

“Snippets Plus”

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From 1st November

1st

FarmOnLine

Brumby pours in \$99m more for pipeline

The Victorian Government will spend an extra \$99 million to finish the Wimmera-Mallee pipeline and is urging the Federal Government to match it. Victorian Premier, John Brumby, said the funding, if matched, would complete the project by 2010, ahead of the original completion date of 2016. But the Opposition said the money was simply a Band-aid for the massive blowout in cost. Opposition major projects spokeswoman, Louise Asher, said the government had botched the project and should pay for its own mistake. Ms Asher said the Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water Authority's contribution would mean farmers and water users would be paying more. Member for Mallee John Forrest said while he welcomed the government pledge it was not enough. SOURCE: Sunraysia Daily, Mildura, Vic, a Rural Press publication. **Why should the Federal Government assist the bloody Victorians they won't sign the National Water Plan?**

Rudd's renewable energy policy

Kevin Rudd has unveiled a plan to require 20 per cent of Australian electricity to be generated from renewable sources such as solar or wind by 2020 as he tries to regain momentum on climate change in the election campaign. Labor's target would increase a typical family's electricity prices by \$40 a year because generating electricity from renewable sources is more expensive. But the Labor leader said the economic costs would be negligible and the plan would significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Labor has previously announced a target of cutting emissions by 60pc from their 2000 level by 2050. "This is necessary to protect jobs into the future and also necessary to protect our environment into the future," Mr. Rudd said in Townsville. Labor rushed the announcement out to head off damage to its campaign after its environment spokesman, Peter Garrett, gave mixed messages over Labor's approach to international negotiations on climate change. Mr. Garrett said Labor might agree to new reduction targets after the Kyoto Protocol expired in 2012, even if developing countries did not have to meet them. Mr. Rudd spent much of yesterday reassuring voters that if elected he would insist any new international climate change agreement would require countries such as China and India to reduce their emissions. But the Prime Minister, John Howard, said Mr. Rudd had done a back flip and there was now no significant difference between Labor and the Coalition on climate change negotiations. * Fairfax Media

Crisis grips SA pig industry

The South Australian Farmers Federation's commercial pork committee called a crisis meeting this week to look at ways forward for the struggling industry. But there were no easy answers for producers with prices continuing to bottom out and feed prices still rising. Committee chairman, Butch Moses, said sow prices had been dramatically hit with many animals now on the market. "With the Australian sow herd there are at least 36,000 sows going out of the system," he said. "This has come about because of a combination of producers leaving the industry and also those who are scaling down. "A few months ago we were getting \$300 to \$400 a sow, now we are lucky if we get \$100 for them." Adding to price pressures, major local pork producer, QAF Meat Industries, has announced a major cost reduction program, which will see thousands of pigs come onto the market. Managing director, Paul Pattison, said the unprecedented level of cheap subsidised imported pork was putting huge pressures on the industry. "Almost three quarters of all processed pork, ham and bacon in Australia is now made from imported frozen pork," he said. "The cost of producing pigs has reached an all time high and cannot be passed on because of competition from subsidised imports holding down prices."

Dairy dearth pushes up farm gate prices

Farmgate milk prices are continuing to rise on the back of a nationwide milk shortage with the dairy dearth now starting to felt hard in Sydney. Chefs are contacting dairies directly trying to secure products like butter. The latest Dairy Australia figures show a decline in milk production for the year to date of 1.4 per cent on the NSW North Coast, 5.7pc in southern NSW and 16.8pc in inland NSW, for an overall State drop of 7.1pc. In southeast Queensland, production has dropped by a whopping 18pc. Processors appear to be racing to get their traditional suppliers on long-term contracts to give them a safety net from poachers before hitting the marketplace to try and bring in new farmers. * More in tomorrow's The Land.

The Australian Science & Nature

John Howard was told by his environment minister two years ago that the Government's reluctance to lift targets for renewable energy generation risked undermining Australia's efforts to combat climate change and forcing investors offshore.

Then minister Ian Campbell wrote to the Prime Minister in December 2005, questioning the Government's refusal to expand and extend the Mandatory Renewable Energy Target scheme and raising "sensitivities" about the policy stance. Senator Campbell reiterated that investment in renewable energy, such as wind and solar power, was likely to "come to a halt" in 12-18 months as the existing MRET target of generating 2 per cent of the nation's energy from renewable sources by 2010 was filled. "Since wind energy has been the main beneficiary of MRET, this industry is likely to be the most affected, though there will also be important impacts for solar hot water heaters, energy generation from sugar by-products and other producers," Senator Campbell wrote in his letter, which was also copied to Peter Costello and Resources Minister Ian Macfarlane. It was not until September this year - 21 months after Senator Campbell's letter, and 10 months after the Prime Minister ridiculed calls to lift the MRET - that the Government announced its renewables target would be lifted to 15 per cent by 2020, albeit under different parameters and encompassing existing state-based schemes. On Tuesday, Kevin Rudd pledged to set the MRET at 20 per cent by 2020 and claimed the amount of electricity generated by renewables had fallen from 10.5 per cent to 9.5 per cent under the Howard Government. While several ministers have publicly denied any responsibility for the decline of the renewable energy sector in Australia, Senator Campbell privately felt the Government was to blame. "Let me outline some of the possible implications for the industry in the period ahead," he wrote. "In the absence of any state government policy responses, it is highly likely that the wind turbine assembly operations in northern Tasmania and Portland, Victoria, will shut down. "Moreover, there will be important impacts on a range of project proponents, ancillary industries and communities (though this will be viewed positively in some cases)." Senator Campbell conceded the Government could stand its ground, playing up the potential energy price rises, the need to look at other technologies, and respond to community concerns over wind farms, which it did. "There are, however, some arguments for considering possible alternative policy responses," he told Mr Howard. "I am particularly interested in ... whether we can provide longer-term incentives for both renewable and other low-emission technology to complement the energy white paper strategy." The eventual policy reversal was attributed to lobbying from Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull succeeding where Senator Campbell and his predecessor, David Kemp, had failed. While Mr Howard initially declined to criticise the new Labor policy this week, he said he did not think the renewables figures quoted by Mr Rudd should be blamed on the Government's reluctance to change its policy. "I think what they demonstrate is the extraordinary industrial development that's occurred in Australia during the time we've been in government," he told ABC's Lateline on Tuesday.

'PM can't be trusted on second climate pact'

Kevin Rudd claims John Howard's failure to support the first stage of the Kyoto climate accord means he cannot be trusted on the second, post-2012 phase. A blunder by Labor environment spokesman Peter Garrett this week has put Labor under sustained attack over its position on a global post-Kyoto emissions agreement. The party dramatically changed its position on Monday, saying a Labor government would not commit Australia to any emission reduction targets without binding conditions also being placed on developing nations such as China and India. Yesterday, however, the Opposition Leader categorically denied he had adopted the Prime Minister's position on a post-Kyoto accord. "Absolutely not and the reason I disagree with that proposition is this: Mr Howard, a complete climate change sceptic, has never embraced a carbon target for Australia in the existing commitment period," he said. "What guarantee do we have that he'd accept one for the subsequent period? That's point one. Point two: when it comes to future commitments from developing countries, how are we to assume that Mr Howard would accept any reasonable commitments from the developing countries as acceptable? "His historical rejection of the Kyoto framework stands on the record for us. We have an engagement with the Kyoto process which goes right back to the ... previous Labor government. We believe it's the only process in town, a process which Mr Howard has explicitly condemned for practically the entire duration of his prime ministership." In an interview with The Australian yesterday, Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull said the Government's objection to ratification of the Kyoto Protocol was "a very clear statement of principle" that the existing protocol did not provide a pathway for developing countries to reduce their emissions. "We have made a very clear statement of principle for not ratifying Kyoto," Mr Turnbull said. "Would you reinforce or undermine that principle were you to ratify today? I have very little interest in climate change history. I'm focused on what do we do now, what do we do in the future." He said the Coalition would ratify an amended Kyoto or the replacement agreement, which included commitments from major emitters. The Coalition yesterday continued its attack on Mr Garrett, with Deputy Prime Minister Mark Vaile saying the fiasco highlighted Mr Garrett's inexperience and warned he would not be able to handle the negotiations in Bali next month on obligations after 2012 in the second Kyoto period.

Renewables target unrealistic, say energy suppliers

Labor's renewable energy target has come under broad attack from the conventional energy industry, which says the pledge may be unachievable and would cost \$10 billion.

Conventional energy industry representatives also question the independence of the research on which the ALP's 20 per cent mandatory renewable energy target by 2020 is based. They claim it does nothing to develop low-emissions technologies such as clean coal, and could be redundant once targets for a national emissions trading scheme are set next year. Kevin Rudd said the policy was based on modelling by economists McLennan Magasanik and Associates that showed the cost of the new target would be "negligible". National Generators Forum director John Boshier said most of the target would have to be met by wind power, which posed serious planning and technical problems as wind could be relied upon to supply only 15 per cent of the national grid because of its variability. "It will be a big stretch," Mr Boshier said. "I'm not saying it can't be done but this is very optimistic." He questioned Labor's use of MMA modelling, which had been commissioned by the main advocates of the target, the renewable energy industry. "It's the assumptions given to them by the client which determine the way the modelling is done," he said. "When those assumptions are driven by advocates, you have to ask how reliable they are. "You should be very wary of basing \$10 billion policy announcements on modelling done by the industry that is the net beneficiary of that policy." Last week, Gordon Brown's Labour Government in Britain said it was downgrading its 20 per cent renewable energy target after leaked briefing papers claimed the target was expensive and faced severe practical difficulties. Energy Supply Association chief executive Brad Page said any complementary measure such as mandatory targets should follow the framing of a national emissions trading system. "If you are trying to get deep emissions reductions, you don't start with complementary measures; you start with the main game, which is emissions trading and setting a target at 2020," Mr Page said. "Because you don't have an emissions target and you don't have a price in an emissions trading regime, you have no instruction whatsoever about the real net cost of these renewable energy targets." The gas industry said it was "incensed" that both the Coalition and now Labor had ignored gas as a transition fuel to a low-emissions energy future. The Australian Pipeline Industry Association warned of substantial increases in the cost of energy or even shortages without a medium-term plan for energy generation, while the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association said emissions trading, not a target, would cut greenhouse emissions. Clean Energy Council chairman Richard McIndoe welcomed the target but said it left a gap in how Labor planned to develop other non-renewable low-emissions technologies. "Clearly, there is a role for clean coal technology going forward, especially given the current fuel base in Australia," Mr McIndoe said. He said MMA's analysis was "done very independently and was not directed by the renewable energy industry".

Turnbull and Garrett go head-to-head

Malcolm Turnbull and Peter Garrett today played down policy slip-ups which diverted attention from their parties' environment policies. Mr. Turnbull, the environment minister, and Mr. Garrett, his Labor counterpart, squared off in a short debate today on the Seven Network. Mr. Garrett said this week a Labor government would sign a post-2012 Kyoto Protocol agreement that did not bind developing countries but changed tack after Labor leader Kevin Rudd reiterated the party's opposite view. Questioned this morning, he denied suggestions he and Mr. Rudd were at odds. "I think Kevin and I were saying the same thing and I think what we've always said is that we need to be at the table," Mr. Garrett said. "We need to ratify the protocol but participate in negotiations - and there will be different sets of commitments for developed and developing countries and that will continue into the future. "And I've got to tell you one headline doesn't alter the fact that we've said the same thing all along - (Prime Minister John) Howard has been hostile to Kyoto." Mr. Turnbull suffered a similar blow when a media report last weekend revealed he had pitched in cabinet six weeks ago for the coalition to sign the Kyoto Protocol. "We don't talk about what goes inside the cabinet," Mr. Turnbull told the Seven Network. He went on to support Mr. Garrett's initial statement on signing a Kyoto agreement, saying he had been correct on expressing Labor policy but had been reined in by the Labor leader. "Peter didn't make a mistake. Peter was stating Labor party policy and Kevin Rudd made him do a backflip." Mr. Garrett shot back, saying the government was plagued with skeptics over climate change. "We've had ministers including the deputy prime minister (Mark Vaile) talk over the last week about their skepticism about climate change," he said. "Look at what is happening to our weather, look at where we need to go in terms of dealing with climate change. "We cannot have skeptics in the Howard government and have a policy on climate change."

Clean coal 'impossible': candidates

The major political parties have sold voters a furphy by claiming clean coal technology will be a reality in Australia one day, a well-known scientist says. Scientific commentator and broadcaster Karl Kruszelnicki, who is running for the Senate on the Climate Change Coalition ticket, today said clean coal technology was physically impossible. Dr Kruszelnicki said the major parties were lying to the Australian people when they claimed carbon dioxide could be removed from the burning of coal and then compressed and stored underground or underwater. He said this would require one cubic kilometre of compressed carbon dioxide to be stored every day.

