck outside cafes unable to get their caffeine fix. People stand in the street holding dead EFTPOS cards as the ATMs refuse to work. Zombies appear out of the dark in supermarkets with trolley loads of food they can't buy because the barcode scanners won't work and the tills won't open. Even the doors have to be prised open because they're electric. Tellies won't work, video games are cactus and computers are down. You might squeeze an hour or so out of a laptop, but there's no internet. The family is under pressure. They might have to talk to each other. They can't cook. The electric appliances are useless and if they can't find any matches they are reduced to boiling a billy on the gas barbecue to make a cup of tea. Meanwhile, in the state of Victoria nothing is happening to offset this disaster. No new power stations are imminent. There are no restrictions on airconditioners. My friends could be wrong, but if there is a power outage this summer, I'll be gunning for someone from the Government to come to my place to reset all the digital clocks.

NEWS.com - Bush commits \$2.2bn to climate fight

The US will commit \$US2 billion over the next three years to a new international fund to promote clean energy technologies and fight climate change, President George W. Bush said in his annual State of the Union speech today. "Let us create a new international clean technology fund, which will help developing nations like India and China make greater use of clean energy sources," Mr Bush said. He said the US was committed to working with major economies and the UN to complete an international agreement that "has the potential to slow, stop and eventually reverse the growth of greenhouse gases". "This agreement will be effective only if it includes commitments by every major economy and gives none a free ride," Mr Bush said. "The United States is committed to strengthening our energy security and confronting global climate change." Delegates from the biggest greenhouse gas-polluting countries will meet this week in Hawaii to spur UN negotiations for an international climate agreement by 2009 that would replace the current carbon-capping Kyoto Protocol expiring in 2012. The Bush administration rejects the Kyoto plan, saying it unfairly exempts developing countries from cutting their emissions and could hurt the US economy. Mr Bush favours voluntary measures and "aspirational goals" to limit climate change. On energy issues, Mr Bush once again called for the US to cut "our dependence" on oil, which earlier this month hit a record \$US100.09 a barrel, by developing new sources of energy.

"To build a future of energy security, we must trust in the creative genius of American researchers and entrepreneurs and empower them to pioneer a new generation of clean energy technology. Our security, our prosperity and our environment all require reducing our dependence on oil," Mr Bush said. He said the US needed to generate more of its electricity from clean coal, solar and wind energy and nuclear power. He also called for more investment in developing advanced batteries and renewable fuels that would run future cars and trucks. However, Mr Bush is not giving up on oil altogether. The White House said the administration wanted Congress to pass legislation that would open to drilling more offshore US waters and parts of Alaska where energy exploration is now banned. Mr Bush also wanted Congress to approve doubling the size of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which can now hold about 727 million barrels of emergency oil supplies at four underground storage sites in Texas and Louisiana. Unlike last year's State of the Union message, there was little in Mr Bush's speech this year calling for a major overhaul of US energy policy. That's because Congress passed a comprehensive energy Bill which Mr Bush signed into law in December that increases vehicle fuel efficiency for the first time in over three decades, significantly boosts ethanol use, makes appliances more energy efficient and phases out the traditional light bulb.

