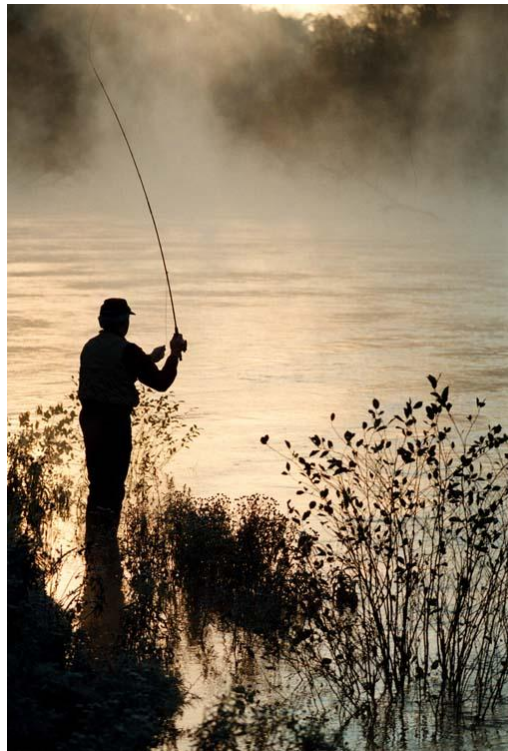


2008

Council of Outdoor Recreation Associations of New Zealand



NewsWatch is taking a break!

NewsWatch will not be published for a while, as I am taking a break from the position of Research Officer for the NZ Federation of Freshwater Anglers (Inc). (It has been a few decades, and it is time that someone else had a go and took it in a new direction).

I hope that it has been of some small value over the years. It has been an enjoyable experience, but one that is becoming less sustainable time wise for someone who already has a fulltime job. It is also getting harder to sustain as copyright restrictions are made increasingly more stringent. It

is just another example of the limitations experienced by purely voluntary organisations fighting against both corporate and governmental policies and practices.

Anyway, thanks for your attention, and for the encouraging comments along the way. Have a great weekend. I'm going fishing

Cheers,

Ken Sims

(formerly) Research Officer
New Zealand Federation of Freshwater Anglers (Inc).
Co-Chairman CORANZ

[CORANZ NEWSWATCH]

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NZ News:

Review will encourage investment into NZ - Key

12:19PM Saturday Mar 14, 2009

Prime Minister John Key has told the Act Party conference a review into the Overseas Investment Act will be announced next week. Photo / Mark Mitchell

The Prime Minister is keen to open the door to foreign investors.

In a speech to the Act Party conference today, John Key said a review of the Overseas Investment Act will be announced by Finance Minister Bill English next week.

The review aims to create an overseas investment screening regime that encourages investment into New Zealand while protecting sensitive land, assets and resources.

Mr Key also told the meeting that New Zealand is in a better position than many other countries to withstand the worst global economic downturn seen in more than a generation but the significant challenges it faces include falling growth rates, lower commodity prices, falling demand for New Zealand's exports, operating deficits and rising unemployment.

He says the Government is determined to keep the economy running as strongly as possible and take the sharpest edges off the recession.

NZ Herald

Sand mining opponents take battle back to court

4:00AM Monday Mar 16, 2009 By Wayne Thompson



Local fears the mining will cause beach erosion.
Photo / Paul Estcourt

Sand-mining opponents have appealed to the High Court in their battle to halt dredging near the beach at Pakiri and Mangawhai on the east coast of Northland.

Friends of Pakiri Beach and the Auckland Regional Council are appealing against an Environment Court decision which in June 2006 extended permits for mining near the shore at Pakiri for 14 years.

This overturned an earlier ARC decision to deny an application from McCallum Bros and Sea Tow for permission to take 76,000cu m of sand a year in water 5m to 10m deep.

The ARC accepted evidence that the resource was not replenished naturally by sea currents, and that continued extraction from near the shore would lead to or worsen coastal erosion.

But the Environment Court took a different view.

It found the breakdown of shells in the 25km-long Mangawhai-Pakiri embayment contributed 90,000cu m of sediment a year to the quantity of sand to offset the effects of mining.

It also accepted the companies' evidence that despite 85 years of extraction, no significant erosion or change to the coastline could be blamed on dredging, and that no other efficient sources of quality sand were available to Auckland construction projects.

The Environment Court also ordered monitoring which McCallum Bros says is the most extensive for any beach in New Zealand.

Lawyers for the Friends of Pakiri told the High Court at Auckland last week that errors of law took away the foundation for the decision.

Nicholas Davidson QC said much of the case turned on scientific evidence.

Some errors were related to findings based on "unfounded speculation masquerading as expert hypothesis" or where no evidence existed to support the finding. Some findings flew in the face of available evidence.

For the ARC, lawyer Andrew Green said the case was about the sustainability of the mining.

He asked for the matter to be sent back to the Environment Court for reconsideration on the basis of a revised calculation which reconciled experts' conflicting evidence.

This covered the contribution of shell breakdown materials to the "box", or sand resource area, assuming that the outer limit of the box was a depth of 25m.

Justice Raynor Asher reserved his decision.

The appeal parties could not introduce new evidence at the hearing.

The Mangawhai Harbour Restoration Society has complained to the ARC that erosion over 18 months along the beach threatened the breeding area of the endangered fairy tern and the stability of the sandspit.

It said sand lost at Pakiri in a year was equivalent to 50 times the amount used to restore Kohimarama Beach in Auckland City.

The ARC said erosion along the beach was likely from extreme storms in July 2007 and last July, and was consistent with low beach levels recorded in ARC coastal monitoring of other east coast beaches.

NZ Herald

Kakariki return to mainland Auckland

11:11AM Sunday Mar 15, 2009



Kakariki or red-crowned parakeets, are today being released into the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary.

Photo / Hawke's Bay Today

Kakariki are making a comeback.

Twenty of the red-crowned parakeets are being released into the Tawharanui Open Sanctuary at the Tawharanui

Regional Park today.

Coordinator Matt Maitland says the birds have not been seen in mainland Auckland for more than a century.

They are coming from Little Barrier Island, and will join other recently released species, including the North Island brown kiwi.

Matt Maitland says another 20 kakariki will be released in April.

- NEWSTALK ZB

Kiteboarders threat to godwit sanctuary

4:00AM Monday Mar 16, 2009 By Kathy Marks



The Ruakaka Wildlife Reserve in Northland. Photo / Northern Advocate

by Kathy Marks The bar-tailed godwit, a plump wading bird that undertakes the world's most spectacular migration, is under threat in one of its winter sanctuaries in Northland.

Kiteboarders have invaded the Ruakaka Wildlife Reserve, causing havoc among the birds as they prepare for their annual 11,000km migration.

Every spring, godwits fly from New Zealand to their breeding grounds in Alaska, an epic nonstop trip that takes up to nine days.

Conservationists say the birds have been harassed by kiteboarders, who harness wind power to zip across the water on small surfboards.

Ruakaka is an important sanctuary for the godwits because its sandbanks remain exposed during very high tides.

Thousands of creatures flock to the Ruakaka River's estuary from nearby Whangarei Harbour, where they spend the winter months roosting and nesting. Over the past two years, though, the sheltered waters of the little estuary have drawn increasing numbers of kiteboard-carrying visitors.

Bird protection volunteers say they encroach on the sandbanks, disturbing the godwits and frightening them away.

One volunteer, Margaret Hicks, said the birds and the kiteboarders were competing for "the same space, the same sea, the same sandbanks, the same air".

"You can imagine who's coming off worse. If everywhere else is under water, where the hell are the birds going to go? I've seen nests abandoned and eggs left to die."

While most kiteboarders left when told about the birds, a small hardcore of locals paid no heed, and were an "absolute nightmare".

"They are arrogant and selfish, and they don't give a damn about the environment," Ms Hicks said.

She and her fellow volunteers have complained repeatedly to the Department of Conservation and sent video of the birds being disrupted.

But a spokeswoman for the department, Lynnie Gibson, said there was not enough evidence to justify banning the sport, and a ranger had been engaged to research the issue more thoroughly.

The godwits' remarkable stamina was confirmed after birds were fitted with satellite transmitters and tracked during flight in 2006 and 2007.

The Ruakaka refuge is used for other activities, including walking, swimming, boating, jetskiing, windsurfing and horse riding.

But conservationists say that kiteboarding poses by far the biggest threat, because riders spend several hours in the estuary, frequently approaching the godwits and their nests, with their kites sometimes landing on top of the birds.

IN JEOPARDY

- * The godwits are under threat from kiteboarders at the Ruakaka Wildlife Reserve.
- * Every year the birds travel about 11,000km non-stop from New Zealand to Alaska.
- * This is believed to be the longest non-stop migration path recorded for a bird.
- * The birds rest here over summer to prepare themselves for the long flight back.
- * More than 85,000 bartailed godwits visit New Zealand annually.

- INDEPENDENT

Treating algae seen as costly, ineffective

By Rebecca Fox on Mon, 16 Mar 2009

Lake Hayes residents are being warned possible solutions to the lake's algal bloom problem could be costly, with no guarantee of success.

Over the past 40 years, the lake has had increasing high levels of nutrients and in the past three years experienced algal blooms which have given it an unsightly brown appearance.

A recent report to the Otago Regional Council environmental science committee outlined the issue and possible solutions.

Environmental information and science director John Threlfall said council representatives had met the Lake Hayes Water Quality Enhancement Society in January to go over the issues.

Council monitoring had found that while nutrient input levels from Mill Creek to the lake were improving, significant changes to the lake quality in the short term were unlikely, due to historical land-use practices and intense phosphorous loading in the lake sediments.

Committee chairwoman Gretchen Robertson said any improvements could prove very costly, with one option alone, capping the sediment, estimated to cost \$1 million, while another, the SolarBee, \$700,000.

Cr Duncan Butcher said it was an issue which had been around for decades and the council had been monitoring the lake, but it came down to cost, who would pay and whether or not the suggested treatments would be successful.

The option of siphoning water from the depths of the lake was seen by some people as a "simple fix" which would not cost too much, but he questioned that.

Mr Threlfall said there were issues with the siphoning process such as the effect changing the height of the lake would have on the Kawarau River and the environmental effects of discharging the lake water.

"We don't believe any of these individual options are necessarily the answer and with the costs associated there is no cost benefit."

If the community wanted to pursue the options further it could do so through the Long Term Council Community Plan consultation process, he said.

The council was providing what information it could to the group and continuing a collaboration with University of Otago into researching possible causes of the problem, he said.

Cr Stephen Woodhead said the algal bloom did not change the look of the lake too much and might just be "one of those seasonal things you put up with".

Mr Threlfall said, except for possible skin irritation, there were no other known health issues associated with swimming in the lake.

ODT

Report shows value of water to economy

By Lynda Van Kempen on Mon, 16 Mar 2009

Water is probably the single most important contributor to the Central Otago economy, district councillors have been told.

The Central Otago District Council was considering a Business and Economic Research Ltd (Berl) report on the economic impact of commercial water use in the district.

Business development manager Jonathan Gadd said the council wanted an economic impact assessment to quantify the value of water to the Central Otago economy.

"By accounting for dependants, a conservative estimate is that approximately 2500 to 3000 of the district's population is resident due to the existing commercial water use," he told the council.

"It is probable that water is the single most important contributor to the district's economy, and by extension, the community."

He said the Berl study gave the council some useful economic analysis on agricultural and hydro-electrical activities within the district.

Central Otago Mayor Malcolm Macpherson said the report would be particularly useful when considering funding applications for new irrigation schemes planned in the district.

"There's three on the go - Tarras, Dairy Creek and one in the Ida Valley," he said.

"We are potential stake-holders and this report will help us [decide] to what extent we get involved."

The report, prepared by Kel Anderson and Adrian Slack, concluded that the net impact of irrigation increased the district gross domestic product by about \$93 million a year.

Hydro-electric generation increased the district GDP by a further \$15 million to \$20 million a year.

The Berl report found 15% of those employed in the district had direct or indirect links to the impact of irrigation or electricity generation.

ODT

Appeals may take 5 weeks

By David Bruce on Sat, 14 Mar 2009

Environment Court appeals opposing a planned \$900 million hydro power scheme on the lower Waitaki River will be heard in Oamaru and Christchurch, may take up to five weeks and involve as many as 70 witnesses.

Meridian Energy Ltd wants to build its north bank tunnel concept (NBTC) scheme on the lower Waitaki River, but that has been appealed by the Waitaki Protection Trust, Ngai Tahu, Ngati Mamoe Fishers People and Black Point farmer Garth Dovey.

At a pre-hearing conference in Oamaru yesterday, Judge Jon Jackson set a timetable which would have the court start hearing evidence in Oamaru for two weeks from June 22, then in Christchurch from July 6 to 17, with a fifth week if needed.

Meridian and ECan both sought to have some or all of the hearing in Christchurch.

Meridian counsel Jo Appleyard said Meridian was seeking "the first possible court fixture" it could get. A Christchurch venue would be more suitable for witnesses and counsel, because

of the logistics and time of having them "out of town", she said. Some appellants opposed that.

Judge Jackson would have preferred the hearing to be held locally. However, he came up with a compromise by splitting the hearing between Christchurch and Oamaru, with Meridian starting its evidence in Oamaru. Out of town witnesses could then present their evidence in Christchurch.

Miss Appleyard said Meridian was open to mediation over the appeals, provided it did not delay a hearing date.

It was already in discussions with the Ngati Mamoe Fishers People and Mr Dovey, and there was "a good prospect" those appeals would be settled.

Ngai Tahu counsel Philip Maw said Ngai Tahu had also entered discussions with Meridian and intended to have private mediation.

Meridian planned to call 37 witnesses, although Waitaki Protection Trust counsel Robert Makgill felt not all were needed.

He believed witnesses for all parties could identify the issues that needed to be heard, which would reduce the time the court needed.

Judge Jackson directed that, after evidence was filed, witnesses caucus be held from May 25 to determine areas they agreed or disagreed upon, reporting to the court by June 18.

He also set in place a timetable for parties to exchange evidence and rebuttal, starting with Meridian and ECan on April 17.

North Bank scheme

- The Meridian Energy Ltd \$900 million north bank tunnel concept power scheme is to take up to 260 cumecs of water from Lake Waitaki into a 34km-long tunnel between the Waitaki dam and Stonewall with one powerhouse generating between 1100 and 1400gWh a year.
- Environment Canterbury (ECan) granted four water-only resource consents in December to divert, take, use and discharge water for the new power scheme.
- Five appeals filed with the Environment Court by the Waitaki Protection Trust, Ngai Tahu, Ngati Mamoe Fishers People and Black Point farmer Garth Dovey oppose granting consents.
- Environment Court pre-hearing before Judge Jon Jackson yesterday set a timetable to hear the appeals: Venue: June 22 to July 3, Oamaru; July 6 to 17, Christchurch; fifth week from July 20 if needed.
- Up to 70 witnesses.
- Meridian and ECan's evidence ready by April 17.
- Appellants' evidence by May 22.
- Meridian and ECan's rebuttal evidence by June 12.
- Expert witnesses to discuss evidence to determine points at issue.

- Mediation may be held between parties.

ODT

Six have say on lake plan

By Lynda Van Kempen on Sat, 14 Mar 2009

Six submissions have been received so far on plans to raise Lake Roxburgh by 60cm to boost power generation.

Contact Energy has applied to the Otago Regional Council to raise the lake's maximum operating level from 132m above sea level to 132.6m.

The council had received six submissions by late yesterday afternoon but the final number would not be confirmed until next week, ORC senior resource officer Mathew Bell said.

Four of the submissions opposed the application, while two supported it, one with conditions.

In its application for a variation of its water permit, Contact said a heightened lake level would boost power generation and allow it to alleviate New Zealand's current shortage of electricity generation capacity.

The dam was capable of operating safely at that level, it said.

The existing flood rules for the Roxburgh dam would be altered to make allowance for the heightened level and the change in level would have an "insignificant" effect on the amount of sediment in the lake, Contact said.

There would be no effect on the lake's water quality and negligible effects on the river's ecology. The effect on amenity and recreational values would be minor, it claimed.

However, last week the Alexandra District Flood Action Society said it would oppose the plans to raise Lake Roxburgh, and a commercial operator on the lake also voiced concerns about the impact of the change on recreational users.

Contact owns and operates the dam, located on the Clutha River. Lake Roxburgh stretches from Roxburgh to Alexandra, so the raising of the lake will have an impact on the shoreline and beaches between the two towns.

ODT

Hide signals no Govt support on water quality

Friday, 13 March 2009, 12:17 pm

Press Release: New Zealand Labour Party

New Zealand communities with poor quality or erratic drinking water supplies face getting no Government support to have any upgrades, say Labour MPs Parekura Horomia and Brendon Burns.

Local Government Minister Rodney Hide said in Parliament yesterday it was the responsibility of local communities and councils to sort out the future of their water supplies.

He was responding to questions about Bridge Pa in Hawkes Bay, where residents have been without water for weeks since local bores ran dry. Ikaroa Rawhiti MP Parekura Horomia visited Bridge Pa ten days ago and says residents are having to fill water containers and line them up on their verandahs.

“The Bridge Pa community had reliable supplies from their own bores for many years but these have run dry amid huge vineyard and farming demand,” Parekura Horomia said.

“This is outrageous. These people have been there for generations using modest amounts of water. Now they are having to put up with trucked-in water while big users with deeper wells continue to draw supplies.”

The Government’s Jobs Summit included a recommendation to put a moratorium on requiring drinking water supplies to meet minimum standards.

Questioned about that yesterday, Mr Hide said the drinking water standards put in place by the Labour government would cost tens of millions of dollars – “to meet standards those communities did not want or need.”

Labour’s water quality spokesman Brendon Burns says the Labour government provided \$136m over ten years in funding to help small communities get drinking water that met quality standards. “Continuing this funding is crucial. More than 600,000 New Zealanders are drinking water that does not meet minimum World Health Organisation standards. There are huge health and environmental consequences for us as a nation.”

“Mr Hide does not support helping small communities to get reliable supplies of good drinking water. Instead he wants a moratorium on lifting water quality standards.”

ENDS

DOC freezes campground and hut fees

Friday, 13 March 2009, 5:11 pm

Press Release: Department of Conservation

The Department of Conservation will not be increasing fees for huts and campgrounds on public conservation land this year.

“In these challenging economic times it is common sense to ensure that people can continue to enjoy the outdoors without worrying about increased charges,” Al Morrison, the Director-General of Conservation said.

“The family friendly policy of the Great Walks being free to under 18’s, will be retained,” Mr Morrison said.

"This summer, revenue from the recreation facilities is holding up. New Zealanders are staying at home and enjoying camping and other outdoor experiences on their conservation land."

However he said the Department is concerned at that some people are not paying their fees.

"Costs continue to increase, international visitor numbers are declining and this means there are significant uncertainties around future revenue," Mr Morrison said. "When people use facilities without paying their fees that puts extra pressure on and makes it harder to hold fees. It is unfair to the majority who do pay."

The department relies on honesty in many places and Mr Morrison appealed to people to pay the modest fees.

The department has also moved to an on-line booking system that allows people to secure places in huts on the Great Walks two years ahead. Mr Morrison said this will provide greater certainty for recreational users and tourism operators, enabling them to plan their trips well in advance.

Footnote :

Last year there were some modest fee increases for hut charges on the great walks, which had not risen for four years, and for serviced huts in other areas, where prices had been stable since 1999.

The Department manages a network of 12,800 km of tracks, 940 huts and 250 camp grounds and skiing opportunities on areas such as Mt Ruapehu in Tongariro National Park. It is estimated there are 33 million visitors annually to conservation lands (this includes repeat visitors) .There are nine Great Walks on public conservation land.

The Department's pricing policy for recreation fees on conservation land, sets out five principles by which fees will be determined. The principles are based around consistency, standard of facility provided and fees not being a significant barrier to recreating in protected areas. They recognise, however, that those who derive benefit from these facilities should contribute to their upkeep.

ENDS

Sustainability no longer just a "nice to have"

Friday, 13 March 2009, 9:44 am

Press Release: Environment Waikato

Former Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment Morgan Williams has told Environment Waikato councillors that sustainability is no longer just a "nice to have".

At a briefing for EW's policy and strategy committee on Wednesday 11 March, he quoted from the summit of the Global Agenda World Economic Forum in January. "It

[sustainability] has become a human security and survival issue and we must envisage ways for humanity to thrive, not just survive."

Dr Williams – who currently has Adjunct Professorships at the University of Canterbury and Queensland and a consultancy business called FutureSteps - said regional councils had a key role to play in ensuring that communities thrived as they tried to ensure a healthy environment and a healthy economy in their areas.

A key challenge for New Zealand was to help meet the growing global demand for higher quality, higher value food, particularly animal protein, while sustaining the health of ecosystems, and reducing the contribution of food production to climate change, Dr Williams said.

He believed New Zealand needed to focus on changing whole farm systems to dramatically increase the efficiency of inputs (such as energy and fertilizers), fodder production and livestock performance, and therefore impact on our natural capital, rather than have too much focus on one component, such as greenhouse gas emissions.

Praising EW's understanding of the region's soil and water resources, Dr Williams said the recent global economic meltdown underlined the importance of good regulation, compliance monitoring and quality governance. He suggested declining water quality could affect the region's reputation: "From a marketing point of view it's a nightmare - how do you explain to customers at home or abroad that your waterways are so polluted stock can't drink from them, people can't swim in them."

It was therefore important that EW didn't "drop the ball" on monitoring and measuring environmental indicators, and the council needed to work with its community to improve everyone's capacity to manage the weather extremes that are already a reality (as global insurance claims indicate) of climate change, he said.

Dr Williams also said that allowing subdivision of prime agricultural land was like "pulling the rivets out of the wings of a 747 - do we want to allow that to happen?"

Policy and strategy committee chair Paula Southgate said she agreed that EW, the Waikato agricultural sector and other agencies needed to work together closely to better manage the impact of farming on the environment.