"That is the volume of compressed carbon dioxide that we have to get rid of - not every 10 years, not every year, but every single day," Dr Kruszelnicki said. "It's just not technologically possible. "It is simply a furphy, it's a porky pie to cover up the fact that there is no such thing as clean coal." Dr Kruszelnicki said political promises including a \$20 million plan for exploration of underground caverns would be a waste of taxpayer dollars. As well, any storage facility would eventually wear down and would release the stored carbon dioxide back into the environment, he said. His political party is recommending a 40 per cent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions by 2020 and a 70 per cent reduction by 2050. Underground thermal energy accessed in South Australia could provide 100 per cent of Australia's baseload electricity for the next 75 years and then be supplemented by other renewables, he told reporters. "If we tried really hard we could have all of the electricity in Australia made without carbon by 2020 using a mixture of renewable energies including hot rocks and the wind and the waves and the sun." Dr Kruszelnicki was joined today by his running mate on the Senate ticket, Patrice Newell, a resident of the Hunter coalmining region, who challenged suggestions that the coal industry would suffer major job losses if Australia made a dramatic switch to renewable energy sources. "I know that for a fact that they would be quite happy to have a job in the renewable industry," Ms Newell said. "It's not that it's a commitment to a coal job, they want a commitment to a job." Dr Kruszelnicki said Australia must decide where it wanted to focus its energy prospects for the future. "We've got two choices in 15 to 20 years from now," he said. "Either to make money, we sell dirt overseas, coal, or we sell the (renewable energy) technology without burning dirt."

The Advertiser

Turbines 'political stunt'

The State Government's five mini wind turbines were put on city roofs as a political exercise and will not work effectively, a key association says. Alternative Technology Association SA branch president Alan Strickland the says has offered to put the Government in touch with experts who are prepared to assist with proper placement of the turbines. "I believe this has been a political exercise that wasn't properly thought out," he said. A Premier and Cabinet Department spokesman said the turbines were part of a strategy to "position the state as pre-eminent in the field of solar and wind technology". He said the 12-month study was about gathering information on the effectiveness of turbines. "The testing was assisted best by placing the turbines in a variety of locations, not necessarily placing them all in the most prospective locations for energy generation," the spokesman said. Each turbine is supposed to produce 1.5kW - or between a third to a half of a household's electricity requirements - under the right conditions. The Government proposes to use "recently designed software" to assess specific sites in built up areas if more turbines are introduced, as originally planned. "This software is able to predict wind sheer and impact from various forms of interference in a built up environment," the spokesman said. Mr Strickland said this was "policy on the run" and urged the Government to be clear about its objectives. "Perhaps some should be on the coast if you really want to compare different locations around the city," he said. These issues were raised at a recent meeting of the association's SA branch. The guest speaker was Beatrix Smith, director of the Capital City Committee, which was set up to "build co-operation between the State Government and the Adelaide City Council".

She was caught off guard by questions about motives, planning, measurements and data monitoring associated with the turbines.

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FarmOnline

Drought preparedness not in Coalition ag policy

The Coalition will not fund future drought preparedness measures as part of its agricultural election policy, due out in a fortnight, but will stick with its existing drought assistance measures despite calls for change from State Governments and the National Farmers Federation. Instead weeds and feral animals will underpin any new commitments to agriculture if the Government is re-elected, according Federal Minister for Agriculture, Peter McGauran. Mr. McGauran says supporting farmers through drought and preparing rural industries for the resurgence that will come with rain is his highest priority for the farm sector. "Agriculture is set to take off and make an even greater contribution to the nation's prosperity by the combination of extraordinary efficiencies and innovation coupled with high international commodity prices," Mr. McGauran said. "The only ingredient missing for a spectacularly successful agriculture is water. The fundamentals are in place on-farm and increasingly through the supply chain. "Farmers through the drought have maintained a 2.4 per cent productivity rate which is equal to the United States productivity levels and significantly in front of Canada and not to mention the rest of the world." But Mr. McGauran has cautioned against allowing "drought exhaustion" becoming a distraction from supporting farm families through the current drought. He said tax, or across the board incentives, are all part of the planning

for better drought preparation. "But at the moment we are concentrating our support both financially and through natural resource management on drought management.

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"Drought preparation is all very well and good, but at the moment farmers are not in a position to undertake drought mitigation measures such as the installation of silos or fodder storages. "We have been working on it, but a number of contributors to the debate want a trade off between the interest rate subsidies for tax incentives. "I don't accept that, as I believe through a drought an interest rate subsidy is a very good form of business assistance. "I'd like the NFF to put their cards on the table and outline how tax incentives would work and what financial contribution is required by individual farmers. I'd also like the NFF to be concentrating more on the problems at hand than future issues that they themselves haven't got an agreed position on that I've seen." Mr. McGauran gave little away on new funding measures he will announce in his election policy, but said the government would be prepared to make weeds a priority in the same way the Government has announced it will tackle feral pests. While arguing the government has no preference to a particular production system when it comes to GM or natural crops, he said his opposition number in Labor, Senator O'Brien was "sitting on the fence" and should take a position on GM crops. "Senator O'Brien wants the government to provide information and act as an honest broker in the GM debate. "This is exactly what we've done by commissioning eight separate studies in the last 12 months alone by reputable scientific organisations...and circulated the reports to aid in the debate." SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service, Parliament House Bureau, Canberra

Environment before people in water debate?

The environment - and perhaps votes - is being placed ahead of people as this drought bites harder. This is the raw fear of desperate people such as Luke Keogh at Barham, NSW, who now has only a trickle of increasingly foul and salty water for his family and stock to live on. Few are more acutely aware of the lack of water this year, however with the Murray River flowing freely nearby and political talk of environmental flows in more marginal electorates downstream, his suspicions have been worsened. "No irrigation water is fair enough, no one is expecting that in times like these, but why is one system shut off and sacrificed and not another?" he asked. "How about our environment?" NSW Department of Water and Energy executive director of water management, David Harris, said he was well aware of the stress users on the Merran Creek system were under, but they were by no means the first victims of this extreme dry, with those west of the Darling not receiving water for up to eight years. Mr. Keogh is one of about 120 farmers that rely solely on the now shut-off Merran Creek system that bi-passes the Murray River. NSW state water ended inflows to the Merran Creek late last month after months of discussions, but assured landholders that "while there is water available in the system, landholders who rely on the Merran Creek System for domestic and stock and basic landholder rights will continue to have access to water". That water is now vanishing fast. Mr. Keogh has paid over \$10,000 in delivery and fixed charges for less than a 10pc allocation in the last two years. "I'm just not sure what we can do, we are lucky enough to have some feed but no water," he said. "We know there isn't much but we are only after a fair go here, we have certainly paid our way and if Murray water is being used to dilute Lake Alexandrina in South Australia instead of here we have a fair right to be furious." But Mr. Harris said there were no environmental flows occurring in the Murray system at the moment, only flows for other downstream users. He added there was simply not the water available given the worst drought in living memory and the action taken depended on the water available. "Of course people have to take priority over the environment in times like this but we also need to look at the most efficient systems and the Merran Creek is very inefficient," he said. SOURCE: Extract from *Stock & Land*, Vic, and *The Land*, NSW, November 1 issues.

Irrigators stand firm on fixed charges

The NSW Irrigators Council General meeting in Sydney today has called upon Minister Koperberg and the NSW Government to reverse their recent policy announcement on fixed water charges. The meeting, attended by delegates representing 12,000 irrigators across NSW, passed a motion urging change. "NSW Irrigators Council calls upon Minister Koperberg and the State Government to reverse their policy on fixed charges relief for irrigators and to provide, as a minimum, a similar level of assistance as their Victorian counterparts," the motion reads. Council chairman, Col Thomson, said the motion was passed unanimously. "Irrigators are united on this. Their short-term viability is dramatically threatened by receiving a bill for fixed water charges and they need the State Government to act," Mr. Thomson said. "Council members have reported to the meeting that water allocations are at critically low levels, crops are being cut for hay, there is concern that seed stocks will not be available in future, grain prices are reaching critically high levels and – in some areas – there is simply no supply of water on the market at any price. "On top of all of that, irrigators are receiving bills for fixed charges on water they did not receive. "Treasurer Michael Costa announced last week an expected budget surplus in excess of \$540 million. Minister Koperberg must ask Treasury to divert some of that surplus to ensure the survival of irrigators." NSW

Farmers' Association president, Jock Laurie, says it's "inequitable" that a wholly government-owned agency is able to demand payment of fixed charges during the most severe drought in history.

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"The Association is disappointed at Minister Koperberg's recent comments in an interview on Monday with the ABC Radio, indicating that charges cannot be waived," Mr. Laurie said. "A majority of irrigators in the Murray Darling Basin are in their second year of receiving zero per cent water allocation. "Irrigators realise that the system needs to be maintained, however believe they should not have to pay for a service which does not deliver their water entitlement." SOURCE: Rural Press National News Service.

Bleak outlook for SA irrigation allocations

South Australian River Murray irrigation allocations for 2007-08 will remain at 16 per cent as below-average rainfall continues to affect inflows into the Murray-Darling Basin. Minister for the River Murray, Karlene Maywald, says she is extremely concerned about the ongoing impact of such low water allocations on River Murray communities. "In light of the dire outlook, I urge all irrigators to not delay making decisions on how to best manage this situation for their own properties," Ms Maywald said. "Help is available through the SA Department of Primary Industries and Resources (PIRSA), the Drought Hotline and industry associations." "Winter and spring is usually when the majority of inflows are received into the Murray-Darling Basin system. "Unfortunately this year this is not the case, as we are tracking at near record low inflows again." Ms Maywald said River Murray inflows during September this year were the fifth lowest on record at 210 gegalitres, just 14pc of the long-term median of 1460 gegalitres. At this stage, October inflows are likely to be just as low. "The volume of water held in storage within the four major Murray-Darling Basin reservoirs is currently 22pc, compared with the average of 75pc for this time of year," Ms Maywald said "As a result of these low inflows, the volume of water available to South Australia does not allow for any increase to allocations at this stage, under the current water sharing rules agreed to by State Premiers and the Prime Minister earlier this year. "When the total volume of water available for diversion across the basin reaches 1500 gegalitres, then further allocations can be made. "However, we are still around 130 gegalitres below this target, based on the latest assessment from the Murray-Darling Basin Commission." Ms Maywald said further increases to allocations during summer are unlikely because of continued extreme drought conditions across the catchment. SOURCE: SA Government and *Stock Journal*, SA.

NEWS.com

Australians world's biggest greenhouse polluters

Australians were responsible for more harmful greenhouse emissions per person in the decade to 2005 than any other nationality in the developed world. Research by the Australian National University shows that despite the rhetoric from politicians, the country's carbon footprint has worsened compared to other nations. Between 1990 and 2005, our emissions grew almost 26 per cent - the sixth-fastest in the developed world. Seventeen years ago, each Australian contributed 24.8 tonnes in emissions annually. By 2005, that had grown to 25.9 tonnes. The analysis by the ANU's Climate Law Initiative uses data from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and excludes emissions associated with land use changes and forestry. It shows that Australia's per capita emissions were the highest in the developed world on average between 1996 and 2005. The US came in second, followed by Luxembourg, Canada and New Zealand. Report author Andrew Macintosh said Federal and State governments had failed to reduce or stabilise emissions.

The Australian

Professor on sunny side

Australia had "fabulous" solar resources, and energy from the sun would play a major role in meeting any renewable energy targets, a university expert said yesterday. But a CSIRO expert was not convinced, saying solar would be too expensive to compete. The head of the Australian National University's Centre for Sustainable Energy Systems, Andrew Blakers, predicted that solar collectors would be major contributors to renewable energy in Australia. He said it would not be difficult to meet Labor's plan to supply 20 per cent of energy from renewable sources by 2020; in fact, it could probably be done by 2017. By 2015, solar panels would be a major contributor because prices for their manufacture and installation would fall, he said. The CSIRO's chief of energy technology, David Brockway, was not as confident about the prospects for renewable energy. He said renewable energy accounted for less than 1 per cent of energy generated in Australia and that it could be 10 to 15 years before forms of renewable energy were cost competitive.

Snowy release backflip

The NSW Government has backtracked on a decision to stop environmental water releases to the Snowy River. The backflip occurred after the Government discovered halting the river flows would dry up the only source of water for Dalgety, the only historic village left on the Snowy River. The Australian revealed last week that the health of the Snowy was to be sacrificed for towns on the other side of the Great Dividing Range. The decision was

made to cut environmental flows and instead quarantine the water for emergency use because of fears towns and cities could run out of water because of the drought.

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Renewables industry backs Labor's target

The renewable energy industry has predicted it can meet Labor's ambitious 20 per cent target by 2020, rebutting claims by conventional power generation companies that the target may be unachievable. The prediction came as conventional power generators disputed claims by Labor's environment spokesman, Peter Garrett, that he had consulted widely with industry before announcing the ambitious target. "There has been significant consultation with both (Labor energy spokesman) Chris Evans and myself," Mr Garrett said yesterday. "The views of industry have been listened to very, very intensely." Senior energy industry sources, who did not want to be identified, yesterday said Labor had not consulted them on the development of the target. They criticised it as ambitious and premature before the framing of an emissions trading scheme next year. A spokesman for Mr Evans said Labor had not flagged specific details of its mandatory renewable energy target but did talk generally to industry about its plan to support renewable energy. Mr Garrett said Labor decided to announce a target now and not wait until Ross Garnaut finished his economic analysis of emission trading and targets next year because the renewable energy industry was ready to move. "Why wait when we have a climate crisis on our hands?" Mr Garrett said. "Why wait when we have \$20billion worth of investment just waiting to emerge?" John Howard yesterday refused to confirm or deny the report in The Australian that former environment minister Ian Campbell wrote to him two years ago seeking an expansion of the Mandatory Renewable Energy Scheme. In his letter, then senator Campbell said the reluctance to lift targets risked undermining efforts to combat climate change and might force investors offshore. "I'm not going into discussions that may or may not have occurred," the Prime Minister told ABC radio yesterday. Mr Howard said Labor's 20 per cent target by 2020 imposed too many costs on industry, compared with the Coalition's clean energy target, which "struck the right balance". Kevin Rudd yesterday said Mr Howard's decision to ignore the advice of Mr Campbell was motivated by his scepticism of climate change. "What we have today is clear-cut confirmation that his environment minister warned of the consequences for Australia's future in bringing down greenhouse gas emissions and Australia's future as far as a viable, renewable energy industry is concerned," Mr Rudd said. "You cannot have a convicted and confirmed climate change sceptic as part of Australia's long-term climate change solution, including on renewable energy." Pacific Hydro spokesman Andrew Richards said the renewable industry was ready to spend the estimated \$12billion needed to deliver Labor's renewable target. He said that although wind energy alone could meet the target, it was likely to be augmented with a range of other renewable technologies, including geothermal and biomass. "The only thing stopping 10,000 megawatts of wind energy in Australia is policy," he said.

