

## July 2006 : Edition 4

**Snippets Plus compiled using information from the Australian Water Association & Murray Darling Association and various other sources including various printed media.**

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**Australian Water Association - Promoting the Sustainable Management of Water**

The National Water Commission will spend more than a year learning how much water there was in Australia in 2004-05, and even that information will be subject to a number of caveats when it is released. Where data is available it is spread between about 600 Federal, State and Local Government agencies. It seems that, in an increasing number of instances there is not enough water to go around.

Two Aquifers together containing more than the volume of Sydney Harbour have been found deep within sandstone on the outskirts of Sydney. The Sydney Catchment Authority says if the aquifers are managed cautiously, the city now has a viable source of groundwater, harvestable in extreme drought.

A Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper on 'Stranded Irrigation Assets' by H. Roper, C. Sayers, and A. Smith has been loaded on the Commission's website. The paper presents the results of research on the options to address the perceived adverse financial consequences of stranded irrigations assets.

The federal government will suspend \$4m in National Competition Payments (5%) to WA to penalise the state's lack of progress with water planning.

At the UNDP's Eco Forum in Nicosia, a speaker from the Water Development Department in Cyprus showed that the 78% of the available water supply used by agriculture to irrigate citrus groves could be used to support twice the population and it is planned to reduce the level of water used for irrigation to 58% by 2020.

The NSW Code of Practice for Plumbing and Drainage from 1 July 2006 furthers water conservation efforts with reference to devices such as rainwater tanks, greywater and recycling systems with new requirements to help plumbers, builders and householders. The Code reflects the Australian Standard AS/NZS 3500.

BASIX (sustainability tool for housing) in NSW will be optional for extensions to existing homes from 1 August and mandatory after 1 October this year. A new BASIX Completion Receipt will identify compliant homes, from 1 July.

Welcome rain over the grain belt in WA this week has many farmers trying to finish sowing crops. But, in the Mallee, a promising start to the season has turned into a long wait for follow-up rains resulted in an early seeding, with ~60% of the crop sown by the end of May.

A heat wave sweeping across France following a prolonged period of low rainfall with associated low groundwater levels has led the government to declare a drought in 15 of the country's 96 mainland departments and issue advice on how to avoid dehydration and overheating, especially to the elderly. In 2003, 15,000 people died in a prolonged heat wave.

The EU Commission is taking Greece to the Court of Justice for failing to ensure proper treatment of urban wastewater in 24 of its towns and cities by the end of 2000. The lack of treatment means that the environment suffers and the health of residents in these areas is being put at risk.

The World Bank has approved a loan of US\$150m for water supply and sanitation projects in central China's Henan Province to improve water supply and wastewater management in 38 towns under 12 municipalities, through the construction of water production facilities, water distribution networks, sewerage systems and treatment facilities.

Water use in apartments could be cut by up to 10% if a Sydney Water trial of individual water meters for installation in new units proves a success.

The federal Government could intervene to block Queensland Premier Beattie's plans for a massive dam in SE Queensland.

Alan Mitchell, Economics Editor of the Australian Financial Review, was critical of the slow pace of water reform and of the burden on taxpayers. He noted a draft Productivity Commission report on rural water.

SA residents will now be entitled to apply for a \$400 rebate for plumbing a rainwater tank into their household system to encourage greater water savings.

### **Adelaide Advertiser**

Since the call for water donations for environmental flows back into the Murray went out last October, more than eight gigalitres has been diverted into environmental projects along the river in SA.

### **MDA**

#### **NSW says water reform way ahead of other States**

Frustrated NSW irrigators have blasted the National Water Initiative's slow-moving reforms, claiming they are being unfairly disadvantaged while other States fail to implement changes, such as water use cuts.

The NSW Irrigators Council, which last week delivered a damning report card on the progress of the National Water Initiative (NWI), said it would consider blocking further reform work until Queensland, Victoria and South Australia "pulled their weight" and met more of their obligations to reform water use and planning.

Two years into the landmark water agreement between the States and Canberra, the NSW Irrigators Council claims the NWI has "little National focus, is poorly led by the National Water Commission (NWC) and has failed to deliver unified water resource management". The claims are fiercely rejected by the NWC, which says the council's glowing report card of NSW's own reform achievements isn't exactly accurate.

The NWC says all States have made "significant progress" in meeting their obligations under the NWI agreement.

But chief executive of the NSW Irrigators Council, Doug Miell, believed NSW had copped the brunt of water reforms while other States missed implementation deadlines or didn't finish tasks.

He said NSW was often targeted by politicians and the National Water Commission as "the recalcitrant child" of water reform, yet a water reform progress report by the council showed Victoria, South Australia and Queensland had failed to complete more than half of their NWI obligations, while NSW has nearly completed all areas.

#### **Old Govt to build new dam in South-East Qld**

The Qld Government today announced a new dam to be built at Wyaralong near Beaudesert, south of Brisbane, at a cost of about \$400 to \$500 million.

An announcement about another major dam North of Brisbane, on the Mary River, is expected later this week.

Premier, Peter Beattie, said the dam was one of four new water storage initiatives on the Logan/Albert River catchment south of Brisbane.

In total, they will provide an additional 42,000 megalitres a year for South-East Queensland.

"An alternative site at nearby Tilleys Bridge would have provided a greater yield, but the disruption to the surrounding community would have been far greater," he said.

"At Wyaralong, we already own a lot of properties around the site. We need to purchase only around 15 rural properties, at a cost of approximately \$30 million.

"No matter where we locate the dam it will cause disruption and angst for the people affected by its construction."

The new dam at Wyaralong will provide approximately 21,000 megalitres a year.

This will be supplemented with water harvesting from the Logan River and other rivers - pumping water at times of high flows.

The Wyaralong Dam is expected to be completed by the end of 2011.

Brisbane is already on Level 3 water restrictions, with its dams down to around 30pc of capacity. No major dams have been built in South-East Qld to supply Brisbane for a number of years.

### **More bad news for the bush from Beazley**

Labour Leader Kim Beazley has continued his attack on rural and regional Australia by confirming his plan to redirect \$2.7 billion earmarked by the Coalition for telecommunications infrastructure for regional areas.

Speaking at the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia summit Mr Beazley reaffirmed his pledge to raid those funds for his own purposes but won't reveal how he will guarantee telecommunications services in regional Australia.

Deputy Prime Minister, Mark Vaile, said it was further evidence that Labour didn't care about regional communities.

"The Coalition established the \$3.1 billion 'Connect Australia' package, the largest telecommunications package in Australia's history, to ensure the seven million Australians living outside our capital cities have access to modern, quality regional broadband and mobile phone communications services and Mr Beazley wants to take it away.

Mr Vaile said, "Mr Beazley and Labour are happy to trash services to regional Australia if it meant achieving its political aims in the cities.

"Recently we had Mr Beazley promising to abolish 457 visas for skilled migrants which would have threatened the supply of overseas trained doctors and other health professionals in regional areas.

"Mr Beazley makes promises like this on the run with no thought for the impact on country people who are already suffering because of State Labour Governments' mismanagement of the health system."

### **Local Govt should unite to get better funding deal**

Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor is urging Australia's 450 Local Government Councils to unite to get a better funding deal from Government and for constitutional recognition of Local Government.

"I have been meeting with councils around the electorate of New England in recent weeks discussing their concerns," he said.

