



Issue 1

November 2008

Message from the Minister

Water for the Future

Life savers save water too!

Jemalong Irrigation

Windy Hill the first Green Precinct

Announcements

Subscriptions

Water Matters will be published every two months.

For subscription queries or questions about this mailing list, contact Public Affairs, Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts on 02 6274 1783.

Welcome to the first edition of Water Matters, a newsletter to keep you informed about the Australian Government's water reform package Water for the Future.

The first edition of Water Matters will focus on the background and development of *Water for the Future*. Future editions will focus on specific initiatives that form part of the policy and will provide stories and profiles from rural and urban communities.

Message from the Minister

Ensuring that we have enough water is one of the key challenges for Australia's future. The long-running drought over large areas of the country has focused attention on the need to conserve water. Projections of reduced water availability as a result of climate change have reinforced the importance of using water wisely and of ensuring there is sufficient water for a healthy environment.

In some cases, major changes will be needed to put our water use on a sustainable footing, particularly for agriculture which accounts for around 70 per cent of all water use. The Australian Government has developed *Water for the Future*, a ten-year, \$12.9 billion plan to guide and support the changes we need to make to secure our water resources and to restore our rivers and other water-dependant ecosystems.

Water for the Future is the first nation-wide plan to address both rural and urban water needs. The plan will enable us to better manage the impacts of climate change, drought and over allocation to achieve a sustainable water supply. This will benefit food production, domestic and commercial users and the environment.

Water for the Future is founded on four priorities:

Taking action on climate change

Water reform is our largest investment in climate change adaptation. Through *Water for the Future* the government is funding improvements to monitoring, assessing and forecasting the availability, condition and use of water. It is also establishing the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to develop a basin-wide plan that addresses the legacy of past over-allocation and identify risks to water resources, such as climate change.

Using water wisely

Improving the efficiency of water use in rural and urban Australia will enable us to do more with less water. The government is investing in key rural water projects that save water by upgrading outdated, leaky irrigation systems, providing funds for installation of rainwater tanks and greywater recycling systems, and supporting businesses which use large volumes of water.



Minister for Climate Change and Water,
Senator Penny Wong

Securing water supplies

With reduced rainfall expected in large population centres as a result of climate change, we need to find alternative sources of water.

The government is investing in desalination plants, water recycling, stormwater reuse, and upgrading pipelines and water treatment plants in towns and cities across the country, in cooperation with state and local governments.

Supporting healthy rivers

The large volume of water drawn from rivers and groundwater systems for human use has disrupted natural systems and put ecosystems and species under great stress. Australia's rivers and groundwater systems provide most of the water we use in our homes and to grow food and other crops so it is important to restore the health of these natural systems. The Australian Government is buying back water entitlements to provide more water for the environment, and the Murray-Darling Basin Authority will set a new sustainable diversion limit that integrates surface water and groundwater. This cap will be part of the Basin Plan.

Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Minister for Climate Change
and Water



Murray River, Barmah State Forest (J Baker & DEWHA)

Water for the Future Background to water reform

Water for the Future builds on more than a decade of water reform in Australia. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed in 1994 to reforms for Australia's rural and urban water industries. In 1995, the governments which are party to the Murray-Darling Basin Commission introduced a cap on diversions of surface water from the Murray-Darling Basin.

Following the introduction of the cap, people used more groundwater, exacerbating the environmental problems that have flowed from over-allocation. This increase in groundwater use combined with population growth, the expansion of some rural industries and extended drought have put pressure on many river systems.

As part of the water reform process, the Australian Government, state and territories agreed to the National Water Initiative (NWI) which is the blueprint for water reform. The NWI sets out actions to develop a more cohesive national approach to the way we manage, measure, plan for, price and trade water. The Intergovernmental Agreement on a National Water Initiative was signed by the Council of Australian Governments in June 2004. The Tasmanian Government joined the Agreement in June 2005 and the Western Australia Government joined in April 2006.

www.nwc.gov.au

Cooperative partnerships

In March 2008, a Memorandum of Understanding on Murray-Darling Basin Reform was signed by the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Premiers of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland, and the Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory.

The Memorandum provides for the Commonwealth to plan and manage the Basin and provides for Basin states to manage water within their catchments. It is supported by the intergovernmental Agreement on Murray-Darling Basin Reform, signed by First Ministers in July 2008, which sets out new governance structures and partnerships:

- transferring current powers and functions of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission to an independent, expert body, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority;
- strengthening the role of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission by extending the application of water market rules and water charge rules; and
- enabling the Basin Plan to provide arrangements for meeting critical human water needs.

Reforming the *Water Act 2007*

The changes agreed to in the Memorandum and the intergovernmental agreement are to be given effect through legislation to be passed by the Basin states and the ACT referring certain of their powers to the Commonwealth, and by amendments to the Commonwealth *Water Act 2007*.

The Murray-Darling Basin Authority is due to commence operations in late 2008, subject to passage of the relevant legislation, and will finalise the Basin Plan by 2011.

Together these changes to management and governance of the Murray-Darling Basin and the Australian Government's \$12.9 billion investment in practical measures through *Water for the Future* will help prepare the nation for the challenges of securing enough water for our homes, businesses, farms and the environment as we confront the impacts of climate change.

For more information about *Water for the Future* call 1800 218 478 or visit www.environment.gov.au/water



Molongolo Water Quality Control Centre (D Markovic & DEWHA)

Water for the Future programs and initiatives

Water for the Future comprises a number of programs and initiatives across rural and urban Australia. These measures represent a comprehensive, national approach to placing our use of water on a sustainable footing and restoring the health of rivers and water-dependant ecosystems. Below is a list of the programs and initiatives as well as additional measures that support the goals and objectives of *Water for the Future*.

- *Restoring the Balance in the Murray-Darling Basin* (\$3.1 billion)
- *Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure* (\$5.8 billion)
- *Improving Water Information Program* (\$447 million)
- *A Northern Australia Water Futures Assessment* (\$20 million)
- *Sustainable Yield* projects South West WA, Tasmania and Northern Australia
- *National Rainwater and Greywater Initiative* (\$250 million)
- *Water Smart Australia* (\$937 million)
- *Raising National Water Standards* (\$214 million)
- *Water Efficiency Opportunities* program
- *National Urban Water and Desalination Plan* (\$1 billion)
- *National Water Security Plan for Cities and Towns* (\$256 million)
- Establishing the *Murray-Darling Basin Authority*
- *Driving Reform in the Basin* (\$646 million)
- *The Living Murray* initiative (\$185 million)
- Great Artesian Basin (\$85 million), and
- Creation of a *Commonwealth Environmental Water Holder* position to manage the water the government buys back for the environment.

Besides the key programs under *Water for the Future*, the Government has a number of other water initiatives that relate to be objectives of this initiative. They include the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Scheme and the National Water Quality Management Strategy. The government is also actively pursuing further water reforms, building on the National Water Initiative, through the Council of Australian Governments. These include improved water market operation, best practice water planning and improved compliance and enforcement. You can find out more about these programs and initiatives at:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/water>



Rainwater tank (J Baker & DEWHA)

Life savers save water too!

Australia's iconic surf life saving clubs are set to showcase water efficiency technology in local communities with the help of Australian Government grants.

On a windy October day at the Ocean Grove surf beach club near Geelong, Minister for Climate Change and Water, Senator Penny Wong launched the *National Rainwater and Greywater Initiative: Surf Life Saving Clubs* program.

Flanked by young life savers and nippers, Senator Wong said surf life saving clubs played a role in the summer holidays of thousands of Australians.

"We are providing up to \$10 000 per club to install water saving and water efficient devices," Senator Wong said.

Surf Life Saving Australia has been contracted to help deliver this program.

Activities eligible for funding include installation of new rainwater tanks connected to club premises so that they can be used for toilet flushing and/or laundry use. Clubs can claim funding for plumbing, guttering, downpipes and other materials, provided these are for the new tank.

Funding will also be considered for water efficient or water saving devices such as taps, toilets, urinals and showers. Showers and urinals must have a three star rating under the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards Scheme and toilets and taps must have a four star rating.

It is hoped that Surf Live Saving Australia members as well as other beachgoers will see and use these water saving products and feel inspired to adopt similar measures at home and at work.

To apply for a grant surf life saving clubs may contact Surf Life Saving Australia by emailing watersavings@slsa.asn.au or telephone 02 9300 4000. For more information, including guidelines and application form, visit www.slsa.com.au



Senator Wong launching the program at the Ocean Group surf beach club (provided courtesy of SLSA)



Jemalong Irrigation District (M Mohell & DEWHA)

Jemalong Irrigation

Jemalong Irrigation district is moving into the future of climate change with a vision underpinned by science.

Jemalong Irrigation Limited, an unlisted public company with each irrigator landholder being a shareholder, is the only irrigation scheme on the Lachlan River. With 100,000ML of entitlements, the company diverts water through a 300km network of open channels to its 100 irrigators across an area spanning over 96,000 hectares.

Jemalong irrigation district, bordered by the rural communities of Forbes, Parkes, West Wyalong and Condobolin in central-western NSW, was set up in 1941 as part of the expansion of irrigated agriculture in the Murray-Darling Basin. The region supports a diverse range of high yielding agricultural enterprises across both cropping and livestock sectors.

The recent Sustainable Yields study undertaken by CSIRO which took into account climate change and other risks, predicts a future of lower water availability for the Lachlan. Jemalong Irrigation is preparing itself for this future.

In February 2008, as part of *Water for the Future*, the Australian Government announced the success of Jemalong Irrigation in receiving \$300 000 to prepare a Modernisation Irrigation Plan. Their program takes into account the social and economic aspirations of their irrigators and the hydrologic issues in their catchment.

Dennis Moxey, Jemalong Board member said, "each of the farmers in Jemalong is doing a whole farm plan". This will allow the company to understand the long term business plans for every irrigator which will be combined with a hotspots assessment and other scientific information. This understanding will enable future improvements to irrigation infrastructure to be targeted to the best location, to achieve water savings and to keep the irrigation community vibrant.

Windy Hill the first Green Precinct

The first project approved under the Green Precincts Fund was announced at Windy Hill, the home of the Essendon Football Club in Melbourne, last month. Upon arrival, Environment Minister Garrett rolled up his sleeves as he and Minister Tanner (representing Senator Wong) prepared to quite literally 'kick off' the launch. Before long both Ministers were joined by Essendon Football Club captain Matthew Lloyd for a friendly mid-field kick about.

Windy Hill is the first of at least 10 demonstration sites that will be funded under the Australian Government's \$15 million national Green Precincts Fund. High-profile facilities accessible to the public that demonstrate and deliver significant energy and water savings are eligible for funding. Green Precincts funding will range from \$500 000 through to \$1.5 million, with project proponents required to match government funding.

The Windy Hill project involves constructing an 800,000 litre water storage system to be housed underneath the famed Windy Hill oval surface. The project is a funding partnership between Essendon Football Club and the Australian Government, with each contributing \$1.5 million.

The water storage system (called 'storm tech water storage system') will capture 5-8 million litres of water each year from existing roof structures, the oval and an approved bore. This water will be stored in underground cylinders.

Together with other new water saving initiatives and recycling of pool water, the club aims to halve its potable water use. The Windy Hill precinct will also generate renewable energy through solar or wind power, install solar hot water systems and build energy monitoring systems including smart metering. These measures will result in substantial reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Expressions of Interest for the Green Precincts fund close on 22 November 2008.



Work underway at Windy Hill (M McAulay & DEWHA)

Announcements

Links to media release, speeches or other pages of DEWHA web site.

Efforts to save water in the Menindee Lakes in western New South Wales received a boost today with the award of a \$1.3 million contract for the Darling River Water Savings Project (Part B).

<http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/mr20081113.html>

An independent review of the first round of the Rudd Government's Murray-Darling Basin water purchase program has found it was efficiently run and achieved good value for money.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/mr20081018.html>

Water entitlement holders in the northern Murray-Darling Basin are invited to submit proposals for the 2008-09 Northern basin water entitlement purchase round. Applications must be submitted before **5:00pm (EST) 19 December 2008**. Through the water entitlement purchase, the Australian Government aims to purchase regulated and unregulated entitlements from irrigators upstream of the Menindee Lakes.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/water/programs/entitlement-purchasing/index.html>

A tender for water entitlements in the southern Murray-Darling Basin opened on 7 October. The buyback will be open to willing sellers of water entitlements from the South Australian and Victorian Murray-Darling Basin, as well as the Murray, Murrumbidgee, Lachlan and Lower Darling rivers in New South Wales.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/mr20080926.html>

An invitation has been issued for proposals from groups of irrigators in the Murray-Darling Basin wishing to sell their combined water entitlements in ways that deliver simultaneous benefits for farmers, irrigation water providers and the environment.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/mr20081009.html>

The Australian Government is offering to buy the water entitlements of small block irrigators in the Murray-Darling Basin who agree to sell all their water entitlement to the Commonwealth. The Government will offer up to \$150,000 as a special exit payment, along with other transitional assistance, to eligible irrigators on 15 hectares or less. http://www.pm.gov.au/media/Release/2008/media_release_0487.cfm

Community organisations, sporting clubs and state and local governments can apply for grants under the Australian Government's \$15 million Green Precincts Fund which will support at least 10 high-profile demonstration projects that deliver water and energy efficiency savings while educating the community about water and energy efficiency.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/water/programs/green-precincts/index.html>

The joint purchase by the Australian and New South Wales governments of Toorale Station in northern NSW will return an average of 20 gigalitres of water to the Darling River each year, peaking at up to 80 gigalitres in flood years.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/minister/wong/2008/pubs/mr20080910b.pdf>