Wetlands recycling hailed a success

Recycled stormwater is purer than mains water, costs less than a desal plant and is better for the environment so why isn't the State Government on board? Salisbury Council has achieved a world-first in turning stormwater into drinking-quality water but the State Government has already ruled out supplying it across Adelaide. Water quality trials at Parafield wetlands over the past three years, funded by the CSIRO and the European Economic Community, have produced drinking water from stormwater collected and cleansed in local wetlands and stored in aquifers. And, according to these scientists, the cost to build the infrastructure and produce this drinking water is about half that of the \$1.1 billion desalination plant to be built at Port Stanvac, which will be used in conjunction with the River Murray to supply Adelaide with a steady water supply. CSIRO water recycling and diversified supplies leader Peter Dillon said the recycled stormwater option was "about half the cost of desalination, uses less energy (and) emits lower levels of greenhouse gases". "It's environmentally beneficial and there's less discharge into the sea," he said. "I'm not against desalination but I feel we ought to have an open mind because these new processes are appropriate for not only western civilisations but for third-world countries as well." Even former Prime Minister John Howard was given a bottle of the treated stormwater to drink late last year and gave the tippie a thumbs-up. But Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald has stood by her stance against using stormwater for consumption, claiming it was "not necessary". "There is definitely a place for treated stormwater in the supply of water to Adelaide but it is not in our drinking water supply," Ms Maywald said last week. "Currently, perfectly good drinking-quality water is used for parks, gardens and industry. "The SA Government supports projects to use treated stormwater for these purposes...this will free up more drinking-quality water. "The Government does not support the use of stormwater for drinking purposes because it is not necessary." A spokesman for Premier Mike Rann referred all comment to Ms Maywald. Salisbury projects manager Colin Pitman said it appeared the State Government misunderstood the science, benefits and costs of stormwater recycling. "The cost of producing this water is less than a dollar per kilolitre which compares with a desal plant where production is closer to \$2 per kilolitre. "In State Government circles, there seems to be a misunderstanding about the capacity of stormwater to be reused. "This is an enormous opportunity for metro Adelaide." Opposition Water Security Spokesman Mitch Williams commended the trial and said it had "proved without a doubt there was a cost-effective way of meeting Adelaide's water needs". However, he still supported a desalination plant. "The State Government has no imagination and this is exactly what they did with the idea of desalination," he said. "They denied desalination was effective for a long, long time before they were forced to take on board that it had to be part of Adelaide's water future. "I think for Karlene to say recycled stormwater (for consumption) is 'not necessary' is ludicrous why have we got water restrictions now if we have enough water?"

AWA

1. Federal Cabinet has approved the establishment of Infrastructure Australia to be a key driver in the fight against inflation by boosting the economy's productive capacity. The effort will be directed to unclogging roads and ports and fast tracking water and energy focused projects.
2. Federal Water Minister Penny Wong will convene the first meeting of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) working group on climate change and water. Senior State and Commonwealth officials plan to meet in Sydney to progress talks on the former government's \$10 billion water plan for the Murray Darling basin which Victoria has not signed.
3. Victoria's Water Minister has announced the government would work with communities in northern Victoria to develop the Northern Region Sustainable Water Strategy with the aim to achieve further reforms to the water market, including pricing.
4. An innovative scientific project aimed at increasing rainfall throughout southeast Queensland catchments by injecting clouds with rainmaking particles has commenced. The Queensland Government is investing \$7.6 million over four years in the Cloud Seeding research project.