Greenie's Monaro 'only for freeways'

Celebrity physicist and climate change crusader Karl Kruszelnicki rejects the tag of environmental hypocrite and says he drives his V8 Holden Monaro only on the freeway. "We did own a Ford Territory and we traded it in for a (Toyota) Prius, which has three times the fuel economy," he said yesterday. "The next process is to trade in the Monaro, but we only drive it on the highway, where it has the same fuel economy as a Corolla in the city." Dr Kruszelnicki, a former ABC radio personality, is running as a Senate candidate for the Climate Change Coalition, and is second on their ticket after farmer and author Patrice Newell. But his passion for powerful cars has attracted criticism, with recent media reports suggesting a Monaro, even on a weekend drive, guzzles about 11L per 100km, compared to the environmentally friendly Prius, which the Toyota website says consumes about 4.4L per 100km. Customs House to attack what he called "the great furphy" of clean coal. "Goebbels, the Nazi propaganda minister, said, 'If you're going to tell a lie, tell a big one', so they're saying we've got clean coal ... technologically it can't be done. You cannot get rid of one cubic kilometre of compressed carbon dioxide, solid or liquid, every day. You just don't have the storage space. "In a way, carbon dioxide is worse than nuclear waste; overtime, nuclear waste will turn to lead but carbon dioxide will always be carbon dioxide." But he acknowledged that being green did not come cheap. He has installed solar panels on his family home - which now generates more energy than it consumes - but says it was "highly costly". He also acknowledged that funding a political party was an expensive enterprise. The Climate Change Coalition is running on a shoe-string budget. "We are all self-funding this campaign ... we've got no budget," Dr Kruszelnicki said. Ms Newell, the party's founder, expects that in NSW alone the campaign will, "end up costing over \$100,000". Most of this money is sourced from private donations, and Ms Newell, with the support of wealthy husband Phillip Adams, has self-funded party advertising. "People learn about candidates through advertising, more than the news, it's very hard for any small party to compete," she said yesterday. She described her husband as "a fabulous supporter of me, my money is his money". "I want to use my celebrity status for good," Dr Kruszelnicki said yesterday as he appeared at Sydney's

Nuclear necessary evil: scientist

The nation's chief scientist Jim Peacock has declared targets for cutting greenhouse gas emissions using renewable energy sources cannot be achieved without more investment in research and development, and that nuclear power needs to be considered. Dr Peacock believes clean coal technology and nuclear power must be part of a portfolio of new energy sources and suggests that the higher cost to consumers cannot be calculated "with any certainty". Dr Peacock said yesterday it was essential that Australia reduce its CO2 emissions from electricity generation and increase the role of low-emission energy sources. "The commitment of the country to reducing greenhouse gas emissions is something that must be a reality," Dr Peacock told The Australian in an interview yesterday. "It's not all doom. I would like to see as much done as we possibly can." He suggested it would be 10 to 15 years before there was a significant level of retrofits to existing power plants for clean coal power production, and solar, wind and geothermal power still needed much more development. Dr Peacock said Australia's current 10 per cent of electricity generation from renewable sources - mostly from hydro-electricity - could rise "to a higher figure" but he did not set a target nor a deadline. "None of it will really happen without committing more to research and development - that is essential," Dr Peacock said. As chief scientist, Dr Peacock reviewed last year's energy and nuclear power report of former Telstra chief executive Ziggy Switkowski. He formed the view there were only two "mature technologies" with low emissions that could contribute to baseload power for the foreseeable future: clean coal power stations and nuclear energy. Dr Peacock yesterday reiterated those views. "Nuclear has very, very low emissions and, even if it was committed to now, it would still be 15 years before there was a nuclear plant," he said. "I realise it is a very emotional issue in Australia but it could provide one element of a low-emissions power system. "Currently we produce about 10 per cent of our power from renewable energy; of that, hydroelectricity makes up 8 to 9 percentage points and wind produces the rest," Dr Peacock said. "There is no doubt in my mind that clean coal has to be developed. There are various methods of CO2 capture, including retrofitting carbon capture to existing stations, geo sequestration, gasification and other variants." Dr Peacock said all forms of alternative energy deserved to be developed but solar and wind power had problems with constancy of supply and geothermal required much more development. "Windmills are relatively simple to build but all have a problem with 'intermittency' - when they can't produce - and energy storage capacity has yet to be developed," he said. "One or all should find their way into our portfolio. "But they will be developed at a cost, and they are more expensive than our current coal-fired power stations." Dr Peacock suggested that renewable energy sources, and clean coal, were currently between two and five times more expensive than existing coal-fired power stations, although at present it is not possible to accurately calculate rising costs for households. "It all depends on research and development and what new technology can be developed to bring costs down," he said.

Vaile waters down conflict claims

Nationals leader Mark Vaile yesterday backed away from his claims earlier this week that there is "conflicting evidence" on climate change. However, the Deputy Prime Minister continues to recognise a small body of scientific evidence that disputes the phenomenon. Mr Vaile caused a stir earlier in the week when he said there was "conflicting evidence" on the "whole concept" of climate change. Labor pounced on the comments, accusing him of a backflip. Yesterday, he clarified his position, saying climate change did in fact exist. "There are differing bodies of scientific opinion about it; the overwhelming majority of scientific opinion is that climate change is a phenomenon that is real, it is happening," he said. "I'm a lay person as far as science is concerned. I accept the scientific fact and that is the majority point of view. All I've done is point out that, as in every circumstance, there are conflicting scientific points of view on this, but of course we accept the majority of the scientific view that we need to do something about it." Mr Vaile said scientific evidence contradicting the majority view must also be acknowledged. "You've got to acknowledge it - I mean in any scientific debate there's a point of view on both sides of it and there is in this case," he said. "But there is no question that the overwhelming majority view amongst the scientific community is that climate change is happening."

Diversion plan a dry argument

A Bradfield -Tyoe scheme to turn the Clarence River in northern NSW inwards, which was rejected by the NSW government 40 years ago, could have helped South Australian farmers whose water allocations have been cut. But Peter Cullen, one of Australia's foremost water authorities, said that while the scheme was technically feasible, it would have been an economic disaster. The Clarence River scheme was proposed by Jack Beale, an engineer and minister in the Askin state government in the 1960s, who said at the time the project would be bigger than the Snowy Mountains Scheme. It involved the construction of 14 dams in the headwaters of the Clarence River and the diversion of some of the 5 million megalitres that flow to the Pacific Ocean each year westward to the Murray-

Darling Basin. "The big issue is the cost of the water, and whether farmers would be willing to pay for it or whether the taxpayer would have to subsidise them," said Professor Cullen.

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"It couldn't happen now because government has to provide a lot more water for those areas, which have grown a lot since then." The Australian reported this week that water allocations for South Australian farmers on the Murray River had been frozen at 16 per cent of their total entitlements as there was little inflow into the Murray-Darling system. Sydney broadcaster Alan Jones has backed the Beale scheme as an answer to lack of water in the Murray-Darling system. A variation of the Beale scheme was resurrected last year by Environment Minister Malcolm Turnbull, who proposed damming the Clarence River and piping the water to the rapidly growing southeast Queensland area. But the proposal has become an election issue in the two electorates around the Clarence River - the Nationals-held Page and Cowper - where the Coalition has been forced to deny it plans to go ahead with the scheme. The area's main newspaper, The Daily Examiner, has run a campaign against the plan called "Not a Drop", and pointed out that several hundred people in the fishing industry rely on the Clarence River for their livelihood. The Clarence River forms part of the boundary between the two electorates, and Kevin Rudd has visited the area's main city, Grafton, to promise no water will be piped out of the area under a Labor government. The Nationals candidate for Page, Chris Gulaptis, said the matter had been put to bed by the Prime Minister's announcement that because the states were opposed to the proposal, it could not go ahead. "We might have enough water for several Sydney Harbours flowing through the Clarence every day, but there's nowhere to store it, and ... just too many logistical difficulties." But Labor's Janelle Saffin said the federal Government's takeover of water rights in the Murray-Darling system showed it was capable of taking over what was traditionally a state government function. "They created the issue, and they haven't put it to bed ... why did they commission all the reports for it if they didn't intend to dam the river?"

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Tropical system promises more rain

Tropically generated rain that moved across the state yesterday will continue through the weekend, and isolated falls of up to 70mm are possible. The Bureau of Meteorology says the West Coast, lower Eyre Peninsula and Kangaroo Island can expect 10-20mm over the next few days. The rest of the state will receive 20-40mm, but thunderstorms will bring up to 70mm in some places. Adelaide had received almost 9mm by late yesterday, and senior bureau forecaster Paul Lainio said most settled areas would get more rain. "We've had a good in-feed of moisture from the tropics," Mr Lainio said. "As we move into Friday, we should see some more development of activity up in the north of the state. "Overnight Friday and then on Saturday, it looks as though we're going to be really very wet."

Adelaide.now.com

Government denies water unusable

The New South Wales Government has scuttled reports that an algae bloom has made half of Sydney's drinking water supply in Warragamba Dam unusable. A Sydney Catchment Authority report, obtained by *The Daily Telegraph*, states that Sydney water filtration plants are not designed to filter algae. *The Daily Telegraph* says the inefficiency means the 10 metre deep algae bloom has made 500 billion litres, or half of the dam's water, unusable. The Sydney Catchment Authority said today water from Warragamba was currently being taken from a depth of 48 metres and there was no impending threat to the drinking water supply. NSW Water Minister Phil Koperberg said only five per cent of Lake Burragorang, the area of water impounded by the dam, is affected by the bloom. "Very little of the total volume of the water in Warragamba Dam, or Lake Burragorang, is affected," Mr Koperberg told ABC Radio. "It is in fact about three to four per cent - nowhere near the 50 per cent suggested. "On current indications we would have enough unaffected water to last Sydney between four and six years." Sydney Catchment Authority acting chief executive Ian Tanner said the algae bloom posed no threat to Sydney residents. "It is not toxic at all," Mr Tanner told ABC Radio. "The water that is coming out of Warragamba Dam, through the water filtration plant at Prospect and other water filtration plants, is absolutely perfectly safe to drink." He confirmed newspaper reports that the bloom occupies the top 10 to 12 metres of the water but said it stretched about 13km, not 60km as reported. Algae blooms proliferate in warm waters and only cooler temperatures would reduce its size, he said. "If there's enough nutrients or food sources in the water it can multiply," Mr Tanner said. "What we've noticed is that it's become very stable, it's not growing, it is still hanging around and will hang around until the water cools down. "It's probably going to be closer to early winter or until it runs out of food source." Warragamba Dam had a maximum depth of 85 metres, allowing water to be taken at even deeper points if conditions required, Mr Tanner said.

Town learns to live with water 3 hours a day

ORME, Tennessee. - As twilight falls over this Tennessee town, Mayor Tony Reames drives up a dusty dirt road to the community's towering water tank and begins his nightly ritual in front of a rusty metal valve.

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With a twist of the wrist, he releases the tank's meager water supply, and suddenly this sleepy town is alive with activity. Washing machines whirl, kitchen sinks fill and showers run. About three hours later, Reames will return and reverse the process, cutting off water to the town's 145 residents. Associated Press.

NEWS.com

National Foods to increase price of milk, juice, again

The cost of milk, pushed up by the crippling drought, is set to rise again with National Foods flagging price increases for its dairy and juice products. National Foods is Australia's largest processor of drinking milk, dairy products and juice. The company's managing director, Ashley Waugh, said National Foods had to pay more at the farm gate because of increased dairy commodity prices, the cost of production and the drought. He also said further prices rises were possible early next year. "Prices for international dairy commodities have continued to rise beyond our expectations and is the most significant factor in placing pressure on the price we pay our farmers," Mr. Waugh said in a statement today. "Farmers are also facing increased costs of production with higher stockfeed prices and the drought is continuing to put pressure on the availability and price of milk. "We expect these difficult conditions to continue, and nothing indicates that next year will be any different."

Kevin Rudd pledges \$20 million for desal research center

A Federal Labor Government would invest \$20 million in a national centre of excellence for water desalination in Perth, Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd says. Western Australia already has one desalination plant, with a second planned. The centre of excellence would research ways to most efficiently use desalination technology to address the challenge of climate change, Kevin Rudd said. In Perth for the funeral of Special Air Service Sergeant Matthew Locke, Mr Rudd said desalination is a key part of Australia's water security future. "We want Perth to become Australia's centre of excellence and research when it comes to the important technology for Australia's water security," Mr Rudd said. "We want to be partners, if we form the next government, with state governments and private companies in making sure that we get this level of additional water security out there for working families."

Dr Karl's coal Nazi comments 'offensive'

New South Wales Senate candidate Karl Kruszelnicki has been accused of botching his figures and contradicting the likes of Nobel Prize winner Al Gore, after the science broadcaster described clean coal as a "complete furphy". On the campaign trail in Sydney yesterday, Dr Kruszelnicki derided clean coal technology as "physically impossible", and compared support for clean coal with Nazi propaganda. "It is simply a furphy, it's a porky pie to cover up the fact that there is no such thing as clean coal," he said. "Goebbels, the Nazi propagandist, said if you're going to tell a lie, tell a big one, and this is a beauty." Dr Peter Cook from research group CO2CRC, and lead author of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, said Dr Kruszelnicki's comments were offensive. "It is offensive to compare statements on clean coal to Nazi propaganda given world eminent IPCC scientists Sir Nicholas Stern, head of the UK Government Economic Service (and author of the Stern Review) ... and Nobel Prize winner Al Gore have publicly supported CCS (Carbon Capture and Storage)," Dr Cook said. "The IPCC special report on Carbon Capture and Storage, which involved many eminent international scientists, found the technology was viable and that up to 55 per cent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions can be stored in the deep subsurface." Dr Cook also accused Dr Kruszelnicki of getting his figures wrong when he claimed Sydney would produce one cubic kilometre of compressed carbon dioxide every day if it reverted to clean coal technology. "The alleged one cubic kilometre of carbon dioxide emitted in Sydney daily would be equivalent to about 600 times Australia's or 10 times the world total carbon dioxide emissions," Dr Cook said. The IPCC scientist's comments were backed up by the coal industry, with lobby group the NSW Minerals Council saying Dr Kruszelnicki must have been having a "microsleep" yesterday – a reference to a road safety advertisement he appears in. Marshalling statements made by another famous historical figure, the council's CEO Dr Nikki Williams accused Dr Kruszelnicki of "mythmaking". "John F Kennedy once said that 'the greatest enemy of the truth is not the lie, but the myth'," Dr Williams said. "Political ambitions in a federal election are no excuse for mythmaking." "Clean coal technology development and deployment, here and around the world, involves serious people, serious money and serious science."

Activists swim into Cup fashion stakes

They won't be lining up for fashions on the field, but a group of environmental activists is hoping to attract attention by parading the latest nautical trends at next week's Melbourne Cup. Demonstrators will shun fascinators for goggles and suits for wetsuits in an attempt to raise awareness about climate change. Spectators might even spot

a seahorse amid the Melbourne Cup line-up because, according to activist Harry van Moorst, that's the only type of horse that could be racing at Flemington in future. Mr van Moorst said a sea level rise of five metres would put Flemington racecourse under water by 2060, if the rate at which Greenland's ice is melting continues to increase.

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The demonstrators will gather outside the racecourse at Epsom Road at 7.30am next Tuesday and distribute information about climate change to Melbourne Cup revellers. Mr van Moorst said the group would not disturb authorities by entering the venue. But if the fashion police are patrolling, the flipper-clad group might have some explaining to do.

Press Release New South Wales Minister for Climate Change Environment & Water: Phil Koperberg **More water for valleys but no end in sight for drought**

Phil Koperberg said today more water for the Murray and Murrumbidgee Valleys would be made available but warned the drought could get worse. Minister Koperberg told a meeting of intensive livestock producers in Griffith the traditionally wet months of September and October had passed with little rain. "Inflows are well below the long-term average in most areas of NSW and with warmer drier months approaching we must start planning ahead," he said. "Together with local councils and industry, the Lemma Government will continue to do all it can to keep water flowing to drought stricken NSW communities.

Minister Koperberg announced:

- * An increase for high security allocations in the Murraybidgee Valley from 75 per cent to 80 per cent; and
- * A further 10 per cent of suspended account water from 2006 in the Murray Valley will now be re-credited, bringing total repayments to 45 per cent.

"This increase will provide high security users in the Murrumbidgee with enough water for horticultural production and support the needs of intensive livestock and forestry industries until July 2008" he said. "Enough water is available in the Murray to allow the contingency watering program to run till March 2008 but a number of creeks still do not have ongoing access to domestic and stock water, so tributary flows will be directed to these as a priority." Mr. KoperBerg said while the extra water was some good news for the region the outlook for the next year was grim. "Inflows have been well below the average and if the drought continues we cannot guarantee that we will have enough water to meet all needs after June 2008. We need significant rainfall over the coming months to turn this situation around and hopefully that will happen, but there are no guarantees with the weather.

"I have asked all intensive livestock producers in the Murray and Murrumbidgee to assess what impact critically low water will have on their future viability. Given long lead times it would be prudent to start considering their option now. I feel families doing it tough through this severe drought." The Lemma Government has invested \$300 million on a range of assistance measures to assist struggling families and rural communities including:

- * Waiving the fixed water charges in 2006/07 for general security irrigators in the Lachlan Valley due to the prolonged and severe impact of the drought in that valley;
- * \$20 million extraordinary assistance package to help southern irrigators cope with reduced water allocations; and
- * Emergency household support, mental health services, transport subsidies and assistance for small businesses.

Minister Koperberg said water availability across NSW was continually monitored by the Department of Water and Energy.

World Meteorology Organisation Weather Condition Update

Below is an update on weather conditions from the World Meteorology Organisation that may be of interest to you. Unusually cold sea temperatures are the cause for the devastatingly low rainfall in Australia's southeast since early August, the United Nations said. The UN's World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) will today release an update on El Nino & La Nina weather conditions, showing an unusual pattern across the Indian & Pacific oceans. The WMO said surface waters across the north of Australia were up to 1.5 degrees celsius colder than normal causing lower-than-expected rainfall. Warmer than normal sea surface temperatures in the western equatorial Indian Ocean near Madagascar have caused unusually heavy rain in eastern Africa, while dry conditions persist in many areas of Australia. El Nino and La Nina are weather patterns involving major atmosphere-ocean interactions but the current sea temperatures are unusual. During a La Nina, sea surface temperatures in the eastern tropical Pacific are markedly colder than normal. In contrast, El Nino events have warmer sea surface temperatures in the same region. Gary Meyers, a Hobart oceanographer and director of the Integrated Marine Observing System, said cooler seas between Australia and Indonesia had been recorded at the same time as a La Nina event on the Australian east coast made the seas cooler. "It seems that this cool event in the eastern Indian Ocean damped out the good rains normally expected with La Nina," he said. Dr Michael Coughlan, head of the National Climate Centre within the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), said last month a La Nina weather pattern bringing cool, wet weather, had so far been wasted, occurring over the Tasman Sea and Pacific Ocean. He said there was little

potential for the La Nina event to make its presence felt over inland Australia today. "It's probably too late now to aid the main cropping regions," Dr Coughlan said.

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LAKES WATER: Lowest level in 40 years

Water levels in the lower Lakes have dropped to their lowest level in almost 40 years. The level of the River Murray at Mannum is below sea level.

CLIMATE: Encroaching seas make an impact

Warning for coastal buildings: Sands of change

Shacks, kiosks and surf-lifesaving clubs risk being flooded with water as sea levels rise, the Coast Protection Board has warned. The warning came yesterday, three days after *The Advertiser* revealed flooding at Port Adelaide this week was expected to become more common as sea levels rose. The board said coastal protection measures and policies developed in the past 15 years would protect structures from the predicted 1m increase in sea levels by 2100 but not from storm surges. Coastal management manager Dr Murray Townsend said the Henley and West Beach Surf Life Saving Club buildings were two properties at risk. Shacks on Yorke Peninsula at Hardwicke Bay, Corny Point and Chinamen Wells also were under threat. Structures too close to the top of sea walls would not be protected against storm surges. "There is a risk that any building too close to the foreshore will be damaged by storm waves and that risk increases with sea level rise," Dr Murray said. "Some shack areas across the state would be at risk and there are buildings built close to the metropolitan coast. Henley Surf Life Saving Club president Neville Fielder said it was consulting the board about plans to rebuild the club.

\$780M Project

Biggest Power Plant

Queensland's Darling Downs is to be home to the Nation's biggest gas fired power station, (630 megawatt) to be built 40Km West of Dalby.

Australia leads in greenhouse emission

Australia emitted more greenhouse gases on average per person in the decade to 2005 than any other country in the developed world, according to a new report. And despite both sides of politics talking up their climate credentials in recent years, in 2005 Australia was the second highest emitter per capita in the developed world, behind Luxembourg. The bleak assessment came today as Labor released a leaked federal government departmental briefing, encouraging diplomats to "keep a low profile" during a UN climate change meeting in Montreal in 2005. The diplomats were told to stay under the radar because Australia had not ratified the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, Labor's environment spokesman Peter Garrett said. He said the memo undermined Prime Minister John Howard's assurances that Australia's failure to ratify the protocol would not damage its clout at the UN climate change meeting in Bali next month. Delegates at the summit will negotiate the conditions of a new climate change regime to replace the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012. Mr Garrett said if Australia did not ratify the Kyoto Protocol, as Labor has promised to do if it wins office, it will not have full voting rights in Bali. "The Howard government has been absolutely and completely exposed," Mr Garrett said in Melbourne. "The fact that we didn't have capacity to sit in the front of the room at these meetings in Montreal, but had to sit at the back of the room, has exposed the Howard government on its climate change policy. "Our position is crystal clear, to ratify (the Kyoto Protocol) and be serious about climate change, to take a full seat at the negotiating table." But Foreign Minister Alexander Downer dismissed Mr Garrett's comments as "complete rot." "He may be able to remember his scripts from his songs, but he doesn't seem to be able to work out the diplomacy of climate change," he said. Mr Downer said Australia would be a full participant, and also chair an umbrella group of non-European Union developed countries, at the Bali meeting. As both sides of politics clamoured for the upper hand on climate change, a report from the Australian National University's Climate Law Initiative showed between 1990 and 2005, the nation's emissions grew more than a quarter and at a rate which was the sixth-fastest in the developed world. Australia pipped the United States for the dubious mantle of the average highest emitter per capita in the developed world between 1996 - when the coalition came to power - and 2005. Coming in third was Luxembourg, then Canada and New Zealand. Seventeen years ago, each Australian contributed 24.8 tonnes in emissions annually. By 2005, that figure had ballooned to 25.9 tonnes. Report author Andrew Macintosh said Australia had increased its emissions by 26 per cent since 1990. "Anyone who tries to maintain that Australian governments have done enough (to tackle climate change), that argument can't be sustained by the statistics," he said. "I think the federal government has to take a lot of responsibility for what has or hasn't happened but the state governments can't walk away from it, and bear some responsibility as well." Mr Macintosh said whichever party wins government needed to do away with an "obsession" with voluntary programs and forge ahead with compulsory programs, like a national carbon emissions trading scheme. His study used figures from the United Nations Framework Convention

on Climate Change and the World Resources Institute. It did not include emissions from land use change and forestry.

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Adelaide.now

Solar airport plan 'a secret'

The State Government has chosen a new plan for the troubled Adelaide Airport Solar Project. Details, however, are being kept secret until Premier Mike Rann has an opportunity to make a public announcement. As revealed by The Advertiser on September 17, the original concept for the \$1 million project was axed two years after Mr. Rann announced the airport would be the first in Australia, and possibly the world, to be solar-powered. The project was taken up as an Advertiser Watch issue on October 6 to try to help get it moving. The Advertiser in September reported an Adelaide Airport Ltd and State Government working group had decided to "go for a completely new concept". Office of Major Projects and Infrastructure executive director Rod Hook said one of two options put forward by AAL had been selected by the Premier. "They (AAL) will now design that with a detailed design and proceed to call tenders, with a view to installation early next year," Mr. Hook said. "When they've done some further designs and have something that is visually good, there will be a public release of exactly what it is." AAL has favoured a concept it says is "currently operating in the city of Adelaide" very successfully and that could be delivered within budget. The Premier, however, wants to ensure any project has a "visual" component to try to highlight the Government's green credentials. Mr. Hook said he had to wait for the Premier to "release the information about the new project when it's properly drawn up". "I will not pre-empt any future announcements," he said. Mr. Hook said the tender process would begin before Christmas. It was expected to cost \$1 million. AAL spokesman John McArdle said while the airports preferred concept had not been selected, the new option was "a more efficient and effective scheme". "It gives you more power for the capital expenditure. We're proud to be working with the state on this sustainable project," he said.

Internet

2009 set to be the year of Global warming

Global warming will start spreading its malicious venom in 2009, initiating a spell of heat waves, warming the atmosphere and shooting the temperature beyond the highest ever level. But, are we thinking too far? What about the present weather situation around the globe? Already fossil fuels have facilitated the mercury to shoot to a point that has left many areas parched resulting in drought, while few regions are recording incessant rains culminating in flooding, others are recording glacier retreat, and some are hanging on the noose of a total environment disaster. However, scientists have predicted 2009 to be the beginning of an environment catastrophe, warning that the earth will begin heating furiously because of reckless fuelling of the atmosphere with carbon and green house gas emissions, thanks to industrial pollution. Still, natural cycles like El Nino and La Nina will upset the climatic balance at places where they have been recorded particularly in the east Pacific and southeast Asia heating the atmosphere at one place and rain at other, resulting in droughts here and flooding there. It is widely surmised that global warming will follow the El Nino spatial pattern. But, in whatever way or whichever year it might be, global warming is going to impact everyone from man to flora to fauna to buildings to houses. From dramatically impacting the atmosphere, it will result in devastation, illustrations of which are already visible around the globe. Still, the worst is yet to happen, as time passes, with the ticking of the clock, the destruction will come closer. Future will turn into present and we will be witness to the weather fury for which no one but man is to be blamed.