"Two of their major shared issues have been adequate funding for and constitutional recognition of Local Government.

"Local Government has been asked by Federal and State Governments to deliver more and more services with less and less funding available to them to do so."

Mr Windsor believes that there has been major cost shifting onto Local Government over the last 15 years or so and there needs to be better recognition of this by both the Federal and State Governments.

"The Mayors of the 450 Local Government instrumentalities across Australia need to unite, sign a common charter of arrangement and put that before the Federal Government and Opposition to get better recognition and funding for Local Government.

Whether that money is a percentage of income tax or GST or just greater allocation of Federal Assistance Grants, Local Government needs and deserves the extra funding to be able to deliver what Federal and State Governments are requiring them to deliver on top of what ratepayers expect from them.

"If Local Government can unite on this issue and really drive the need, I have no doubt that they will achieve the outcome they desire," Mr Windsor said.

Mr Windsor will be writing to all mayors in Australia, urging them to become active and united on this issue.

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“We have seen the positive result of active advocacy by Local Government on the continuation and enhancement of the Roads to Recovery Program,” Mr Windsor said.

"The same positive result could be achieved on constitutional recognition and better funding of Local Government if mayors and their councils take the same active positive approach."

### **Treasurer is on the money – Federalism isn't working**

The Federalism System set up more than 100 years ago is definitely broken with one quarter of all local councils in NSW now on the brink of financial collapse, according to the NSW Farmers' Assoc.

NSW Farmers' Association Non-Metropolitan State Taskforce chairman, Mal Peters, has thrown his support behind Treasurer Peter Costello's criticism of the "three tiered" system and is calling for urgent changes.

The Federal Government must convene an urgent symposium with a broad representation from Australia's community to find a better way forward," he says.

"The matter is urgent and the problems are complex.

"But Australia's long term economic and social wellbeing will suffer if we don't make changes.

“People are disenchanted with all tiers of government and service delivery including health, education, roads and the police system.

“Many Australians feel their nation is over-governed and the federal system conflict-ridden and inefficient.

"But giving more power to Canberra isn't the answer," Mr Peters says.

Mr Peters says our founding fathers, who wrote Australia's constitution, expected change, this hasn't happened and "We are now starting to pay the price of not doing so".

“Public debate on this issue must be had and we already have the material needed to kick start the process,” Mr Peters said.

In March, the NSW Farmers' Association hosted a National Symposium – Federalism and Regionalism in Australia, to start looking for a better way to govern the country.

Representatives from Griffith University, CSIRO, The Australia and New Zealand School of Government and the Institute of Public Administration Australia joined the Association.

“This group concluded that reform must provide a more efficient, durable and cooperative apportionment of policy responsibility between national and regional levels of government,” Mr Peters said.

The association has also launched a discussion paper, “Reform of Australia's Federal System – Identifying the Benefit” and is calling for public comment.

“At the moment we have a system that fosters the ‘blame-game’ mentality, where problems and funding shortfalls are fobbed off to other tiers of government,” Mr Peters says.

“Any new model of governance has to be approached systematically in phases to get the desired outcome that people will embrace.

“This issue is too critical for political games and leadership is needed. "Mr Costello has a great opportunity to take Australia forward into the 21st Century, I urge him to take up the challenge.”

ABC Interview “What is the MDA doing in Dubbo today and what are you trying to achieve for the MDA in Central NSW?

### **MDA**

The Murray Darling Association now in its 61st year, was formed out of the need for local government to address issues of sustainable development along the Murray and hence the Snowy Mountain's scheme was conceived. Over a long period, the issues on the table include security of water supply for urban and rural

development, the control of soil erosion and salinity (by formation of landcare groups, but more recently the control of pest plants and animals).

5.

The MDA is holding its annual Conference in Dubbo on September 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> and the theme of the conference is "Who Owns the Water". The conference theme and program will explore the current topic of water ownership and the likely impact of the proposed separation of water and land titles across the Murray-Darling Basin.

Rate revenue for Local Government is currently based on water and land being linked. A major challenge facing Local Government is how to maintain services to the community where some Council's are likely to have a lower rate base. Water trading is inevitable, so keeping that commodity within community boundaries is one means by which Local Government can maintain the viability of communities. Transferring water use to higher value crops will also be discussed.

There are many competing forces for the water, one of which is the environment but water borne and land based weeds and salinity have all contributed to increases in management costs for the farmers and the councils in the current push for a better balance in natural resource management.

The views and opinions are as diverse as the regions that the Basin covers and hence it has never been more important for these regions to interact and exchange data that gives a better understanding of each regions long term needs for development to remain sustainable and viable.

The charter of the Murray Darling Association is to facilitate this exchange of knowledge and data and we have several mechanisms for this to happen. We align ourselves with groups of councils and operate across all borders. We are 'A' political and hence not dictated to by any one philosophy.

We sit in one of the world's greatest basins. Most people in the basin are aware of its importance to the Australian economy, both through irrigation and dryland farming.

The complication of severe drought only comes once every 30 or 40 years and this time it has really taken bite. Any old timers will tell you how they survived the 1930's depression and how water scarcity became translated in to the need for water storage and so we embarked on massive projects to water proof our communities.

The prosperity we have seen over the past 60 years is a result of the collective efforts of all communities and all the Darling and Murray systems. It is the wish of the Murray Darling Association to expand its resources through interaction with councils and in sync with the recently formed Catchment Management Authorities.

Following on the WA Irrigation review and the governance review, the WA Government is preparing a State Water Plan of which Part One is released for public comment as a Draft Water Policy Framework Discussion Paper.

The NSW Irrigators Council has delivered a damming report on the progress of water reform under the NWI, in particular criticising a lack of action in other states and their continuation of the status quo rather than taking up the new opportunities implicit in the NWI.

Wastes discharged to sewers, mine water wastes stored in tailings dams and material transferred to landfills will be reportable under proposed changes to the National Pollutant Inventory in a move aimed to encourage greater recycling.

Qld State Government will legislate to make tough new water savings targets mandatory in all new housing estates throughout southeast Queensland in a move to match BASIX in NSW.

Sydney Water is trialing metering of individual units in Meriton apartment blocks at Rhodes and Hornsby using two types of Meters, to decide if they are a feasible option for new apartment blocks. The unfinished block at Hornsby will use water meters connected to a data logger so the meters can be read using remote digital technology.

Another new Dam to be built has been announced for Wyaralong near Beaudesert at a cost of approx \$400 to \$500 million, one of 4 new water storage initiatives on the Logan-Albert River catchment to provide an additional 42 GL/yr for South East Qld.

Melbourne Water says it is on track to complete a major environmental upgrade costing \$84m that will significantly reduce Ammonia in its sewage treatment processes at the Eastern Treatment Plant at

Bangholme by more than 75% and will significantly improve the quality of the fully treated effluent discharged into Bass Strait at Boags Rocks.

6.

Water Corporation (WA) is upgrading the water transfer infrastructure between South and Port Headland to provide a more reliable and robust water supply system.

Sydney Water has appointed AGILITY Management Pty Ltd to improve infrastructure and reduce wet weather overflows in Cronulla as a part of the SEWERFIX Wet Weather Overflow Reduction Program to improve water quality in Gunnamatta Bay and surrounding Cronulla beaches.

SA Water's \$48.5m project to secure Eyre Peninsula's water supply is progressing well. Construction of the pipeline component of the project is also on track with 25km of pipeline already laid. Expected completion date is December 2006.

Qld Premier Beattie announced the first stage of the Traveston Dam to be built by 2011 for ~\$1.7b, 180 GL capacity, to yield 70 GL/yr.

Nearby Borumba Dam wall will be raised by 30m, supplying an extra 40 GL/yr, for \$250m.

Traveston Dam could then be extended to provide another 40,000 ML, with a decision around 2030.

WATERSVR, a patented monolayer that saves water from evaporation, was recently tested on potable water reservoirs at Coliban Water in Victoria. The trials were done over a month-long period on the reservoir and averaged over 30% in evaporation reduction.

Yarra Valley Water has awarded a \$25m contract to TENIX Alliance to construct major sewerage infrastructure for Mernda South, Mernda North and Doreen, on the northern fringe of Melbourne. The project will support continued development of the Mernda-Doreen corridor and includes the construction of pump stations, flow control facilities and pipelines.

An Austrian manufacturer of Stormwater Management Unit drainage systems in cast iron. Preis & Co. is interested in entering the Australian market and would thus like some information on possible channels and partners for distribution.

Thames Water in UK escaped a fine for missing annual leakage targets when water services regulator OFWAT ordered it to spend an extra £150m on replacing leaking water pipes instead. Failure to meet targets for the third year in a row caused a public outcry made worse by a parallel announcement of a 31% rise in annual profits.

A \$29 million irrigation project near Griffith, NSW, has converted the Barren Box Swamp in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area into a water-saving facility.

Protesters confronted Premier Peter Beattie when he visited communities on Brisbane's rural fringe to announce two controversial dam sites - but it appears only federal intervention can stop the projects.

The \$6 billion expansion of the Olympic Dam uranium mine in outback South Australia hinges on environmental approvals for a \$300million desalination plant that is crucial to the mine's expansion and that is threatened by the southern right whale.

Work on the Traveston Dam in SE Queensland will proceed in three stages so as to cause least dislocation to local communities.

Annabelle McDonald, on water restrictions and attitudes in SE Queensland, reports on independent research, which "shows 61 per cent of residents, especially those in Brisbane, are ready to accept recycled water being put into dams for reuse.

Dams themselves garnered 80 per cent support". Don't blame El Nino entirely for the dry years. A new climate model based on sunspot activity indicates Southeast Australia could be heading for a period of even lower rainfall.

Associate Professor Robert Baker from the University of New England, NSW, outlined the results of his research last week at the Regional Congress of the International Geographical Union in Brisbane.

He said his model could be used - in conjunction with other indicators such as the Southern Oscillation Index (SOI) - as a significant decision-making tool in agriculture and natural resource management.

The paper he presented to the congress was titled "Predicting drought in southeast Australia using solar cycles".

7.

Changing patterns of dark spots on the surface of the Sun are a visible indication of changes in the magnetic forces within.

Dr Baker has correlated these sunspot patterns - which have been recorded since 1745 - with historical rainfall records in South-Eastern Australia.

The correlation shows that periods of high rainfall are associated with periods of increased sunspot activity.

The most well-known sunspot cycle is the 11-year cycle, which comprises alternating five-and-a-half-year periods of relatively high and low sunspot activity.

Once every 11 years, too, there is a sudden reversal of the polarity of the Sun's magnetic field, so that there is a complete magnetic cycle (the "Hale cycle" or "double sunspot cycle") every 22 years.

The 11-year sunspot cycle, however, is part of a more complex pattern that includes cycles of 500 and 1500 years. (Some of the climatic effects of these longer cycles can be deduced from ice-core data and historical records).

Dr Baker's model, which incorporates all these factors, indicates that southeastern Australia - much of it currently drought-affected - could be heading for a period of even lower rainfall.

This is because of an imminent coincidence of several of the solar cycles. The sunspot minimum in the 11-year cycle due in August this year coincides with that phase of the Hale cycle in which the magnetic field lines emerge from the sun's south pole.

Dr Baker said historical records showed that this coincidence was associated with the increased likelihood of severe droughts in eastern Australia. On top of this coincidence - and contributing to the potential for drought conditions - the sun is entering a longer, 500-year period of reduced sunspot activity.

Dr Baker explained that the power of his predictive model lay in the fact that solar activity as a whole occurred in regular cycles.

"In this respect the sun is like a musical instrument - vibrating in a complex manner, but with all the components (like the 'harmonics' of music) related to a vast 'fundamental' vibration by simple numbers," he said.

"This predictive potential of the sunspot cycle is available because much of solar behaviour is quasi-periodic.

It's governed by the operation of the magnetic fields generated by a peculiar 'dynamo' in the sun.

"The congress - from Monday to Friday last week - was at Queensland University of Technology.

### **McGauran grants \$700,000 to tackle feral animals**

Farmers and the environment are losing \$500 million a year to feral animals, including rabbits, foxes and feral pigs, but are now fighting back through a raft of targeted Government programs.

Australian Minister for Agriculture, Peter McGauran, has today announced funding of more than \$700,000 for 19 new projects to find better ways of controlling feral animals.

"Feral animals kill or compete with livestock and native animals, damage crops, degrade the environment, and could spread exotic diseases if they were to enter the country," Mr McGauran said.

"One of the projects involves finalising development of a humane carbon monoxide fumigator to target rabbits in warrens where ripping and baiting is not feasible.

"This will be a critical part of an integrated approach to maintaining low rabbit populations following the spread of rabbit haemorrhagic disease in the mid-1990s.

"It is vital that we do not allow rabbits to build up to pre-calicivirus levels."

Another project will test ways of reducing the increasing impact of bird pests on Australia's horticulture industry.

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This is particularly relevant with the recent spread of starlings - often called the 'rats' or 'cane toads' of the sky - into Western Australia.

A Queensland-based project will investigate the potential use of cyanide as a quick and humane way of reducing feral pig populations.

The projects will be overseen by the Government's National Feral Animal Control Program, whose aim is to identify better ways of managing nationally significant pest animals.

### **Murray irrigators outraged by 79pc water price hike**

Irrigators in the Murray Irrigation district are appalled by a recent decision to increase the costs of bulk water charges by 79pc over the next four years.

Chairman of Murray Irrigation, Stewart Ellis says the increase will garner an additional \$5.7 million from irrigators annually, and has been driven by rising costs at the Murray Darling Basin Commission.

"We don't know what is a true and efficient way to find out costings (of MDBC)," Mr Ellis said. Across NSW forecasts for irrigation costs vary with some areas receiving a reduction, while others, are looking at a substantial cost hikes.

"But Murray irrigators are being asked to pay a much larger share of MDBC costs than irrigators in other parts of the Murray Darling system," he said.

### **Qld abandons plan to buy major irrigation properties**

Negotiations are continuing with farmers for the purchase of two South West Queensland irrigation properties that were at the centre of a political debate about returning water to the Murray River.

The Queensland Government today ruled out attempting to purchase irrigation giants Ballandool Station, at Hebel, and Clyde, Dirranbandi.

It had earlier mooted the idea of buying the blocks, cancelling their irrigation licences to return flows to the Murray Darling, and then re-selling the properties.

Both blocks were passed in today even though a crowd of 300 people attended the Ray White in-room auctions.

Clyde was offered first where bidding reached \$27m and was passed in at that figure to Kelvin Weekes, a successful cotton grower from Wee Waa, NSW.

Mr Weekes is continuing with negotiations, however the property is currently available to the post auction market on a first-in best-dressed basis.

Clyde, situated 20kms south of Dirranbandi, consists of 19,150ha and water-storage capacity of 120,000 megalitres.

The second property on offer was the 27,853ha Ballandool Station situated on the Queensland-New South Wales border, which has a storage capacity of 100,000ML. Bidding for this quality holding reached \$20m. The vendors are keen to consider all offers in excess of the passed in amount.

Selling agents Rob & Simon Southwell of Ray White Rural says the properties represent "excellent value with purchasers having the opportunity to secure them at a price considerably below market expectations".

**Adelaide Advertiser**



More than half of South Australians are concerned about the purity of their water supply. A National survey, conducted in March, found 56% of South Australian's were concerned about water impurities, the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest level behind Western Australian's on 60%.

"Water Supply Risk as Dry Hits" as inflows to the Murray Darling Basin River system fell to the lowest level on record last month the State government has been forced to limit River Murray water allocations to 80% of normal supply from the river this year. Total water in the Murray Darling basin system is 3576GL, which is just 40% of capacity.

9.

## AWA

Prime Minister John Howard addressed a CEDA luncheon in Sydney on Monday 14th and said that the commonwealth and the states had agreed that the states should focus on a small number of major projects to improve water availability in the capital cities and that water should be judged by its quality and not its history.

National Water Reform was a key topic at last week's Council of Australian Governments meeting between Prime Minister Howard and state and territory leaders, with a re-affirmation of intent, identification of priorities and a new focus on large projects.

The Victorian Smart Water Fund, Round 4 Funding Program, part of a commitment by the Victorian water industry and the Government to encourage individuals, community groups, businesses and research bodies to put up innovative water savings ideas, now has \$6m available through various funding streams.

The National Water Commission's Report, "Progress On The National Water Initiative", to COAG gave a good appraisal of progress to date and supported the implementation of Indirect Potable Re-use.

The Qld Government is increasing its investment in a program to save water drawn from the Great Artesian Basin used by rural landholders with an additional \$500,000 over three years for the Great Artesian Basin Sustainability Initiative (GABSI), bringing total commitment to the program to \$15m. Wateraid Australia has achieved the holy grail of DGR (deductible gift recipient) status, awarded by the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer. This enables Wateraid to conduct its own fund raising (\$2m target this year) for the many water, sanitation and hygiene projects under way and planned for Timor Leste, PNG, India, Nepal, Mozambique and Ethiopia.

Goulburn - leading Australia in water conservation or a toilet-to-tap town? It all depends on how you look at it but for Goulburn Mulwaree Council, spin could play a big part in the success or failure of an ambitious \$40 million plan to recycle the city's sewage.

Draft Moreton Water Resource Plan for Brisbane, Pine and Caboolture Rivers, plus the Cabbage Tree and Pumicestone Creeks, has been released for public comment. It includes a framework for managing underground water and taking water from overland flow.

IPART, NSW Pricing Regulator, has released a Draft recommendation on prices and charges for Recycled water and sewer mining for households by Sydney Water, Hunter Water, Gosford City and Wyong Councils.

NSW Irrigators threaten to pull out of the National Water Initiative because of the financial burden it is placing on them, unless the Federal and State Governments come up with changes to address their woes. They are mainly concerned about forecast draft bulk water price rises of 92% for regulated systems and 144% for unregulated and groundwater systems.

The European Commission has issued the report 'Quality of bathing water, 2005 bathing season' published annually before the start of the season to inform the public of water quality for each of its member states and covering trends over previous bathing seasons.

With thirsty cash crops replacing traditional agriculture in the Mediterranean, the region must brace itself for harsher, and more frequent drought, according to WWF, meaning that fresh water could become a scarce commodity, with communities and livelihoods set to suffer. A major shift in European and National policies that govern the way water is used is called for.

Clough and joint venture partner Kellogg Brown & Root have won a \$65 million contract to design and build a reservoir in Kalgoorlie for the Water Corporation.

Leighton Contractors have recently secured two major water infrastructure projects in NSW, including the Liverpool to Ashfield Pipeline for Sydney Water Corporation (SWC) for completion in 2008 and the Shannon Creek Storage (near Grafton) for North Coast Water, a business unit of Clarence Valley Council also for 2008.

The CRC for Water Quality & Treatment held a workshop in Melbourne on 14 July, to discuss its future, after its life as a CRC has ended. Various models and emphases were thrashed out and an inclusive, public-good approach was agreed upon, focused on water supply and health.

10.

Industries in China guilty of contributing to the massive pollution threatening water supplies in the country will be named & shamed.

Sydney Water could almost treble the cost of recycled water for residential consumers in the next three years to discourage overuse.

According to Australian Financial Review, it is taking social scientists to unravel our intense reactions to liquid issues particularly water with CSIRO and the Warren Centre at Sydney University among those employing them to tease out psychological and socio-political dimensions of water use.

China's water problems make solving Australia's look like child's play with shortages at one end of the country, floods at the other and massive industrial pollution.

### **Darling Downs waste pipeline 'won't go away'.**

The proponents of the recycled wastewater pipeline between Brisbane and the Darling Downs say they 'are not out of the game'.

In fact, NUWater Alliance chairman, Phil Jauncey, has taken the gloves off, believing the water lobby group must raise its political profile by actively championing candidates who support the project.

In the meantime, the message remains: "We are still here and we are not going away," he said.

After the project being knocked back for Federal Government funding by the National Water Commission, lacklustre interest on the part of the State Government and despite SE Queensland's deepening water crisis, NUWater remains remarkably optimistic.

Mr Jauncey, speaking at an annual general meeting attended by about 100 supporters in Norwin late last week, maintains the push to get recycled water up on to the Darling Downs already is underway.

He reasons that the Beattie Government's multi-million dollar Western Corridor Recycled Water Pipeline scheme, which will redirect 130,000ML of recycled water from Brisbane's bay-side to power stations west of the city, still has 60,000ML plus left over – for agriculture.

Stage two of this ambitious project envisages this water being piped to the Lockyer Valley with Mr Jauncey underscoring his "delight" at the Premier's decision to fast-track the Western Corridor project.

He makes no bones of his disappointment, however, at the continued lack of State Government support for the NUWater proposal, citing it as a major reason why it did not secure a seal of approval from the National Water Commission.

Mr Jauncey admitted the organisation took some time "to get our breath back" after the NWC outcome became public, believing it was best to take a measured approach to ensuring its long-standing campaign to revitalise large swathes of rural Queensland did not falter.

"The NWI rejected it because we did not have the support of the Queensland Government," he said. "A major part of the NWI criteria is to have the partnerships and politics in place but, at this point in time, we don't have that," Mr Jauncey said.

Nevertheless, he is confident that NUWater will be able to address some "minor issues" when it resubmits its plan to the NWC.

### **New push to reinvigorate the NSW bush.**

Key representatives from more than 10 organisations have met in Sydney to flesh out new ways to breath life back into rural and regional communities across NSW. NSW Farmers Association president, Jock Laurie, said the meeting, which his association convened, addressed the obstacles facing country communities and ways in which to overcome these as a combined lobby force.

"Stakeholders from agriculture, education, and local government all agreed that rural NSW needs to be pro-active in order to keep its communities alive and remain vibrant places to live," Mr Laurie said.

"Issues discussed include ways to attract greater health and education services to the bush, pro-active ways to retain vital infrastructure particularly in road and rail, counter population drift, boost employment, and cut down on government regulations," he said.

11.

Mr Laurie said there needed to be a change of focus from a metropolitan planning strategy to a "whole of state" long term strategy, with one area of concern being cost shifting from State to local government. "At this stage we don't know how to fix the problems but we're having discussions with relevant groups to sort these issues out," Mr Laurie said.

Don Burke from the Australian Environment Foundation, and Roger Fletcher from Fletcher International Exports, were some of the attendees at the meeting.

Mr Laurie said the stakeholders also looked forward to providing input into the consultation process which NSW Premier, Morris Iemma, announced this week which will be used to harness the views and priorities which are presented in the final State plan.

Representatives included the NSW Farmers Association, Fletcher International Exports, Charles Sturt University, Regional Communities Consultative Council, Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, Australian Livestock and Property Agents Association, Country Women's Association, Shires Association of NSW, Australian Business Ltd, Australian Environment Foundation, Local Government Association and Rural Arts NSW.

### **NSW irrigators slam national water initiative.**

The NSW Irrigators Council has delivered a damning report card on the progress of the National Water Initiative (NWI).

Two years since the historic agreement was signed, the irrigator group says the NWI has "little national focus, is poorly led by the National Water Commission and has failed to deliver unified water resource management".

The council's chief executive, Doug Miell, said NSW was often targeted by politicians and the National Water Commission as the "recalcitrant, bastard child" of water reform but says the NSW Government and irrigation industry is ahead of the pack in meeting its commitments under the initiative compared with other States.

Mr Miell said there was also often "unfinished business" leftover from NWI reforms which were being picked up by irrigator groups, and not the National Water Commission, such as market information, consumer protection, local government rates, management of environmental water and taxation of groundwater asset reduction payments.

"Instead of leadership on resolving these issues, the NWC is missing in action and not interested in ensuring that reforms are properly and fully completed," Mr Miell said. A water reform progress report by the council showed Victoria, South Australia and Queensland had failed to complete more than half of their NWI reform obligations, while NSW has nearly completed all areas.

### **NSW irrigators confident of winning tax battle.**

Groundwater users in six NSW valleys are now confident of winning their tax battle to have a \$110 million NSW and Federal Government structural adjustment package to compensate them for large permanent cuts to water entitlements taxed as capital not income.

Former Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, and representatives of the NSW Irrigators Council have met Prime Minister, John Howard, and his Parliamentary Secretary in charge of water, Malcolm Turnbull, requesting immediate changes to the Tax Act following concerns were raised by irrigators.

Mr Anderson told last weekend's State conference of The Nationals in Ballina that while the final decision rested with the Prime Minister and the Treasurer, he believed there was strong support now for changes to the tax ruling.

NSW Irrigators Council chief executive, Doug Miell, said he expected the issue would be resolved – possibly in a couple of weeks – after a favourable response from Mr Howard.

He said the council had presented the Prime Minister with a detailed argument against taxing the package as income and legal advice it had obtained supporting their case that the payments should be taxed as capital not income.

12.

The package affects groundwater users in the Upper and Lower Namoi, Lower Gwydir, Lower Macquarie, Lower Lachlan, Lower Murrumbidgee and Lower Murray systems.

### **Driest May in 50 years for NSW**

The lowest average May rainfall in NSW for 50 years has pushed further large chunks of the State into drought, with 89 per cent now drought declared compared with 62pc last month.

However, the figures are based on the situation at the end of May, before reasonable rainfalls two weekends ago eased the situation for farmers and allowed most to complete sowing of their winter crops.

Only the North Coast representing 2.9pc of the State is in satisfactory condition and parts of the Northern Tablelands, Slopes and Plains near the Queensland border, the Illawarra region and a patch of the lower Western Division are considered marginal.

NSW Primary Industries Minister, Ian Macdonald, said rain since the end of May had helped but much more was needed to pull NSW out of drought.

NSW Farmers Association president, Jock Laurie, said the latest figures were "devastating" and called on NSW and federal governments to urgently re-assess their drought aid.

### **Managing the weed menace.**

Management of one of the major problems affecting agricultural production in Australia will be assisted by national data collection standards, released today by the Minister for Conservation, Senator Eric Abetz.

"Weeds are a serious threat to natural and agricultural ecosystems and have major impacts on the health, safety, amenity, economic well-being and quality of life of Australians," the Minister said.

"Weeds of National Significance (WONS) are the weeds considered to currently pose the most serious threats at a national level.

"There are 20 such weeds, including commonly recognised plants such as blackberry.

"For instance, on farms blackberries reduce pasture production, restrict access to water and increase fire hazards. Berries are easily spread and blackberry will persist indefinitely in an area unless it is treated," he said.

One of the challenges for management of WONS is access to accurate and consistent information about infestation and spread. "You can't manage what you can't measure and setting priorities for management requires data.

"The WONS field manual sets out procedures to ensure national consistency in data collection. "This will allow planners and policy makers to make informed decisions about priority areas for weed eradication and containment," Senator Abetz said.

The WONS field manual was funded by the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust.

It is collaboration between Australian Government, State and Territory weed management and research programs.

### **Water: Debate to hit boiling point this week.**

The national water debate is likely to heat up again this week, back to boiling point.

The National Water Commission on Friday called for governments to increase their commitment to National Water Initiative (NWI) reforms.

There is likely to be vigorous reaction this week to that call. The NWI is meant to provide the blueprint, timetable and mechanisms for constructive cooperation in national water reform.

- The Prime Minister in a speech later today (Monday) is expected to blast Australia's lack of progress over major water upgrades.
- NSW irrigators last week threatened to pull out of the NWI agreement.

13.

The irrigators are angry over proposed huge hikes in irrigation water charges by the NSW Government, which claims the higher charges are needed for NSW to comply with the NWI.

On Friday, chair of the National Water Commission, Ken Matthews, said, "The commission has determined that the risks to Australia's water resources are increasing – particularly through growing demand and falling reliability of supply."

He was reporting to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in Canberra.

He said Australia faced ongoing difficulties with: -

- Sustained below average rainfall.
- achieving sustainable water management in practice.
- closing the knowledge gaps around the availability and nature of the water resource in many surface and ground water systems.
- the fact that our water markets are still in their infancy.

Mr Matthews said there were six key areas for improvement in the NWI:

- completing the process of converting existing water rights into secure and tradable water access entitlements.
- completing NWI-consistent water plans through transparent processes and using best available science.
- implementing these plans to achieve sustainable levels of water extraction in practice.
- establishing open and low cost water trading arrangements.
- improving water pricing to support the wider water reform agenda.
- Implementing national water accounting and measurement standards, and adequate systems for measuring, metering, monitoring and reporting on water resources.

### **2006 Water Industry innovation awarded to Waterfind.com.au**

Australia's online water market, Waterfind.com.au, has been recognised at an industry awards ceremony as the recipient of the 2006 Australian Water Association Innovation Award.

The award judging and ceremony was conducted by the Water Industry Alliance (WIA) which has a national and international membership base. The alliance conducts annual awards ceremonies to provide national recognition of excellence from their members.

"Waterfind.com.au" is a national company that currently operates water-trading markets in the Southern Murray Darling Basin, as currently this is where over 70pc of all Australia's water trading occurs.

As the separation of water and land is now on the National agenda, many existing farming organisations are finding that they have gained a valuable commodity that needs to be managed on a market throughout the water season.

Waterfind provides services directly to water licence holders through its online trading system, and indirectly through services provided to Water brokers, Governments and Irrigation Authorities.

Its charter is to "make water trading easy."

## **Water: PM demands new urgency.**

Prime Minister John Howard has defended the National Water Initiative as turning around water management in Australia.

He was responding to NSW irrigators who last week threatened to walk away from the National Water Initiative (NWI) program.

14.

Major policy speech today to the Committee for the Economic Development of Australia (CEDA), Mr Howard has outlined his vision for solving Australia's water crisis.

It places heavy emphasis on the NWI and greater recycling of water.

"Rational water management has eluded Australia for too long," Mr Howard said.

"Now, with the National Water Initiative, we are finally turning this around.

"Funding of more than \$400 million has been approved.

"This is supported by more than \$1 billion of investment in water conservation projects.

"Cities, towns and rural communities around Australia will in time see the benefits.

"They see this through, for example, improved irrigation channelling in the Wimmera Mallee, better drinking water in Adelaide, and, if the communities of Toowoomba and Goulburn so decide, greater water recycling."

Despite this, Mr Howard says a "sense of urgency" must be maintained in water reform.

"There is still too much reform slippage in some areas," he said.

"There is still too much blame-shifting between governments".

"There is still too little truly innovative thinking about Australia's large-scale water challenges."

Mr Howard identified six 'basics' of the National Water Initiative where urgency needs to be focused.

All Governments need to:

- Improve approaches to water pricing.
- Ensure water entitlements are secure and tradeable.
- Facilitate permanent interstate water trading.
- Ensure scientifically-based and transparent water planning.
- Improve water resource accounting.
- Integrate management of environmental water.

"I especially urge New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia to move quickly towards effective water trading arrangements," he said.

At Friday's COAG meeting Mr Howard asked State and Territory leaders to bring forward a small number of major water saving proposals for Federal funding."

Allied to this, I believe we need nothing short of a revolution in thinking about Australia's urban water challenges," he said today.

"Two assumptions have dominated water infrastructure in our cities. "The first is that water should only be used once.

"The second is that storm water should be carried away to rivers and oceans as quickly as possible.

"Compared with desalination, for example, water recycling and capturing storm water have much more to recommend them as strategies for solving Australia's urban water challenges.

"The simple fact is that there is little or no reason why our large cities should be gripped permanently by water crises."

## AWA

The Victorian Government has banned building of dams on Victoria's 18 heritage rivers, including the Snowy and Mitchell Rivers, by amendment of the Victorian Heritage Rivers Act.

## 15.

The latest report on its Leakage Reduction program, from Sydney Water, says that since 1999 till end of June 2006, it had inspected and corrected 41,505 km of leaking pipes for estimated water savings of 50.3 ML/d, however there remained a leakage loss of 8.7%.

The CRC for Water Quality and Treatments plain language Consumer's Guide to Drinking Water has recently been updated. It provides an overview of water supply in Australia and around the world and discusses how water is collected, treated, distributed, used and regulated.

The Economic Regulatory Authority of WA published its Final Report: "Inquiry on Country Water and Wastewater Pricing in Western Australia", recommending measures to move gradually towards a more cost-reflective pricing policy. In the south, households using up to 300 kL/yr will pay a uniform \$0.82/kL, but rising block tariffs will have the biggest users paying up to \$5/kL.

Dept Natural Resources, Mines & Water (Qld) has released a report by Parsons Brinckerhoff, examining environmental and social considerations, on options for Toowoomba whose citizens, after an extensive campaign to address their concerns, will shortly become the first Australians to vote on Indirect Potable Re-use to secure its water supply into the future.

Earth Systems Technologies was recently awarded a Commercial Ready Grant from Austindustry for field trials of its innovative Neutral Barrier Technology. This approach provides control of subsurface water flow, and has application to a broad range of potable and polluted water issues. The company is selecting final trial sites, and seeks interest in the technology from potential users.

More than 2000 applications valued at \$500,000 have been lodged as of 18 July 2006 with the Queensland Government's Home Waterwise Rebate Scheme as residents in the State's southeast step up their efforts to save more water.

Just released, a special bulletin from Allens Arthur Robinson, major sponsor of AWA's upcoming Master Class (see below under Events). The bulletin asks the question "will Queensland Water Commission be able to solve the state's water shortage problems?"

A groundbreaking trial to decrease Salinity in the Collie River and the Wellington Dam is on track to render the water suitable for drinking.

WA Water Resources Minister Kobelke launched year 2 of the Collie River Salinity Recovery Project (CRSRP), saying initial results had been very promising.

The proposed new Desalination plant at Tugun on the Gold Coast has received a further promise of \$80m from the Queensland Government, bringing its commitment to \$92.4m but contingent on the Gold Coast City Council contributing a further \$20m.

Gold Coast City Council is seeking proposals from industry to form an Alliance for delivery of the Hinze Dam Stage 3 Project. The dam augmentation will provide additional flood mitigation capacity and water supply yield for the Gold Coast region.

A water desalination unit at Beverley mine, in north of SA was contaminated after a maintenance worker mistakenly added 4 litres of 0.4 % uranium solution rather than hydrochloric acid to the cleaning cycle: the error was discovered about three hours later. However subsequent testing by the Australian Water Quality Centre revealed uranium at 0.027 ppm slightly above the NHMRC guideline of 0.02 ppm.

The Queensland Water Commission, after consultation with Councils throughout the South East, has decided to amend Level 3 Residential Water Restrictions to assist the elderly and residents with a disability.

Four large River Restoration Projects - Kissimmee River (USA), Lake Macquarie (Australia), South Saskatchewan River (Canada) and Sha River (China) - are finalists for the 2006 International Thies Riverprize award for excellence in river and waterway management. The \$225,000 prize will be awarded at a special ceremony during the International Riversymposium in Brisbane on 5 September.

Europe's rivers, lakes and coastal waters, as well as human health, will be better protected against pollution from a range of dangerous substances under new legislation proposed by the European Commission setting limits on concentrations in surface waters of 41 types of pesticides, heavy metals and other dangerous chemical substances; to be met by 2015.

16.

EEB (European Environmental Bureau) and WWF have submitted a complaint to the European Commission asking to open an infringement procedure against 11 EU Member States for failure to correctly apply the EU Water Framework Directive because the 'polluter pays' principle is not being applied.

Australian National Committee on Irrigation and Drainage (ANCID) is calling for applications for the 2006 Sustainable Irrigation/ANCID Travel Fellowship Award, a 12-month fellowship for a young scientific achiever in irrigation research and development, sponsored by the National Program for Sustainable irrigation; and ANCID will a mentor for the winner during the 12-month fellowship. Closing date 7 August

The Mayors of Wyong and Gosford were due to meet the Minister for Water Utilities David Campbell today, to discuss options for the future of the Central Coast's water supply. Supplies in the area are at less than 16% capacity, and the Minister has asked the Councils to consider ways to secure more water, including closer ties with the Hunter Water Corporation.

The Federal Government has demanded the states stop stripping hundreds of millions of dollars in profits (up to \$5 billion since 1999) from corporatised water authorities as dividends into their State budget figures and re-invest the funds into overdue infrastructure projects. The largest payment was in Victoria (almost \$1.6 billion from its metropolitan water authorities) followed by Western Australia on \$1.56 billion.

In making a call for governments to rethink urban water use practices, PM John Howard called for increased projects for water recycling and stormwater capture.

The Beattie government has allocated \$25million for work on a new northern regional pipeline to link the new Traveston Dam to be built on the Sunshine Coast hinterland to Brisbane. Problems with handling the water crisis in Southeast Queensland have caused headaches for the Beattie Government, frustration and complaints of miss-management.

The Murray River is but one of a number of global rivers facing a major crisis through extraction and salinity.

Water is in such short supply on the booming NSW Central Coast that the State Government may seize control of supplies from local councils, while a plan to place 20 mobile desalination plants on the region's beaches may send water bills soaring.

### **Murray Valley Standard: Murray Bridge SA**

#### **Flows Boosted**

SA has made its first payment to the Goulburn Murray Water Recovery Package, a Victorian project that will boost SA's River Murray environmental flows. The State Government has contributed \$800,000 of its \$12 million commitment to the project, to be paid in full by 2009.

#### **Adelaide Sunday Mail: 30<sup>th</sup> July 06**

Toowoomba's referendum seeking support from the ratepayers of Toowoomba regarding the indirect re-use of potable water (IPR) held 29<sup>th</sup> July failed to gain support as 60% voted against the proposal. Whilst Premier Beattie said he was disappointed, he stated, "but that would not end the debate" and that he would press ahead with a referendum in 2008 seeking support for IPR in South-East Queensland. Premier Bettie stated, "Everyone will get their say on this matter, just because Toowoomba said no, that does not rule it out for South-East Queensland. I want the people to decide the issue".

#### **MDA**

Well it seems that the MDA board does identify major issues within the basin that need correction, Menindee Lakes



question is high on the Agenda for action to upgrade that outdated facility.

Decentralisation is a constant subject that most of our member councils are coming to grips with, and only want the State and Federal governments to understand that investment in our Rural Infrastructure should be paramount if growth and prosperity are to be achieved.

The stories attached include: -

### **Plans to fix nation's worst water waster - Menindee studies a waste of money**

### **Govt should decentralise departments to the bush - Nation's first recycled water poll this weekend**

### **Aust irrigation farmers using less water - More NSW rain but spring's an even bet**

17.

#### **Menindee studies a waste of money**

NSW Opposition spokesman for Natural Resources, Adrian Piccoli, has slammed the NSW Government's call for tenders to study solutions to fix Menindee Lakes, saying it's a waste of money. Mr Piccoli said the Government should have completed the Menindee project by now rather than wasting more money on studies.

"There have been numerous studies already completed and the final environmental impact study was announced last year," Mr Piccoli said.

"The Menindee Lakes Project which would reduce evaporation losses and protect Broken Hill's water supply has been delayed because the NSW Government has been totally focussed on Sydney.

"It has ignored Menindee Lakes, the Barwon Darling River System and Broken Hill, and for that matter the rest of NSW.

"With the lakes empty now is the time for the work to be done had there been any genuine commitment to the project."

#### **Plans to fix nation's worst water**

A "bold plan" to fix the enormous evaporation losses at Menindee Lakes, in far western NSW, is now squarely on the NSW Government's hit list for major structural works investment. A feasibility study into major improvements is set to be announced in weeks.

The announcement by NSW Minister for Natural Resources, Ian Macdonald, at the NSW Farmers Association conference in Sydney last week, was made just one day after northern NSW irrigators labelled the evaporation losses at Menindee as a "national scandal".

Irrigators have slammed tighter restrictions on Darling River water usage, arguing Menindee Lakes must be "the most inefficient town water supply on earth".

Tighter restrictions became necessary, in part, to protect Broken Hill's water supply from diminishing to crisis levels.

An average of 430,000ML evaporates from the very shallow, extensively man-modified lakes each year at the expense of water users and the environment.

"There is no doubt that Menindee is one of the most wasteful water systems in this country," Mr Macdonald said. "We need a bold plan – and one that will secure Broken Hill's water supply on an ongoing basis."

#### **Govt should decentralise departments to the bush: Ley**

Commonwealth and State governments should relocate the headquarters of their rural services departments to regional areas, according to Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Sussan Ley.

In a wide-ranging interview with Rural Press this week, Ms Ley has outlined her support for government decentralisation as a means of injecting new life into rural and regional economies and populations.

While the idea is not new, it has never been broadly adopted by any government.

But Ms Ley says relocating the headquarters of departments such as agriculture from the capitals to regional centres should be complemented by other departments re-opening branch offices in small towns.

"It is up to governments to lead the way, particularly with its rural departments to place them in rural areas," she said.

"We've got a very city-centric State government here and there's the crazy notion that we see agencies that have rural NSW as their responsibility being based in Sydney."

Ms Ley also rejects the argument that qualified staff would not relocate to the bush, citing as an example the success of regional universities in delivering flexible, quality services.

A former employee of the Australian Taxation Office in Albury, the Liberal Member for Farrer herself benefited from the Whitlam Government's policy of building major regional hubs for Government service delivery.

18.

### **Nation's first recycled water poll this weekend**

Reference Adelaide Sunday mail page 16 this edition of Snippets

The Nation's eyes will be on the outcome of this weekend's Toowoomba, Qld, water poll in which its residents must vote on a plan to recycle purified sewage into the city's main dam.

The result will have important ramifications for drought-stricken councils across Australia, many of whom almost certainly will have to make similar equally controversial decisions.

This week the 'yes' and 'no' cases resorted to massive television advertising campaigns designed to win over the ranks of the undecided.

All bets are off as regards predicting the result which is expected to go down to the wire.

Toowoomba's outspoken Mayor, Dianne Thorley, maintains one of Australia's biggest inland cities after Canberra has no option when it comes to securing a future for Toowoomba on the edge of the Dividing Range, just 100km up the road from Brisbane.

Some 135,000 people live in the greater Toowoomba Region.

The 'yes' campaign believes its Water Futures project, which centres on purified sewage being pumped from Toowoomba's waste-water treatment plant to the city's principal dam, is the way ahead.

The 'no' vote insists the solution lies in the construction of new dams, greater use of artesian bores, a link-up with Premier Beattie's South-East Queensland water grid and a water 'swap' with local irrigators.

Local Government Association executive director, Greg Hallam, said, "This is an Australia-wide test case."

### **Just one type of water supply not enough**

Investing in just one method of water supply for a particular area can spell long-term disasters for water availability, according to water specialist Professor Peter Cullen.

Speaking this week at the AgForce conference in Charleville, Qld, Prof Cullen told farmers that future water projects - whether they were aimed at servicing agriculture or booming metropolitan populations - should deliver water in multiple ways.

This should include dams, water recycling, pipelines, desalinisation - and simply increasing the cost of water.

"We're looking at a serious problem over the next 50 years and we need to get smart at comparing and analysing each option of water supply.

"We need three to four alternative ways to get water for a region, compare these ways and their costs, and adopt a mix to balance the risks."

At the moment, he said, this was not always the case.

"Most of the visionary schemes of long channels or pipelines to take water from one place to another are economically idiotic," he said.

### **Aust irrigation farmers using less water**

Australian farmers are using less water for irrigation, according to the latest statistics released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

A total of 10,085 gigalitres of water was used on crops and pastures in 2004-05, down 3.4pc on that of the previous year.

The number of irrigated Australian farms dropped by 13pc - to 35,000 farms, down 5,000 on the those of the year before.

Both sets of figures reflect the impact of drought in 2004-05 and escalating water costs. While most pastures and crops experienced decreases, cotton went against the trend.

19.

Water used to irrigate cotton in 2004-05 was the highest for three years, totalling 1,819 gigalitres, an increase of 45.7pc on 2003-04.

The area of irrigated cotton also increased by a similar percentage, leaving the irrigation usage rate steady at 6.7 megalitres per hectare.

The only crop to have a higher irrigation usage rate nationally was rice, at 12.1 megalitres per hectare.

Other highlights from the report include:

- Hay and silage recorded the most substantial decreases in irrigation water use, down by 206 gigalitres.
- Rice was also down, by 195 gigalitres.
- Pasture for grazing was down by 188 gigalitres.
- Pasture for grazing remained the most extensive use of irrigation water, using 2,897 gigalitres in 2004-05 on 842,000 hectares, or 35pc of the total area irrigated across Australia.
- Surface irrigation, such as flood irrigation, continues to be the most common method of irrigating, with over 60pc of the area irrigated in Australia during 2004-05 being by surface irrigation.
- Irrigation water makes up over 90pc of the water used on Australian farms. New figures collected by the ABS show water used for other agricultural purposes, such as stock drinking water, dairy and piggery cleaning, totalled 1,062 gigalitres.
- Water trading by farmers was up a little from the previous year, with 6,446 agricultural establishments reporting purchasing extra water, an increase of 4pc, and 4,748 establishments selling water, up 8.2pc.

#### **More NSW rain but spring's an even bet**

Following more steady rain right across NSW in the past week, farmers can take some heart from a Bureau of Meteorology prediction of a 50:50 chance of above average rainfall across NSW from August to October.

The rain delivered falls of 25 millimetres or better across much of the grain belt.

It came on top of good falls on the weekend of July 15 and 16.

The bureau said although the chances of a drought-related El Nino had risen in the past month, continued neutral El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) conditions were the most likely outcome for the remainder of 2006.

It said, however, current seasonal rainfall odds did not strongly favour either wetter or drier than average conditions across NSW.

It has, however, predicted there would be warmer than average temperatures from late winter to mid-spring across much of the State.

#### **Adelaide Advertiser: Promise to build new dam: 31<sup>st</sup> July 06**

The Queensland Opposition says it will build a new dam to support water to drought ravaged Toowoomba if it wins the next State election.

The proposed dam at Emu Creek would have a holding capacity of 130,000 Megalitres and cost \$170M.

Mr Springboard said Toowoomba residents had demonstrated they were no longer prepared to "cop the nonsense" from Premier Beattie or Mayor Di Thorley that recycled sewage was the only alternative.

## AWA

The referendum on Indirect Potable Reuse in Toowoomba was lost, with 62% of the community against the proposal. Intense media interest continues. Although that is a disappointing result for most water practitioners, the associated level of debate has been a positive; and clearly refuting the misinformation spread by the 'no' campaigners is a priority.

20.

The ABS publication Water Use on Australian Farms, covering the period 2004-05, is now available on the ABS website where it can be downloaded free of charge. 10,085 GL was used for irrigating a total of 35,244 establishments (12.8% fewer than for the previous year). Cotton used more water, but all other categories used less than the previous year. ([Website](#))

The Qld Government had decided to conduct a feasibility study into a water pipeline from the Burdekin Basin to Brisbane. The Premier said good long-term planning meant all water supply options would be investigated to ensure Queensland had sufficient secure water supplies for the entire state for the coming century.

Gosford & Wyong Councils (NSW Central Coast) are considering the construction of a 20 ML/D seawater desalination plant as one option to help secure their water supply.

Water price increases on the Central Coast may be unaffordable for low-income residents, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre says. Prices have already risen in the past year from 92.5 cents to \$1.12 per KL and will rise to \$1.33 in July 2007 and \$1.57 by July 2008.

The Hon Malcolm Turnbull made a special presentation to former students, Linda Van and Alex De Sousa, and the Principal of St James College, Brisbane for winning this year's Australian Junior Water Prize. Linda and Alex will travel to Sweden in August to represent Australia in the international Stockholm Junior Water Prize, which will be contested by 30 countries.

Queensland local governments and organisations are invited to apply for Environmental Infrastructure Research Program (EIRP) subsidies designed to encourage the introduction of innovative environmental treatment technologies.

The Tasmanian Government has called on local councils to better monitor their drinking water after 24 suppliers failed to reach national standards and 67 local met requirements (up 9 on 2005). Bulk suppliers Hobart Water, Esk Water and Cradle Coast Water all complied with national guidelines.

The approval process for re-using Biosolids in Tasmania has been simplified. The new Approved Management Method for Biosolids Reuse (AMM) outlines a framework for classifying biosolids and specifies permitted uses for some types.

Leakage by water companies in England and Wales fell by around 20 ML/D in 2005-06, figures released by Ofwat reveal. Overall leakage in England and Wales was close to 3,600 ML/D, compared to nearly 5,000 ML/D just a decade earlier. Four companies failed to reach targets, the worst being Thames Water and Severn Trent Water.

Chinese Vice Premier Zeng Peiyan has called on local governments to take effective measures to curb Water Pollution, which remains a big threat to public health and social stability. The government will invest 1.4 trillion yuan (US\$175 billion) in environmental protection between 2006 and 2010 to be spent on water pollution control, urban air quality, waste disposal and erosion prevention.

The Irish government has warned that it will introduce a regulatory framework to ensure that everyone living in rural areas who gets their water from small, community-owned systems (over 600 of these private schemes in Ireland) serving more than 50 people each, will receive treated water.

The water industry's Industry Advisory Committee (IAC) met for the first time in Sydney, creating a key link between the industry and the new Government Skills Australia (GSA) Industry Skills Council (ISC). This will be the conduit for water industry views on Vocational Education and Training issues.

The NSW Government has, through Utilities Minister David Campbell, flagged an intention to consider establishing a new water corporation to cover the Gosford-Wyong area, taking over from local government

and filling the space between Sydney Water and Hunter Water Corporations' jurisdictions. This is in the context of storage levels for Gosford-Wyong being down to some 16%.

The Queensland Government has announced the release of the finalised Mary Basin water resource plan (WRP) which provides for a strategic reserve of 150,000 ML each year for high priority water use throughout the basin and other parts of the south-east region.

A plan by the NSW Opposition to close Sydney's ocean sewage outfalls and rely on recycling the sewage has been labelled "fantasy" by the current incumbents.

21.

Queensland's plans for addressing its water deficit with dams & long pipelines is attracting criticism but also suggestions from Water Minister Malcolm Turnbull. The Beattie government has rejected claims it cannot afford almost \$4billion in new water infrastructure announcements over the past month. The pros and cons of judging water by its quality not its history are outlined in The Weekend Australian Magazine for July 29-30, 2006 on page 22. Toowoomba has proved to be a litmus test of the public's understanding and support for recycled drinking water.

Empty dams photo tour. ([Website](#))