"We collectively need to identify measures we can take to make sure we maintain a healthy rural economy while, at the same time, doing more to protect the environment," said Cr Southgate.

"I agree with Dr Williams that more sustainable management of natural resources is no longer just a 'nice idea'. It's something we need to do to better so as to support the natural resources which underpin activities like farming and tourism, and the great outdoor way of life we enjoy in the Waikato.

"These types of issues will be looked at closely in the forthcoming review of our regional policy statement and in the development of our sustainable agriculture strategy."

ENDS

Sentencing sends message to commercial fishers

Monday, 16 March 2009, 11:22 am

Press Release: Ministry of Fisheries

Heavy sentencing sends clear message to commercial fishers

Last week's heavy sentencing of three Polish crewmen on board the vessel, FV Atria, sends a clear message to the fishing industry that the Ministry of Fisheries monitors the activities on vessels closely and offenders will be prosecuted seriously.

The trio were sentenced in the Christchurch District Court last Thursday and ordered to pay fines totalling 147,500 within 28 days. Their vessel (which is currently outside New Zealand waters) was also been forfeit to the Crown following the six-week trial.

The three men had been prosecuted for fish dumping, a process that increases the value of catch by discarding less valuable or damaged fish, the effects of which can lead to exceeding the allowable quota.

The master of the vessel, Josef Eugeniusz Popowicz, admitted not recording fish return information, and two charges of dumping fish at sea. He was fined \$67,500.

The ship's factory manager, Wlodzimierz Pierzchlinski, pleaded guilty to two fish dumping charges and was fined \$60,000.

Foreman, Janusz Miroslaw Josefiak was fined \$20,000 on one fish dumping charge.

It's understood the men left New Zealand for Poland last Wednesday before sentencing took place.

"The result is especially pleasing as it shows that the court recognises the seriousness of the offending and the dishonest and negligent part played by parties in this offending," said MFish Investigations Manager in Christchurch, John Slaughter.

"I am hopeful this will send out a strong message to the industry that we will deal with reported offending in a detailed and committed manner to get the best results we can.

"In order for our fisheries to be sustainable in the future, dumping and mis-reporting of fish, together with wasteful fishing practices, will not be tolerated," he said.

The case started in 2007, when nine Polish fishermen approached MFish to complain about the dumping and poor fishing practices aboard the FV Atria This was supported with cell phone video footage.

The investigation relied heavily on the witnesses who all supported the prosecution throughout, coming back to New Zealand for six-week's before the defended hearing started.

"I am also pleased for the sake of the Polish fishing crew who approached us in the first instance and gave evidence. The judge fully endorsed their credibility and this outcome vindicates their position over a difficult and trying time," said John.

ENDS

1080 ban irks Feds

by Colin Williscroft

13/3/2009

Westland District Council's ban on aerial application of 1080 from ridgeline to ridgeline near waterways has been upheld much to the surprise and annoyance of Federated Farmers.

The federation, along with the Animal Health Board, the Department of Conservation and Forest and Bird sent a delegation to the WDC to explain the need for 1080 to be applied from the air.

During the one hour presentation, the Animal Health Board explained the science behind the use of 1080, while DoC and Forest and Bird spoke about the importance of 1080 for controlling the possum population. Federated Farmers gave a presentation on the impact of Tb on farming and the West Coast economy.

Federated Farmers West Coast president Basil Meyer says he thought the delegation's presentation to the council went well.

'I thought they'd given us some assurance that they would soften their stance. I went away quite happy. They said they didn't completely oppose the use of 1080.

'Since then they've done a u-turn and reaffirmed their initial position. It's very disappointing.'

Meyer says Federated Farmers will continue to work with the council to find a solution that all parties are happy with.

He points out that aerial application of 1080 on the West Coast will not stop immediately as there are consents in place that will see it continue - for a while anyway.

'It's not imminent. There's a variety of consents that are valid for a few years yet. The current programme will keep happening. We're carrying on business as usual.

Federated Farmers will continue to fully support the national pest management strategy.

The supplier of the programme that supports that strategy, the Animal Health Board, has a different take on the meeting.

AHB communications manager, John Deal, says his organisation welcomed the opportunity to meet with the Westland District council.

‘We feel that the meeting was extremely positive.’

Rural News

Buff weka released to start breeding

Tue, 17 Mar 2009



Buff weka are released on Stevenson's Peninsula, near Wanaka, last week. Photo by DOC.

A new mainland buff weka population has been established at Lake Wanaka, with last week's release of 15 birds by Ngai Tahu and the Department of Conservation on Stevenson's Peninsula, near Wanaka.

Populations of the feisty, flightless birds have already been established on islands in lakes Wanaka and Wakatipu.

Ngai Tahu spokesman Rewi Anglem said the release was the culmination of eight years of conservation work, following the establishment of a breeding programme on Te Peka Karara (Stevenson's Island) in Lake Wanaka.

Four Otago Ngai Tahu papatipu runanga have been involved in the joint iwi-Doc project to breed enough birds for a mainland release.

Mr Anglem said the challenge had been to find a suitable mainland site that was big enough yet had low predator numbers.

Pastoral lessee Tim Burdon had supported the project by allowing the release on Stevenson's Peninsula, which has a semi-predator-proof fence across its narrow neck.

The peninsula is big enough to allow the weka to breed unhindered by space restrictions, and ongoing predator control will help keep pest numbers low, Mr Anglem said.

The buff weka returned to the mainland yesterday are the descendants of the last 12 buff weka taken to the Chatham Islands in 1905.

Buff weka were once abundant in the drier inland regions of the eastern South Island but by the early 1900s had been driven to the brink of extinction by rabbit poisoning, introduced predators and loss of habitat.

Mr Anglem said the ultimate aim was to establish a successful population that could be transferred to many more habitats in the east coast of the South Island, providing an opportunity for Ngai Tahu to restore a taoka tuku iho (treasured asset of the past).

Funding was provided by Ngai Tahu and Doc.

The Otago University Zoology Department has recently become involved in the project.

Six of the 15 birds have transmitters attached for ongoing monitoring.

The project was at a critical stage and a key concern for the project team was that peninsula visitors did not light fires on, or take dogs to, the peninsula, Mr Anglem said.

"I know the locals will be careful and I hope we can get this information to potential visitors to ensure that the no-fires, no-dogs rules are strictly adhered to," Mr Anglem said.

ODT

Deepening of river under way

By Lynda Van Kempen on Tue, 17 Mar 2009



Work begins this week on removing sediment from the bed of the Manuherikia River at Alexandra and some beaches beside the river channel to cut the flood risk. Photo by Lynda Van Kempen.

More than 50,000cu m of sediment will be removed from the Manuherikia River over the next four months in flood works required as part of Contact Energy's consent to continue operating its Clutha River hydro dams.

The work began this week and Contact communications adviser Louise Griffin said it should be completed by the

end of July.

"This work is a requirement of the resource consents granted to Contact by the Otago Regional Council and the Environment Court in 2007 for our Clutha River operations," Miss Griffin said.

The project involves excavating and removing about 50,000cu m of sediment from the river bed between the Shaky Bridge and the confluence of the Clutha and Manuherikia Rivers, just downstream from the Alexandra bridge.

The sediment would be placed on to the Linger and Die area near the river and on a paddock near the Shaky Bridge cafe.

Those sites would be covered with topsoil and sown with grass, Miss Griffin said.

During the work, a temporary fence might be placed around part of the works area to ensure public safety while heavy machinery was in operation.

Under the terms of its consent, Contact was required to mitigate effects of flooding that might arise because of its hydro dams at Roxburgh and Clyde.

The first section of the work involves removing sediment up to 2m deep from the terraces and beaches beside the river channel, between the Shaky and Alexandra bridges and deepening that stretch of river by up to 1m.

Contact Energy generation manager Graham Quinn said the second stage of the work involved excavating a similar amount of gravel from the river downstream of the Galloway bridge for a distance of about 2.5km.

That work might not be carried out until next year, he said.

ODT

Greens warn about overseas investment rules changes

Wed, 18 Mar 2009

The Government says a review of the overseas investment regime is intended to make the process quicker and less complex but the Greens says that translates to easier sales to foreign investors.

The Government confirmed yesterday it would be reviewing the Overseas Investment Act and its associated regulation.

Finance Minister Bill English said when New Zealand came through the current recession it would need simpler rules and quicker decisions to attract the foreign investment needed to kick-start the economy and create jobs.

"The current processes are cumbersome and complex. It takes a long time to make decisions because all the applications have to be measured against 27 different criteria by a pretty legalistic standard," he said.

The Government wanted to retain the opportunity to protect assets and land that it believed needed to be protected, but reduce the cost and complexity of decision making.

New Zealand had to compete with other countries for investment and the recent economic crisis meant a "lot of investment was going home".

Mr English said the Government was not being overwhelmed by applications for investment and this was likely to get worse.

New Zealand's lack of savings meant it was reliant on foreign investment until that base could be built up.

NZPA understands that applications to invest are down 7 percent.

The picture is mixed because as the number of applicants seeking to invest here slow, New Zealand companies are having to seek foreign private capital because banks are less reluctant to lend.

National criticised the previous government for changing the rules and blocking the attempt by a Canadian pension board to purchase Auckland International Airport.

Mr English said he would not comment on whether individual applications might benefit from a rule change, but the Government wanted investors to be clear about what the rules were and ministers would abide by them.

"We have to re-establish the credibility of the process."

If the process was not simplified and investors were not given certainty New Zealand would miss out on investment.

The review would not mean the Government would lose its ability to block investments it considered a threat to New Zealand's economy or strategic interests.

The Government would still be able to look at applications that had an impact on cultural and heritage values, but this may be done through other processes that were currently duplicated by the investment regime.

The purchase of land by foreigners was a small part of the regime and he did not imagine significant changes in that area.

Law firm Chapman Tripp welcomed the review saying while it was important sensitive and culturally or historically valuable land was retained, unnecessary barriers should not be put up to foreign investments that could help the economy.

"Chapman Tripp's experience is that trivial or minor transactions which were never intended to be caught by the Overseas Investment Act are being caught due to technical drafting issues with the legislation," partner Nick Wells said in a statement.

Green MP Kennedy Graham said simplifying rules was not necessarily a good thing and he was concerned the changes would make it easier for foreign investors to buy up pristine land for uses like golf courses or mining.

"The Government and ACT Party seem intent on greater foreign ownership of New Zealand for the sake of uncritical economic growth," Dr Graham said.

Foreign investment often meant profits going offshore and New Zealand was at risk of being exploited rather than getting the productive investments it wanted, he said.

New Zealand research and education network Arena spokeswoman Dr Jane Kelsey was concerned that changes to the rules would be locked into future free trade agreements (FTA).

Existing FTAs already contained significant provisions around services and investment that promise that New Zealand won't ever tighten up its foreign investment rules, she said.

Dr Kelsey said FTAs stopped the last government when it tried to block the sale of Auckland Airport.

The previous Labour government "had to use the farcical situation of claiming the strategic asset was sensitive rural land so it could use a loophole in the Singapore-New Zealand FTA."

The review is to be completed and decisions made by June.

ODT

Many submit on water changes

By Rebecca Fox on Wed, 18 Mar 2009

Changes to the Otago Regional Council's water plan have brought in a "good" number of submissions from the public.

The council's proposal to make two changes to the Regional Plan: Water for Otago was opened up to public submissions before Christmas.

Change 1B proposed minimum flows for the Waianakarua River, Trotters Creek and Luggate Creek, and the second change, 1C, suggested new policies to guide how water was allocated.

Seventy-one submissions had been made towards the minimum flow change and 59 towards the water allocation and use change.

Resource planning director Fraser McRae said the submissions would now be summarised and go out for further submissions at the end of the month.

It was planned to hold hearings into the plan change mid-year

ODT

Carter: Underpinning Biosecurity Science in NZ

Tuesday, 17 March 2009, 5:32 pm

Speech: New Zealand Government

David Carter

Good morning and thank you Brian Richardson for your introduction.

Firstly, I would like to welcome Gary Fitt who is here today representing the OECD - sponsors of this International Forest Biosecurity Workshop in Rotorua.

I would also like to welcome keynote speakers and guests who have travelled from around the world, and New Zealand, to take part.

Being mainly scientists, you will know much more about the intricacies of this subject than me.

As a politician, I rely on people like you for advice. I have a background in Agricultural Science with a Bachelors degree from Lincoln University. This background means I like to make decisions based on sound science. So, I am very pleased to be opening an event where scientists, industry, and policy-makers can come together to share ideas and exchange information.

Let me begin by saying science makes a huge contribution to our economic prosperity and social well-being.

And, as Minister of Forestry and Minister for Biosecurity, I have a special interest in the subjects you will be covering during this conference.

This is my second trip to the area in as many weeks. I recently visited the Scion facilities in Rotorua and toured the Port of Tauranga where I looked at biosecurity, surveillance and monitoring.

This is a high biosecurity risk area and I was impressed with the systems that have been established close to the Port to monitor any incursions that might breach our biosecurity border.

I will talk more about biosecurity later, but first I want to speak about forestry and its importance as a global primary industry.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, in 2005, forest covered 30 percent of the world's land area.

Although planted forest accounted for no more than seven percent of the global forest area - or 270 million hectares - the importance of planted forests is expected to increase steadily.

Wood is becoming increasingly vital for industry and there are many opportunities for its use as a source of bioenergy.

The role of forests in combating the negative effects of climate change is also well-established and something that policymakers worldwide need to be constantly reminded of.

As a raw material for construction, wood is renewable, energy efficient and substantially more environmentally friendly when compared with alternatives such as steel, aluminium, concrete and plastic.

It is a valuable resource, but its risk as a natural product is that it could be wiped out by pests or diseases.

In New Zealand, commercial forestry plays a big part in economic development and has huge growth and innovation potential for our economy.

New Zealand exports wood products to over 30 countries, with total export earnings of around \$3 billion per year.

New Zealand is an efficient producer. We will take every opportunity to passionately argue for the freeing up of trade access to countries around the world that impose tariffs on our timber products, in an attempt by them to protect less efficient domestic producers.

Forestry contributes about three percent to New Zealand's Gross Domestic Product and directly employs more than 20,000 people. Its contribution to employment though, is much greater than just this, and it is estimated that follow-on benefits contribute to up to a 100 thousand jobs. For a country of just 4.2 million people, this is very significant.

A trend that is unique to New Zealand is the potential return of large areas of forest land currently owned by Government to Māori through the Treaty of Waitangi settlement process.

Māori are already substantial forest and forest land owners, with current and potential ownership of over 250,000 hectares, about 14 percent of the national plantation forest estate.

Successful Māori land claims are likely to result in the area of plantation forest on Māori-owned land increasing over time. This will lead to Māori having a significant influence on the future forestry sector in some regions of New Zealand.

This will parallel what has been achieved over the past 20 years in our fishing industries, where Maori now control over 50 percent of the total resource and businesses due to earlier Treaty settlements.

Apart from forestry's economic role in sustainable development, it is valued for recreation and its place in the landscape.

Forestry plays a major environmental role in reducing soil erosion, improving water quality in our rivers and streams, and reducing net greenhouse gas emissions.

Due to the value we, as a country, place on this resource, getting biosecurity right is critical.

The arrival of a major forestry pest or disease would be devastating to both the forest industry and our country's reputation as a source of sustainable, high-quality, pest and disease-free products.

It is for these reasons the New Zealand Government is committed to improving our already internationally well regarded biosecurity system, which is vital to primary industries and to New Zealand as a whole.

We must strike the right balance between pushing risk offshore, managing risk at the border, and maintaining capability to respond to risk organisms within New Zealand.

Maintaining a robust biosecurity system while facilitating trade and tourism in the face of increasing globalisation is a challenge, but one New Zealand will not shy away from.

Over the past few decades, we have seen rapid and significant changes in our economy and trade, and we are now also seeing changes in our environment. These include changing weather patterns as a result of increased greenhouse gas emissions.

This year New Zealand expects more than 600,000 sea containers and four million passengers to cross our borders. This has substantial consequences for biosecurity.

It is impossible for any country, even a geographically remote island nation like New Zealand, to isolate itself from all risks of imported pests and diseases.

Earlier incursions of white spotted tussock moth, painted apple moth, gypsy moth and fall web worm have reminded us that we are not immune.

What these types of incursions remind us is that we need to be able to deal with pests and diseases that are already here, as well as the ones that have the potential to establish in New Zealand.

Scientific knowledge can help us make informed decisions about how we prepare and respond to pests and diseases.

Science is crucial to biosecurity - it provides relevant and practical solutions and ways to manage new and established pests and diseases.

But in regards to Research & Development, I think there is more that can be done.

The last Government announced the Fast Forward Fund, a mechanism by which it was proposing to borrow \$700 million and spend it over the next fifteen years.

This proposal had some good points.

Firstly, a government that was recognising the importance of spending money on primary sector R&D.

It was also predicated on industry being involved in co-funding projects. This is necessary. If there is no commercial interest at the start of a research project, it's likely to be of no real commercial value at the end of the project.

Thirdly, it was looking at projects that were going to potentially give our primary sectors a quantum leap in productivity.

Any project needs to look right across the spectrum, effectively, from the forest floor to the final consumer product, which may then be marketed anywhere in the world.

In summary, government funding of R&D should be responsive to the needs of the economy, both long and short term.

Resources must be directed to areas where they will have the most impact. And bureaucracy and compliance costs must be minimised.

The trouble with the Fast Forward Fund was the clumsy mechanism of funding. I am now in the process of preparing a Budget bid for a programme that will replace it.

I am hopeful that with clear and transparent funding, we can demonstrate that we will actually spend more money on an annual basis than the other initiative was ever proposing to do.

The Government has been liaising closely with industry cornerstone investors and initial indications are a high degree of support for the project being developed. Further details will be released soon. But in short, the New Zealand Government is committed to supporting and developing publicly funded Research & Development.

In conclusion, this workshop's exploration of the link between researcher and 'real world needs' is extremely important to ensure our biosecurity system is based on sound science.

Given the substantial investment in research for Biosecurity, it is absolutely crucial that we work together to identify, prioritise and resolve the big "mission critical" issues.

The challenge for the research community is to provide innovative solutions that meet the needs of both today and tomorrow.

I recently came across a Henry Ford quote. He once said about the Model T: "If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse."

It says so much about the need for science and leadership.

Someone needs to think outside the square. Someone has to have a vision for the future.

Science has solved every challenge we have ever faced and it is science that will deliver the solutions to our future challenges - be they biosecurity threats or wider issues such as climate change.

This workshop provides an invaluable opportunity for scientists, industry and policy makers from around the world to share knowledge and work together to create solutions for critical problems. If these challenges can be met, there will be huge benefits for the global community, as well as for New Zealand.

Thank you.

ENDS

Improving Auckland's coastal areas

Tuesday, 17 March 2009, 2:04 pm

Press Release: Auckland City Council

Auckland's coastal environment is set to be further enhanced thanks to a proposed \$10 million coastal upgrade programme included in Auckland City Council's draft 10 year plan.

Six coastal areas have been identified for upgrade work, including Judges Bay, the Blockhouse Bay to Onehunga Harbour Walkway, Herne Bay Reserve, Orakei Basin Walkway, Achilles Point and Pt England beach.

Arts, Culture and Recreation Committee chairperson, Councillor Greg Moyle, says these projects will build on the success of the council's recent beach resanding projects in the western and eastern bays.

"By continuing to improve Auckland's open spaces and improve access to the coast, the council is taking steps to make sure that our unique coastal environment can be enjoyed by the local community and visitors to Auckland for generations to come," says Mr Moyle.

Improvements to Judges Bay will include the delivery of an all-tide beach and a boardwalk connecting to the Tamaki Drive footbridge. The bay will also be dredged, and improvements made to stormwater management.

A continuous walkway will be established around the Orakei Basin, creating pedestrian and cycle connections.

The existing track between Blockhouse Bay and Onehunga will be realigned to follow the contours of the land, and repair work will be undertaken on track structures and signs.

Herne Bay Reserve will undergo landscaping improvements including replanting, paving, new furniture and the rebuilding of the large retaining wall at the end of the reserve.

Work will take place at Achilles Point to reflect the importance of the HMNZS Achilles memorial, and improve public safety by allowing the reserve to be closed at night.

Approximately 5,000m³ of sand will be pumped into Pt England beach, and construction work will be started on a 40m headland groyne structure to improve beach stability. The

stormwater outfall at the northern end of the beach will also be extended to reduce future sand erosion.

These upgrades will protect and enhance the unique features of Auckland's valued coastal environment

The council's draft 10 year plan will be released for a month-long public consultation on 17 April.

ENDS

Pampered young bats going home

Tuesday, 17 March 2009, 12:09 pm

Press Release: Massey University



One of the four short-tailed bats.

Four juvenile short-tailed bats will be taken home today after being nursed back to health at Massey's wildlife ward.

The bats were affected by an anti-coagulant poison used to control rats at the Pureoa Forest Park near Te Kuiti. The poison killed more than 100 of their colony.

The bats have been recuperating in the ward and senior lecturer in avian health Dr Brett Gartrell says they have now recovered sufficiently to return home.

“They came here as unfurred babies so at first were kept warm in a small humidicrib,” Dr Gartrell says. “They were initially fed by syringe but have lately been feeding on artificial bat milk replacer, nectar and mealworms.”

It is the first time bats have been found dead due to the effects of the poison (diphacinone) in New Zealand, Dr Gartrell says, and has implications for pest control in bat habitats.

Some extra special care was needed to aid the juvenile bats' recovery, he says.

“Vitamin K was given to them every day for three weeks as an antidote. The humidicrib dried them out so we actually rubbed moisturiser into their skin. They've now grown fur and are able to forage on their own. It took a while for them to learn but once one started they all followed pretty quickly.”

Short-tailed bats forage both in the air and on the ground so it was important they were grown sufficiently to fend for themselves to avoid predators such as ferrets, stoats and weasels.

The bats will be transferred back to the forest by Conservation Department staff today. Specialised wooden bat-houses have been constructed, which will be attached to trees in the forest, opened and left there, allowing the bats come and go as they please for a while.