5. PUB, the national water agency of Singapore, has awarded the contract for the fifth and largest NEWater plant at Changi to Sembcorp Utilities (Sembcorp). Sembcorp won the bid to design, build, own and operate the plant with a production capacity of 50 ML/day. The plant will be built on the rooftop of the Changi Water Reclamation Plant, saving on land and cost of laying pipes.
6. Prolonged rains and floods in Queensland have failed to ease level 6 water restrictions because increases in storages in the worst areas of supply have only moved to 27.2% total capacity (but up from 7.20%).
7. Jeff Parish from the Central Irrigation Trust was awarded an Order of Australia Medal. The head of the Riverland's largest water trust was honoured for his contribution to the irrigation industry and his efforts in developing and implementing water delivery services and contribution to efficient resource management. Mr. Parish has been working in the industry for 42 years.
8. A US EPA report on wastewater infrastructure has estimated \$202.5 billion is needed to control wastewater pollution for up to 20 years. The Clean Watersheds Needs Survey, based on 2004 data just presented, outlines the needs of publicly owned treatment works. The estimate includes \$134 billion for wastewater treatment and collection systems, \$54.8 billion for resolving unsatisfactory CSOs and \$9 billion for stormwater management.
9. After years of drought and severe water restrictions, towns in Northern Victoria are heading in a different direction from most of the nation. Increased flows in Murray and Goulburn rivers have allowed local water authorities to allocate more water for consumer use and ease water restrictions from stage 4 to stage 3.
10. The OVENS catchment in Victoria, one in a series of 18 about current and future water availability in regions of the Murray-Darling Basin has been reported by CSIRO, to be likely to suffer a 13% decline in flows by 2030 (228 ML/year). The Ovens catchment traditionally feeds a lot of water into the system.
11. A call for Expressions of Interest from business groups, community members, residents and people living in fringe and regional areas to review the performance of Hunter Water has been posted on their website.
12. Melbourne Water has advised residents to avoid contact with Jacksons Creek in the Gisborne area, following the detection of Blue Green Algae one of whose species could be harmful to animals or humans. Jacksons Creek is a major tributary of the Maribyrnong River.
13. ACT Government is increasing the rebate for rainwater tanks. The \$200 increase will come into effect from February 1. The rebates will range from \$750 for a 2,000 litre tank to \$1,000 dollars for a 9,000 litre tank.
14. A technical report on the impact of wildfires on Water Catchments is now available online. The study undertaken by CSIRO Forest Biosciences has helped shed light on how impacts of fires might be more accurately estimated in future.
15. Flovac Vacuum Sewerage Systems Pty Ltd has partnered with Metito (UAE) to form Flovac Middle East. The deal, which took seven months to negotiate, was finalised in December, and signals the 14th Flovac office worldwide.
16. Documentary film "Flow," premiering at the Sundance Film Festival this week, condemns water profiteering, calling for a UN resolution to make access to clean drinking water a human right.
17. School of rare native fish under threat from the drought in south-western NSW received life-saving water in a bid to save them from extinction.
18. PM Rudd has agreed to compensation payments for flooded communities in Queensland enabling individuals in disaster-declared areas to apply for grants of up to \$10,000, and businesses up to \$25,000, to help them recover from the floods and water damage.

30th

FarmOnLine

Expert warns against climate targets

The economist advising the Rudd government on climate change has warned nations against locking in to strict interim greenhouse-gas reduction targets in their zeal to tackle global warming. Professor Ross Garnaut is examining the economic costs of tackling climate change and is due to deliver his report to the federal govt in the second half of this year. At December's international climate talks in Bali, the Rudd government refused to commit Australia to interim emissions-reduction targets until the Garnaut review was complete. Prof Garnaut says it is more important to achieve an overall greenhouse-gas reduction target longer-term - for example over 40 years - than to meet short-term targets in particular years. Instead, the market should decide how quickly to cut emissions, he said. "By focusing on a particular date you may diminish the environmental impact of what you're trying to do and you may increase the economic costs of it," he told ABC Radio on Tuesday. "We're trying to address the question of how we can meet the strong environmental goals in a way that minimises cost. "You have to ask a question about how strongly you focus on particular dates and how much you look at the overall impact over a number of years." He says however, this does not amount to a recommendation that governments set looser rather than tighter emissions-reduction targets. "You're looking at a binding total amount of emissions over a long period of time," Prof Garnaut said. "If you just focus on one year or particular years then you can do an awful lot of emitting in other years and so you don't meet the environmental objective that's absolutely crucial - and that's the total amount of emissions going into the atmosphere."

However, he acknowledges there is a danger that countries could leave it 10 or 20 years before doing anything if they refuse to commit to interim emissions cuts. SOURCE: AAP

Irrigators look to Canberra water meeting

The race is now on to prevent one of Australia's largest inland cities, Toowoomba, from running out of water – a situation that could develop by early 2009. The discussions will take place against a backdrop of Toowoomba city's water security resurfacing with news the three dams that supply 85pc of its water have slipped below 11pc capacity. In labeling the developing situation as "critical," Premier Anna Bligh says the approximate \$200m project to pipe water from Brisbane's Wivenhoe Dam to Toowoomba's Cressbrook Dam will need to be fast-tracked by three years. The project originally was scheduled to be completed by 2012. The move has triggered local controversy since Toowoomba now is poised to receive recycled water from Brisbane's western corridor pipeline scheme - despite residents voting against such a move in a 2006 referendum. Against this background, a meeting of irrigators with the Rudd administration in Canberra next month will request Federal Government capital funding for Lockyer Valley irrigators, in Qld, to access recycled water from Brisbane's western corridor pipeline scheme. Chair of the Lockyer Water Users Forum, Linton Brimblecombe, says former Prime Minister, John Howard, flagged a \$400m plus investment in the scheme last year. That was contingent on Queensland making the water available "on reasonable terms" to the drought-ravaged district. Mr. Brimblecombe says while he's "comfortable" with the medium priority status of any recycled water being earmarked for the Lockyer Valley. That compares with the high-priority status given to urban supplies. But the issue of drought-proofing the district's embattled horticulture industry remains. "It's a project of significance, to keep the Lockyer Valley alive," he said. SOURCE: Queensland Country Life

Temporary rise in Murray salinity at Wentworth expected

The Murray-Darling Basin Commission today advised water users on the Murray River between Wentworth and Lock 9 and also along Frenchman's Creek to expect an increase in salinity as the initial flush of water from the lower Darling River makes its way through the Wentworth Weir pool to Lake Victoria. Chief executive, Wendy Craik, said the water being delivered down the lower Darling River had arrived in the upper reaches of the Wentworth Weir pool. It was expected to arrive at the weir on Wednesday or Thursday this week. "Water quality monitoring in the lower Darling indicates that the salinity of the initial flush of Darling water is up to 1 700 EC. But it should quickly drop to about 250 to 300 EC," she said. Electrical conductivity (EC) estimates the amount of total dissolved salts (TDS), or the total amount of dissolved ions in the water. EC is controlled by rock types, lake basins and the sources of the ions. A small temporary rise in salinity (up to 280 EC) in the Murray, which originated from the Campaspe River in mid-December, will also arrive at Wentworth in the next few days. "Although the water from the lower Darling River will be diluted by the fresher water in the Murray River, the combined effect is expected to cause a short-term rise in salinity for a couple of days, of about 700 EC in the Murray downstream of Wentworth." "The increased salinity should only be temporary," Dr Craik said. "Salinity below Wentworth Weir should return to more normal levels in the range of 150 to 250 EC "We plan to mitigate impacts on South Australia by passing as much of the higher salinity water as possible into Lake Victoria. "There it will be diluted with 320 Gegalitres of 180 EC water. "After mixing, the salinity in the lake is expected to rise by 40 EC to 220 EC. "We advise water users between Wentworth and Lock 9 to take into account the rise in salinity when planning their operations over the next two weeks." SOURCE: Murray-Darling Basin Commission.

31st

FarmOnLine

SA to miss out on Darling River recharge

South Australian irrigators will receive minimal benefits from the flash floods occurring in the eastern states, despite the Darling River flowing "for the first time in a long time", says SA River Murray Minister, Karlene Maywald. "It is very exciting to see the Darling flow, as it moves us closer to getting more resources available for SA irrigators," she said. "Under the new water sharing arrangements, SA is 150 gegalitres better-off than we would otherwise have been. "But, we have to pay back that imbalance out of any improvements in the water situation, before we get any further allocations to irrigators. "This is a consequence of our receiving more water than we normally would have had under the Murray Darling Basin agreement. "The sooner we have paid that imbalance back, the sooner we will move closer to being able to allocate more water." Ms Maywald said what was needed was more water to flow into Lake Menindee, east of Broken Hill, to push the water level above 640gL and into commission management. "Once it gets into commission management, the water then becomes a shared resource," she said. "If this occurs, the water NSW is obliged to supply to SA could come from the Darling or Murray systems. "The Darling starting to flow like this increases SA's chances of getting some unregulated water." Lake Menindee supplies Broken Hill with water and stores Darling water for SA irrigators. However, as of last Wednesday, the Lake was recorded at 233gL - a third of the amount needed for SA to see benefits. Murray Darling Basin Commission chief, executive Wendy Craik says heavy rain and flooding of the Warrego River, in NSW's north west, would see more water make its way into the Darling upstream of Bourke, NSW, and then into Lake Menindee.

And heavy rain in the upper Murray might lead to 50-80g/L into the Murray system in SA. "However, it won't solve the water shortage in the southern part of the basin," she said. "NSW has also started releasing 70g/L from Lake Menindee into the lower Darling for stock and domestic use and a small amount of that may get into the Murray. "We just have to watch and wait. "Thankfully, La Nina appears to be sticking around until early-mid-autumn, which is good. "We just hope that will deliver plenty of rain over the Murray area." SOURCE: *Stock Journal*, SA, January 31

Woolworths says food prices will climb

This could be averted if we stopped or cut back on primary production exported

Australia's biggest retailer Woolworths Ltd says food prices will continue to rise in the months ahead, after posting a near 9pc lift in first half financial year sales. The company also firmed up its guidance for annual sales, after benefiting from solid growth across all of its key supermarket and general merchandise divisions. Woolworth said total sales for the 27 weeks ended December 31 grew by 8.7pc, to \$24 billion. The result was in line with expectations, as the company also took more market share from rival Coles. Supermarket sales climbed 7.9pc, to \$20.324 billion, while general merchandise jumped 13.8pc, to \$3.002 billion. Woolworths chief executive, Michael Luscombe, expects sales to grow 8-10pc in 2007-08, against earlier guidance of 7-10pc. He says upward pressure on food prices will continue over the next six months, as costs increase. "Indication from our vendors is that we've got more of the same coming," he said during a teleconference. Woolworths shares fell \$1.35, or 4.5pc, to \$29.46 on Wednesday. Mr Luscombe said the retailer had swallowed past price increases, although, he said, "It has nothing to do with the government inquiry. "We recognise there is a lot of competition out here. "We are just trying to do the right thing." Shoppers will soon be able to monitor the price of certain supermarket items online as part of a government probe into the grocery industry, with the consumer watchdog due to release its findings in July. Coles was bought by Wesfarmers Ltd in a \$22 billion takeover last year. Woolworths, however, continues to crush its main rival, which reported a flat profit of \$792 million in 2006-07, and is currently forecasting net profit to rise by 19-23pc this year. Mr Luscombe said the impact of inflation across the company's key categories has changed consumer behaviour, with the popularity of its own brand picking up. "Our private label business in food has been absolutely going gangbusters in the last half," he said. Last week, inflation rose to 3pc in 2007, latest official figures show. Mr Luscombe said there is "no doubt that discretionary spending will be tough" in the months ahead, particularly in those suburbs in the mortgage belt areas. But analysts point to Woolworths' plan to ramp up the refurbishment of its stores and include more private labels. "This is much higher margin for Woolworths, so they are effectively forcing the private label down the throat of the consumer," an analyst said. "Even if the consumers start to feel the pinch on interest rates and fuel, it will still support Woolworths profit by buying higher margin products." SOURCE: AAP

The Australian - Warmer oceans 'spark more hurricanes'

London: Researchers say they have shown that a half-degree Celsius temperature rise in the Atlantic ocean can fuel a 40 per cent increase in hurricanes. The finding by the team from University College London is a contentious one in the debate over how climate change affects weather and, especially, storms. "A 0.5 degree C increase in sea surface temperature is associated with a 40 per cent increase in hurricane frequency and activity," the British researchers wrote in their report, published in the journal *Nature* today. The team showed ocean warming is directly linked to the frequency, strength and duration of hurricanes, said Adam Lea, the research scientist who co-led the study. The study, which did not look at whether greenhouse gases linked to global warming played a role in increasing water temperature, will help scientists better predict how warmer oceans might affect hurricanes, he added in a telephone interview. "It is important that future climate models are able to reproduce the relationship between sea surface temperature and hurricane activity," Lea said. "If you are trying to predict some of the impacts of global warming you need to have that kind of sensitivity." Hurricanes feed on warm water, leading to conventional wisdom supported by some recent research that global warming could be revving up more powerful storms. US researchers, however, last week challenged this view, saying global warming could reduce the number of hurricanes hitting the United States with warmer waters resulting in atmospheric instabilities that prevent storms from forming. Atlantic storms play a pivotal role in the global energy, insurance and commodities markets, particularly since the devastating 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons, which hammered US oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico. The British team looked at storms that formed in the tropical North Atlantic, Caribbean Sea and Gulf of Mexico - a region that produced nearly 90 per cent of the hurricanes that struck the United States between 1950 and 2005. Reuters

Relax greenhouse cuts, Rudd told

The Rudd Government will have to abandon plans for rigid interim targets for greenhouse gas cuts to allow its emissions-trading scheme to work properly, a senior economist has said. Warwick McKibbin, whose economic models on climate change are being used by Treasury to calculate the costs involved, yesterday added his voice to concerns that mandating a specific cut for 2020 could lift the cost of tackling global warming. "That's the problem with politicians who make promises that can't be sustained," Professor McKibbin said. "I think the Government will realise they can still be credible enough, even if they drop a few things."

Kevin Rudd has said Australia needs interim targets for emissions cuts, beyond its existing pledge to reduce greenhouse emissions by 60 per cent by 2050. The Prime Minister commissioned Australian National University economist Ross Garnaut to advise the Government on how the targets should be set. Professor Garnaut suggested yesterday it would be more efficient to use targets as a guide for allocating carbon permits, rather than as exact and enforceable cuts for specific years. Professor McKibbin agrees, saying business should in some years be allowed to exceed the target for emissions. "It can't be all or nothing," he said. "There has to be a balance between the environmental benefit and the economic costs, and that's what's missing." However, a spokesman for Climate Change Minister Penny Wong said the Government would not abandon its election commitment on targets. "The Government expects (Professor Garnaut) will raise a number of interesting questions and ideas for consideration," Senator Wong's spokesman said. "Of course, given Professor Garnaut is independent, his ideas may not necessarily reflect government thinking." WWF climate program director Paul Toni warned that some companies would risk doing nothing to cut emissions if there were no binding interim targets, in the hope they could lobby future governments to soften the rules later. "Instead of the crunch coming in 10 years or five years, there will be some industries that will be asking for further support and will be able to exert pressure," Mr Toni said. "It will just postpone rent-seeking to a date further in the future." Australian Industry Greenhouse Network chief executive John Daley said he favoured less government interference and more market freedom in an emissions-trading system. The renewed debate over the targets comes as the US, isolated by its refusal to set emissions targets, promised \$2 billion to help developing countries reduce their carbon footprints. President George W. Bush pledged in his State of the Union address to set up a fund to transfer clean technology to those nations. Senator Wong's spokesman welcomed the US announcement, saying Australia would examine details of the fund. At the UN climate change conference in Bali last year, developing nations pushed for funding from the richer nations to help them introduce less polluting technology. The Howard government had promised more than \$100 million towards projects to help clean up industries in poorer countries under a US-backed Asia-Pacific Partnership. The Rudd Government has wound back Canberra's commitments to the partnership, but Senator Wong's spokesman said yesterday it supported the transfer of clean technology. "There is no doubt that a global solution to climate change requires the widespread use of clean energy technologies and assistance to developing countries to help them act on climate change," he said.