Australia's drought may stay for keeps

Sydney: Australia's current drought, called the worst in 1,000 years, is the result of changing rainfall patterns and may necessitate major changes in the continent's water economy. Experts cited climate change as a factor contributing to the increasing uncertainty in Australian weather. "It's a combination of short El Nino drought and longer-term decreasing rainfall," said Michael Coughlan, of the Australian Bureau of Meteorology. "The combination of short and long-term drought is surprising - we didn't see it coming, and it's really shaken everyone up." The findings come as part of the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) report on the 2006 global climate, made public today. 2006 was the 6th hottest year on record globally, according to the U.N.'s weather service, and saw prolonged droughts in Australia, the U.S., Brazil, and the Horn of Africa. Some Australian experts don't see rainfall on the arid continent increasing again anytime soon. "Drought is too comfortable a word," said John Williams, the New South Wales state Commissioner for Natural Resources. "Drought connotes a return to normal. We need to be adjusting." According to Williams, Australia is a nation of extremes, where droughts and flooding rains are the norm. The last 50 to 60 years, when Australia developed much its water infrastructure, have been times of relative plenty, he said. He harked back to the years between 1900 and 1950, when rivers in the Murray-Darling system were dry for a total of 17 years. "It's only been dry 5 years since then," he said. According to Williams, the continent is reverting to the drier conditions of the past, exacerbated by climate-change induced

uncertainty. It's a return to the sequence of the first 50 years [of the century]," he said. Williams and others think that Australia's new rainfall pattern will require fundamental changes in the way water is used.

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The years of high rainfall have led to an over-allocation of water resources that we can no longer sustain, said Williams. "We need more water storage and desalinisation, or better water usage." Jenifer Simpson, an industrial chemist and water advocate, agreed, stressing water recycling as the way to reduce reliance on uncertain rains. "Right now our 'water cycle' is not a cycle," she said. "Our current urban water cycle is a straight line from dam to disposal, with a shortage of water at one end and pollution at the other." She said that the technology exists to make recycled water safe for drinking, but that a lack of understanding between the water industry and the community prevented recycled water's acceptance. "Recycling should be accepted and exploited," she said.

Natural Hazards and Disasters in Australia

Australia is an island continent extending from approximately 10 degrees to 45 degrees South in latitude and is subject to harsh extremes of climate. It has an area of 7.7 million square kilometres, a population of 18.5 million and a coastline over 25,000km long. Much of the land area is desert and the remainder varies from tropical rain forest to winter snowfields. It is a land that, because of its climate, physical geography, vegetation and patterns of human settlement along rivers, coasts and across marginal agricultural land, is prone to a range of meteorological, geological and biological hazards, including tropical cyclone, storm surge, bushfire, flood, severe storm, earthquake and landslide. Other than the great influenza epidemic in 1918 that killed thousands, however, Australia has experienced relatively low loss of human life in comparison with other countries. This is largely because we have a stable continent, well-constructed homes and are not densely populated. Even so, natural disasters have resulted in approximately 500 deaths and 6,000 injuries in Australia over the last 25 years and have caused annual average estimated losses of approximately A\$1.25 billion (excluding drought). Since European settlement in Australia in 1788, the most deaths from a natural hazard have been as a result of several heat waves and the most costly hazards in total estimated economic terms have been drought and flood, although the most costly events were the Newcastle earthquake in 1989 and Cyclone Tracy at Darwin in 1974.

Ten Hard Facts About Australia's Natural Hazards:

1. **BUSSHFIRES** - South-eastern Australia includes areas which are prone to the most severe and frequent wildfires in the world.
2. **FLOODS** - The Great Floods of 1990 in southern Queensland, northern NSW and SE Victoria covered a total area larger than Germany.
3. **HEATWAVES** - During the 20th Century, heat waves have caused more deaths in Australia than any other natural hazard (except disease). The worst recorded killed well over 400 people.
4. **SEVERE STORMS** - On average in Australia, severe storms (including hail and tornadoes) occur more frequently and cause more insured damage, per year, than any other natural hazard.
5. **DROUGHTS** - On average, approximately three out of every 10 years bring drought which costs Australia more than any other natural hazard.
6. **CYCLONES** - Tropical cyclones cross the northern, northeastern and northwestern Australian coastline 6 times per year on average.
7. **EARTHQUAKES** - In Australia, an earthquake of Richter magnitude 5.5 (ie almost that of the Newcastle event in 1989) occurs every 15 months on average.
8. **TSUNAMIS** - Numerous small tsunamis (seismic sea waves) have been recorded along Australia's coastline and evidence suggests much larger ones occurred before European settlement.
9. **LANDSLIDES** - In Australia, landslides have been responsible for approximately five times as many deaths as earthquakes but have caused only 5% as much economic damage.
10. **VOLCANOES** - Although the vast majority of volcanoes in Australia are extinct, scientists believe further minor volcanic activity is possible from long-dormant ones in SA and Victoria.

Meteorological Hazards - Overview and Selected Case Studies

Some meteorological hazards such as tropical cyclones, bushfires, floods and severe storms (including wind, rain, hail and tornado) occur frequently in Australia, from several to many times a year, causing regular disruptions and hundreds of millions of dollars of damage annually. Others, such as severe droughts occur once or twice a decade usually for extended periods, while still others such as severe cyclone storm surges have affected urban areas less frequently. The following case studies give an indication of the potential losses associated with a range of meteorological hazards occurring in Australia. Tropical Cyclone Tracy struck the city of Darwin in the Northern Territory at 1.00am on 25 December 1974. Category 4 winds gusting up to an estimated 250km/h, caused enormous infrastructure damage, destroyed over 80% of all buildings, killed 65 people and injured 650. Over 35,000 people were left homeless and had to be evacuated. Insurance losses amounted to A\$837 million and the total estimated

cost of the disaster was A\$4.2 billion (in Dec 1998 values). The 'Ash Wednesday' bushfires broke out in very dry, heat wave conditions of 43°C across the states of South Australia and Victoria on 16 February 1983.

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Fanned by high winds, hundreds of wildfires burnt a combined total of over 520,000 hectares in 24 hours. Their severe toll involved: 76 deaths; 1,100 injuries; 3,700 buildings destroyed (including 2,400 homes and over 1,000 farms); 18,000 cattle; 340,000 sheep; 20,000km of fencing; and huge areas of forest and bush land. Their insured loss was A\$320 million and total estimated costs reached A\$950 million (in Dec 1998 values). Floods in northeastern Victoria caused widespread, severe damage in October 1993 when intense rainfall in mountain catchments caused a total of 12 river systems to rapidly flood many towns and the surrounding rich agricultural regions, some with very little warning. The worst affected large towns were Benalla, Shepparton, Wangaratta and Euroa where most of the total of over 4,000 homes and businesses were inundated for several days. Approximately 5,500 people were evacuated and huge losses were inflicted on fruit and vegetable crops, dairy cattle herds and other livestock. Roads, bridges and other infrastructure items suffered massive damage. Insurance payouts were very small but total estimated costs (including lost agricultural production) were A\$400 million (in Dec 1998 values). A severe hailstorm struck many of Sydney's eastern and inner suburbs without warning on the evening of 14 April 1999. Huge hailstones averaging the size of tennis balls in many areas caused widespread devastation to the roofs and windows of tens of thousands of homes, factories, businesses, and motor vehicles and even damaged a number of large aircraft at Sydney Airport. Fierce lightning and rain caused fire and water damage adding to the destruction. Although only one death resulted, there were numerous injuries and several hundred people left homeless. The homeless figure would have been much higher except for a massive effort by emergency service volunteers who worked for weeks to secure and temporarily seal roofs with approx' 200,000 huge tarpaulins. In all, 22,000 homes, 2,800 commercial buildings and 63,000 cars were damaged creating Australia's most expensive insurance loss from a natural disaster. The resulting payout figure to June 1999 was A\$1.5 billion and total estimated costs exceed A\$2 billion.

Geological and Extra-Terrestrial Hazards - Overview

Compared with regional neighbours such as New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Indonesia, the Australian continent is relatively geologically-stable and is less prone to geological hazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides and volcanoes. Moderate-sized earthquakes, however, have caused substantial losses. In December 1989, an earthquake resulted in 13 deaths and 160 injuries at Newcastle, 'shaking' over an area of more than 250,000 sq km of the State of New South Wales, reported building damage across an area of about 20,000 sq km and total estimated property/infrastructure and recovery costs of over A\$4 billion, of which only \$1.145 billion was insured. Tsunamis (seismic seawaves), despite being rare in Australia, have impacted on our coastlines. Serious damage was caused in 1960 along the eastern seaboard and in 1977 and 1994 along the north-west coast from distant earthquakes. Landslides in Australia are usually the result of soil saturation and human activity. In 1996 and 1997 they began to be viewed more seriously when lives were lost in a cliff collapse at a beach near Gracetown in Western Australia (9 dead) and a landslide on a steep site at the Thredbo ski resort in New South Wales (18 dead). Volcanoes are extremely unlikely to seriously impact directly on Australia, although scientists believe further minor volcanic activity is possible from long-dormant ones in South Australia and Victoria. Although presenting a very low risk, a comet or asteroid impact on Earth could cause a major regional disaster or even a world-wide catastrophe. There are many past impact sites throughout the world, including Australia.

Biological Hazards - Overview and Selected Case Studies

Biological hazards with potential for causing disaster in Australia include: human disease epidemics (such as influenza, Ross River fever, Hepatitis, AIDS); vermin and insect plagues (eg rabbits, mice, locusts); exotic animal diseases (eg 'foot-and-mouth', Anthrax); and food-crop diseases. These and other similar hazards have dramatically and suddenly affected both the health and wealth of our nation in the past, particularly in rural areas. In late January 1997, Australia's most serious outbreak of Anthrax this century occurred on dairy farms in northern Victoria. The emergency was brought under control by late February after approximately 200 cattle & some sheep had died on over 80 properties. More than 60,000 cattle & 2,000 sheep were immunised to contain the disease. The estimated cost of control measures and lost exports and other impacts was approximately A\$15 million. A knacker worker required hospital treatment after becoming infected via a small wound.

Human-Caused Hazards - Overview and Selected Case Studies

Human error or deliberate acts sometimes take on disastrous proportions. These may include: terrorist bombings; riots; wars; crowd-crushes at mass gatherings; shooting massacres (eg Port Arthur); and even sabotage of essential services (eg water or power supplies). On Sunday 28 April 1996 the peaceful serenity of Port Arthur in Tasmania was shattered by a tragic and shocking event that left 35 people dead and 19 injured. A military-style weapon was used to kill 20 people in the Broad Arrow Cafe at the Port Arthur Historic Site. The shooting rampage continued

outside, leaving behind more dead and injured before the offender left the historic site in a commandeered motor vehicle and drove to the Port Arthur Store.

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There he took a hostage, securing him in the boot of the vehicle and shooting dead the hostage's female companion. He then drove to a nearby guest-house, firing upon large numbers of people along the way and flagging down and shooting the occupants of a four-wheel-drive vehicle. Taking refuge in the guest-house, the offender kept police at bay until the early hours of the following morning before setting fire to the building. He later emerged from the building and was taken into police custody. The fire destroyed the building and site examination revealed three more bodies.

Technological Hazards - Overview and Selected Case Studies

Australia is an industrialised and resource-rich nation which has suffered from, or is at risk from, technological hazards and accidents which sometimes become disasters. These include: major transport, mining and hazardous materials accidents (eg oil or chemical spills); as well as industrial explosions; urban fire and occasional structural collapses (eg 'Westgate', Melbourne and 'Tasman', Hobart). This category also includes dam failures, nuclear accidents and re-entry of space debris to Earth (eg Skylab, WA 1979). Accidental damage to essential services also has the potential to cause loss of life and significant economic and social disruption, as evidenced by recent disruptions to gas and water supplies in major urban centres. In early July 1998, some sections of Sydney's water supply became contaminated by harmful bacteria necessitating the boiling of drinking water by tens of thousands of residents in the affected areas. The crisis continued for over two months until the source of the problem was identified. Although only isolated illness cases occurred, a total cost of approximately A\$75 million resulted. On 25 September 1998, following a gas refinery explosion at Longford in Victoria (which killed 2 and injured 8 other workers), the State was left without its major domestic and industrial energy source for a period of two weeks at a relatively cool time of the year. Massive disruption to commerce and industry resulted which has been estimated to total A\$1.3 billion in lost production and revenue.

Adelaide. Now

Victoria water 'secretly traded' for NSW rice

Water meant to protect Victoria's electricity supplies has been traded off to NSW rice growers in secret multimillion-dollar deals with the Snowy Hydro corporation. Snowy Hydro Ltd and the NSW Department of Water and Energy have been accused of jeopardising the future of electricity outputs, the livelihoods of other irrigators and environmental flows to the Snowy and Murray rivers for short-term profits, Fairfax newspapers report. The revelation of the secret sales comes as a cross-state deal on the Snowy River made by two former premiers threatens to tear apart the already frayed relations between the states' current premiers. Former Snowy Mountains engineers and managers say the corporation abandoned established drought strategies, maintaining minimum annual water releases without emptying storages in lakes Eucumbene and Jindabyne. The engineers estimate Snowy Hydro benefited - by about \$160 million - from the special irrigation-deal payments and by bringing forward release revenues. "Had such releases not been made, the total active storage in Lake Eucumbene and Jindabyne Dam would now be more than 800 gegalitres, instead of virtually zero," retired Snowy Mountains Authority (SMA) engineer John Kelly said. "If the current drought drags on, the water in storage could continue to be seriously overdrawn, with the result that future irrigation releases and electricity outputs will be well below the amounts that would have been produced had the water deals not been done." Snowy Hydro Ltd spokesman Paul Johnson said the corporation would study Mr Kelly's report before responding. A former executive with SMA and Snowy Hydro Ltd, Max Talbot, has targeted the big irrigators, saying: "Now they have had their crops and made their profits, but they have not had any option to start paying back the water because the inflows have not been there." The engineers have joined Gippsland activists angered by the NSW government's attempt last week to cancel the return of environmental flows to the Snowy River, citing Lake Eucumbene's critically low water level. "It's time the Snowy Hydro stopped treating the storages as its own private, bottomless swimming pool," Louise Crisp, of the Gippsland Environment Group, said. "By their actions they have put at risk future releases to irrigators, their own electricity generation capacity and environmental flows to the Snowy and Murray, whilst all the while blaming the empty dams solely on the drought."

4th

Sunday Mail

Farmers face water theft charge

Farmers are being prosecuted for "stealing" water from the River Murray. State Water Security Minister Karlene Maywald warned irrigators during the week their water allocations were likely to remain at a historic low 16 per

cent over the summer. Three cases of water theft are headed for court while "numerous" others are being investigated as part of a crackdown by the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation. The department would not release details of the pending prosecutions.

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As part of its enforcement of water restrictions, it has launched a 24-hour hotline number – 8539 2110 – and is encouraging the public to report suspected non-compliant behaviour. Maximum penalties for the "unlawful taking of water" are \$35,000 for an individual and \$70,000 for a company.

5th

FarmOnLine

Water efficiency drives Downs vegetable producer

A batch of some of the latest New Holland high clearance tractors have been bedded-down on a vegetable-growing enterprise on the Darling Downs near Dalby, Qld. Their arrival on the Kaimkillenbun property of Shane Nuendorf signals his firm commitment to diversify away from the traditional broad acre cropping regimes traditionally associated with the district. The four new tractors required to smooth this vibrant horticulture-orientated production process are made up of High Clearance TD80 models that were delivered with a ROPS specification. Noted farm machinery distributor McIntosh and Son's principal, John Cronin, says the tractors were earmarked for a range of jobs including tillage and planting operations. When *Queensland Country Life* caught up with the four newcomers they were fitted with linkage-mounted picking baskets spread across a special frame to optimise picking performance by spanning as many rows as possible. "But, most importantly, they had to be able to move down rows without damaging crops," Mr. Cronin said. "With about a metre clearance under their axles, that allows operators to handle a lot more crops than normally would be the case." Just recently, Mr. Nuendorf was in the throes of overseeing the last pick of a broccolini crop that had been grown during the winter season. "This year was very cold compared to last year – we had a prolonged cold spell in the middle of the year which slowed down production of everything, including maturity and therefore harvest," he said. He is now concentrating on growing a crop of watermelons as part of his summer cropping programme. His Downs-based horticulture venture is all about maximising his returns for each megalitre of water used. "With allocations getting smaller in all irrigation areas, it just means you need to achieve the best possible returns from every acre," he said. SOURCE: *Queensland Country Life*, weekly rural newspaper, posting news updates daily on *FarmOnline*.

The Australian

Cloncurry in northwest Queensland will become the state's first town to be powered entirely by solar energy. Queensland Premier Anna Bligh said the town would be the site for a \$7 million, 10-megawatt solar thermal power station. "It's a real breakthrough for energy generation," said Ms Bligh, who visited the town for her first community cabinet meeting as premier. "The technology we're going to use in Cloncurry will ensure the power station keeps generating electricity even when the sun is not shining." Luckily, a lack of sunlight is not a problem that faces Cloncurry - about 800km west of Townsville - Ms Bligh said yesterday. "The town of Cloncurry has long claimed the title of having recorded Australia's hottest day - 53 degrees in the shade in 1889, so I reckon we're on a winner," she said. The solar thermal power station will be built and running by the summer of 2009. A similar, although much larger, solar power station will be built near Mildura in northern Victoria in a project jointly funded by the Victorian and federal governments. Plans for the plant, which will be one of the world's largest, were announced last year and the station is expected to be fully operational by 2013. The \$420 million "super plant" will aim to provide green energy to 45,000 homes and will create 1000 jobs. At the Cloncurry plant, 8000 mirrors will be erected to reflect sunlight on to graphite blocks. Water will then be pumped through the graphite to create steam, used to power a conventional steam turbine electricity generator. The graphite is designed to remain hot even during the night or in overcast weather. Ms Bligh said this would ensure Cloncurry would have "continuous 24-hour electricity". Mines and Energy Minister Geoff Wilson said the power station would provide enough energy - about 30 million-kilowatt hours each year - to power the entire community. "It will cut greenhouse gas emissions with clean energy powered by the sun, and it will save money in the long term with less money being spent on upgrades to the local network," he said. Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation Andrew McNamara said renewable energy sources, such as solar power, would be vital to meet the challenges of climate change. "One thing Australia has more of than any other country is sunshine, and the tremendous potential for solar energy hasn't begun to be tapped yet," Mr. McNamara said. Ergon Energy will develop the project.

6th

FarmOnLine

Labor threatens future of live exports

Animal welfare activists have gate crashed Prime Minister John Howard's morning walk in Sydney, calling for the Government to ban live exports. The protests come following an admission during an ABC debate by Labor's

primary industries spokesman, Kerry O'Brien, that the live export industry would have to be shut down if public concerns could not be addressed.

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This morning activists from PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) were waiting for the PM at the gates of Kirribilli House, calling for an end to live exports to improve Australia's animal welfare standards. "The only way you can improve animal welfare standards is to ban live export all together," a protester said. One of the protestors was dressed as a sheep, and asked by police to remove his headpiece so he could be questioned for identification. On yesterday's Landline debate between Minister for Agriculture, Peter McGauran, and his opposite number, Senator O'Brien, it was revealed Labor would move to shut down the live export industry if public pressure to stop the trade continued. "If it comes to the point where the Australian public do not accept that animal welfare concerns are properly being met, Governments of any persuasion will be faced with a difficult decision and will probably be almost forced to shut it down," Sen O'Brien said. Mr. McGauran described the admission as "a bombshell" and accused Labor of bowing to pressure from "extreme" animal activists, and named Animals Australia. Animals Australia has this morning announced it will instruct solicitors to commence legal proceedings in the Supreme Court of Victoria, alleging it has been defamed by Mr. McGauran after he labeled Animals Australia an extremist organisation whilst defending the live export trade during the debate. Executive director of Animals Australia, Glenys Oogjes, said it was "incredible" Mr. McGauran would call an organisation represented on his own Federal advisory committee extremist "in an attempt to score points with the rural community". Animals Australia has also written to Mr. McGauran demanding an apology and a retraction of his comments.

Industry backlash at Labor's live ex threat

Australia's sheep and cattle industry bodies have hit out at Labor's plan to shut down the live export industry if public perceptions do not change, saying it will cost thousands of rural jobs. The Sheep meat and Cattle Councils of Australia have both emphasised that the livestock export trade is crucial to the sustainability of Australia's farmers and rural communities. Sheepmeat Council president, Chris Groves, says livestock producers are looking for a government that will work collaboratively with the livestock export industry to build its sustainable future and ensure that it retains the highest animal welfare standards in the world. "Animal welfare is the number one priority of the livestock export trade, so the industry is committed to meeting genuine community expectations in regard to the care of livestock," Mr. Groves said. "It was pleasing to hear Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran's strong and positive support for the livestock export trade into the future. "The Minister quite rightly highlighted that the trade operates to world's best practice." Mr. Groves acknowledged that Sen O'Brien had also said there are parts of Australia that totally depend on the livestock export trade and that he wants to work with the industry to continue to improve. "However, in respect of Labor's comments that public pressure will determine the future of the livestock export trade, it must be remembered that some examples of pressure on the industry are generated by extremist animal rights groups that not only want to shut down the livestock export trade, but all livestock farming," he said. And Cattle Council president, Bill Bray, said that producers do not want to see a situation where organised letter writing campaigns by extremist groups dictate the future of this trade. "Extremist groups will never acknowledge the ongoing and significant improvements within the livestock export trade and its continual investment to deliver the best welfare outcomes amongst any exporting nation," Mr. Bray said. "Let's be clear about the value of live exports to Australia – the industry contributes \$1.8 billion to the Australian economy and employs 13,000 people. "The livestock export trade invests \$2 million annually in research and development to continually improve animal welfare outcomes. "Australia, unlike any other country, has animal welfare experts based in the Middle East, to provide practical training to stockman and veterinarians on how to work with Australian animals, plus upgrade infrastructure, such as abattoirs, ports and feedlots. "If we are not in the Middle East the rate of progress and improvement in animal welfare will slow, or worse, stop."

Farmers reluctant to take cash and quit the land

Drought-stricken farmers are opting to stay on the land, with just a handful taking up the latest Federal Government exit grant. Many are hanging on in the face of failing crops, despair, and the doubling of the Coalition's offer. Responding to the mounting drought crisis in the southern states - and as the federal election loomed - the Government announced in September that it would double the exit grants available to farmers to \$150,000, plus an offer to cover up to \$20,000 in training and moving expenses. According to the Agriculture Minister, Peter McGauran, more than 300 farmers had sought information about the grant, but only 14 had lodged applications as of Friday. He said he understood why farmers had not rushed to take up the offer. "Any decision to leave the land is a life-changing one," he said. "Many who have battled through this long drought will put off a decision until normal conditions return." Mr. McGauran said he expected that eventually more than 1000 farmers would take up the offer, allowing them to "leave their properties with dignity" and give them the opportunity to find another job or retire.

The grant is just one of several measures to help drought-affected farmers. These have totalled \$3.5 billion since 2001. Family farms make up 99pc of the Australia's 130,000 farm businesses. The number of farms has declined slowly over many years but the drought has not yet triggered a mass exodus.

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Rural social researcher Neil Barr said he was not surprised by the lack of exit grant applications. "The history of those grants is that they rarely act as a significant incentive," he said. He said most farmers were "asset rich but income poor", and the grant was not large enough to compensate for selling - often multi-million dollar - properties when the farm property market was so slow in southern regions. The Government introduced an exit grant of \$50,000 in the mid-1990s. It increased it to \$75,000 earlier this year, and then doubled it to \$150,000 in September. Farmers are eligible for the new grant if the value of their property and other assets - minus debt, is worth less than \$350,000. Fewer than 1200 farmers have taken up the grant over a decade. Mr. Barr said farmers tended to remain on their properties unless it suited their career paths: "Unless they're young, without kids and commitments to a mortgage, or they're older and it fits in with their retirement patterns." Jim McColl, who chaired a review of rural adjustment for the Government in the 1990s, agreed that more farmers were likely to sell after the drought eased. "Everybody hangs on," he said. "People would have to be in pretty desperate straits to take what might seem a relatively generous exit fee." But while farmers themselves may be reluctant to leave the land, paid farm workers continue to do so in ever-greater numbers. The 2006 census reveals a drop of 40,554 in agricultural employment nationally since 2001, leaving just 3pc of the nation's workforce in farming. And the decline is accelerating. Agriculture is one of few industries with dwindling employment. Even manufacturing is on the rise. While largely a result of mechanisation, Mr. Barr said, the drop was also explained by the poor wages and conditions for farm labourers. SOURCE: *The Age*, Melbourne, a Fairfax Media publication.

AWA

*Advertisements attacking the Queensland Government over its handling of a takeover of south east Queensland council water assets began this past week with the mayor claiming their assets are not being fairly valued and appropriate compensation awarded.

*Media continue to talk about the Algal Bloom on the surface of the lake at Warragamba Dam, a not uncommon phenomena in warm weather. The Sydney Catchment Authority has stated that "it is quite conceivable that the algae will remain on the surface for months until such time as their food source runs out or the weather becomes much colder". NSW Health also advised that there is no risk to public health.

*Large food and beverage organisations, office buildings and car manufacturers all featured prominently in the list of metropolitan Melbourne's 191 sites using more than 50 million litres of water over the past year. In regional Victoria, 267 industrial sites also used >50 million litres.

*The SA Government's new \$24 million water saving rebates package has begun giving householders a diverse range of options to continue reducing water consumption inside and outside the home. Advice on how is available in a booklet available from SA Water.

*Planning for the new sewerage scheme for residents of Glossodia, Freemans Reach and Wilberforce which is part of the NSW Government's priority sewerage, is moving ahead quickly with the preferred service option to be put on public display early next month.

*The NSW Government will stop environmental water releases to the Snowy River and instead quarantine the water for emergency use because of fears towns and cities could run out of water because of the drought. The Government found that halting the river flows would dry up the only source of water for Dalgety, the only historic village left on the Snowy River.

*The Bureau of Meteorology is hosting a series of Water Information Industry Seminars in each capital city targeting professionals involved in water resource policy, planning and management.

*A recently completed review available assesses the health risks associated with the relationship between bacterial pathogens and protozoa in water supplies. It appears that the Protozoan host may Project these bacteria from disinfection during water treatment with implications for water treatment plant protocols.

*In a mimic to Australia's WaterSmart and WELS schemes, US EPA has released a "high-efficiency faucet specification" to give consumers a new way to identify high-performance, Water-Efficient products for their homes. These and other products such as aerators that receive the WaterSense label will use about 30 % less water than conventional models.

*Canadian water utilities have also formed a Biosolids Partnership Program similar to the US Biosolids Partnership and the Australasian Biosolids Partnership. Updates on developments can be seen with the added bonus on having a choice of English or French editions to view.

*A 66-year-old Sydney man watering his front lawn in evening on a "watering day" was assaulted by a 36-year-old who criticised this. The older man sprayed him and he then punched and kicked the older man. The younger man is now in custody charged with murder.

*Mayors accused of lying by Queensland Premier Anna Bligh over the value of council water assets have challenged the state government to obtain an independent review of their costings.

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*Plans to inject millions of dollars to set up desalination plants will have massive unspecified environmental impacts on Australia's coastline, The Australian Greens say.

*A major dispute is building between the Queensland Government and the southeast region local councils about the size of compensation payments for the government's takeover of their water assets. Australian Financial Review.

*Peter Cullen, one of Australia's foremost water authorities has said that a Bradfield type scheme to turn the Clarence River in northern NSW inwards, rejected by the NSW government 40 years ago, may have helped South Australian farmers whose water allocations have been cut, would have been an economic disaster.

*Water meant to safeguard Victoria's electricity supplies has been traded off to NSW rice growers in secret multimillion-dollar deals with the Snowy Hydro Corporation.

Murray Pioneer

Maywald: NSW 'frustrating' water crisis

The NSW Government has been a major contributor to rising water prices and has forced the SA Government to rule out buying water for its irrigators, according to River Murray Minister Karlene Maywald. Speaking at a SA Citrus Industry Development Board meeting at Berri on Tuesday. Mrs. Maywald said NSW had an opportunity to supply more water to the Murray-Darling system. "The frustrating thing for all of us is that NSW has actually issued more allocation instead of leaving it in the system to be allocated to those who actually need it," Mrs. Maywald said. "They have allocated to people, such as rice growers, who aren't even planting a rice crop at the moment. So they get the benefit of being able to sell water in the market place, which assists their growers in their adjustment through this period, which is incredibly frustrating. "SA irrigators and other growers with permanent plantings, are once again the ones bearing the costs to subsidise the incomes of those with annual crops." However, with some NSW irrigators placing their water on the market, Moorook citrus grower and businessman Jeff Knispel questioned Mrs. Maywald on why the State Government could not purchase that water on irrigator's behalf. "The big burden for growers is finding funding for the purchase of water from the market," Mr. Knispel said. "Now if there was no water anywhere, either in the river or available to buy in the market place, then I guess we'd all shit ourselves, but the fact is there is water to buy to top up our 16 per cent. "All variations on EC (Exceptional Circumstances) packages will still leave the burden of funding with irrigators. Now irrigators do not have that capital available." Mrs. Maywald said she "completely agrees" with Mr. Knispel, but that her hands are tied when it comes to purchasing water. "there is water on the market, but because the prices are high it puts it out of reach for a lot of growers," she said. "(However) the meeting on Friday with NSW and the Commonwealth made it very clear that they do not support the SA Government going in and buying water. They want the market to play its part. "They don't mind however, if the Commonwealth provides assistance to growers to purchase (water). They are just strongly opposed to the (SA) Government buying the water from the market price." Mrs. Maywald said the State Government had no choice but to abide by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments' wishes. "We have to buy water from NSW, but the NSW Government could shut down trade tomorrow if they wanted," she said. "So this what they are saying, they do not want the SA Government to be the purchaser of water. "(However) this is a drought situation and it is the Federal Government's responsibility, they have a budget surplus of over \$17 billion to spend. "Just to compare, SA's entire budget is \$2 billion so, we are a prosperous nation, and it's time the Federal Government started addressing the situation more seriously." Mrs. Maywald said the State Government had purchased a number of options to obtain more water for irrigators. "We have looked at borrowing from the future (what a stupid idea, ask those who borrowed some time ago and are still trying to repay what they borrowed) and bringing it forward to now, but we have been unsuccessful in negotiating that with NSW and the Commonwealth," she said. "no-one is allocating any more water this year, like they did last year in NSW, when they allocated water they didn't actually have. "The results from our meeting with the Commonwealth and NSW last Friday were that they were adamant the market needs to find the solution."

MDA: Playing politics a matter of life and death

From the potato grower on the Murray to the waterless hamlet just inside the Queensland border and the wheat farmers, with their failed crops, in between, exactly 2600 kilometres straight up the guts of NSW. Up and back, that is, in three days and three hours. The election is irrelevant by comparison. Water is now Australia's absolutely critical issue, not the campaign games of John Howard and Kevin Rudd. "There's the real world," said Bill Heffernan, nodding to the conveyor belt and the thin stream of wheat making a pyramid in the grain holding centre

we were passing near Walgett in the state's far north. "That's where the loaf of bread in the supermarket starts." Heffernan is the NSW Liberal senator some people think, quite wrongly, is just another dinosaur. He knows more about country people and what is happening in the bush - and what needs to be done - than all those bone-headed Nationals in John Howard's Government put together.

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And while Heffernan won't thank me for saying so, Howard's lousy judgment, as well as his lack of courage, failed him and his Government when he didn't move outside the conventional envelope and make the outspoken farmer politician from Junee the minister for primary industries after the last election. Instead, Howard took the easy Coalition option and continued elevating National dunces like Warren Truss and Peter McGauran and John Cobb and left Heffernan to rot on the back bench because he wouldn't trust his friend and ally after Heffernan had said what he thought, under parliamentary privilege. In March five years ago about the High Court's Michael Kirby, a darling of the Labor Party. Howard cared more what the judiciary thought of him personally, a former suburban solicitor, than he did about the political well being of his Government. Howard's error was a grievous one. Which brings us back to two grumpy old men in a four-wheel-drive. As always, Heffernan went to look for himself. He had a wad of letters and emails from NSW farmers here and there across the state, most of them desperate for help for the same reason. Water. If Howard wouldn't make him a minister, he did make Heffernan chairman of a taskforce looking into how Australia might develop its waterlogged north as our next great food bowl after the ailing Murray-Darling Basin. The job has become Heffernan's passion. Locking up Australia's food security, he calls it. He tells a great story about a young farmer from Gilgandra who moved to the Northern Territory five years ago, bought 2000 acres of bush at \$10 an acre south of Darwin, and who, joined by his brother, last year cleared \$1 million growing watermelons for city buyers in the south. Heffernan tells the story as he likens the opportunities for agriculture in the north to having bought a house in Sydney and Melbourne in the 1960s. Whatever, when he left Canberra at lunchtime last Sunday, he drove south to Mulwala on the Murray, opposite Yarrowonga, first to talk to a potato grower in trouble buying water at soaring prices after his licence allocation was reduced, then to see Doug and Bronwyn Thomas, a couple with four school-age children, who've spent \$470,000 on the family farm in the last six years on the latest, most efficient irrigation technology to grow feed to fatten lambs, only to have the NSW bureaucracy cripple their water allocation by an arbitrary 84 per cent reduction in their licensed entitlement of 600 megalitres a year. Now they have to buy bore water at prices that have gone crazy. Brian Peadon is chief executive officer of the National Water Exchange, the stock exchange of the exploding water trading market in NSW and Victoria. Last year, he says, was dreadful for farmers in both states. The water licensing system is out of control. "The stress farmers are under this year is even more intense," Peadon said by phone yesterday. "And there's all sorts of awful political games going on at the moment which don't help. "The message we're trying to get across is that last year was a disaster socially in country areas, and this year is going to be worse because [governments are] still fiddling. In fact, what is going on within the government bureaucracies is just putting the most enormous strain on farm families. My short-term objective is to alleviate that strain. The long-term policies, we're fighting those out, but diabolic things are happening at the moment [within state government agencies]. To put things in perspective, a normal temporary transfer of water takes three or four days by the time you get [the water]. This year it's taking 36 days, and counting. "So even though people have made the decision, 'Well, I'll sell the scrap of water I've got, here's my income for the year, I'll save the farm', given the record prices, they're not being paid because the governments just won't approve the transfers. Approve or deny them or do anything. "It's even worse in Victoria because they won't let anything go and [are] putting the pressure back on NSW farmers. We're seeing state governments, or state bureaucracies, playing with people's lives. We have people desperately wanting the water, paying the money, it's held in trust accounts, the [sellers] desperately wanting the income, yet neither is happening. "People are just watching their crops die while these guys are playing bureaucracies. It's the national plan and, you know, there's the state thing too, and the poor old farmer is being held as the ammunition in the fight. It's really very serious. "In the data last year, in our customer base - we have 22,000 customers - we had eight identifiable suicides in the Murray region, with the majority in northern Victoria. Now the pressures are even greater. I can't stress enough what's happening is absolutely appalling. "My part, in NSW, is just getting somebody [within the bureaucracy] to try and take some ownership and responsibility with Victoria. Again, to put it in perspective, in the Murray-Darling Basin we deliver the same document to 17 separate governments agencies. You know, doing the same thing with 17 of them. You get held up at that mid-bureaucratic level and you can't get anything done. And you just don't know who to grab and shake to solve these problems, whether it's policy or just incompetence, or whatever. But at the end of the day the system doesn't work. It's been going on for years, but this year is crisis year." Heffernan knows exactly what Peadon means. He tells an awful story about a farm family south of Gundagai when cattle prices plunged in the 1980s. The father went to the station to pick up his children on their arrival home from boarding school. One

wasn't on the train. The others he drove home. There he shot the family, including his wife, and hanged himself on a shed hoist. He has another piece of horror involving a family dispute among siblings over division of the farm. The father settled by later going to the shearing shed and plunging a pair of electric shears into his throat. They found his body at the bottom of the chute where the sheep are dropped outside.

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"People in the cities don't understand the pressures on farm people," Heffernan said, as we drove north from Mulwala through Griffith and West Wyalong, Forbes, Parkes, Dubbo, Walgett and on up to Lightning Ridge and Angledool, near the Queensland border (see sidebar). "When I wanted to get into politics some years ago, an old state Liberal colleague told me that so long as the bread, the milk, and the meat and veg were in the supermarket, city people didn't give a rat's arse about where it all came from. They just looked on farmers who complained as whingeing cockies. "Nothing has changed."

Nothing but muddy pools left in Angledool

Angledool is 60 kilometres north of Lightning Ridge and 12 kilometres south of the Queensland border. It was founded in 1870 and used to have 3000 people, locals say. It also had five pubs, two stores, a memorial hall, a school, a police station and an Aboriginal mission. It now has 36 people, 20 occupied dwellings and two open rubbish pits. The hall is still there, sort of. It is very decrepit. The police station, the stores and the school are long gone. So, too, the mission. The last pub burnt down 30 years ago. Something else Angledool used to have was a quite stunning river, the Narran, that fed into the heritage-listed Narran Lake wetlands 140 kilometres southwest. Now the river's gone, too. The cotton farms upstream, across the border, have taken its water. Quite legally, it seems. All that is left of the Narran River near Angledool, if you walk far enough upstream, is a series of steeply banked, shrinking waterholes, dead freshwater mussels, and choking weed growth. The water stinks but some things still live in it, including "protected" long-necked turtles. Angledool's Alan Guihot found a 12-kilogram Murray cod dead in the mud a few weeks ago. It had tried to slide from one pool to another. Sun-baked slide marks and turtle tracks are still visible in the riverbed. A 2002 "fact" sheet, issued by Commonwealth bureaucrats, lists the Narran Lakes as "a wetland of international significance well-known for its water bird populations". It adds: "The area is particularly important for Aboriginal people, and graziers depend on floods for their livelihoods." Well, not any more they don't. What the "fact" sheet delicately calls "off-river storages upstream", have reduced the Narran River's "median annual flows" by 74 per cent. That was five years ago. The authors should take another look. Two years earlier, in July 2000, ABC television's *7.30 Report* told viewers: "The water has been trapped upstream, where huge Queensland cotton farms have been licensed to harvest floodwaters. Just a few months ago, the bulldozers at Cubbie Station were working flat out, finishing off massive dams which can now store twice as much water as contained in Sydney Harbour." Queensland's state environment minister at the time, Rod Welford, told the program: "The bulk of scientific opinion now acknowledges that in Queensland, in the Condamine-Ballone [river] system [that feeds south into the Narran River and NSW's Darling River system], we're overtaxing the system. The question is, how do we make an effective and satisfactory adjustment?" That was seven years ago. Seven years later and the three governments - federal, NSW and Queensland - are still fiddling while the rivers and the wetlands die. Coalition interparty politics and Labor inertia have found no "effective and satisfactory adjustment" to "unblock" the "over-taxed system" north of the Queensland border. Drought and climate change have only compounded the "problem". However, what Angledool does have is Michelle Pymble. She has two preschool daughters and works two days a week in Lightning Ridge. Her husband works on a property three hours away and comes home every fortnight. They moved to Lightning Ridge from Sydney's Peakhurst 13 years ago and they've been in Angledool since 2001. They have a two-story mudbrick house, with television, air-conditioning and a home computer, and they wouldn't live anywhere else. On October 17, Pymble, as secretary of the Angledool Progress Association, wrote to (among others) Senator Bill Heffernan, in part: "The Narran River, which the residents of Angledool rely on for water for washing, has approximately two weeks water left. In the past it has been released from St George [dam] in Queensland. We have not received any water for more than 580 days. We are hoping you would be able to help us." People rang people, emails were exchanged, and the Brewarrina Shire Council, already alerted, organised for a water tanker to truck in water once a week. Each Angledool residence is to get, on average, 882 litres a person. Each house pays, with a 90 per cent state subsidy, \$3-plus per thousand litres. The first water arrived last Sunday. Heffernan arrived on Tuesday. But like the rain, nobody knows when the water from upstream might arrive in the Narran River. Moving Queensland's politicians is as difficult as moving its cotton farmers.

The Australian

Labor jumps gun on emissions

Labor may have already committed households to increased electricity bills of at least \$200 a year by 2020, even though the cost of emissions trading will not be finalised until next year. Labor has committed to phasing out its 20 per cent mandatory renewable energy target from 2020 when the price placed on carbon under emissions trading will make clean energy competitive with traditional fossil fuels. The economic modeling used by Labor as the basis for its renewable targets estimates this will require a carbon price of around \$30 per tonne, equivalent to a 70 per cent increase in wholesale electricity prices.

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Labor's target, released last week, precedes analysis by ANU economist Ross Garnaut, who was commissioned by Kevin Rudd in April to set a price on carbon and to frame a market for emissions trading by mid-2008. Labor environment spokesman Peter Garrett yesterday rejected any suggestion that the Opposition was aiming for a carbon price of \$30 a tonne if it were elected. "Labor has not set a price on emissions, nor can it," Mr. Garrett told *The Australian* yesterday. "If Labor is elected, the price of carbon will be set by the market in the context of interim targets set following the completion of the Garnaut Review." Industry sources have expressed concern at the lack of detailed analysis preceding last week's announcement, estimating a \$30 a tonne carbon charge would add around \$1 billion a year in costs to Australia's aluminum industry and increase average household power bills by 20 per cent, or \$200 a year. Former Australian Bureau of Agricultural Economics chief executive Brian Fisher said the cost of electricity was likely to be much higher than this by 2020 if Labor planned on meeting its ambitious target of a 60 per cent cut in emissions by 2050. "I think \$30 a tonne will be an underestimate if you are going to hit the Labor Party trajectory," Dr Fisher said. Reserve Bank board member Warwick McKibbin said it was difficult to predict what carbon prices might be by 2020, which brought into question the rationale of both Labor's MRET and the Coalition's clean energy target of 15 per cent by the same time frame. "It's pure politics from both sides," Professor McKibbin said yesterday. "The rationale should focus on the emissions reduction we need, and achieving it at the lowest possible cost." Professor McKibbin said Labor's MRET was a "third-best" policy response that ignored non-renewable low-emission technologies. He said it would be preferable if Australia first set a price on carbon that delivered required emissions targets, rather than actually specifying a mandatory target. "You need targets to guide you but they shouldn't have a timetable that is to be hit no matter what it costs," he said. Business Council of Australia policy director Maria Tarrant said the focus should be on establishing an effective emissions trading scheme, with mandatory targets introduced only if specific market failures were identified after that. "Both parties have set these targets, so our fallback position is that great care needs to be taken in putting these in place and ensuring they are done in such a way that all forms of low-emission technologies are included," she said. "They should be phased out as quickly as possible when emissions trading is started."

ALP leads but losing its green edge

Labor retains its election-winning lead over the Coalition, but is squandering one of its key electoral strengths, with a series of blunders on the environment dramatically undermining its standing among voters on key green issues. According to the latest Newspoll survey, as the campaign enters its final weeks Labor holds a six-point lead over the Coalition after taking into account preference flows. But a series of mistakes by Opposition environment spokesman Peter Garrett, coupled with Labor's endorsement of the Tasmanian pulp mill, have caused its support on handling the environment to slump 10 points in the past month to an 18-month low of 29 per cent, only slightly higher than the Coalition. Despite Mr. Garrett's errors, he is still preferred by voters as environment minister over the Coalition's equally accident-prone Malcolm Turnbull. Support for Mr. Garrett over the Environment Minister includes 22 per cent of Coalition voters. Overall, Labor has kept its election-winning lead in the latest Newspoll, conducted exclusively for *The Australian* last weekend, with a primary vote of 47 per cent to the Coalition's 42 per cent. On a two-party preferred basis, using preference flows at the 2004 election, Labor is in front of the Coalition by 53 per cent to 47 per cent. Although little changed since last week, it is the closest the Coalition has been to Labor since November last year, before Kevin Rudd became the Opposition Leader. John Howard's standing is at its best since Mr. Rudd took over the Labor leadership, with his satisfaction rating of 49 per cent and support as preferred prime minister of 43 per cent back to the levels of November last year. Mr. Rudd has maintained near-record levels of satisfaction for an Opposition leader of 61 per cent. Since the Newspoll in mid-October, before the election was announced, Labor's lead on primary vote has fallen from nine percentage points to five points, but the two-party preferred lead has dropped only from eight to six points. Labor's two-party preferred lead, compared with the Coalition's victorious 52.8 per cent to 47.2 per cent lead at the 2004 election, would deliver it victory if the election were held now. Mr. Rudd, campaigning in the marginal NSW Liberal seat of Dobell yesterday, accused the Government of "putting up the white flag" on inflation and interest rates ahead of today's meeting of the Reserve Bank board, likely to raise rates for the sixth time since the 2004 poll. "I don't talk about opinion polls, whether

they are up, down, sideways, twisting about or whatever," he said. "What I do know is this - Mr. Howard told Australians, looking down the barrel of the camera, that interest rates would be kept at record lows at the last election." Campaigning in the South Australian marginal seat of Wakefield, Peter Costello denied the Coalition was giving up. "Nobody is conceding a thing," the Treasurer said, when asked about marginal seats in Adelaide. "We are not conceding a single seat anywhere." Labor's strong lead over the Coalition on handling the environment - about 15 points since Mr. Rudd became leader and appointed former rock singer and conservationist leader Mr. Garrett as his environment spokesman - has shrunk dramatically.

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Last weekend, when asked which party would better handle the environment, 29per cent said Labor, 24per cent said the Coalition and 27per cent said "someone else". In June last year the ALP and the Coalition were equal on 28per cent and "someone else" almost the same on 26per cent. But after Mr Rudd became leader, the ALP's support jumped to 41per cent, the Coalition dropped to 24per cent and "someone else" registered 15per cent. In recent weeks, Mr Turnbull approved the pulp mill in the Tamar valley in Tasmania, which Labor endorsed. And it has been revealed that Mr Turnbull was rebuffed by cabinet when he suggested a change in policy for the Coalition to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, causing embarrassment for Mr Howard. Mr Garrett created bad headlines for the ALP last week when he stumbled over Australia's policy on signing a new Kyoto agreement after 2012 without insisting on binding targets for developing nations, and later said Labor would change its policies after the election. But despite Mr Garrett's endorsement of the pulp mill, which is strenuously opposed by the Greens, he is still clearly preferred as environment minister over Mr Turnbull. When asked who was most capable as environment minister, 45per cent said Mr Garrett and 37per cent said Mr Turnbull. Nine per cent said neither and 13per cent were uncommitted on the question. The Newpoll survey found people were making up their minds as the campaign progressed, with 63per cent of voters saying the party they have nominated will be the party they vote for, compared with 60 per cent at the beginning of the campaign and 56per cent in September.

Adelaide.now.com

New wind farm on the way

Energy company AGL will build its third wind farm in South Australia, the facility to become operational by late 2009. The 34 turbines will generate 71 megawatts and be built at Hallett Hill, 170km north of Adelaide. The wind farm is one of three under development in SA, where six already operate. AGL managing director Michael Fraser said the new facility would make AGL the nation's largest private renewable energy supplier. "The Hallett Hill wind farm will significantly add to AGL's capability to self-supply its renewable generation needs," he said. At a cost of \$166 million over two years, the project will create 150 jobs when construction begins in January next year. The wind farm will be built about 20km from the 45 turbines at AGL's Brown Hill project. "These two projects, combined with Wattle Point, will bring the total number of wind turbines under AGL's management in South Australia to 134, with a total capacity of 257 megawatts," Mr Fraser said. "The wind farm will provide enough renewable energy to power 40,000 average Australian households and abate approximately 250,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide." Premier Mike Rann said the new development showed that SA was within reach of renewable energy targets set for 2014. "We are well on track to achieve the legislated target of 20 per cent of our state's power generated from renewable sources by the end of 2009," he said. Hallett Hill will also be eligible to supply renewable energy under proposed federal schemes. The project will be structured so either a sale similar to that undertaken for AGL's Brown Hill wind farm or other funding structures can be pursued by the company. A decision is expected on the future ownership structure towards the end of the 2008 financial year. AGL will contract all electricity output and green credits and will maintain the operations and management contract.

7th

The Australian

How to generate wind farm angst

Forget noise, bird deaths and the ugly factor; what is putting the wind up people about wind farms is that nobody has asked whether or where they wanted them. Richard Hindmarsh, a senior lecturer in environmental politics and policy at Griffith University, scoured three years' worth of press articles to measure public perceptions about alternative energy. Noise and visual amenity were important, but Hindmarsh found that half the articles dealt with residents' complaints that governments and power companies had not asked them what they wanted, where and how. He studied 1200 articles from 2004 to 2006, half of which "represented public voices, especially community groups and environmental groups". Governments and power companies needed to have genuine consultations with people who might be affected. "Much opposition appeared to stem from tokenistic community consultation, which left people feeling the decision was already made," he said. Dr Hindmarsh said people would be "absolutely happier" if they were consulted about a wind farm going up in their vicinity. Consultation would smoke out some

opponents but "if you start putting (wind farms) in without community engagement, you then strike lots of opposition." Because wind farms are placed on prominent sites they are obvious in the landscape. "Unlike centralised energy generation such as coal, renewable energy is often built at the source within communities, so siting has a direct impact on communities," he said. Dr Hindmarsh and his team want to do some consulting of their own: "We want to go and talk to people about how they would like to engage with wind farm approval processes because, at the moment, it's outside of their control."

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Herald Sun

Refusal over new dam call

The State Government is still refusing to consider more dams in the Gippsland, despite millions of litres being flushed out to sea and towns threatened in the weekend floods. Nationals leader Peter Ryan yesterday called for the Government to reconsider, saying it was ideology stopping the Government building new dams to capture water that threatened the towns of Newry and Tinamba. Mr Ryan said 200,000 million litres of water was expected to be lost after the weekend rains, and that a dam would provide the answer. But Water Minister Tim Holding rejected the suggestion, saying the solution to the water crisis lay not in dams but in modernising irrigation and non-rainfall dependent supplies such as desalination. "More dams simply locks Victoria into an ongoing cycle of reliance on rainfall and with drought and climate change this is an unsustainable and irresponsible strategy," Mr Holding said. The Government examined building a dam on the Mitchell River but abandoned the process, finding it was not viable. Mr Ryan said the Government could dam the Mitchell, and that he would support this plan. He also supported building a dam on the Barkly River, or a second, larger dam above the Glenmaggie Weir on the Macalister River. Releases of water from this weir contributed to the flooding of Newry this week, and major floods in the region in June. Mr Ryan said 600,000 million litres had been lost out to sea in June, as well as the 200,000 million litres lost this weekend. "This is almost as much as the entire capacity of the Thompson Dam, which holds one million megalitres," Mr Ryan said. Premier John Brumby said the Government was considering whether it could offer more support for the flood victims. "While obviously there is damage and hardship because of the floods in many areas, in other parts of the state, this has been an absolute godsend," Mr Brumby said. Melbourne's storage levels rose to 40.2 per cent of capacity yesterday.

Farmers downcast despite rain

Confidence among Victorian farmers has plummeted to its lowest level this year, according to the latest agribusiness survey released by Westpac and Charles Sturt University. Only 54 per cent of farmers are confident about the coming summer -- down from a high of 74 per cent just three months ago. Farmers were deflated by the lack of winter and spring rain, the survey said. At the same time, capital expenditure, livestock levels, employment and profit margins had stalled while operating costs had increased. Westpac senior economist Justin Smirk said given the lack of rain, he was surprised that confidence among farmers hadn't fallen further. "The overall mood is that, despite such an optimistic start to the winter season, the lack of follow-through on early rains has left farmers with a tough summer ahead," he said. Mr Smirk said the survey was taken in September, so the widespread rain at the weekend would need to continue to create a more optimistic outlook among the farming community. "While high commodity prices and the strength of the general economy may be offsetting some of the effects of the drought, especially in the southeast corner, many farmers will be writing off 2007 and instead concentrating on 2008," Mr Smirk said. "The weekend rain was promising but it's only a good start to the summer season. As long as we get more rain, all the factors are in place to see a lift in confidence next year." The survey showed farmer confidence fell in every state over the past three months. NSW farmers were the most pessimistic.

Water use level unknown

The State Government still does not know how much water it uses; with a number of government departments admitting they do not meter all their water use. The admissions come a year after the Government appointed a water watchdog to clamp down on departments found to be wasting water. Government agencies employing hundreds of thousands of public servants cannot work out how much water they are using. Environment Minister Gavin Jennings issued a press release yesterday claiming the departments had cut their water use by 17 per cent this year. However the fine print contained in the departmental annual report shows that a number of government agencies are unable to provide full records of water use. And the Department of Sustainability and Environment was one of the worst, measuring their water use at only 2.33 per cent of their sites and covering only 44 per cent of their staff. Mr. Jennings said the Government had introduced a more accurate method of reporting, which he said would improve trend reporting over time.