“Bat colonies don't stay in one place for too long and the rest of their colony has moved on already, but they won't be too far off and these four should find them pretty quickly,” Dr Gartrell says.

The short-tailed bat is listed by the department as a species of highest conservation priority.

- Short-tailed bats are grayish in colour, have large, pointed ears and weigh 12-15g.
- They are found in native forests where they roost in hollow trees.
- Males sing to females in a voice inaudible to human ears.
- Sort-tailed bats eat insects, fruit, nectar and pollen.

ENDS

Fisheries 2030 project takes next step

Wednesday, 18 March 2009, 2:12 pm

Press Release: New Zealand Government

Hon Phil Heatley
Minister of Fisheries

The Minister of Fisheries, Phil Heatley, has announced the next stage of Fisheries 2030, a review to establish clear direction and actions necessary to unlock the future economic potential of New Zealand's fishing sector.

Fisheries 2030 was initiated by the Ministry of Fisheries in August 2008 as an independent review of the fishing sector. The review, carried out by PriceWaterhousecoopers, incorporates input from key leaders from across the fisheries sector including aquaculture, commercial, amateur and customary fishers, as well as environmental and other NGOs.

Mr Heatley said the report contained a useful package of measures to move the debate forward.

“The fundamentals of our fisheries are sound, now is the time to build on them for the future.

“We support sustainable fisheries practices, an internationally competitive commercial fishing sector, high quality recreationally fishing, and we are working with Maori on treaty settlements,” Mr Heatley said.

The review listed a large number of measures that could enable better value to be gained from fisheries and could contribute to a strengthening of the economy and New Zealanders’ experiences of fishing.

The next stage in Fisheries 2030 will involve the Ministry of Fisheries working with fisheries stakeholders to pick the best suggestions from the PriceWaterhouseCoopers report. From this work a direction will be confirmed and a plan of action put in place.

ENDS

NZ fisheries overseen by 8000 regulations

Updated at 5:23am on 19 March 2009

A report into New Zealand fisheries by PricewaterhouseCoopers says the sector must overcome conflict and bureaucracy.

It says New Zealand fisheries are governed by 8000 regulations.

The Seafood Industry Council acknowledges the "varied level of responsibilities" among groups creates conflict.

Fisheries Minister Phil Heatley says commercial groups don't need greater regulation, as they already provide information about their catches.

But he says more detail is needed from recreational and customary fishermen, so the Government can better understand their needs and sustain their fishing stocks.

Radio New Zealand News

Water - It's time for the iwi to get involved

Thursday, 19 March 2009, 10:32 am

Press Release: Ngati Kahungunu Iwi Inc

“Enough is enough – It’s time for the iwi to get involved”

“Over the past few years as the Hawke’s Bay & Wairarapa economy has grown, the quality and volumes of water available to hapu on traditional lands has diminished markedly, to the point now where there’s a mantra resonating from all hapu, that ‘enough is enough’, and that its time for the iwi to get involved directly with the crown to ensure the water quality and quantity is not sacrificed any further in the name of economical wellbeing” said Ngati Kahungunu Iwi Incorporated Chairman, Mr Ngahiwi Tomoana.

A Hui a hapu organised and facilitated by Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Incorporated leaders will take place at Taihoa Marae in Wairoa on Saturday 21st March. The hui will give Kahungunu whanau the opportunity to share their concerns about 'Freshwater ownership issues' and 'whanau, hapu and iwi development', to determine a course of action. "This Hui a hapu needs to take place in order to halt the slide of water degradation and to ensure control and authority is in the proper hands which I believe is in the hands of iwi and its constituent hapu" said Mr Tomoana.

There have been many cases of iwi owning the lake bed, the river bed and river edges but not the water. "A key question to be determined by the iwi is, what ownership means in tikanga terms, which could be kaitiakitanga, rangatiratanga or whakamahitanga", said Mr Tomoana.

Following the meeting, whatever the outcome, presentations will be made to Government Ministers and regional and local authorities about how best to partner with iwi in fulfilling the promise to our mokopuna of clean and plentiful amounts of water for their wellbeing.

'Support to whanau during these times of extreme stress'

The economic summit will focus on how to support whanau during these times of extreme stress in the knowledge that it is whanau members that will be laid off and affected by the recession. The empirical evidence tells us that when whanau are unemployed, domestic abuse increases, violence in the community increases and criminal offences increase, as well as the increase of mental health problems. Although we may focus on some of the economic development models, these models have a long gestation period and will have minimal impact on this current recession. The hui will focus on how whanau can help each other and how hapu can help hapu and how the crown agencies can partner with whanau and hapu to buffer the impact of the recession.

Mr Tomoana said, "The research into the Whakatu Freezing Works closure showed that suicide and self harm doubled and comparative research into the closure at Tomoana Freezing Works where workers were made redundant for the second and third time identified a greater suicide and self harm rate increasing six times that of normal". "The iwi will be working closely with all sectors of our community to prevent this recurring".

ENDS

Clean, but not clean enough

by Sudesh Kissun

19/3/2009

Good but not good enough.

That's the verdict from stakeholders on the latest Dairying and Clean Streams Accord results for 2007-08 season.

While Fonterra farmers have made good progress on four of the five targets set out in the accord, the industry's record on complying with regional council effluent rules remains abysmal.

Full compliance with regional council regulations is just 70%, compared with 68% the previous period, still well short of the 100% immediate compliance target the accord outlines for dairy farm effluent discharge.

Also worrying is that the overall level of significant non-compliance for the season has barely improved – 11% compared to 12% the previous season.

Dairy effluent discharge has been identified as a major source of pollution of waterways and rivers.

Fonterra sustainability leadership team chairman Barry Harris admits that some farmers are ‘experiencing difficulties’ in complying with regional council regulations and that level of non-compliance remains much too high.

‘We have to recognise that these farmers are very much in the minority, but they are spoiling it for the majority of our farmers and we have to make a renewed effort to help them lift their environmental performance,’ he says.

Agriculture Minister David Carter released the report in Wellington last week. While he welcomes progress made by the industry he says no farmer has the right to pollute.

‘The small numbers of dairy farmers who ignore effluent disposal requirements are testing the patience of all New Zealanders, and risk damaging the reputation of the dairy industry as a whole,’ he says.

In a bid to halve significant non-compliance by August 2011, Fonterra is introducing a milk payout deduction system in 2010-11 season for those who receive an infringement notice or prosecution for an effluent offence from a regional council.

Under a two-tier system \$1500 will be deducted from farmers who receive infringement notices and \$3000 for prosecutions.

But the plan has come under fire from regional councils and recreational groups.

Fish & Game NZ chief executive Bryce Johnson says nothing short of full compliance is acceptable, otherwise Fonterra is saying it will tolerate half of those farms in serious breach of their consents continuing to pollute waterways.

‘Fonterra is explicitly condoning the ongoing flaunting of the law by a proportion of their farmer shareholders,’ he says.

Horizons Regional Council describes the new measures as a ‘gentle push on a huge scale problem’. It says while it is a good step in the right direction, the question is whether the sanctions will provide enough of a disincentive for those farmers who are still failing to comply.

Federated Farmers is also unhappy and believes the system is flawed as farmers will end up being fined twice – once by regional councils and then again by Fonterra.

It says the majority of dairy farmers play by the rules.

Industry good organisation DairyNZ, which will assist Fonterra to reduce effluent non-compliance levels, says the issue is a bottom line for the industry.

DairyNZ strategy and investment leader sustainability Dr Rick Pridmore says the industry needs to change.

Rural News

Water watch by satellite

by Neil Keating

18/3/2009

Researchers hope Rotorua's water quality is improving.

Research into water quality in Rotorua and Waikato lakes, funded by Environment Bay of Plenty, is gathering pace with remote sensing by satellite and frequent monitoring by sensors on buoys.

And the Rotorua work shows not all bad news about water quality there, says Matthew Allan, a University of Waikato student researching towards a doctoral thesis.

He says the Rotorua work shows lower inflows of nutrients 'so we're hoping for less algal bloom'.

The satellite-and-buoy technique does not entirely replace customary point sampling of water from a boat.

The satellite pictures monitor the extent of variation in water quality over large areas. This enlarges the research picture – by showing water-colour differences, in the case of the satellite images – by contributing to a 'three-dimensional ecological model' calibrating and validating data.

The university project is headed by Professor David Hamilton who predicts the technique will enable councils to see cause-and-effect relationships between farmers' land use and changes in quality of lake water, especially in respect of the Clean Streams Accord.

Whereas point sampling of water shows only a minute fraction of the whole, the buoys take readings every 15 minutes, helping verify the satellite data.

Remote sensing determines water colour and quality. The buoy-mounted sensors measure and record water temperature, nutrient and algae content and the mixing of water 'bodies' as water ebbs and flows, rises and falls.

'It's important we give a spatial [3D] context to the samples gathered at various points in a lake,' Allan says. 'We don't go very deep – in Lake Taupo down to about seven metres and in the Rotorua lakes we take from about the top two metres.'

Rural News

Water needs work

by Colin Williscroft

18/3/2009

Moves to open up applications to the Community Irrigation Fund is a good start but some say it will only benefit those already advanced in planning.

The move to open up the scope for applications to the Community Irrigation Fund (CIF) is a good start – but there's plenty more work to do, outgoing Irrigation New Zealand chief executive Terry Heiler says.

Following a water storage seminar in Christchurch last year the Government has opened up the fund's criteria to allow local government agencies developing rural water infrastructure strategies to apply for grants.

Heiler says while this is a positive move, at this stage it will only benefit groups who are already well down the track in their planning. He cites the Canterbury Mayoral Forum's work on producing a water management plan for the region.

'There are definitely no negatives involved but in addressing the real issue of putting together a coordinated, nationwide water management programme, we're still some way off. Some groups will find it useful but it does not address the real need for long term planning in this area.

'I hope to see something more substantial in the future but it's still early days.'

Federated Farmers water spokesman Hugh Ritchie says any support to boost water storage is vital.

'I welcome the Government placing water storage centre stage and the recognition that while we don't lack rain or snow in the South Island or North Island, we lack the means to store it in most parts of the country.

'The negative economic impacts of drought are well known by farmers and economists and a repeat of last year's drought, which tipped the economy into recession, would be a major blow.

'Given the primary sector's significant contribution to export revenue, the opportunity to increase productivity upwards of a quarter by boosting water storage is an economic opportunity we can not afford to miss.

'The simple fact is water storage equals economic growth and transformation.'

Agriculture Minister David Carter says one message that came through loud and clear at the water infrastructure forum was that excluding local government initiatives that examined water management strategies did not make sense.

‘It is clear that the best way to deal with the issues of sustainable water management is through a coordinated, strategic approach involving central government, local government and communities working together.

‘Expanding the eligibility and assessment criteria of the CIF, and increasing the allocated funding available in the early years, means local government-led water strategies can be part of this process.

‘An ad hoc approach on the development of water infrastructure, allocation and water management initiatives is now not an option,’ Carter says.

The CIF helps agricultural producers and rural communities with the transaction costs of raising support for new community water storage and irrigation schemes.

Rural News

Toxic chemical leaks into drains

New 7:25AM Friday Mar 20, 2009

Firefighters used an absorbent material to soak up a corrosive chemical at a transport yard in Mt Maunganui today but said some of it had escaped into waterways.

Ten litres of the fuel additive 'Control Blue' was spilled at a Robert Monk Transport in Aviation Avenue about 4am today.

Fire Service shift manager Jaron Phillips said the chemical was highly corrosive acid and could cause severe damage to eyes and skin if people came into contact with it.

"Unfortunately in this case it has entered the drains. They (firefighters) are trying to absorb it and are awaiting for a disposal company before commencing a clean up."

Mr Phillips said Environmental Bay of Plenty was also involved.

- NZPA

Students gaining rare NZ diploma

By Tracey Roxburgh on Fri, 20 Mar 2009

Queenstown Resort College Diploma in Adventure Tourism Management student Graeme Sharpe, of Zimbabwe, during his Dart River Jet Safaris work placement. Mr Sharpe is one of 17 graduating with the diploma - the only one of its kind in New Zealand - tomorrow. Photo supplied.

Tomorrow, the second graduation for the Queenstown Resort College will be held, and 17 students will each



receive a Diploma in Adventure Tourism Management, the only qualification of its kind in New Zealand.

The two-year course develops future adventure tourism managers by blending business management and leadership skills with practical work experience and adventure education.

The diploma sparked interest in New Zealand and overseas, with about 70% New Zealand and 30% international students completing the first course.

The graduands will officially mark the end of their time at QRC at the Millennium Hotel tomorrow, along with 24 Diploma of Hospitality students.

Deputy Prime Minister and Clutha-Southland MP Bill English will attend as the official guest of honour, presenting each student with their diploma and giving the official graduation address.

Based in the resort, every student in the Adventure Tourism Management course received six months' fully paid industry training with an adventure tourism business.

This year, as a result of a new strategic partnership between QRC and NZSki Ltd, a specifically developed intake of students with a snow industry focus would be guaranteed work placement at Coronet Peak, the Remarkables or Mt Hutt for a winter season.

The diploma was developed by the college in consultation with Queenstown's hospitality and adventure tourism industry leaders and was evolving in line with industry trends.

An industry advisory board regularly critiqued it to ensure relevancy and accuracy.

QRC Head of Tourism Dr John Cossens said he was delighted with the calibre of the graduating students, which ensured the future of the industry was in good hands.

"After teaching and getting to know these students, I feel confident in saying that New Zealand's adventure tourism future certainly looks bright, with the wealth of very talented and motivated young people going out into the workforce.

"I think they will really make a difference to our industry both here and overseas."

Ngai Tahu Tourism Southern Region operations general manager David Kennedy said the students were a credit to QRC and an asset to the community and industry.

"We've had several students work for us at Shotover Jet and Dart River Jet Safaris and have been really impressed with their high standard of professionalism and commitment.

"They've all come to the business with a good understanding of the needs of tourism, and apply themselves as hardworking and effective team members."

Destination Queenstown chief executive Stephen Pahl applauded QRC, and said it provided a valuable programme which would enhance Queenstown's reputation in providing quality tourism experiences.

"Adventure tourism requires a unique set of skills and training so it's great to see an educational facility working closely with industry to deliver such a relevant programme. It will go a long way to future-proofing Queenstown's and New Zealand's tourism.

"We're known as the adventure capital of the world, so it's appropriate that we develop and nurture the next generation of adventure tourism professionals," he said.

Mr Pahl said the curriculum mirrored industry standards to ensure the students were trained with the most up-to-date and relevant information in workplace standards.

Those who had achieved QRC's Diploma of Adventure Tourism Management could go on to a bachelor degree, in British Columbia, at Thompson Rivers University, Canada's leading specialist in adventure tourism education and training.

ODT

Ocean drive to stay off-limits

By Chris Morris on Fri, 20 Mar 2009



Contractors use a crane to raise piles during the dismantling of the pier used in the construction of Dunedin's 1.1km Tahuna outfall pipe. Photo by Gerard O'Brien.

Dunedin's popular John Wilson Ocean Dr will not reopen to motorists, despite the removal of construction material associated with the city's new 1.1km outfall pipe, council staff say.

Vehicle access to the road, which runs alongside St Kilda beach to Lawyers Head, has been restricted since construction of the \$37 million outfall began in late 2006.

Since the commissioning of the completed pipe in January, contractors had been using a crane to dismantle the pier used during construction in a process known as "demobilisation", Dunedin City Council Tahuna upgrade project manager Brian Turner said.

Work to remove the pier, reinstate sand dunes and remove an access road down to the beach was expected to be completed by the end of next month, Mr Turner said.

However, DCC parks and reserves team leader Martin Thompson said the gate blocking vehicle access to Lawyers Head, would be retained, with some modifications.

Pedestrian access to the area would be reinstated, but vehicles would be prevented from driving to the lookout until a new long-term Ocean Beach management plan was completed, he said.

That followed a decision of the council's community development committee in July last year.

Asked how long the management plan would take, Mr Thompson said "it will be several years".

A recently completed study of wildlife in the area showed more activity - particularly in sea lions - since the disturbance from vehicles was reduced, he said.

And, speaking in January last year, Dunedin psychiatrist Dr Keren Skegg told councillors there had also been a dramatic reduction in the number of people committing suicide by jumping from the cliff since access to the area was cut off.

ODT

GDC may face \$200,000 fine

By Margaret Phillips on Wed, 18 Mar 2009

A fine of up to \$200,000 could be slapped on Gore District Council after a silt-removal process carried out at the Mataura water-supply dam resulted in the contamination of the Pleura Stream.

Environment Southland (ES) is investigating the contamination of the stream, which came about when a system using straw bales to remove silt from the dam failed, ES compliance manager Mark Hunter said.

The incident happened shortly before Christmas and ES had a timeframe of six months to carry out an investigation and decide on a course of action, Mr Hunter said.

Gore District Mayor Tracy Hicks said bales of straw were used to filter water from the dam in order to remove silt, and that system had worked in the past.

However, he believed the wrong type of straw had been used on this occasion and silt ended up in the creek.

Gore District Council utilities manager Ross Haslemore said the same method of removing sediment from the dam had been used in 2004 and on one other previous occasion with success.

The council used large bales of straw in the process. However, in this instance the bales had moved, allowing silt to contaminate the stream.

“It was unfortunate they [the bales] moved,” Mr Haslemore said.

The silt-removal process was prompted by having to shut down the Mataura water treatment plant while silt was cleaned out of the filters.

The silt influx into the treatment station was caused by a combination of a heavy rainfall and stock being moved which caused a lot of sediment to be washed into the dam in addition to the build-up of sediment that was already there, Mr Haslemore said.

After the contamination occurred, the council carried out remedial work on the stream, he said.

Council chief executive Steve Parry said ES halted work once the contamination was discovered.

ES was prompted to investigate the contamination after receiving complaints from the public, Mr Hunter said.

The straw bales were placed in the stream with the intention they would act as a filter to remove sediment. However, that did not happen.

Instead, the bales which were placed on the stream floor dislodged and floated to the top and the effectiveness of the method was compromised, Mr Hunter said.

“What we are concerned about is the amount of sediment going down that small waterway and the effect that sediment will have on the life of that stream,” Mr Hunter said.

Of particular concern was the impact the contamination would have on invertebrates living in the stream, he said.

Ferndale farmer Cyril McFadzien, whose land the dam is on, said his son David had questioned the council about the legality of flushing out the dam using that method.

Mr McFadzien contacted ES to check if the council had a discharge permit and was told they did not.

Because the matter was under investigation, Mr Hunter said he did not wish to comment on whether a consent had been issued or not.

Mr McFadzien said if a dairy farmer had done the same thing they would be in jail by now.

“It [the creek] was just a slurry. I was devastated. It kills everything in the creek,” Mr McFadzien said.

“It’s actually still quite contaminated on the banks,” Mr McFadzien said.

ES has the authority to take action under the Resource Management Act.

Potential penalties include a fine of up to \$200,000 or a prison sentence of up to two years.

However, given the body under investigation was not a person, the imposition of a prison sentence was not an option, Mr Hunter said.

Environment Southland’s investigation will include gathering scientific data and compiling a report.

Mr Hunter expected the investigation to be completed within two months.

ODT

Dairy factory backers to privately update council

By Glenn Conway on Fri, 20 Mar 2009

Backers of a \$90 million dairy factory near Gore, who delayed the project late last year, will be back in town next week to update the Gore District Council behind closed doors on its plans, but it is unclear if they are bringing good or bad news.

Mataura Valley Milk Ltd, which is jointly owned by New Zealand and overseas investors, announced its plans in May last year but five months later, the ensuing credit crisis forced it to delay its move by at least a year.

Little has been heard from the company since, and efforts to contact management yesterday failed, with its main telephone line on answer phone.

Gore Mayor Tracy Hicks yesterday confirmed company representatives were due to address the council next Tuesday night.

An item tagged "Mataura Valley Milk Ltd" has been included in the non-public section of the meeting agenda.

But he was reluctant to comment further, other than to say he thought the item would involve some kind of update from the company.

"It's nothing negative as far as I know."

The company wants to build a milk-drying plant at McNab, on the site of the former livestock saleyards, to produce what it calls high-value, highly functional milk powders for Asian and Middle Eastern customers.

Its management claimed Southland was ideal for the venture, boasting a reliable climate, the ability to produce quality milk, room for future conversions of farms from sheep and beef to dairying, high protein and fat levels in its milk, and a long dairy season.

About 100 Southland sheep and beef farms converted to dairying for the 2007-08 dairy season and it is widely expected a similar number will convert for the coming season.

Financial backers of Mataura Valley were primarily business investors rather than farmers or end users.

Industry heavyweights, including former Fonterra senior executive John Shaskey and Max Parkin, former chief executive of the Southland Dairy Co-op (which later became part of Fonterra), were recruited as advisers.

ODT

Playing to an audience

Wellington

Last updated 05:00 20/03/2009



WHALE SPOTTING: An Orca spotted off Wellington's south coast was part of a pod of about five.

An Orca frolics off Wellington's south coast, to the delight of onlookers on the shore.

It was part of a pod of about five orcas that took advantage of calm waters yesterday to swim close to shore at Houghton Bay, showing off their distinctive black and white markings.

"They are really wonderful animals," said Anton van Helden, Te Papa's marine mammals collection manager. Orcas might look peaceful but sometimes

got up to no good in Wellington waters, he said. "They've been known to take dolphins in the harbour, or beat up on them at least."

Also on their menu could be kahawai, stingrays and flatfish. There are thought to be fewer than 200 orcas, or killer whales, living in New Zealand waters. They were most commonly seen off the coast of Bay of Plenty, East Coast and Hawke's Bay, Mr van Helden said.

There are probably three resident populations, one off the North Island, one off the South Island, and a group that spends its time in both regions. The typical pod size of New Zealand orcas was two to four animals, smaller than in most other places. There have been no known orca attacks on humans in the wild.

Dominion Post

Eruptions hit bird island

By TOM FITZSIMONS - The Dominion Post

Last updated 05:00 20/03/2009



SMOKE AND ASH: An underwater volcano erupts at Hunga Ha'apai, Tonga.



Reuters

POWERFUL FORCES: Smoke is seen after an underwater volcano erupted in Hunga Ha'apai, Tonga.



A huge underwater volcano off Tonga threw huge rocks into the air, left the sea coated in ash, and ravaged an island known as a bird paradise, a spectator says.

Lothar Slabon, 52, a German who has lived in Tonga for 16 years, took his eight-metre game-fishing boat to within 100 metres of the eruption.

Speaking from the capital, Nuku'alofa, Mr Slabon said he was alerted to the volcano about 2pm on Wednesday by tremors in the city and the sight of ash in the distance. "We saw it, but we had no idea what it was. It was just clouds, but they were fully attached to the water."

He jumped into his boat, which he operates for tourists, and went about 50 kilometres to a spot near the twin islands of Hunga Tonga and Hunga Ha'apai.

He was stunned by the sight of two eruptions taking place one from deep underwater and the other from the shoreline of the western island.

A new block of land had risen up out of the water, jets of steam and ash were being regularly pumped hundreds of metres into the air, and the island had been effectively destroyed, he said.

"It's usually a bird paradise, this island, with a lot of palm trees and so many seabirds. Now it's just a war zone, it's all burnt, everything is gone. I don't want to know how many birds are dead."

Mr Sloban took photographs for an hour and scooped up a handful of ash from the surface of the water. "It was pure pitch black, what came out. And then it turned into steam, and ash, and there were huge rocks in the air. They were splashing in the water all around."

He did not feel at risk till he took the boat away and the eruption suddenly grew bigger.

"We were very lucky we got away from the real big one. We got away with it."

Dominion Post

Bid to get Rings river renamed for tourists

By TOM FITZSIMONS - The Dominion Post

Last updated 05:00 09/03/2009

Mt Doom over Mt Ruapehu? The Rohan Plains over the Canterbury ones? Rivendell over Upper Hutt?

Lord of the Rings film sites have been drawing tourists for years, but now there is a bid to officially name one of them after its movie moniker.

Fiordland motor camp operator Aaron Nicholson has written to the Geographic Board proposing a new name for a stretch of the Waiiau River between Lakes Manapouri and Te Anau.

The two-kilometre stretch doubled as the Anduin River in Fellowship of the Ring, with cast members floating downstream in elfin boats.

Mr Nicholson wants the unnamed stretch to be called Anduin Reach. He has taken his quest online, drawing support from Rings fan websites and a YouTube video.

"We've had comments from all over the world saying this is a good thing."

Despite the beauty of the area, only a jetboat tour brought people to see it, along with the odd tourist who Mr Nicholson pointed in the right direction.

"It seemed a bit sad to me that there's all this Rings tourism and not many people are coming to see this one," he said.

Before making any changes to official place names, the Geographic Board seeks the views of affected people and the public.

The Dominion Post

Days numbered for park lake pest

By BETHANY MARETT - The Timaru Herald

Last updated 05:00 13/03/2009

The Conservation Department will remove the noxious fish rudd from Timaru's Centennial Park Lake next month.

Biodiversity Programme manager Kennedy Lange said rudd was classed as a noxious fish under the Freshwater Fisheries Regulations because of the damage they caused to native and sports fish habitat.

The operation was initially delayed when hornwort, a noxious plant, was discovered in the lake, but now the plant was gone they had the opportunity to get rid of the rudd, he said.

DOC has resource consent to eradicate the rudd using a naturally-occurring plant poison, cube root powder, which contains a small amount of the toxin rotenone, also used in some home garden products.

"Though highly toxic to fish and other aquatic life, cube root powder in water has a low toxicity for birds and mammals, including humans and dogs. It breaks down rapidly and does not accumulate in sediments," Mr Lange said.

Warning signs will be erected around the lake and people are advised to keep themselves and their pets away from the treated water until the signs have been removed.

DOC is working with Central South Island Fish and Game to remove as many non-target fish as possible before cube root powder is added to the lake. The lake level will be lowered to remove sports fish, such as tench and perch, and native fish such as eels, bullies, and galaxiids.

"These fish will be released into the stream below the lake."

Once the poison is applied to the lake, any remaining non-target fish poisoned will be revived in aerated tanks before being released.

Central South Island Fish and Game resource officer Bridget Pringle said rudd had an adverse effect on sport fish populations as they competed for food with other fish and increased the cloudiness of water which prevented the regeneration of aquatic plants.

The operation is planned to take place during the two weeks from March 30 to April 10, though this will depend on having dry and relatively calm, warm weather.

The Timaru Herald

Council warns of contaminated water

By RACHEL YOUNG - The Marlborough Express

Last updated 13:00 19/03/2009



CHRISTINE CORNEGE/Marlborough Express

TOXIC: Brenda Alexander with her sons Ben, 7, left, and Cameron, 9, at the side of the Harlings Park pond, which is suspected to be contaminated with planktonic cyanobacteria.

Beware of the water in some Marlborough waterways.

Marlborough District Council environmental scientist Fleur Tiernan issued a health warning for Taylor Dam Reserve after tests found cyanobacteria (blue-green algae) in the water.

It is suspected that cyanobacteria is also present in ponds along the Wairau Bar Reserve and in the pond at Harlings Park.

Ms Tiernan said cyanobacteria produced toxins which were harmful to humans and animals if swallowed or even through skin-contact activities such as wading or swimming.

She said in rare cases it was deadly, however most people would develop symptoms such as skin rashes, nausea, tummy upsets and tingling and numbness around the mouth or tips of the fingers.

Anyone using Taylor Dam Reserve, Harlings Park or the Wairau Bar Reserve should not use the water or allow animals near the water until the water tested clear.

Last year, a dog in Marlborough died of suspected toxins associated with cyanobacterial mats after a visit to the Wairau Lagoon Tracks.

Brenda Alexander always walks through Harlings Park when taking or picking up her children from school.

She said even though the children did not go in the water, she often saw several dogs playing in the water.

Cyanobacteria occurs naturally but can increase rapidly during summer months.

It can be spotted by the public if the water is cloudy, discoloured, or has small globules suspended in it. However, not all cyanobacterial blooms are visible to the naked eye and toxins can persist after the bloom has disappeared.

Ms Tiernan said the council would be monitoring the sites for the next few weeks.

She said anyone experiencing health symptoms after contact with contaminated water should contact the Nelson Marlborough District Health Board and visit a doctor immediately.

The Marlborough Express

Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits Centre to be sentenced today



Elim Christian College students killed

Fri, 20 Mar 2009 6:15a.m.

Elim Christian College does not want to see the outdoor pursuits company - responsible for the deaths of six pupils and a teacher - put out of business when it is sentenced today.

The group from the Auckland College died in April last year when they were swept down a canyon in the Mangetepopo Gorge near Turangi, in the central North Island.

Elim College principal, Murray Burton, says he expects the Sir Edmund Hillary Outdoor Pursuits centre to be fined.

Each charge carries a maximum fine of \$250,000.

RadioLIVE

NZ scientists helping frame environmental code for marine mining



Fri, 20 Mar 2009 5:24a.m.

Maritime scientists, including geologists and biologists, are drafting an environmental code for miners planning on exploiting seafloor minerals.

"We're pulling together a code of conduct that we would like members to adhere to," said Cornel de Ronde, the GNS Science geologist and geochemist who is president of the Honolulu-based International Marine Minerals Society.

The global body sponsors the Underwater Mining Institute and has just released a draft code for environmental management of seafloor mining.

Massive sulphide deposits (SMS) of gold, zinc and copper and other minerals at sites such as New Zealand's Kermadec Arc are attracting prospectors and miners.

British entrepreneur Neptune Minerals has lodged applications for mining licences with the NZ Government over discovered two mineral deposits on the Rumble II West seamount about 400km northeast of Tauranga.

It has described the target sites as "inactive SMS zones".

Dr de Ronde said some miners, such as Nautilus Minerals - which has been seeking gold, copper and zinc in seas off Papua New Guinea - avoided the potentially destructive use of dredging to gather geological samples in fragile sites.

"Nautilus would have a fit if you dredged a site that might have animals, so they use remote-operated vehicles and mini subs," he said.

But using the alternative of gathering material by submersible to minimise damage was very expensive, Dr de Ronde said.

"For nations like New Zealand, and organisations like the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric research (Niwa), dredging is cheap," he said.

Though it could cause damage, the dredges used were not huge.

"It's easy to say it should not happen, and that it should only be by subs or ROVs - but then the Government needs to give you more money," he said.

The proposed code of conduct envisaged a biological survey of sites before any mining started, he said.

But there was a need for a systematic approach in a rapidly developing sector.

Dr de Ronde said the global recession might provide a breathing space for reviewing the environmental precautions needed in seafloor mining, as mining companies were "cooling their jets".

"In New Zealand, the Government has been sitting on and stalling its oceans policy ... so maybe we have some breathing room".

He was one of a team of New Zealand scientists who joined an American research voyage earlier this month to investigate three key submarine volcanoes along the Kermadec Arc, northeast of White Island, Bay of Plenty.

The seafloor hydrothermal systems and their vents were dynamic and ephemeral, he said.

At the Rumble II West volcano - for which there was not a detailed survey of vent fields in the public domain - no active or dead vents were seen, but the camera being used only covered a few metres of seafloor at a time.

"We just saw rocks and sediment," said Dr de Ronde.

Sensitive tracking of helium isotopes in plumes of mineral-enriched water from hydrothermal systems had previously shown activity at Rumble II West but Dr de Ronde said it was not highly active.

More information waited on detailed water column analysis from data recorded during the voyage.

Massive sulphide (SMS) deposits are left on the sea floor by hydrothermal vents over millions of years as minerals in the Earth's crust dissolve in super-heated fluids then drop to the seafloor when they emerge into cold seawater.

Neptune has claimed that deposits of gold, silver copper and zinc, worth up to \$US2000/tonne (\$NZ3700/tonne) along the Kermadec Arc can be mined for a combined capital and operating cost of less than \$US162/tonne.

Metallurgical testing done for the company on a composite sample from its initial Kermadec exploration in 2006 showed an average of 11.2 parts per million of gold, 122ppm of silver, 8.1 percent copper, 0.5 percent lead and 5 percent zinc.

NZPA

Overseas News:

Oil Spill Blackens Queensland's Pristine Island Beaches

BRISBANE, Queensland, Australia, March 13, 2009 (ENS) - The government of Queensland has declared Moreton Island and the southern area of the Sunshine Coast a disaster area after a cargo ship damaged by the loss of more than half its containers spilled 30 tonnes of heavy oil into the sea.

On Wednesday, the 185 meter container ship, Pacific Adventurer, was enroute from Newcastle to Indonesia via Brisbane when it ran into heavy seas whipped up by the tail end of Cyclone Hamish, a category 5 storm.

The ship was seven nautical miles east of Cape Moreton when it reported losing 31 of a total 50 shipping containers of ammonium nitrate being carried on its deck. Several of the fallen containers pierced the ship's hull, resulting in the oil spill.

"This is a very serious situation," said Queensland Premier Anna Bligh today, after a meeting of the emergency response group - members of key government agencies.

"I'm advised that it appears the volume of oil involved is much greater than originally reported by the Pacific Adventurer," she said. "And the effect of the oil spill is more widespread."

An aerial survey this morning shows that oil has washed up along a 20 kilometer (12 mile) stretch on the eastern side of Moreton Island, extending 20 kilometers south from Cape Moreton, and along the foreshore on Moreton Island's northern side. The resort island is a 75 minute ferry ride from Queensland's capital city of Brisbane on Australia's east coast.

Bligh said the state would seek compensation for the cost of the cleanup, which she estimated would take at least a week.

The Hong Kong-based Pacific Adventurer has been detained at Hamilton Wharf by the federal authority, the Australian Maritime Safety Association. Its remaining cargo of 19 containers have been offloaded and moved to a safe storage site. The company can face fines of up A\$1.5 million and the ship's master fines of up to \$500,000.



Oil has washed up along a 20 kilometer stretch of Moreton Island's coastline.

(Photo courtesy Government of Queensland)



"A comprehensive risk assessment has been carried out both in relation to the hazardous cargo on board ship and its entry into Moreton Bay," said Maritime Safety Queensland General Manager Director Captain John Watkinson.

"I must stress there are no reports of crew members being injured or being exposed to any risk and there is no general risk to the wider coastal community," he said.

The Pacific Adventurer before the oil spill incident (Photo by Peter Karberg MarineTraffic.com)

About 30 campers have been evacuated from a site at North Point by the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, who have enlisted Queensland Police assistance to restrict all private vehicle movement on the island to limit the spread of contaminants. All camping grounds on Moreton Island, the Ocean Beach camping area and Ocean Beach on Bribie Island have been closed until further notice.

Maritime Safety Queensland has sought scientific advice from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service regarding the potential hazards of ammonium nitrate and been advised that it is stable in its current state. The chemical is commonly used in agriculture as a high-nitrogen fertilizer and as a component of explosives.

One of the world's largest sand islands, Moreton is almost completely a national park. A favorite resort destination, the island is famous for its miles of sandy beaches, crystalline creeks and lagoons, and abundant wildlife, which makes the spill all the more devastating, environmentalists say.

Don Henry, executive director of Australian Conservation Foundation and a former president of the Moreton Bay Preservation Society, said, "I am devastated to see the massive damage the oil slick is doing to this beautiful coastline."

"Reports that the northern tip of Moreton Island has been turned into an oily wasteland are very disturbing. This area is home to bottlenose dolphins, dugongs and a treasure trove of other marine species," said Henry. "Turtles lay their eggs in the sand of these beaches. Beachstone curlews and sooty oyster catchers nest just above the high tide mark."

"At this stage Maritime Safety Queensland has not been notified of any extensive oil contamination of wildlife. However, the potential hazard remains significant," said Queensland Transport Minister John Mickel.

Watkinson, said an oiled wildlife response plan has been developed to deal with the consequences of the spill.

Tangalooma Island Resort, which offers guests the experience of hand feeding a pod of wild bottlenose dolphins that visit each evening, reports that it has not been affected by the oil spill. The spill has remained outside of Moreton Bay and has only affected the north and eastern side of the island.

"Maritime Safety Queensland is continuing to conduct aerial surveillance and tracking the movement of the oil slick released from the Pacific Adventurer," Captain Watkinson said.

"I would like to see four major reforms come out of this environmental disaster," said Henry.

"First, the federal government should insist on heavy penalties for companies that play fast and loose with safety requirements and environmental conditions.

"Second, the federal government should ensure Australia has a national coordinated cleanup capability, to quickly respond to environmental crises at the scale needed.

"Third, for goodness sake, the government must get serious about tackling climate change. This ship was hit by the tail end of a category 5 cyclone. Just as Victoria will experience dramatically increased days of extreme bushfire weather, the science is telling us Queensland will cop more destructive cyclones unless we make big cuts to greenhouse pollution."

"And fourth, all political parties in the Queensland election should commit to establish adequate green zones to make sure Queensland's beautiful beaches and Moreton Bay are as healthy as possible to survive accidents like this."

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority, Australian Transportation Safety Bureau and Maritime Safety Queensland are conducting an inquiry into the incident.

Meanwhile coastal authorities have been advised on precautions to take if they identify any containers washing up on their shores in coming weeks. Members of the public are also being encouraged to report sightings to Queensland Police or Maritime Safety Queensland.

ENS News

Whaling Commission Political Deal Could Overturn Moratorium

ROME, Italy, March 13, 2009 (ENS) - Winding up a three-day meeting this week, the International Whaling Commission signaled what conservationists see as a dangerous change of course that jeopardizes the future of the world's great whales.



Queensland government officials are briefed on the Pacific Adventurer oil spill. March 13, 2009 (Photo courtesy Premier Anna Bligh)

For several years, the 84-nation intergovernmental commission has been working on a detailed scientific procedure known as the Revised Management Procedure to ensure all catch limits for any future commercial whaling would be within sustainable limits calculated using tested scientific procedures.

On Wednesday, after an intersessional meeting in Rome attended by about half the member countries, the commission agreed to sidestep this scientific process and authorize a Small Working Group of member countries to continue developing a package of proposals for a resumption of commercial whaling, relying on ad-hoc catch limits set for five years at a time, without regard to long-term sustainability.

The proposed deal would grant Japan permission to hunt minke whales in its coastal waters in exchange for a scaling back of its so-called research whaling in the Southern Ocean whale sanctuary near Antarctica.

In the past five years, the Japanese fleet has harpooned nearly 5,000 fin, sei, sperm, minke and Bryde's whales in the Antarctic and the North Pacific under self-assigned quotas for what the Japanese call "scientific" purposes.

The IWC's Scientific Committee, in a review of the Japanese program, concluded in 2007 that the scientific questions that the Japanese supposedly set out to answer, such as the natural mortality rate of whales, remain unresolved despite the killing of thousands of whales. The IWC has repeatedly called for Japan to end its lethal "research" program.

International Whaling Commission Chairman William Hogarth of the United States is leading this new IWC direction in an effort to resolve the bitter and long-standing dispute between the whaling nations Japan, Norway and Iceland and the whale conservation countries, including the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, Chile and many others.

"These have been helpful discussions, said Hogarth as the meeting closed. "There were clear expressions of view that efforts to arrive at a package of proposals must continue. Opinions differ amongst the members as to precisely how to accomplish our goal and a great deal of work remains to be done."

The final report of the Small Working Group will be available by May 18. The aim is that this deal would be approved by the full IWC at its annual meeting on the Portuguese island of Madeira in June.



A Bryde's whale lies on the deck of a Japanese whaling vessel. The species is listed as "Data Deficient" on the IUCN Red List and current population numbers are not known. (Photo courtesy [Institute for Cetacean Research](#))

Anti-whaling groups have united against the plan. Twenty-six conservation organizations from around the world have issued a call to governments asking them to oppose the deal. They say it could end the moratorium on commercial whaling that has been in place since 1986 to allow the great whales to recover after centuries of unregulated whaling had brought many species close to extinction.

The World Society for the Protection of Animals has led the production of a briefing, signed by the world's leading anti-whaling organizations condemning the proposal, which the conservationists say "effectively barter with animals' lives."

In Rome, Patrick Ramage, global whale program director of the International Fund for Animal Welfare, said, "Science has been thrown to the whalers like Christians to the lions in ancient Rome."

"Conservation-minded IWC members hope that by offering Japan interim, ad hoc, catch allowances for coastal whaling, that will encourage Japan, in turn, to exercise self-restraint in its 'scientific whaling' operations, said Ramage. "However, conservationists are extremely sceptical that this olive branch will elicit the hoped for response."

"The message from the commission today was forget science, forget sustainability, compromise full steam ahead! The Commission is ignoring ongoing whaling by Iceland and Norway and also their recent resumption of the international trade in whale meat," said Ramage.



The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, which sends ships to interfere with Japanese whaling fleet in the Southern Ocean, condemns what it calls "this proposal of appeasement" and calls upon President Barack Obama to remove Hogarth as the U.S. commissioner to the IWC.

"The United States has a policy of not negotiating with terrorists and they should not be negotiating with poachers," said Sea Shepherd founder and president Captain Paul Watson. "The Japanese whaling industry is a criminal organization that targets endangered whales in an established international whale sanctuary."

**William Hogarth
chairs the IWC**

(Photo courtesy NOAA)

"Hogarth's proposal is so milquetoast and weak it does not even demand an end to Southern Ocean whaling and allows this criminal activity to continue," Watson said. "The United States will be betraying the whales and marine conservationists if they allow Hogarth to advance this shameful proposal of appeasement."

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society is requesting an investigation of Hogarth by the U.S. Justice Department "to see if there are other unknown factors motivating Mr. Hogarth to sell out the whales to the outlaw whalers of Japan," said Watson.

Watson is not alone in calling for Hogarth's removal.

In February, House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Nick Rahall, a West Virginia Democrat, sent a letter to the acting secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce, calling for Hogarth's replacement "amid growing criticisms that holdover political appointees of the

Bush administration are proposing to dismantle the current worldwide ban on commercial whaling."

In June 2008, the House of Representatives approved a resolution introduced by Rahall urging U.S. leadership to use all appropriate measures to end commercial whaling around the globe.

The Obama administration has taken a position in favor of continuing the IWC's whaling moratorium.

White House Council on Environmental Quality Chair Nancy Sutley said March 6, "The United States continues to view the commercial whaling moratorium as a necessary conservation measure and believes that lethal scientific whaling is unnecessary in modern whale conservation management. The United States also continues to have significant concerns over the recent resumption of international trade of whale meat."

"The administration is fully committed to furthering discussions of critical issues within the IWC, including the future of the organization," Sutley said. "While we reserve judgment on various proposals until discussions are completed, it is our view that any package, to be acceptable, must result in a significant improvement in the conservation status of whales,"



"We recognize some of these issues facing the IWC may require a longer view toward resolution," she said. "However, the failure to resolve these issues is not an acceptable outcome to the United States."

Humpback whale jumps out of the sea.

(Photo courtesy [Greenpeace UK](#))

At the close of the meeting in Rome, Australian Environment Minister Peter Garrett said Australia's proposals for "modernizing the Commission into a genuine conservation-focused organization continue to receive strong support from around the world."

"The Commission's history of gridlock is simply not acceptable. It is taking the cause of whale conservation backwards, and in the spirit of finding a way forward, Australia will continue to listen and discuss all views, standing firm in our opposition to commercial and so-called 'scientific' whaling," Garrett said.

"Australia will only support changes within the IWC that bring us closer to our goal to eliminate whaling for good," he said.

Australia's reform agenda will be advanced on March 23, when Sydney hosts participants in the Australian Government's Southern Ocean Research Partnership planning workshop, launching the largest international whale research project in the world.

U.S. seeks to spur renewable energy on public lands

Thu Mar 12, 2009 2:47am EDT

By Ayesha Rascoe



Several sections of the 90,000 photovoltaic solar panels being installed at Florida Power and Light's DeSoto Next Generation Solar Energy Center is photographed outside Arcadia, Florida, February 26, 2009.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Interior Department on Wednesday said it has created a special task force to speed the development of renewable energy projects on federal lands.

"More so than ever, with job losses continuing to mount, we need to steer the country onto a new energy path," said Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

The task force will identify specific zones on public lands where the department can act rapidly to create large-scale production of solar, wind, geothermal and biomass energy.

"We will assign a high priority to identifying renewable energy zones and completing the permitting and appropriate environmental review of transmission rights-of-way applications that are necessary to deliver renewable energy generation to consumers," Salazar said. "We have to connect the sun of the deserts and the wind of the plains with the places where people live."

The department will have to coordinate its efforts with other government agencies involved with energy and electricity transmission policy, including the Energy Department and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Interior is also moving forward with finalizing regulations for offshore renewable energy production, but the department will have to work with FERC to sort out which agency is responsible for issuing permits for offshore wind energy.

"We ought not to let the jurisdictional bureaucracy get in the way of the ultimate agenda," Salazar said. "We need to get it done."

The department manages one-fifth of the U.S. landmass and over 1.7 billion offshore acres.

Environmental groups applauded the department's decision to make renewable energy a priority.

"Secretary Salazar has laid the foundation for our nation's entrepreneurs to harness the planet's wind, sun, heat and other renewable energy sources in a manner that safeguards the wildlife and natural resources that help keep American communities healthy, safe, and prosperous," Wilderness Society President Bill Meadows said in a statement.

Reuters

Chilean Town Withers in Free Market for Water

By ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO



Tomas Munita for The New York Times

Pipelines to mines siphon water from some of the driest towns on earth, in northern Chile

QUILLAGUA, Chile — During the past four decades here in Quillagua, a town in the record books as the driest place on earth, residents have sometimes seen glimpses of raindrops above the foothills in the distance. They never reach the ground, evaporating like a mirage while still in the air.

What the town did have was a river, feeding an oasis in the Atacama desert. But mining companies have polluted and bought up so much of the water, residents say, that for months each year the river is little more than a trickle — and an unusable one at that.

Quillagua is among many small towns that are being swallowed up in the country's intensifying water wars. Nowhere is the system for buying and selling water more permissive than here in Chile, experts say, where water rights are private property, not a public resource, and can be traded like commodities with little government oversight or safeguards for the environment.

Private ownership is so concentrated in some areas that a single electricity company from Spain, Endesa, has bought up 80 percent of the water rights in a huge region in the south,

causing an uproar. In the north, agricultural producers are competing with mining companies to siphon off rivers and tap scarce water supplies, leaving towns like this one bone dry and withering.

“Everything, it seems, is against us,” said Bartolomé Vicentelo, 79, who once grew crops and fished for shrimp in the Loa River that fed Quillagua.

The population is about a fifth what it was less than two decades ago; so many people have left that he is one of only 120 people still here.

Some economists have hailed Chile’s water rights trading system, which was established in 1981 during the military dictatorship, as a model of free-market efficiency that allocates water to its highest economic use.

But other academics and environmentalists argue that Chile’s system is unsustainable because it promotes speculation, endangers the environment and allows smaller interests to be muscled out by powerful forces, like Chile’s mining industry.

“The Chilean model has gone too far in the direction of unfettered regulation,” said Carl J. Bauer, an expert on Chile’s water markets at the University of Arizona. “It hasn’t thought through the public interest.”

Australia and the western United States have somewhat comparable systems, but they contain stronger environmental regulation and conflict resolution than Chile’s, Dr. Bauer said.

Chile is a stark example of the debate over water crises across the globe. Concerns about shortages plague Chile’s economic expansion through natural resources like copper, fruits and fish — all of which require loads of water in a country with limited supplies of it.

“The dilemma we are facing is whether we can permit ourselves to continue to develop with the same amount of water we have now,” said Rodrigo Weisner, Chile’s water director in the Public Works Ministry.

“There is no political consensus about how to deal with the challenge of producing the resources we have — including the biggest reserves of copper in the world — in a country that has the most arid desert in the world,” Mr. Weisner said.

Fernando Dougnac, an environmental lawyer in Santiago, said that balance was particularly difficult because the “market can regulate for more economic efficiency, but not for more social-economic efficiency.”

Lately, the country’s approach to water has been showing some cracks. In the Atacama desert city of Copiapó, unbridled water trading and a two-year drought mean that “there are many more water rights for the river than water that arrives from the river,” Mr. Dougnac said.

Quillagua is in Guinness World Records as the “driest place” for 37 years, yet it prospered off the Loa River, reaching a population of 800 by the 1940s. A long-haul train stopped here — today the station is abandoned — and the town’s school was near its 120-student capacity. (Today there are 16 students.)

That prosperity first began to ebb in 1987, when the military government reduced the water to the town by more than two-thirds, said Raul Molina, a geographer at the University of Chile. But the big blows came in 1997 and 2000, when two episodes of contamination ruined the river for crop irrigation or livestock during the critical summer months.

An initial study by a professor concluded that the 1997 contamination had probably come from a copper mine run by Codelco, the state mining giant. The Chilean government then hired German experts, who said the contamination had a natural origin.

Chile's regional Agriculture and Livestock Service, part of the Ministry of Agriculture, refuted those findings in 2000, saying in a report that people, not nature, were responsible. Heavy metals and other substances associated with mineral processing were found that killed off the river's shrimp and made the water undrinkable for livestock. (Drinking water for residents had been transported in for decades.)

Codelco, the world's largest copper miner, rejects any responsibility. Pablo Orozco, a company spokesman, said that the river water had been bad for years, and that heavy rains around the time of the contamination episodes had briefly swelled it, sweeping sediments and other substances into the water.

But the debate is largely academic, because without suitable water to raise crops, many residents saw no reason to continue resisting outside offers to buy the water rights in their town. One mining company, Soquimich, or S.Q.M., ended up buying about 75 percent of the rights in Quillagua. Most residents moved away; those who remain average around 50 years old.

"Quillagua cannot resist much longer," said Alejandro Sanchez, 77, pointing a cane at a parched, grassless field where he once grew corn and alfalfa.

In 2007, the national water agency started investigating claims that Soquimich was extracting even more water from the Loa River than it was due. The inquiry is still pending, officials said, though the company says it has never taken more water than it owns rights to.

But early last year, the regional water authority started satellite monitoring along the Loa. After recording no water at all in the summer of 2007, Quillagua suddenly received small amounts last year, and again this January.

That has made water authorities suspicious that companies had been draining more water than permitted, according to Claudio Lam, a regional director for the Chilean water agency.

Even so, the water arriving in the summer is still not enough to produce crops, said Victor Palape, the chief of the Aymara Indians in Quillagua.

In a cruel twist, the town survives only because of daily water trucks that are partly financed by Codelco and Soquimich, the two companies that residents blame most for their troubles.

Quillagua's residents remain determined. Mr. Palape, who owns the town's main restaurant, still dreams of attracting tourists to the 108 meteor crater sites in and around Quillagua.

His sister Gloria is equally proud of Quillagua's place in history.

"To be able to live in the driest place in the world, with everything that has happened, the people have to be resilient, to be stubborn," she said. "We are not giving up."

Pascale Bonnefoy contributed reporting from Santiago, Chile.

New York Times

Water forum seeks way through worsening crisis

1 hr 56 mins ago

ISTANBUL (AFP) – Politicians, corporate executives, engineers and greens gather here on Monday for a week-long arena aimed at tackling the planet's fast-growing water crisis.

Around 20,000 people are expected for the Fifth World Water Forum in the Turkish city of Istanbul, where a charged agenda awaits them.

Access to clean water and sanitation, river pollution, madcap extraction of aquifers, jockeying for water rights and the impact of climate change have turned the stuff of life into a fiercely contentious issue.

The Forum, held only every three years, has been foreshadowed by a report issued by a constellation of UN agencies.

In 348 pages, their document, published last Thursday, warned of a triple whammy in which supplies of freshwater were being viciously squeezed by demographic pressure, waste and drought.

It spoke of a "global water crisis" with plenty of potential for instability and conflict.

Loic Fauchon, head of the World Water Council which is organising the Istanbul meeting, said the facts amounted to a glaring message that times have changed.

"The era of easy water is over. We have to embark on policies for regulating demand," Fauchon said in Paris last week.

"Over the last 50 years, water policies around the world have focused on providing ever more water. Absolutely no thought was given to water consumption, which has reached shameless proportions in some countries."

He added: "All of us, around the world, have to ask questions about our relationship with water and work to use less of it."

Hydrologists point to some notorious acts of water vandalism over the last century.

They include the desiccation of the Aral Sea, once the world's fourth largest inland lake, by Soviet-era plans to grow cotton in the central Asian desert.

There is Saddam Hussein's destruction of the Iraqi wetlands, an act deemed an assault on the so-called "Marsh Arabs" who opposed his rule.

Less visible, but also massively destructive, is over-irrigation, in which water is used to grow thirsty crops in scorching climates and soils that are naturally parched. California's Imperial Valley and Australia's Murray-Darling river system are often cited for such waste.

Then there is the damming of rivers for hydro-electric projects, which affects flows downstream, and the frenzied extraction of "fossil water" -- underground aquifers that took hundreds of thousands of years to build up.

Amplifying the problem is climate change, affecting patterns of rainfall and snowfall.

Water scarcity has the potential to stoke unrest, frictions within countries and conflicts between states, according to the UN document, the Third World Water Development Report.

"Conflicts about water can occur at all scales," the report warned.

"Hydrologic shocks that may occur through climate change increase the risk of major national and international security threats, especially in unstable areas."

One objective of the Istanbul meeting is to develop ways of avoiding these feared "water wars" by encouraging agreements on sharing the use of rivers, lakes and aquifers that straddle boundaries.

Sources close to the conference expect the announcement of a three-way deal between Turkey, Iraq and Syria over the sharing of waters of the Tigris and Euphrates, the two rivers that reputedly fed the Garden of Eden.

The conference will kick off with a mini-summit, hosted by Turkey, gathering around 14 countries, before splitting up into debates on six themes on water management and conservation.

This will culminate in a three-day ministerial-level meeting, gathering 107 countries, that will issue a non-binding statement of recommendations on March 22.

On the sidelines of the political meeting is a major fair gathering actors in the water business, from large corporations dealing in drinking water and sanitation to inventors peddling rainwater harvesting.

AFP

From: [Dalhousie University](#)
Published [March 16, 2009 09:18 AM](#)

Leatherback Turtle Threatened By Plastic Garbage In Ocean



Leatherback turtles, the most widely distributed reptiles on Earth, are threatened with extinction themselves, in large part due to the carelessness of humans. A Dalhousie University professor addresses the threat of plastics to this endangered species.

They survived the extinction of the dinosaurs. They're descendants of one of the oldest family trees in history, spanning 100 million years. But today leatherback turtles, the most widely distributed reptiles on Earth, are threatened with extinction themselves, in large part due to the carelessness of humans.

We've seen reference to the dangers plastic poses to marine life, garbage that we humans directly and indirectly deposit in the oceans, but how clearly have we received the message? Not well enough according to a recent article in the journal *Marine Pollution Bulletin* co-authored by Dalhousie University's Mike James.

"We wanted to see if plastics ingestion in leatherbacks was hype or reality," says Dr. James, senior species at risk biologist for Fisheries and Oceans Canada and adjunct professor with Dalhousie's Department of Biology.

“It was a monumental effort that looked back at necropsies over the last century from all over the world,” he explains. (Necropsies are post-mortem examinations performed on animals.) “After reviewing the results of 371 necropsies since 1968, we discovered over one third of the turtles had ingested plastic.”

Since leatherbacks prefer eating jellyfish, it's widely believed they mistake bags or other plastics for their meals. Since jellyfish and marine debris concentrate where ocean water masses meet, leatherbacks feeding in these areas are vulnerable to ingesting plastic.

Once leatherbacks ingest plastic, thousands of spines lining the throat and esophagus make it nearly impossible to regurgitate. The plastic can lead to partial or even complete obstruction of the gastrointestinal tract, resulting in decreased digestive efficiency, energetic and reproductive costs and, for some, starvation.

“Plastics ingestion doesn't always cause death, but there are clearly health risks to the turtles,” says Dr. James.

Fascinated by reptiles as a child, Dr. James developed a lifelong interest in turtles, from raising them as a kid, to his PhD research and now as a biologist and conservationist. He says there are simple ways to stop these ongoing threats.

“The frustrating, yet hopeful aspect is that humans can easily begin addressing the solution, without major lifestyle changes,” says Dr. James. “It's as simple as reducing packaging and moving towards alternative, biodegradable materials and recycling.”

Leatherback turtles are classified as critically endangered world-wide. The true population size is not precisely known, as only adult females come ashore for nesting in remote tropical locations. During the summer and fall, Canadian waters support the highest density of foraging leatherbacks in the North Atlantic.

ENN News

Dry Australia 'exporting too much water'

March 16, 2009 - 4:29PM

Australia must urgently address its demand for water if it is to cope with challenges such as increasing water scarcity, a leading scientist says.

Addressing a conference in Melbourne, environmental scientist and polar adventurer Tim Jarvis said supply solutions such as desalination plants were only a part of the answer to tackling broader, climate change-related issues.

Knowing how to anticipate and manage changing demand was key to securing future supplies, with issues like potential mass migration - as a result of rising sea levels - further complicating the challenge, he said.

"Australia is a massive net exporter of virtual water, in other words, water we take to grow crops that we grow for export, such as wheat, rice, cotton," Mr Jarvis said.

"We have to address this fundamental discrepancy that exists between the fact we're the driest country yet we're one of the largest net virtual water exporters," he said.

"We should probably be growing crops better suited to the capability of the land.

"Supply strategies are all basically about building more reservoirs and accessing more water to supply what it is that we currently do.

"We should be focusing on demand strategies - we need to be looking at why it is we're demanding so much water and trying to reduce that demand."

Delegates at the Ozwater '09 conference were also told that Australia had to become a bigger and better leader in the worldwide water industry.

Mr Jarvis said while Australia faced its own significant water challenges, the problem was global, adding sea level rises and changes in weather patterns like El Nino had the potential to affect all parts of the globe.

"In terms of climate change ... in this country, we're going to get extremes, essentially. We're going to have more accentuated, elevated El Nino events, which will last longer and be more intense.

"Into that complexity, add to the mix greater monsoonal rains and drought conditions.

"Sea levels will rise resulting in a loss of productive land, which is very difficult to deal with.

"Australia can't work on its water problem in isolation. Developed countries like Australia need to provide the knowledge and technology it's renowned for," Mr Jarvis said.

AAP

Water scarcity 'now bigger threat than financial crisis'

By 2030, more than half the world's population will live in high-risk areas

By Geoffrey Lean, Environment Editor

Sunday, 15 March 2009

Humanity is facing "water bankruptcy" as a result of a crisis even greater than the financial meltdown now destabilising the global economy, two authoritative new reports show. They add that it is already beginning to take effect, and there will be no way of bailing the earth out of water scarcity.

The two reports – one by the world's foremost international economic forum and the other by 24 United Nations agencies – presage the opening tomorrow of the most important

conference on the looming crisis for three years. The World Water Forum, which will be attended by 20,000 people in Istanbul, will hear stark warnings of how half the world's population will be affected by water shortages in just 20 years' time, with millions dying and increasing conflicts over dwindling resources.

A report by the World Economic Forum, which runs the annual Davos meetings of the international business and financial elite, says that lack of water, will "soon tear into various parts of the global economic system" and "start to emerge as a headline geopolitical issue".

It adds: "The financial crisis gives us a stark warning of what can happen if known economic risks are left to fester. We are living in a water 'bubble' as unsustainable and fragile as that which precipitated the collapse in world financial markets. We are now on the verge of bankruptcy in many places with no way of paying the debt back."

The Earth – a blue-green oasis in the limitless black desert of space – has a finite stock of water. There is precisely the same amount of it on the planet as there was in the age of the dinosaurs, and the world's population of more than 6.7 billion people has to share the same quantity as the 300 million global inhabitants of Roman times.

Water use has been growing far faster than the number of people. During the 20th century the world population increased fourfold, but the amount of freshwater that it used increased nine times over. Already 2.8 billion people live in areas of high water stress, the report calculates, and this will rise to 3.9 billion – more than half the expected population of the world – by 2030. By that time, water scarcity could cut world harvests by 30 per cent – equivalent to all the grain grown in the US and India – even as human numbers and appetites increase.

Some 60 per cent of China's 669 cities are already short of water. The huge Yellow River is now left with only 10 per cent of its natural flow, sometimes failing to reach the sea altogether. And the glaciers of the Himalayas, which act as gigantic water banks supplying two billion people in Asia, are melting ever faster as global warming accelerates. Meanwhile devastating droughts are crippling Australia and Texas.

The World Water Development Report, compiled by 24 UN agencies under the auspices of Unesco, adds that shortages are already beginning to constrain economic growth in areas as diverse as California, China, Australia, India and Indonesia. The report, which will be published tomorrow, also expects water conflicts to break out in the Middle East, Haiti, Sri Lanka, Colombia and other countries.

"Conflicts about water can occur at all scales," it warns. "Hydrological shocks" brought about by climate change are likely to "increase the risk of major national and international security threats".

The Independent

Authorities monitor waterways in wake of fires

Posted Mon Mar 16, 2009 3:50pm AEDT

Updated Mon Mar 16, 2009 4:28pm AEDT



Washout: some bushfire sediment will be seen in parts of the Yarra River (ABC News)

Run-off from bushfire-hit areas of Victoria is contaminating the Yarra River with a black sludge which is posing a threat to fish and wildlife like platypuses.

Environmental groups say they will be closely monitoring Victorian waterways as sediment from the bushfires flows downstream and out to sea.

Following heavy weekend rainfall in some parts of the state, ash and debris are making their way into creeks and the Yarra River.

With more than 900 kilometres of waterways in the burnt out areas, stopping the sediment is not possible.

Authorities will be looking at the possibility of releasing water from storages to flush out the waterways.

Environmental Protection Agency chairman Mick Burke says while river life will initially be disrupted by the bushfire sediment, marine species are expected to survive the polluted environment.

He says there are always concerns there will be some impact after sediment enters the catchments.

He says ash in the water will impact on freshwater life.

"We did some studies after the bushfires in 2003 in the north-east of the state and we found that those ash flows and sediment flows into streams do disrupt the life that lives in those streams," he said.

"In fact we could find very little [life] straight after the ash washed in.

"But within 12 to 18 months it returned to almost the same conditions as prior to the bushfires so the recovery should occur."

He says recovery of marine life in the river systems should be seen within a period of one to two years.

"It is a peak event, it does have an impact but that impact, as nature often does, reverses itself over a reasonable period of time," he said.

Over the weekend the Victorian Opposition said the most recent measure of faecal pollution showed massive levels of bacterial contamination over the past fortnight, with samples exceeding acceptable levels at every sampling point on the river.

Mr Burke says it is not unusual for the Yarra to be highly turbid after big rainfalls.

"We keep a close eye on faecal contamination in the Yarra River as one of the indicators of health for recreational pursuits on the Yarra," he said.

"We do know that there are high numbers after rainfall just before Moomba, as would be expected after a long dry period and a sharp rainfall event."

"I can say that as of last Wednesday, they were back to normal."

'Dramatic changes'

Melbourne Water's general manager of waterways, Chris Chesterfield, says people will see some dramatic changes in the Yarra River as some streams turn black.

"It's ash, it's sediment, it's organic material," he said.

"That fine material can coat the gills of fish and make it difficult for them to breathe. The organic material can lower oxygen levels in the river which again has an effect on the fauna."

He says longer term that can lead to algal blooms.

He says authorities are keeping a very close eye on water quality.

"If we get a combination of lot of input during a time of low flow, then there is the potential for fish kills," he said.

"We have both scientists and community members out there looking at the most vulnerable areas so that if we start to see those sorts of things happening, then we can respond."

Authorities will be keeping a close eye on platypus numbers.

ABC News

World Water Forum Opens to Scarcity Fears and Protests

ISTANBUL, Turkey, March 16, 2009 (ENS) - Global demand for water is greater today than it has ever been and demand will increase in the future, thousands of delegates to the Fifth World Water Forum in Istanbul heard at their opening session today. Driving the demand for water are population growth and mobility, rising living standards, changes in food consumption, and increased energy production by hydropower and biofuels finds a new assessment of the planet's freshwater resources by 26 United Nations agencies.

"With increasing shortages, good governance is more than ever essential for water management. Combating poverty also depends on our ability to invest in this resource," said the Director-General of UNESCO Koïchiro Matsuura, who presented the report to the Forum on behalf of the United Nations.

The report finds that corruption in the water sector may account for a rise of almost US\$50 billion in the cost of achieving the Millennium Development Goals on water and sanitation.

These eight goals, to be accomplished by 2015, were agreed in 2000 by all the world's countries and major development institutions.

Typical examples of corruption include falsified meter readings, favoritism in public equipment purchases, and nepotism in the allocation of public contracts. The report estimates that 30 percent of budgets can be siphoned off in some countries.

Yet these corrupt practices are rarely curbed, despite initiatives by some countries. Donors and investors have not been blind to this fact, and most developmental aid agencies have chosen to focus on countries with good anti-corruption records.

One of the six themes of the World Water Forum, governance and management, will address ways to limit corruption.

In his opening remarks, World Water Forum Secretary General Oktay Tabasaran stressed that the Forum's goal is to urgently address the issue of efficient water use.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul told delegates that water issues require attention at the highest levels of government.

With more than 28,000 participants in attendance, more than 100 thematic sessions are scheduled on topics such as global change and risk management; advancing human development and the Millennium Development Goals; managing and protecting water resources; finance; and education, knowledge and capacity development.

The world is on track to meet the drinking water target of the Millennium Development Goals, apart from Sub-Saharan Africa, which is lagging behind with about 340 million people lacking access to safe drinking water.

But the world is far from achieving the sanitation target. Half a billion people lack access to adequate sanitation in Africa alone and many other regions are also trailing. Current efforts will need to be doubled if we are to achieve the goals set by the United Nations, the report shows.

The link between poverty and water resources is clear - the number of people living on less than US\$1.25 a day is roughly equal to the number of people without access to safe drinking water.

This situation has a major impact on health. Almost 80 percent of diseases in developing countries are associated with water, causing some three million early deaths. At least, 5,000 children die every day from diarrhea - one every 17 seconds. About one-tenth of all illnesses



From left, Albert II, Prince of Monaco; Abdullah Gül, President of the Republic of Turkey; and Emomali Rakhmon, President of Tajikistan. (Photo courtesy [Earth Negotiations Bulletin](#))

worldwide could be avoided by improving water supply, sanitation, hygiene and management of water resources, the report shows.

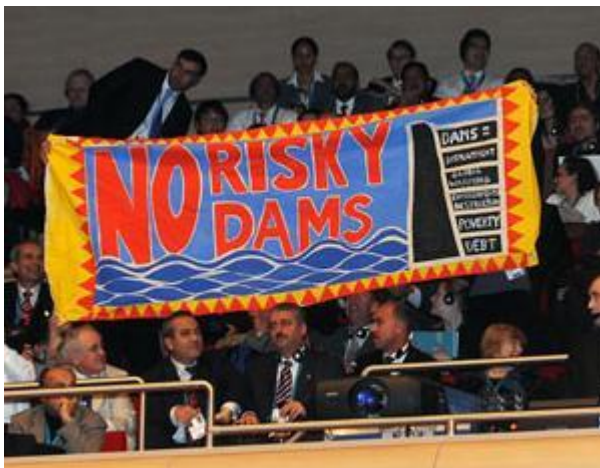
Meanwhile, energy demand is accelerating, and with it, water demand. Global energy demands are expected to grow by as much as 55 percent through 2030. China and India alone would account for about 45 percent of this increase.

Electricity generation from hydropower is projected to increase at an average annual rate of 1.7 percent from 2004 to 2030 – an overall increase of 60 percent.

Criticized for their heavy footprint on the environment and their tendency to displace large numbers of people, dams still appear to offer a solution, given diminishing fossil fuel supplies, the need to shift to cleaner energy sources and the potential use of added storage in adapting to the increased hydrologic variability and uncertainty due to climate change.

Many new dams are planned for developing countries, where the potential for hydropower is considerable.

The conflict over dams erupted today at the World Water Forum opening ceremony.



International Rivers protesters hold their banner up at the World Water Forum opening ceremony. (Photo courtesy ENB)

loss. Continuing to build destructive dams will bring unacceptable risks to people and the planet."

Schneider said, "The Ilisu Dam in Southeast Turkey is a symbol of outmoded water and energy policies which destroy communities and the environment. We call on the participants of the World Water Forum to embrace smarter and cleaner solutions which are readily available."

While some Forum participants applauded the protest, the police detained the two protestors. Meanwhile, outside the conference center riot police used water cannons and tear gas against 150 protestors who shouted "water for life, not for profit" in opposition to what they view as

Two staff members of the California-based advocacy group International Rivers were arrested and detained for unfurling a banner. They will be deported tomorrow morning or face a year in Turkish prison.

As the opening ceremony began, International Rivers' South Asia Director Ann-Kathrin Schneider and climate campaigner Payal Parekh unfurled a banner reading "No Risky Dams" in protest of what they believe to be the World Water Forum's promotion of destructive dams. They shouted slogans as the chair of the World Water Forum and government dignitaries were about to take the stage.

As she was being detained, Parekh said, "Large dams have left a legacy of lies and

the World Water Forum's agenda of water privatization and river destruction. Seventeen protestors were arrested.

Peter Bosshard, International Rivers Policy Director, whose opinion piece on the World Water Forum and large dams was published in today's "Turkish Daily News," said "The response by the Turkish authorities highlights the undemocratic nature of the World Water Forum. Two protestors being deported for unfurling a banner is unacceptable. We call on the World Water Council to respect and support the rights of all people to speak freely and protest peacefully."

The World Water Forum takes place every three years. It is organized by the World Water Council, a membership organization that includes the large development banks, associations of professional engineers, academic institutions, some of the largest aid and environmental organizations, United Nations agencies, national and local government agencies, and dam construction companies.

ENS News

Lead Ammunition No Longer OK in National Parks

WASHINGTON, DC, March 16, 2009 (ENS) - The National Park Service is stepping up efforts to eliminate poisonous lead from national parks by persuading hunters and fishermen to use shot and sinkers made of less toxic metals.

"Our goal is to eliminate the use of lead ammunition and lead fishing tackle in parks by the end of 2010," Acting National Park Service Director Dan Wenk said today. "We want to take a leadership role in removing lead from the environment."

The new lead reduction efforts include changes in the activities of National Park Service staff, such as culling operations or the dispatching of wounded or sick animals.

Rangers and resource managers will use non-lead ammunition to prevent environmental contamination as well as lead poisoning of scavenger species that may feed upon the carcasses.

Non-toxic substitutes for lead ammunition made in the United States are now widely available, including tungsten, copper, and steel, says Wenk.

Lead is an environmental contaminant affecting many areas of the world, including U.S. national parks.

The National Park Service will develop educational materials to increase awareness about the consequences of lead exposure and the benefits of using lead-free ammunition and fishing tackle.

Some hunters just want to be left alone to use lead ammunition as they have for years. One anonymous commenter on a hunting and fishing site wrote, "The greenies use the toxic lead issue as a club to beat up sportsmen. Maybe they'll start a Dept. of Homeland Lead Elimination."

But across the United States, there is an accelerating trend to expand efforts to reduce lead contamination associated with firearms and hunting. California and Arizona have recently implemented mandatory and voluntary bans, respectively, on lead ammunition to facilitate California condor recovery.



A California condor spreads its wings over the Grand Canyon. (Photo credit unknown)

Condors are the largest North American land birds - their wingspan can exceed nine feet. Condors mate for life and can live to be 80 years old. In 1800, condors ranged from Baja California to British Columbia, Canada.

Endangered for nearly 40 years, condors were removed from the wild in 1987 to reestablish the species through captive breeding.

Condors are being reintroduced into the wild at Grand Canyon National Park and Vermilion Cliffs in Arizona and at Pinnacles National Monument and on the Big Sur coast in California.

Currently, there are 215 condors, 126 in captivity and 89 in the wild - 49 in Arizona and 40 in California.

They are recaptured once or twice each year to make sure they are not suffering from lead poisoning, one of two mortality factors hindering their progress.

The birds feed on carcasses of large animals such as deer, cattle and sea mammals and sometimes ingest lead shot. Educating hunters on the threat lead poses and encouraging them to use unleaded ammunition is a critical part of the condor recovery program's success.

Resource managers recognize that hunting and fishing play an historical role in the complicated and intensive management of wildlife populations, says Wenk. Because of this history, these activities continue in some parks and, in some cases, even enhance the park's primary purpose to preserve natural environments and native species, Wenk says.

"The reduction and eventual removal of lead on park service lands will benefit humans, wildlife, and ecosystems inside and outside park boundaries and continue our legacy of resource stewardship," he said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has banned lead sinkers in two national wildlife refuges and Yellowstone National Park. Restrictions have been discussed on the use of lead sinkers and jigs at other national wildlife refuges where loons and trumpeter swans breed.

New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont and New York have banned the use and sale of small lead fishing sinkers.

In June 2000, the Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife Board voted to prohibit the use of all lead sinkers for the taking of fish in Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs, the two bodies of water that support the core of that state's loon population.

ENS News

Klamath Tribe Battles 'Recreational Genocide'

Written by SHELLEY BLUEJAY PIERCE

BOZEMAN, Mont. – Over the past many months, new threats to the Klamath River salmon populations have prompted decisive action by the Karuk Tribe in California. Leaf Hillman, Vice-Chairman for the Tribe, told Native American Times in an interview this week that the recent attacks upon their ancestral fishing grounds are, “Nothing more than Recreational Genocide.”



Ron Reed, Karuk tribal citizen, uses the traditional method of dip-netting for salmon at the Ishi Pishi Falls area on the Klamath River. KARUK TRIBE Photo

Dams, drought, developmental expansion and environmental contaminations have plagued the local rivers and experts have said that California may be faced with the worst fisheries collapse in history.

In 2008, the Karuk Tribe, California Trout, and Friends of the North Fork formally petitioned California Fish and Game to restrict suction dredge mining. This controversial gold mining technique has brought strong criticism from local groups who demand that state agencies limit the recreational mining technique.

The Karuk, aided by support from the Tsi-Akim Maidu Tribe, the Sierra Fund, various sport-fishing groups, and several other conservation organizations are fighting to protect the endangered fish populations. Despite strong opposition by all of these groups, the agency decided not to act on the petition, allowing the recreational mining to continue.

As a result of the Karuk Tribe filing a lawsuit in 2006, the Fish and Game department is under a court order to re-write mining permit rules statewide. Due to extreme budget constraints in California, however, the agency has yet to act on the new mining rule mandate.

Recently, a recreational gold mining club, referring to themselves as, “The New 49ers,”

legally challenged the Karuk Tribe's right to fish at their ancestral fishing area, Ishi Pishi Falls. The hobbyist miners contend that this violation of the California state constitution, allows the Tribe to kill far more salmon than gold mining and other activities combined and that the commission has illegally granted fishing privileges to a specific group of people, specifically, the Karuks.

Dr. Craig Tucker, spokesman for the Karuk, told Native American Times, "Depending on how far the mining groups want to challenge the ancestral fishing rights, the tribe may seek federal fishing rights as a remedy. In the meantime, we are asking the Department of Fish and Game Director, Don Koch, to immediately implement emergency restrictions on where and when suction dredging can take place. This same authority is used to restrict recreational and commercial fishing when the fish runs are low."

The groups banding together to protect the fish species in the Klamath River are battling against a mining process called "suction dredging." These dredges, powered by gas or diesel engines, use powerful vacuum hoses to pull the gravel and sediment from the bottom of riverbeds. This sediment material passes through a sluice box and allows the heavier gold particles to settle into a series of riffles. After the gold is removed, the balance of the dredged material is often dumped back into the river.

This dredging technique is known to redistribute toxic mercury into the environment. As stated in earlier press reports, Izzy Martin, Director of the Sierra Fund, explained, "There is a lot of mercury settled on the bottom of these rivers as the result of gold mining operations in the 1800's. Dredging reintroduces mercury to the stream creating a toxic hazard for fish and people."

Mercury contamination has become a global concern as it applies to fish species in that testing has revealed increasingly high levels of mercury in fish populations that may be harmful when consumed. Exposure to mercury can lead to mental retardation, birth defects and neurological damage.

Suction dredging has come increasingly under attack as declining numbers of fish species such as steelhead, Coho salmon, green sturgeon, and lamprey are reported. Damage to the spawning grounds for the fish and the environmental impacts to critical river habitats are drawing the varied groups, including the Karuk Tribe, to take strong action to stop recreational mining.

"Dredging disturbs spawning gravels and kills salmon eggs and immature lamprey that reside in the gravel for up to seven years before maturing. In a system like the Klamath where salmon can be stressed due to poor water quality, having a dredge running in the middle of the stream affects the fishes ability to reach their spawning grounds," explained Toz Soto, lead fisheries biologist for the Karuk Tribe, in previous press reports.

California Fish and Game manages suction dredge permits and opponents to this type of mining state that the CFG sustains a significant financial loss since the mining fees fail to cover expenses. Figures given by these groups explain that this amounts to spending \$1.25 million per year to subsidize the destruction of California fisheries by gold mining hobbyists.

Many of the recreational miners come into California from other states because the mining laws are less restrictive there.

The Karuk Tribe, indigenous to the Klamath River region, states that the threat to them is greater than ever. Vice-Chairman Hillman told Native American Times, "The first gold rush

killed more than half our people in 10 years. This modern gold rush continues to kill our fish and our culture.”

Hillman added, “The salmon populations have been effected in so many ways from dams on the rivers to environmental damage and mining. As it is now, we cannot harvest enough fish for our ceremonies or to meet our families’ food needs. The recreational gold miners are just a repeat of what began over 100 years ago.”

Though the Karuk Tribe does harvest salmon for food and ceremonial use only, the Tribe rarely harvests more than 200 fish. Since the population of the Tribe is approximately 4,200 members, the amount of fish taken from Ishi Pishi Falls doesn’t begin to meet the needs of their members. With recent drought warnings across California being issued, the Karuk fear that the salmon numbers will be far less given the stresses all ready upon the fish.

In response to the newest attacks from the recreational gold miners, The New 49-ers, Leaf Hillman stated, “Our fishing grounds have been used by the Karuk long before this land was called ‘America.’ We still use traditional dip nets to fish for the migrating salmon and our way of catching them allows us to release the more endangered species back into the river so that their populations can increase.”

Vice Chairman Hillman concluded by telling Native American Times, “We will not be removed from our traditional fishing grounds in favor of these miners. Harvesting and consuming salmon is a fundamental part of our Karuk culture. The recreational miners now threaten more than the survival of fish, they threaten the culture of the Karuk.”

Native American Times

European water use “unsustainable”



The current levels of water being extracted and consumed across Europe are “unsustainable” and must be reversed, experts have warned.

A report from the European Environment Agency says widely-reported problems of drought in the south are being replicated in the north.

The after effects of climate change will worsen the severity and duration of droughts in years to come, the EEA says.

“We are living beyond our means when it comes to water,” said the agency’s executive director Professor Jacqueline McGlade.

“The short-term solution to water scarcity has been to extract ever greater amounts of water from our surface and groundwater assets. Overexploitation is not sustainable. It has a heavy impact on the quality and quantity of the remaining water as well as the ecosystems which depend on it.

“We have to cut demand, minimise the amount of water that we are extracting and increase the efficiency of its use.”

The report’s key findings recommend:

- Public water supply system leakages must be addressed
- Water should be priced according to volume used
- Drought management plans should be implemented more extensively
- Water-intensive bio-energy crops should be avoided where water is scarce
- Combination of crop selection and irrigation methods should be encouraged
- Surveillance, fines or penalties should be introduced to prevent illegal abstraction of water

According to the EEA, 285 cubic kilometres of freshwater are extracted in Europe annually, equal to two Olympic swimming pools per capita.

The Shropshire Star

Kangaroo court tied over culling in Aussie capital

4:00AM Thursday Mar 19, 2009



Canberra has among the densest populations of the common eastern grey kangaroo in Australia. Photo / AP

CANBERRA - The Australian Capital Territory has created a stir by suggesting that Canberra's excess kangaroos need to be shot in regular culls.

Horrified conservationists vowed to demonstrate if authorities tried it.

Canberra has among the densest populations of the common eastern grey kangaroo in Australia, and they are regularly seen hopping in parks and elsewhere in the city.

The national emblem is degrading its own habitats and adding to threats posed to rare insects and lizards.

Kangaroos hopping across streets are a frequent traffic hazard in Canberra, and they can pose other problems - as one family in the city discovered last week when a confused and panicked kangaroo leapt through a bedroom window and bounded around the house until it could be thrust out the front door.

Jon Stanhope, the Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory where Canberra is located, released a draft plan on Tuesday describing how his Government would reduce Canberra's kangaroo population by shooting them - a method that has long divided this community of 330,000 people.

The plan does not say how many kangaroos should be killed.

Supporters say the absence of more effective biological controls means shooting is the most humane way to control the animals.

"There are probably more eastern grey kangaroos in Canberra now than any time in the last 100 years," Stanhope said. "I think we have perhaps tried too hard not to cull."

The territory's Government has been involved since 1998 in research to develop an oral contraceptive for kangaroos, but none is yet effective in the wild.

The report ruled out trapping and trucking kangaroos to where they are less abundant, because the process was expensive, unproven and illogical given there was no threat to the species' survival.

Pat O'Brien, president of the Wildlife Protection Association of Australia, warned of protests if culling was tried.

"The whole thing is a propaganda exercise to get public support for killing kangaroos," O'Brien said. Numbers were high, "but there's certainly not too many of them".

The killing of 400 kangaroos out of 600 at an abandoned military site in Canberra last year triggered several heated protests.

Those kangaroos were killed with lethal injections because firearms were judged to be too dangerous at the site.

- AP

Australia's Dry Run

What will happen when the climate starts to change and the rivers dry up and a whole way of life comes to an end? The people of the Murray-Darling Basin are finding out right now.

By Robert Draper

Photograph by Amy Toensing



On the side of a road somewhere in southeastern Australia sits a man in a motionless pickup truck, considering the many ways in which his world has dried up. The two most obvious ways are in plain view. Just beyond his truck, his dairy cattle graze on the roadside grass. The heifers are all healthy, thank God. But there are only 70 of them. Five years ago, he had nearly 500. The heifers are feeding along a public road—"not strictly legal," the man concedes, but what choice does he have? There is no more grass on the farm he owns. His land is now a desert scrubland where the slightest breeze lifts a hazy wall of dust. He can no longer afford to buy grain, which is evident from the other visible reminder of his plight: the bank balance displayed on the laptop perched on the dashboard of his truck. The man, who has never been rich but also never poor, has piled up hundreds of thousands of dollars in debt. The cows he gazes at through his windshield—that is all the income he has left.

His name is Malcolm Adlington, and for the past 36 of his 52 years he has been a dairy farmer, up at five every morning for the first milking of the day. Not so long ago Adlington used to look forward to a ritual called a dairy farm walk. State agriculture officials would round up local dairy farmers to visit a model farm—often Adlington's, a small but prosperous operation outside of Barham in New South Wales. The farmers would study Adlington's ample grain-fed heifers. They would inquire about his lush hay paddocks—which seeds and fertilizers he favored—and Adlington was only too happy to share information, knowing they would reciprocate when it came their turn. That was the spirit of farming, and of Australia. A

man could freely experiment, freely reveal his farming strategies, with the quiet confidence that his toil and ingenuity would win out.

"That," Adlington observes today, "was before the drought came along." A decade ago, Adlington employed five farmhands. "It's just the wife and I now," he says. "The last three years we've had essentially no water. That's what is killing us."

Except there is water. You can see it rippling underneath the main road just a mile from where his truck is parked. It's the Southern Main Canal, an irrigation channel from Australia's legendary Murray River, which along with the Darling River and other waterways is the water source for the South Australia capital of Adelaide and provides 65 percent of all the water used for the country's agriculture. Adlington possesses a license to draw 273 million gallons of water annually from the Murray-Darling River system. The problem is the water has been promised to too many players: the city of Adelaide, the massive corporate farms, the protected wetlands. And so, for the past three years, the New South Wales government has forbidden Adlington from taking little more than a drop. He still has to pay for his allocation of water. He just can't use it. Not until the drought ends. Adlington finds himself chafing at the unfairness of it all. "It's the lack of rain," he says, "but also the silly man-made rules." Those rules seem to favor everyone except farmers like him. Meanwhile, he's selling off his treasured livestock.

"It's easy to get depressed," he says in a calm, flat voice. "You ask yourself, Why have I done it?" Malcolm Adlington didn't use to doubt himself, but then he has not been himself lately. The drought has depleted more than just his soil. He finds himself bickering with his wife, Marianne, hollering at the kids. He can't afford the gas to take Marianne into town as he used to. With all of the other farmhouses closing up, the nearest boy for his son to play with now lives ten miles away.

Adlington has put his own family acreage up for sale. "Haven't had one person look at it," he says. Not his first choice, obviously. Not what an Adlington would ever wish to do. But when the hell did his dad or granddad ever have to deal with a bloody seven-year drought?

It has been three parched years since any dairy farm walk that Adlington can remember. Instead, there are morale-boosting events with upbeat monikers like Tackling Tough Times or Blokes' Day Out—or Pamper Day, which Adlington's wife happens to be attending today. At Pamper Day, a few dozen farming women receive free massages and pedicures and hairstyling advice. A drought-relief worker serves the women tea and urges them to discuss what's on their minds. They all share different chapters of the same story.

"It's been two years without a crop."

"The family farm is on its knees."

"We sold most of our sheep stock—beautiful animals we'd had for 20 years."

"I can't stand lying in bed every night and hearing the cattle bellow from hunger."

Still, the most poignant gatherings are out of public view. One takes place in a modest farmhouse near Swan Hill. A government rural financial counselor sits at the kitchen table, advising a middle-aged stone-fruit farmer and his wife to declare bankruptcy, since their debt exceeds the value of their farm and a hailstorm has just ravaged their crop.

Holding his wife's hand, tears leaking out of his eyes, the farmer manages to get out the words: "I have absolutely nothing to go on for."

The woman says she checks every couple of hours to make sure her husband is not lying in his orchard with a self-inflicted gunshot wound in his head. When the meeting is over, the counselor adds their names to a suicide watch list.

Back in Barham, Malcolm Adlington sits alone in his truck going nowhere—watching his herd dwindle, his meadows receding into desert scrubland. All he can do is watch.

The world's most arid inhabited continent is perilously low on water. Beyond that simple fact, nothing about Australia's water crisis is straightforward. Though Australians have routinely weathered dry spells, the current seven-year drought is the most devastating in the country's 117 years of recorded history. The rain, when it does fall, seems to have a spiteful mind of its own—snubbing the farmlands during winter crop-sowing season, flooding the towns of Queensland, and then spilling out to sea. To many, the erratic precipitation patterns bear the ominous imprint of a human-induced climate shift. Global warming is widely believed to have increased the frequency and severity of natural disasters like this drought. What seems indisputable is that, as Australian environmental scientist Tim Kelly puts it, "we've got a three-quarters of a degree [Celsius] increase in temperature over the past 15 years, and that's driving a lot more evaporation from our water. That's climate change."

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The once quintessential Australian swagger has now come to resemble, in the wake of the water crisis, what Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross famously termed the "stages of grief": denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. In what is shaping up to be a cautionary tale for other developed nations, the world's 15th biggest economy is learning hard lessons about the limits of natural resources in an era of climate change. The upside is that Australians may be the ones to teach those lessons to the rest of the industrialized world.

In the Riverland district of South Australia, a 48-year-old man drives through his citrus orchard on a bulldozer, mowing down 800 of his Valencia and navel orange trees. The man knows what he is doing. Something must give. For decades the mighty Murray River transformed this land into a lush patchwork of olive, citrus, apricot, and avocado orchards. But now the water bureaucrats have announced that South Australians may use only 16 percent of their annual allocation. And so Mick Punturiero, a third-generation farmer of Italian descent, has made a hard choice: He elects to sacrifice his orange trees and reserve what water he has for his prized lime orchard. Underneath the roaring of the engine, Punturiero hears the cracking of muscular trunks he has nurtured for 20 years. And what roils inside him is something darker than sorrow.

A few weeks later two state officials come to Punturiero's village of Cooltong, just outside Renmark, a few hours' drive from Adelaide. They have an announcement to make. The catchment levels at Hume Dam have been revised, and it's good news: The water allocation has been doubled, to 32 percent! The farmers in attendance are not overjoyed. Truthfully, with the drought bearing down on them, 32 percent of what they need is not enough to save their orchards. All Punturiero can think is, I could have kept my orange trees.

Two months later, Punturiero is still possessed of operatic rage as he pours a guest some homemade lime juice and drops his meaty frame into a chair. Why has it taken them so long to recognize this water crisis? he demands. "Let's go to THEIR house! Tell them which child THEY have to sacrifice to save their whole family! Let's put THEIR family in a pile!"

He takes a deep breath. "I get very upset talking about this issue," he says. "I get very, very, VERY agitated over it. End of the day, what's been done is criminal." As to the actual crime and its perpetrators, Mick Punturiero flails with theories. Mostly he blames government officials who encouraged agricultural development beyond sustainable levels. Even in his more reflective moments, he does not entertain the notion that the problem arises from the folly of growing citrus on the wrong side of "the line."

The line is Goyder's Line, a boundary that marks the limit of sufficient rainfall for crops to grow in South Australia. In 1865 a surveyor named George Goyder set out on a remarkable journey by horseback to trace the point where grassland gave way to sparse bush country. Australia's settlers relied on Goyder's Line to demarcate arable land from land unsuitable for agriculture. Except when they didn't: Renmark, for instance, lay on the wrong side of

Goyder's Line, but that did not stop two Canadian brothers named Chaffey from developing an irrigation system in Renmark two decades after the surveyor's warning.

As it turns out, the Chaffeys were three decades ahead of their time. The Australian government inaugurated its first "soldier settlement" scheme after World War I, offering land, water, and farm machinery to veterans. In the decades that followed, orchards and vineyards and wheat fields miraculously sprang up from former scrub desert north of Goyder's Line. Canal after canal was dug to deliver the Murray's water to the new farmland—and later, to sprawling irrigation districts dedicated to the nascent (and highly water-thirsty) rice industry. By the early 1970s, Australia was a major exporter of such crops, its farming lobby had emerged as a formidable political force, and the government was selling off water licenses to any bloke who fancied being his own boss and who wouldn't whinge when the odd drought came along.

Mick Punturiero's grandfather was a Calabrian émigré who bought his first acreage from a retiring World War II veteran, one of thousands more soldiers enticed by the government to develop the basin. The audacity of farming in such an arid area was not readily apparent to Punturiero's grandfather, who had no education other than in how to grow an exquisite grape.

Soon the Murray began to run low, and fields started to salt up. Unfortunately, the prescriptions only helped spread the disease. Leakproof irrigation technology meant that less water returned to the system. Salt interceptors kept crops from being poisoned, but only by pumping out limitless quantities of water. In 1995 the Murray-Darling Basin Commission finally introduced a cap on how much water each state could draw from the river. But the binge didn't end. Farmers who owned water rights but had never used them proceeded to sell their now coveted "sleeper licenses" to others who would. Industrialists were offered tax incentives to create superfarms and introduced vast olive and almond groves to the basin.

Meanwhile, the governments of New South Wales and Queensland routinely flouted the extraction cap and continued to hand out licenses. "The increase in diversions from the Murray River in the late nineties was rather like drinkers in a bar," says Malcolm Turnbull. "The barkeeper says, 'Last orders, gentlemen.' And everyone rushes in to drink as much as they can before they get thrown out. That's what we were doing. Just as it became apparent that resources were overtaxed, there were more claims on it."

A decade ago, Mick Punturiero had grown to be South Australia's biggest lime producer and was doing all the right things. He employed the latest water conservation technology. What water he did not need he donated back to the state for environmental usage. Even so, he could see where the increasing demands on the Murray would lead. He recalls warning a state official in the late 1990s, "You need to stop this development. We're poorly managing our water resources."

He remembers the official's words as if uttered yesterday: "Mick, you can't control progress."

Then came the drought, which began like any other, in 2002. But it has not ended, and now the binge is over. Though dryland farmers who depend on rain have watched their corn and wheat fields dwindle into dust plains, they at least have been accustomed to braving parched seasons. By contrast, "irrigated farmers have always had water, and never in their wildest dreams did they think somebody would turn the tap off," says rural financial counselor Don Seward. But as the drought advanced, the allocations have plummeted: 95 percent. Then 50. Then 32. And now, in Mick Punturiero's case, back to 16 percent.

"The river's no different from the highways every Australian pays for through his taxes," he argues. "Every Australian has paid for the locks. We've paid for the Dartmouth Dam, which was supposed to drought-proof South Australia. So why don't you give me my full allocation? Give it to me! It's rightfully mine!"

Punturiero sees himself as the faithful caretaker of land that the Australian government gave to reward the service of young men who died on the sands of Gallipoli. He sees that land as a gold ingot that the government has turned into a lump of lead. He sees powerful interests profiting at his expense. He sees new irrigators downriver sucking the system dry. He also sees fellow farmers much like his grandfather, who never bothered to put a dime into savings, tumbling into insolvency. Or committing suicide. And he understands their bottomless despair. He feels it himself at times—"boxed into a corner," he says in a suddenly depleted voice, "and I can't defend my family no more."

But fury returns. Anger is all Mick Punturiero has at the moment. He will not go down without a fight—that he pledges: "You won't see me crawling off the farm on me hands and knees—not unless I see some bloody heads roll first!"

It is hard for many Australians to reconcile the sputtering, surgically disfigured version of the Murray River with the shimmering idyll of their younger days. At the river's mouth, a flourishing ecosystem had long been nourished by the natural ebb and flow of seawater and fresh water. The ocean would rush in when the river ran low and then be pushed out by fresh water as the first hard rains drained down the Murray to the sea. Today the overallocation of irrigation water, coupled with the drought, has brought the river to a virtual standstill. So that the beleaguered Murray can meet the sea, its mouth must be dredged around the clock. Without dredging, the mouth would silt up, cutting off fresh water to the lagoon ecosystem called The Coorong and to nearby Lake Alexandrina.

It is here, every morning, that a 65-year-old silver-haired fisherman in waders and a Windbreaker navigates his aluminum boat out into the waters of Lake Alexandrina, or what is left of it. Long humps of silt-covered land rise up out of the water. Since most everyone else in his line of work has moved away, Henry Jones has the lake to himself—not counting the pelicans, though he, in fact, does count them, thinking: *Maybe a tenth of what there was. And no white ibis. No blue-billed duck.* Edging up to the northern Coorong lagoon, Jones reaches into the water to collect his gill nets. Among his catch there is not a single silver perch or Murray cod or bony bream. The salty water has done them in. Only carp survive. Dozens of carp, which did not even exist in the lower lakes a quarter century ago, and whose presence signals the demise of the freshwater environment.

Jones has adapted to the changes in a way the vanishing species cannot. He has found retailers who will buy all the carp he can catch. And truthfully, he could adapt further. If, as is expected, the government constructs a weir near the bottom of the river to give urban dwellers in Adelaide more water, Lake Alexandrina and its sibling Lake Albert would become saltwater lakes. "Personally, I'd probably be better off catching mullet, flounder, black bream, and a couple of other marine species," he says as he sits at the dining room table of the house he built 40 years ago. "But it's just not right. These lakes have always been freshwater. It's just a massive change. It's nonsense."

The drought has left his community reeling. Local winemakers have recently been informed that the Murray River would no longer be available for their vineyards. And Jones is a close friend to the elders of the Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal people, whose 30,000-year domain over the river abruptly ended when the expedition led by Capt. Charles Sturt arrived at the

Murray's mouth in 1830. For the Ngarrindjeri, the drought has led to the disappearance of black swan eggs, freshwater mussels, and other sacred totems that are vital to their spiritual and physical nourishment.

Still, in the scramble to claim a share of Australia's diminishing water supply, these people at least have a voice. The creatures of the lakes and wetlands do not. "In a crisis, the entitlement the environment supposedly has is totally subjective to political whims," says Murray River environmental manager Judy Goode, who refers to herself as "the manager of dead and dying things." Even protected ecosystems—such as The Coorong and, in the northern basin, the Macquarie Marshes of bird-nesting legend—receive no special dispensation, so long as there is a "critical human need" to be met.

So Henry Jones has become the de facto voice for the dead and dying, delivering a well-honed, if mournful, monologue to whoever will listen: *All the systems are on the point of collapse. Two-thirds of The Coorong is already dead—its salinity is almost that of the Dead Sea.* What Jones finds, as he travels around the basin to argue that water must be allocated for his Coorong and his lakes, is a sentiment that the whole water crisis is the environmentalists' fault anyway. The greenies are derided for their shrill sanctimony. Farmers express indignation that any of their precious "working river" is lost to the sea. They tell Jones that it makes more sense to divert the Murray all the way inland, officially consigning the river to eternal servitude as an irrigation channel, while fishermen buck up and learn to live off the sea. In cotton-growing areas wholly dependent on irrigation, Jones says, "I'm lucky to get out with my life."

The Coorong represents only one glaring example of the Murray-Darling Basin's imperiled ecosystem. For example, Australian scientists and government officials were caught unaware when farther upriver some invisible drought-tolerance threshold was crossed and hundreds of thousands of river red gum trees—in the world's biggest such forest—suddenly died. And of late, a fresh concern has emerged: that the wetlands may be brewing toxins. Robbed of their seasonal flushing, and instead unnaturally submerged for decades, the swamps have become so dry that the crusted silt has reacted with air to form large surfaces of sulfuric acid. Scientists haven't fully gauged the threat to animals and people. For now, as University of Adelaide water economist Mike Young observes, "you wouldn't want to put your hand in it."

Adelaide may have the dubious distinction of being the world's first industrialized city to live in a constant state of water shortage. Its unhealthy reliance on the Murray—up to 90 percent of its water supply in low-rainfall periods—is symbolized by two unsightly pipelines that stretch more than 30 miles from the river to the city's water tanks. Since shortly after the drought's onset in 2002, the South Australia capital has been on water restrictions. Its residents dutifully cart buckets of used shower and washing machine water outside to their gardens. Native plants and artificial lawns are de rigueur. The racks of hardware stores are crammed with soil wetters, gray water diverter hoses, water-restricting shower nozzles, four-minute shower timers, and other tributes to water austerity. The radio "talk-back" shows have become reliable outlets for ranting about this or that water abuser.

Still, civic virtue is no substitute for lasting reform. The nation's water crisis won't be solved by "drought-proofing" Adelaide, which, despite its dependence on the Murray, claims only 6 percent of the total drain on the river. "South Australia's very aware that they're living precariously," says Wilderness Society environmental activist Peter Owen. "We're not going to save our river system by standing in buckets."

Meanwhile, outside of the Murray-Darling Basin, the drought has exposed serious flaws in the water resources of Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane, among other urban areas. The hard lesson of Australia's dry run is that the country's jaunty boosterism no longer suffices as the way forward. "I work on the assumption that we're going to see more episodes of this type of drought in the future because of climate change," says Malcolm Turnbull, whose Liberal Party leader John Howard, a longtime climate change skeptic, was turned out of office in November 2007. "A prudent minister assumes it's going to get hotter and drier, and plans accordingly."

But what does this mean, really? Will it mean the construction of expensive desalination plants in Adelaide, Sydney, and elsewhere, with escalating energy bills? Will it be possible to develop drought-resistant crop varieties to keep food production up? Or to drastically reduce the water needs of dairy farmers who use a thousand gallons of water for each gallon of milk they produce? Will the Murray River's hard labor continue, or will it see mercy? A robust new landscape is required, and it's up to Australia to show the rest of the industrialized world what that new landscape will be. For starters, it may be a landscape that's come to terms with limitations. Goyder's Line is even more relevant today, as drought and climate change give new urgency to the question of how intensively marginal agricultural land should be worked—or whether it should be left fallow.

After all, the final stage of coping with loss is acceptance. Back in 1962 Frank Whelan was the third farmer in his New South Wales district to receive a water allocation to grow rice, six years before the town of Coleambally was incorporated. Until this season he always had a crop. Although he's 74, his memory is as clear as his eyes. Droughts, market fluctuations, wrangles with the government, and, yes, incessant sniping by environmentalists that rice requires enormous quantities of water and therefore has no rightful place on this semiarid continent—Whelan remembers Coleambally prospering through all the adversity. He remembers town gatherings when the news was almost always good, because the irrigation water was always there.

Today the mood is different as Whelan sits in the local bowling hall with 200 fellow farmers. For four hours they listen as a panel of experts say there will be no irrigation water for Coleambally for the foreseeable future. They are suggesting new economic avenues for the town—things that have nothing to do with rice. A number of farmers voice their outrage. They blame the bureaucrats. They blame the environmentalists. They blame New South Wales. But Whelan says nothing. He just sits there, his pale eyes blinking, occasionally rubbing his wrinkled forehead with a hand that includes two fingers mangled by a farm equipment accident.

He has seen this coming. With the onset of the drought, he compacted his soil with a padfoot roller to minimize leakage. He began to cut off some of his acreage from water. Then still more acreage. All the while, the lifelong farmer watched as national production of rice dropped from more than a million tons a year to 21,000, contributing to the food shortage being felt across the globe. Australia, which has served as a food bowl to the world, is searching for a future. Whatever that future may be, Whelan knows the rice-growing town of Coleambally will never play the same role.

And so after the meeting breaks up, a fellow farmer sidles up to him and asks, "Well, what do ya think, mate?"

The question is one that will continue to preoccupy Coleambally for some time to come. At one point, residents actually tossed in the towel and offered to sell the entire town and its

water supply to the commonwealth for \$2.4 billion. A few days later, they rescinded the offer, digging in their heels and insisting the town will remain a vital food provider.

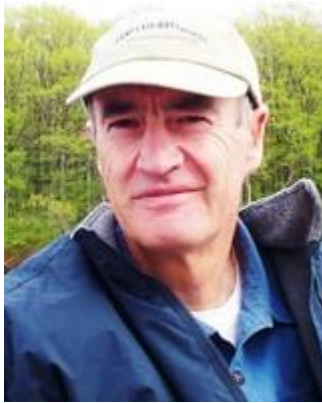
The wrangle will continue, in Coleambally and throughout Australia. But some have arrived, however reluctantly, at a point of acceptance. A year after the reporting for this story began, dairy farmer Malcolm Adlington sold off the rest of his cattle and now drives a minibus for a living. The citrus grower Mick Punturiero uprooted half of his orchard and acknowledges that he will probably be unable to continue farming. And on this night in Coleambally, Frank Whelan makes a decision as well.

"Oh," he replies to his fellow rice farmer with a sad smile, "I think I'll go home and retire."

National Geographic

Let them eat copper

Essay - March 17, 2009 by Ted Williams



I am sitting on the sun-blasted South Rim of the Grand Canyon, tracking condors through binoculars and trying to read the numbers on their wing tags as they dip and wobble above and below me. Next to me is Elaine Leslie, the heroic National Park Service biologist who never gave up on condors, even when a large element of the environmental community advocated "extinction with dignity." Without the courage and tenacity of Leslie and her fellow Park Service and San Diego Zoo condor advocates, we'd have lost these priceless ice-age artifacts to "plumbism."

Plumbism is an especially hard way for an animal or person to die. The agent is lead. Symptoms include anemia, loss of memory, depression, convulsions, brain deterioration, impotence, stillbirth, miscarriage, paralysis, kidney damage and liver damage.

"When lead is ingested or inhaled, the body 'mistakes' it for calcium and beneficial metals, incorporating it into nerve cells and other vital tissues," explains Leslie, now with the Park Service's Natural Resource Stewardship and Science Directorate. Many people survive plumbism, albeit with diminished motor and mental function. Wild animals usually die.

On March 5, Elaine Leslie sent me this eloquent e-mail: "!" Attached was an intra-agency memo from the Park Service's equally heroic acting director, Dan Wenk, ordering a ban on lead bullets and fishing tackle "in NPS units where those activities are authorized." Leslie flings credit around like confetti, but her fingerprints are all over this bold, belated action.

Condors were in freefall to extinction until October 2007 when another bold, belated action by California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger banned lead bullets in the bird's known range. Hunters weren't much inconvenienced. Non-toxic copper bullets are more expensive but have better ballistics.

It's not just condors that are being poisoned; it's everything from eagles to hawks to bears to wolves to songbirds to people. The media paid scant attention to plumbism-by-bullet until 2008, when studies in Midwestern states turned up fragmented lead in venison donated to the poor by the "Sportsmen Against Hunger" program. And research by the North Dakota Department of Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention revealed that people who eat wild game killed by lead bullets tend to have elevated blood levels of lead.

I'm against poisoning the poor. But that's not the only problem I have with "Sportsmen Against Hunger," which was hatched by Safari Club International in an attempt to boost an image diminished by "canned hunts," during which members purchase caged animals -- some with names -- and then shoot them. I grew up in a culture in which, if you successfully hunted something, you ate it -- a dictum that was sternly enforced even on a friend who dispatched a skunk.

I have an even greater problem with the mantra from the Safari Club and the gun lobby that all evidence of plumbism-by-bullet has been fabricated as part of a plot to disarm America.

The NRA, which fought viciously against the California lead ban, attributes such reforms to the secret agenda of "environmental and anti-gun extremists." The U.S. Sportsmen's Alliance pooh-poohs the North Dakota and Centers for Disease Control studies with this non sequitur: "Hunters have been feeding their families with deer taken by lead bullets since firearms were invented."

Plumbism was first seen in ducks in 1874, but it wasn't until 1991, that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service got around to banning lead shot for waterfowl. When I was writing about the impending ban back in 1988, I got precisely the same response from the gun lobby I get now. NRA president James Reinke said that "anti-gunners, attacking lead shot under the guise of environmentalism, have succeeded in gaining a beachhead." Neal Knox of the Firearms Coalition called the '91 ban "the latest scalp in a well-organized, scarcely recognized series of flanking attacks upon the right to keep and bear arms." And Miles Brueckner of Migratory Waterfowl Hunters Inc. offered this explanation: "Someone's getting wealthy on steel shot."

I never understood why so many of my fellow hunters were fine with annually depleting their game supply by about 300,000 ducks and geese fatally poisoned by lead shot.

We've banned lead in paint, toys, gasoline and shotgun loads for waterfowl. Yet we persist in festooning the landscape with bullets made from this deadly neurotoxin. Elaine Leslie puts it this way: "It is 2009. We are better than this. Time for a change. Time to be accountable to future generations. Time to get the lead out!"

Ted Williams is a contributor to Writers on the Range, a service of High Country News (hcn.org). He is the conservation editor for Fly Rod & Reel Magazine.

High Country News

Forum Moves Water Higher Up Global Priority List

ISTANBUL, Turkey, March 18, 2009 (ENS) – Climate change, financial turmoil, energy supplies, biodiversity loss, food scarcity - all are competing for the attention of world leaders, but this week the focus is on the one resource essential for life - water. Participants from 192

countries are in Istanbul for the world's largest water event, the World Water Forum, which drew three princes, three presidents, five prime ministers, over 90 ministers, 63 mayors and more than 23,000 attendees.

Conflict over scarce shared water resources is increasingly likely as the planet's population grows and freshwater resources shrink, the International Union for Conservation of Nature told Forum delegates today.

But the world's largest environmental group advised that better cooperation over shared rivers can help governments avoid water crises.

"We cannot understate the importance of water for life on this planet; it's as necessary as the air we breathe," says Julia Marton Lefevre, IUCN's director general. "Governments must realize that river basins, not national borders, are the boundaries around which effective water management must be drawn."

"We have alternatives to oil but there is no alternative to water," said Marton-Lefevre. "During these times of financial crisis we cannot lose sight of the fundamental economic importance of water for life and commerce."



Waters from the Beas River in the Indian state of Punjab are allocated to India under the Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan.

Rivers shared by neighboring countries provide an estimated 60 percent of the world's freshwater. There are 260 international river basins in the world, which cover nearly half of the Earth's surface and are home to 40 percent of the world's population.

Traditionally, the focus in negotiations over shared rivers has been the apportioning of water. Once the water is divided, each country tries to optimize management within its borders rather than across the shared basin. Yet, the new IUCN report released ahead of World Water Day on March 22, advocates that the focus should be not on the volume of water parceled out between competing consumers, but on basin-wide benefit sharing.

"The problem with shared rivers is that if nations don't cooperate; they can all end up trying to use the same water more than once," says Mark Smith, head of IUCN's Water Program. "When they do, the environment loses out on the water it needs, and development fails while tensions rise. Cooperation on rivers means the reverse; the benefits of a healthy environment and development can be shared, while promoting peace."

"A clear message is needed from governments in Istanbul as water users will only share water cooperatively when they believe it's their best option," said Marton Lefevre.

Held once every three years, the 5th World Water Forum will issue a ministerial declaration when it concludes on March 22.

Crown Prince of Japan Naruhito Kotaishi, Prime Minister of Morocco Abbas Al Fassi, United Nations Assistant Secretary General Sha Zukang, the President of the World Water Council Loic Fauchon, Prince Albert II of Monaco, William Alexander of Orange and Turkish President Abdullah Gul are among the high profile participants.



On Tuesday, delegates heard a keynote address by Prince Naruhito, who said that water has the ability "to unite civilizations." The prince called on the international community to prevent global warming as all water issues are affected by a rising planetary temperature.

From left: UN Under-Secretary-General Sha Zukang; Prince of Orange Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands; the Crown Prince of Japan Naruhito Kotaishi at the World Water Forum

In his speech, Fauchon underlined the importance of a holistic and united approach to water management by the international community. "We need to recognize that technical solutions are not enough to face global water challenges and we need political agreement and consensus among stakeholders," he said.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul told delegates, "Humanity has entered a new era of challenges. Water is no longer considered to be an issue of the environmentalists as it used to be in the near past. Now it is everybody's concern. In this critical age, water should be a bridging force for the nations of the world."

Noting that one billion people lack access to water and 2.4 billion lack access to sanitation, Zukang said it is a "moral imperative" to provide these services, which must be mainstreamed into negotiations on financing for development.

Angel Gurría of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, emphasized the need to encourage governments to incorporate water projects into fiscal stimulus packages.

A world Forum Places Water High on Global Priority List is posing a new category of risk to business that many have not even begun to appreciate, World Water Forum delegates were told today.

The global conservation organization WWF and the Pacific Institute, a U.S. water research group, warned that disruptions in supply and increases in price are increasingly frequent, but have not been factored into the calculations of many businesses.

"If you are an efficient business sitting in a poorly managed river basin you are still exposed to extremely high water risk," said Stuart Orr, freshwater manager at WWF International.

"The companies that will best shield themselves from the unexpected will be those that have assessed water requirements and risks in both their direct and indirect operations and in an integrated way with other emerging risk categories such as with climate and energy," said Jason Morrison, program director at the Pacific Institute.



Business involvement in improved water management can include advocacy and lobbying for better policies in company with civil society and communities, infrastructure and other partnerships with governments and water authorities, and financial support for infrastructure and capacity building, a key factor in the developing world.

The World Water Youth Forum today called for global collective action on water issues. As water stakeholders of the future, about 200 young people from around the world called for concerted action of governments, local authorities, civic groups and individuals to protect and conserve the essential resource.

A Nigerian boy enjoys a drink of clean water.

Global water statistics show dirty water kills more children than war, malaria, HIV/AIDS and traffic accidents combined. Every eight seconds a child dies from drinking dirty water.

Some 100 representatives of people's movements, civil society organizations and concerned individuals from India condemned the arrest, deportation and repression of two protestors at the World Water Forum opening day on Monday.

Two activists from International Rivers were arrested, detained and deported for unfurling a banner reading "No Risky Dams" at the opening ceremony.

The police detained Payal Parekh and Ann-Kathrin Schneider, and held them at an Istanbul police station until Tuesday, when Payal was deported to the United States, and Schneider was deported to Germany. They have been banned from re-entering Turkey for two years.

In a joint statement released today the groups from India said, "We condemn the undemocratic nature of the World Water Forum and urge the World Water Council to respect and support the rights of all people to speak freely and protest peacefully."

"We call on the participants of the World Water Forum to embrace democratic, smarter and cleaner solutions and recognize Right to Water as a fundamental right and not to advance the agenda of privatization and commercialization, with huge social and environmental costs," the groups from India stated. They are demanding that the World Water Forum should not be organized by the World Water Council, but by the United Nations.

ENS News

Selfish use of rivers seen threatening political stability

Thu Mar 19, 2009 2:45am EDT

By Alexandra Hudson

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Countries that selfishly use shared rivers threaten political stability at a time when water is scarce and demand is growing, a conservation group warned on Wednesday.

Disputes over shared rivers such as the Tigris and the Euphrates could be resolved if nations put borders aside and viewed the entire river basin as a unit instead, they added.

In the past some states have built dams or siphoned water from rivers for irrigation without consulting neighbors downstream -- stirring political tension.

"The question countries must face is are they interested only in holding all the water themselves and living in a destabilized region, or do they wish to share the water and cooperate?" said Mark Smith, head of the water program of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a body funded by states, and NGOs.

Rivers shared by more than one country provide about 60 percent of the world's fresh water. There are 260 international river basins in the world, covering half of the Earth's surface and home to 40 percent of the world's population.

Traditionally the focus in negotiations over shared rivers has been how to apportion water. Once the water is divided each country tries to optimize water use within its borders, rather than across the shared basin, the IUCN said.

By working jointly countries could reap better economic benefits from rivers and ease political tensions.

Turkey, hosting the triennial World Water Forum in Istanbul, is home to the sources of the Euphrates and Tigris, which form a river basin flowing through Syria and Iraq before draining into the Gulf from Iraq. Wrangling over the rivers is longstanding.

Upriver dams built by Turkey, Syria and Iran have caused Iraq water shortages, exacerbated by an infrastructure devastated by war.

"There is a real distinction between the upstream and downstream position. Those upstream hold a lot of power. In Turkey that power is accentuated because Syria and Iraq are very dry countries," said Smith.

Smith said some countries cooperate well, such as Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and Senegal which share the Senegal River, while the Volta river is shared by six West African states.

"The Rhine for example used to be a huge source of dispute between France, Germany and the Netherlands, particularly over pollution... institutions were set up and now the river is coordinated and is a clean river again."

In states where huge dams have been built to the detriment of other nations downstream, the flows of the dams could be altered to allow rivers to replicate their previous natural patterns, Smith said, which would help restore ecosystems. Turkey been heavily criticized by some

environmental groups during the conference for pursuing large scale dam and hydro-electric power building projects.

Most controversial is the 1.2 billion euro Ilisu project, begun in 2006, which will construct a dam on the Tigris river, bury part of the ancient town of Hasankeyf and force the relocation of thousands of people.

Reuters

Eco-Bills Come Due at Bay's Beaches

Region Pays Dearly For Climate Change In Erosion, Abatement

By David A. Fahrenthold
Washington Post Staff Writer
Thursday, March 19, 2009; A01



In North Beach, MD, the sand has eroded around the base of a clock next to the town pier

While the nation debates the cost of climate change -- whether the price of electricity and gasoline should increase because of their greenhouse gas emissions -- the problem already has a price tag on the Chesapeake Bay.

Sea levels are rising almost twice as fast in the Chesapeake region as in most of the world, and waterside

communities are spending millions to keep the water from eroding yards, marshes and sandy beaches.

The area's beaches are dealing with the same bad luck: The land is dropping, climate change is altering currents and the oceans are inching up. The impact is slow, but it's real.

Beachgoers won't notice it at major ocean resorts. But for small beaches on the bay, the result is often death by bulkhead.

At the Calvert County shore resort of North Beach, the beach created the town. Now, as the waters of the bay rise an eighth of an inch every year, it's the other way around.

"This is it. This is what we're trying to preserve," said Mayor Michael Bojokles. He was looking at a beach three blocks long and so skinny that a Frisbee could be thrown clear over it -- the remains of the wide sandy strip that first drew vacationers in the 1890s.

The town spends \$25,000 a year to build and rebuild this beach with trucked-in sand. But Bojokles said he knows the waves that eat it away will only grow higher and stronger. "It's a money pit," he said, but crucial to the town's tourist economy. "That has to be said: It's absolutely necessary."

The battle against the water is especially worrisome in spots such as this one, with "beach" in their names and warm sand in their civic hearts. In a few places, the name has become a lie.

"The bills are coming due" at beaches in Virginia and Maryland, said Michael Kearney, a geography professor at the University of Maryland. "If some intervention is not done, they're going to die."

The region's beaches range from the busy Atlantic shores of Ocean City to thin sand crescents on the Chesapeake frequented more by diamondback terrapins than by tourists. They are a long way from disappearing altogether: Erosion moves too slowly, and the economic value of many beaches is too high.

Two natural phenomena mean that sea levels will rise faster along the mid-Atlantic than almost anywhere else in the world.

First, the mid-Atlantic is sinking. It is an echo of the last ice age, when huge glaciers pushed down on the Earth's crust to the north. The land here was lifted like the other end of a seesaw, and now it's slowly dropping. Second, research presented last weekend shows that climate change will alter the dynamics of the ocean, weakening a system of currents that pulls water away from shore here.

At the same time, the world's oceans are inching up -- fed by melting polar ice and swelled as warmer water expands in volume. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, echoing a United Nations science panel, said it is "very likely" that man-made greenhouse gases are primarily to blame.

In this area, the local problem accelerates the global one: As the sea rises, the land falls. In the District, for example, the EPA found last month that the water level is rising at .12 inches a year. That's almost double the global average of .066 inches.

To keep higher waves from washing away waterside property, homeowners and government agencies have spent millions to make the Chesapeake look like a high-sided swimming pool. About a quarter of Maryland's shoreline has been "armored" with man-made sea walls or rock piles. A Virginia official could not provide a comparable estimate but said about 20 new miles are armored every year.

For small beaches, the result is often death by bulkhead. In normal conditions, they would have just moved backward as waves ate into upland dunes and replaced the sand they pulled out to sea.

But not now.

"The beach just continues to erode right up to the wall," said James Titus, a lead author of a massive EPA study of sea-level rise in the mid-Atlantic released this year. "The shore is moving. You put a wall in the way, and you have a wall and the water."

The result is obvious in Manhattan Beach, a 1920s riverside resort turned suburb in Anne Arundel County. The bulkheads there went up decades ago. Now, the place resembles a beach almost as little as it resembles Manhattan.

"When you write the word 'beach,' you have to put quotes around it," said resident Augie Pascuale. Four tiny pockets of sand are left, each one barely deep enough for a blanket. The civic association unsuccessfully applied for a \$35,000 grant from a nonprofit group to rebuild one.

The association says the beaches, however small, provide a gathering place and an average \$30,000 boost in house values.

"You pay now, or you pay later," said Mike Frye, the association president. "This is the cost of ignoring something."

Scientists say the loss of beaches could also threaten animals that depend on them. The recent EPA study found that Calvert's rare northeastern beach tiger beetles could lose habitat and that the diamondback terrapin, which lays its eggs on bay beaches, could be wiped out in some areas.

"Unless you're a barnacle," a bulkhead is no place to live, said Titus, the report's author.

A survey of places with "beach" in their names shows they are facing a special and difficult variant of the region's problem. Even though it can be more expensive, they want to stop the water -- and keep the beach.

On the Atlantic coast, the big resorts do this with brute force. For decades, Virginia Beach has dumped millions of tons of sand onto its beach to replenish what erodes. In Ocean City, state, federal and local authorities spent \$7 million in 2006 to deposit 100,000 dump trucks' worth of sand on its beach. And they say they believe it will need more sand next year.

But around the Chesapeake, smaller beaches -- often the places that vacationers stopped visiting when the Chesapeake Bay Bridge opened the way to Ocean City in mid-century -- need cheaper fixes.

In Highland Beach, just south of Annapolis, residents got a \$22,000 grant to install a "living shoreline" where sand-loving plants anchor the beach. Maryland changed its laws last year to encourage more communities to build this kind of project instead of bulkheads and awards \$1.5 million in no-interest loans for the projects every year.

In a few places, it's too late: They are civic misnomers, where the only beach in town is in their name. Leonard Larese-Casanova, chief of shoreline conservation and management for Maryland, counted at least five: Dares Beach, in Calvert; Columbia Beach, Mason's Beach and North Beach Park (also called Holland Point) in Anne Arundel; and Scotland Beach in St. Mary's County.

"It wasn't a terrific beach, but it was a sand beach," said George Stringer, 88, who lives in Mason's Beach, south of Annapolis. He has an old photo of his mother, pregnant with him, standing on the sand. As a child, he and friends would scoop out the stinging sea nettles so they could swim on summer weekends.

But that scene vanished decades ago. Today, Stringer has a view of a seawall, with Herring Bay rolling up against it.

"Now, it could be called Mason's Bulkhead," Stringer said.

The Washington Post

Surf Battle Generates Fear of Ocean Squatting

By EVAN LEHMANN,

Published: March 17, 2009

The oceans might not be big enough for sharp-elbowed renewable energy developers. Aspiring power producers are claiming sweeping stretches of sea along the East Coast, sometimes overlapping each other and igniting modern-day allegations of "claim jumping."

Open water miles from shore is the newest frontier for prospectors, as vague notions persist about who in the federal government presides over the ocean depths. A jurisdictional dispute between two federal agencies -- the Department of Interior's Minerals Management Service and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission -- is encouraging a "Wild West" atmosphere, as one participant described the accelerating race to grab chunks of seafloor for energy development.

The impasse has led competing prospectors to claim the same areas of ocean off New Jersey's coast, citing authority from different federal agencies. Wind developers are accusing Seattle-based Grays Harbor Ocean Energy Co. of taking advantage of the regulatory uncertainty to snatch a 200-square-mile swath of ocean for a proposed wave and wind energy project through FERC.

Smaller patches within that area had already been identified for wind farms approved by the state and been given a preliminary green light by MMS.

"They are all around us," Chris Wissemann, founder of Deepwater Wind, said of Grays Harbor. State regulators awarded development rights to Deepwater Wind last fall to build a 350-megawatt wind farm about 20 miles off the shore with PSEG Renewable Generation.

But now the Grays Harbor site is "completely overlapping" the smaller 20-square-mile area of ocean identified by Deepwater Wind, Wissemann added, noting that his project is at "full stop." The sprawling Grays Harbor parcel also encompasses a second wind project, proposed by Bluewater Wind, which plans to erect about 100 turbines over 24 square miles.

Wind developers and state officials are pressing FERC to deny Grays Harbor's permit. A decision could come this spring.

'Wild West' goes to sea

The confusion is the offspring of dueling federal agencies. The Minerals Management Service is generally considered the landlord of the ocean floor, and has been working for three years on new rules to provide leases for wind farms on the outer continental shelf. There is no dispute about its authority over wind projects, as outlined in the Energy Policy Act of 2005.

But the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has been arguing for two years that it maintains jurisdiction over hydrokinetic projects -- those that tap the power of waves and currents -- under the Federal Power Act.

That leaves developers of both wind and wave technologies vulnerable to each other. Preliminary permits are easy to get, and that can lead to "a lot of gamesmanship" in areas known to have good energy prospects, said Carolyn Elefant, a lawyer with the Ocean Renewable Energy Coalition.

"There are a lot of people who have these visions of flipping sites, selling sites, jumping claims and making people buy them off," she said. "It's the Wild West."

That "back and forth" struggle between the two agencies stalled the release of MMS's new rule on offshore renewable energy projects at the close of George W. Bush's presidency, according to Michael Olsen, a former deputy assistant secretary in the Interior Department, who worked on the rule. Developers say the delay has prevented the offshore industry from growing.

"There was a tremendous push at the end of the last administration" to finalize the rule, Olsen said an event sponsored by the Energy Bar Association yesterday. "And it was delayed because of this dispute."

'Permit flippers' vs. 'mafiosos'

Grays Harbor is at the center of that storm. Run by Burton Hamner, who has experience in coastal management, the company in October plunged into the race to build the first offshore power generation project on the East Coast.

It applied for six interim leases from FERC, a move that would give it priority over hundreds of square miles off the coasts of Massachusetts, New Jersey, Rhode Island and several other states. The move could essentially secure those areas for three years, sidelining other wind companies that had already gone through a competitive selection process with the state of New Jersey and that are now waiting on the MMS rule before moving forward.

"I could literally have my equipment on a boat and receive a letter from FERC saying, 'You have no right to do this because we have a competing set of regs,'" said Wissemann of Deepwater Wind, which might wait to build a data-collecting test tower until the dispute is settled.

A group of nine U.S. lawmakers, mostly from the East Coast, assailed Grays Harbor's move - - without mentioning the company -- as "claim jumping" in a letter last week to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar. Some wind developers are furious, saying Hamner is "site banking" stretches of ocean with an eye toward trading in real estate, not clean energy.

"They're looking to flip the permits," said one official with a wind developer.

But Hamner dismisses those accusations as if they're insults from entitled lawmakers or bested competitors acting like bossy "New Jersey mafiosos."

Salazar pushing for a fix

He describes his maneuvering as a good business decision, one that fits within existing rules. He is not a claim jumper, he says, because MMS has not issued the rule needed to receive leases -- an assertion with which his competitors have no choice but to agree.

"You can't say somebody else is claim jumping when you haven't in fact made a claim," Hamner said. "All they're doing is sitting there on the shore saying, 'Hey, we were here first. What's this guy doing messin' in our sandbox?'"

He is unapologetic about applying for interim permits under FERC, days after the commission underscored its jurisdiction over hydrokinetic (wave power) projects in October. Nor does he feel burdened by exploiting the turf battle in Washington. FERC, he says, is the rightful overseer of electricity projects.

"They could have done the same thing that I did," Hamner said of other developers. "The ocean's got a lot of opportunity. There's room for everybody. What we don't want to have is people standing on the shore who've got the attitude of New Jersey mafiosos saying that's their playground."

Hamner is eligible for a FERC permit because he's emphasizing wave power. At each of his seven sites, he proposes raising 100 platforms, each with three legs. Every leg will carry a 330-kilowatt generator, providing about 10 percent of the 1,100 megawatts produced by each project. Hamner plans to find the bulk of his electricity through wind turbines, big, 10-megawatt units on each platform.

The territorial dispute, meanwhile, is rising to a new level of urgency in Washington. Salazar said he hopes to draft a long-delayed memorandum of understanding with FERC, perhaps as soon as today. That could prevent the agencies from "stumbling over each other," he told reporters on a conference call yesterday.

"We will not let any of the jurisdictional turf battles in the past get in the way with moving forward with our energy agenda," Salazar said.

The MMS rule regarding leases could follow soon if the inter-agency dispute is settled. That's considered a key requirement for sparking a robust offshore industry.

"They just need to work it out," said Laurie Jodziewicz, manager of siting policy for the American Wind Energy Association. "We have some real projects that are being held up right now."

Yet Olsen, the former official with Interior who worked on the rule, expressed doubt yesterday that Salazar would be able to quickly disarm the two sides. Congress might have to draft new legislation, he predicted, or perhaps President Obama's new energy czar, Carol Browner, could muscle a jurisdictional remedy into place.

"It's going to be the same thing," Olsen said, recalling past challenges to fixing the problem. "Something's gotta happen."

The New York Times

Emissions Trading Too Risky for N.Z. Corporates, Todd Says

By Gavin Evans

March 19 (Bloomberg) -- New Zealand corporate balance sheets are under strain and should not be exposed to the risk of carrying volatile carbon derivatives to meet climate-change targets, Todd Energy Ltd. told lawmakers today.

Carbon penalties planned next year should be deferred until all the world's major economies are committed to taking like action, Todd Energy Managing Director Richard Tweedie said. If penalties are to be imposed, a domestic tax would be preferable to avoid exposure to volatile European emission prices and the counterparty risk of dealing with the region's banks, he said.

"The price of carbon currently owes much more to events in Europe, including political decisions, than it does to least-cost emissions abatement," Tweedie told a parliamentary committee in Wellington. "Loading up with this, another form of derivative, in this very uncertain time, is asking seriously for trouble."

New Zealand lawmakers are revisiting emission-trading rules enacted eight weeks before the previous government was ousted in November. Industry at the time said they were unworkable, and Prime Minister John Key has called for a more gradual phase-in of penalties inline with proposals in Australia, New Zealand's biggest trading partner.

New Zealand opted for emissions trading after scrapping a NZ\$15-a-ton (\$8-a-ton) carbon tax proposal in 2005 because of doubts it would be effective in reducing emissions. Enthusiasm waned last year as European credits climbed to 31 euro (\$39) in July before plunging to 8 euro last month.

Less Free Credit

Under the existing law, utilities and heavy industry will have to start reducing emissions next year or buy credits on global markets to keep pollution at 90 percent of 2005 levels. A pool of freely available credits to help meet that cap would tighten from 2018 with emitters meeting the full cost of their pollution by 2030.

Wellington-based Todd, a power retailer and the country's largest locally-owned oil producer, faces a cost of as much as NZ\$100 million to comply with the law as it stands, the company said in a written submission.

Given parliament won't finish its review until September, the 2010 start date should be deferred at least a year, Todd said.

Bloomberg News

Murray River works to avoid 'disaster'

Pia Akerman | *March 19, 2009*

THE South Australian Government is set to block off part of the Murray River near its mouth in a \$26 million effort to avert further soil acidification and "environmental disaster".

A report on the works handed to a parliamentary committee yesterday outlines the emergency response under which construction will start in May if final approvals are given next month.

A temporary barrier will be built across the Goolwa Channel from Clayton to Hindmarsh Island as well as across the mouths of the Finnis River and Currency Creek.

About 30 gegalitres of water from Lake Alexandrina will be pumped in over two months to raise the water level in the blocked off area, covering exposed soil that has turned toxic.

Andrew Beal, chairman of the Department of Land, Water and Biodiversity Conservation water security working group, told the Public Works Committee yesterday that urgent intervention was needed to mitigate the acid sulphate soils.

"Clearly we are on the verge of environmental disaster in the Goolwa Channel and the tributaries right now," he said.

"It will be quite intractable and very difficult to reverse.

"We are looking at decades of acidification to manage if it goes past the tipping point."

Some Aboriginal groups around the area have opposed the Clayton construction as it will come across from the mainland to Hindmarsh Island, centre of the "secret women's business" affair of the 1990s.

Mr Beal said the Government was still negotiating with the local Ngarrindjeri people, but he was confident their approval would be gained.

"We don't have any reason to believe that Ngarrindjeri will continue to oppose the project," he said.

Mr Beal said the Government aimed to have all approvals in place by April 24, to enable a construction start date of May 24 and the project's completion by July 3.

The Government last week released a draft environmental impact statement on the proposed weir further upstream at Wellington, where preparatory works are already under way.

River Murray Minister Karlene Maywald has said no decision on works in the river channel would be made before June, pushed out from April because of water purchases and to gauge the impact of early winter rains.

The Australian

On Fly Casting's Urban Frontier, the Fish Are Big, the Water's Dirty

'Brownliners' Bring Genteel Pursuit to Canals, