

AWA

Amendments to the Local Governments Regulations in New South Wales is to be put into place which will allow householders to install & make use of 'Greywater' re-use schemes to diverting bath, shower and washing machine water onto gardens without requiring prior council approval.

MDA

Murray water buyback to start in July

Tenders could be called in July to buy back water that irrigators have saved through efficiency measures to bolster environmental flows in the Murray River.

The Federal Government's buyback plan received approval from the states on Friday 19th May at a meeting of the Murray Darling Ministerial Council.

The plan from Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Water, Malcolm Turnbull, seeks to buy backwater from irrigators, but only where the water has been saved through efficiency measures so that there is no net loss to farm production.

In the post-meeting communiqué, the MDMC has noted the framework for the tender proposal and agreed "that jurisdictions would work cooperatively with the Australian Government to enable a call for proposals to be issued by end July 2006 with the aim of commencing investments by mid-December 2006".

The MDMC "applauded" the Federal Government's decision to make a cash injection of \$500m to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission in 2005-06 to improve outcomes in 2006-07 and the following four years.

"Thanks to the leadership of the Commonwealth we now have a more detailed action plan towards returning 500GL of water to the Murray and a historic contribution of funds to help enable that to happen," Mr Turnbull said.

However, Mr Turnbull expressed disappointment that South Australia, Queensland, NSW, Victoria, and the ACT had not added more funding to the Murray Darling Basin Commission, which he says has been starved of cash for years.

The states have only agreed to at least maintain their 2006-07 contributions to the MDBC in real terms for the following four years.

"Water is the most challenging environmental issue facing Australia, and it needs a national response, but we also need co-ordination and collaboration with the States, with whom primary responsibility lies, in order to deliver that response," Mr Turnbull said.

With water prices currently as high as \$1400 a megalitre, it could cost the Government up to \$280 million to retrieve the extra 200 gigalitres it needs to meet its target of 500GL in extra environmental water to the river by 2009.

Water trading rules finally agreed to by Murray states

Water trading between New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia could be possible from the middle of the year under a pilot 'tagging' program after the States finally agreed to rules for interstate trading.

NSW, Victoria and South Australia were spurred into action after \$26 million in National Competition payments were suspended by the National Water Commission last month due to their

failure to meet a 2005 deadline for establishing interstate trading rules.

The three states respectively had \$13m, \$10m and \$3m in payments suspended, this may yet be recovered if the states collectively demonstrate satisfactory progress on water trading by 1 January.

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The new trading system was approved by the Murray Darling Ministerial Council on Friday, which endorsed a revised schedule spelling out arrangements for interstate water trade and provides for both exchange rate and tagged interstate water trade.

The Council directed the Murray Darling Basin Commission "as a matter of urgency" to examine possible approaches to achieve sufficient consistency in measures for dealing with salinity impacts across jurisdictions to ensure they are not a barrier to free trade.

Under the new tagging system water users in Victoria could own a share of water in New South Wales, and be bound by the water conditions in New South Wales and vice versa.

Victorian Water Minister, John Thwaites, says this follows the agreement of NSW to change its conversion rates for low to high security water to make them competitively neutral.

Victoria had also been concerned that exit fees and other institutional arrangements proposed by NSW irrigation companies are so high that water could not practically be purchased from NSW.

The agreement with NSW follows Victoria and South Australia agreeing to expand interstate trade in February.

Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Water, Malcolm Turnbull, says the Federal Government is "delighted to see that Victoria, South Australia and NSW have at long last responded" to its urgings to establish interstate water trading arrangements that "will allow water to be allocated to its most efficient uses".

Border water war: Fix NSW's Menindee Lakes evaporation first

The Federal-State Ministers meeting on the Murray-Darling today should develop a strategic investment plan to fix the inefficiency of the Menindee Lakes, NSW, storage system, as top priority.

"Yet 450GL is wasted through evaporation at the incredibly inefficient Menindee Lakes storage system, on the Darling River 250km north of Mildura.

"The total amount of extractions from the Murray Darling system in Queensland is less than the amount of water lost in evaporation at the Menindee lakes.

"Ironically, the precedent for what should happen at Menindee is to be found at Cubbie Station.

"There, shallow storages are being removed and water pumped in deeper ponds to reduce evaporation losses and increase water efficiency.

"At full capacity, the Menindee system has an average depth of only 5-6 metres.

"At half capacity, that depth falls to 2-3m, with 1-2m lost annually in evaporation.

"With \$500 million on the table for infrastructure, it is time for the Ministers to get creative and do some big, creative things such as fixing Menindee once and for all.

"This should involve major re-engineering work to deepen the main lake.

"It could possibly even be divided into several storage ponds, to maximise water efficiency and take the lower lake (Cawndilla) out of the system completely.

"This could reduce evaporation by 50-70pc, and allow the return of 200-300GL of water to the

river.

“The QFF would not oppose Governments proceeding with the voluntary purchases of the "Clyde" and "Ballandool" irrigated cotton properties in the Lower Balonne.

"But it opposes compulsory acquisitions (as in the case of Cubbie station), or wide scale buybacks of licences that could impact on the viability of irrigation schemes.

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“Purchase of "Clyde" and "Ballandool", which are listed for auction anyhow, could help increase the downstream confidence level on the security of environmental flows, particularly into the Narran Lakes."

Living Murray targets 'off base'

Concerns are being raised that the Living Murray Initiative is now way 'off base' and is not meeting its targets.

Concerns arise because of:

- Doubts about the initiative's ability to meet its target of 500 gegalitres of environmental flows by 2009.
- A CSIRO report released at a Murray Darling Basin Commission Ministerial Council meeting today which claims the 500GL target isn't nearly enough anyhow.

It says a further 2,000 gegalitres, on top of the current 500GL target, is needed before 2030, to retain current flows.

- CSIRO says any environmental benefits from the 500GL put aside by the NSW, Victorian, SA and ACT, agreement will be eroded by future reduced flows.

Head of CSIRO's Land and Water Division, Rob Vertessy, said he was keen for an even higher target to be set than the 500GL, despite the fact we're struggling to meet that current target.

"The big question is how soon are we going to reach agreement that we have to recover another four or five times the target in the next two decades - just to hold at present levels," he said.

"It's likely that all the water is going to do is slow the future problem of the river declining further unless we back that up with more action."

AWA

Sydney's water supply assured until 2015 – no mention if that takes into account growth – Western Sydney Recycling Initiative to recycle 100% of wastewater (27 billion litres) from Penrith, St Marys & Quakers Hill sewerage treatment plants.

SA Water is working on a \$1.5M project in the Piccadilly Valley to improve water quality for downstream watercourses in the Happy Valley Reservoir.

Toowoomba City Council means to tread gently before releasing the shame list of the city's top 30 water abusers.

Scientist Prof Peter Cullen has warned that funding for the Murray River could attract “economically silly” project proposals that were not feasible and would need rigorous scrutiny.

Queensland Government plans to build two MEGA-DAMS in Southwest Qld at a cost of close to \$1 billion.

Sydney Water is saving more than 48 ML/day through its Active Leakage Reduction Program commenced in 1999.

Gold Coast City Council has announced \$14M for proposed desalination plant to safeguard SE Queensland water supply.

Instead of an energy guzzling desalination unit London's Mayor has called on Thames Water to fix leaks.

Sydney water will start planning & environmental impact assessment work on the first 10 villages of a total of 20 villages in outer Sydney to be connected to the public sewerage system rather than having them use on-site systems.

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Gold Coast Water and private enterprise will oversee implementation of the water future master plan that is projected to reduce drinking water use in the region by up to 84% through improved stormwater management and recycling.

Price increases for water use are foreshadowed in five rural Victorian regions from July 1, 2006 and increases have also been announced for Gosford-Wyong in NSW.

Shanghai aims to limit residential water consumption. Spain is suffering severe water shortages and illegal water abstraction makes it impossible for water to be used wisely. SE England is still at risk of suffering the most severe drought of the last 100 years, owing to low levels in aquifers.

Calls to deepen Menindee Lakes or form four deeper catchments, as evaporation is a concern for irrigators and the wetlands' support group.

MDA

Sydney Water Corporation awarded 2006 Stockholm Industry Water Prize for its, "Every Drop Counts Business Program" for working with business, industry & Government to attain long-term sustainability of Sydney's water supply.

The QLD Government has committed \$3.33m to a \$10m project by Dalby Council which aims to desalinate wastewater from the local coal gas mine to provide water for irrigation and at the same time reducing demand.

Foster's Group Yalata Brewery in Qld has cut its water use from 4 ML to 2.25 ML with a water reclamation plant as part of a \$14m water management project.

A mutated species of exotic fish known as the "cane toad of the waterways" will pose a threat to Perth's iconic Swan River if allowed to spread unchecked.

Thirsty Goulburn residents rather than those of Toowoomba may be the first to sample recycled water.

Malcolm Turnbull says that the cost of water in SE Queensland is too cheap.

Water recycling to the rescue

Urban water recycling is a step closer after the Federal Government committed to providing one third of the cost of a plant for water-starved Goulburn, pending community approval.

Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Water, Malcolm Turnbull, has today provided \$50,000 for a community consultation process to identify a long-term solution to Goulburn's water supply.

Already Goulburn's Pejar Dam has run dry, with emergency bores and pipelines from other nearby dams currently supplying the town.

But without rain the town only has 15 months of water supply left.

As a consequence, the Goulburn Mulwaree Council has been developing an integrated water cycle management plan, including the 'Sustainable Cities' project to recycle water to drinking water standards through construction of an advanced wastewater treatment plant.

Under this proposal wastewater would be transferred via a pipeline and wetland system upstream of Goulburn's main water supply dam.

It would be blended with water in the dam and treated again before being added to drinking water supplies.

"In these situations it is essential to inform the community of options for alternate sources of water so there is no delay in working towards a remedy and those remedies have community support," Mr Turnbull said.

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"Community understanding and acceptance of this approach is vital to its success and will demonstrate how to undertake best-practice community consultation for proposed projects."

MDA

Salinity too big to be trivialised by *Sunday* criticisms: CRC

The Cooperative Research Centre for Plant-based Management of Dryland Salinity has welcomed an informed discussion of the causes and impact of salinity in Australia as a result of yesterday's investigative report on Channel Nine's *Sunday* program.

But Salinity CRC Chief Executive, Kevin Goss, says the program may have left some viewers with incorrect perceptions of the significance of the salinity problem across Australia, the current understanding of how salinity should be managed, and the quality of public funded scientific research.

The *Sunday* program spoke with a number of scientists who claim to have previously been gagged by their organisations from arguing an alternative cause of salinity.

Rather than rising groundwater causing salt scalds, they say poor soil health is resulting in salt outbreaks and that planting trees can actually be harmful in restoring soil health.

As a result of the rising groundwater model based on the area of land cleared since settlement, they say the area of land predicted to be affected by salinity has been grossly over-estimated.

However, Mr Goss has pointed to the National Land and Water Resources Audit in 2001 as the basis for estimating the area of land salt-affected and the area at risk.

"This was the first ever attempt to quantify the problem and provided Australia with a very important wake-up call," he said.

"The NLWRA also stimulated development of improved monitoring tools that suggest that the areas at risk in the eastern states might be less than at first expected.

"Already in Western Australia, the area of land at risk to salinity has been revised down from six million hectares to between 2.8 and 4.5m ha.

"This is very good news indeed, but does not alter the fact that salinity is still a very real problem and extremely valuable assets are still at risk."

Mr Goss says the *Sunday* program made several allusions to widespread tree planting as if this was an erroneous and costly recipe being proposed by scientists.

"The reality is that the CRC Salinity, and the National Dryland Salinity Program before it, have consistently warned that such a blanket approach is impractical and could have adverse impact on the amount of water available to our rivers. This is well documented," he said.

"The use of native grasses, highlighted in the Sunday program, and other perennial pastures are significant areas of the CRC's research.

"Farmers and their industry bodies are very keen to join with the CRC in new perennial pasture research because they can see the potential to be more profitable, to improve soil health and to use more water, which assists the control of salinity.

"Likewise, sowing an annual crop into a perennial pasture ('companion cropping') as advocated by NSW farmer Colin Seis in the *Sunday* program is a strong component of our research."

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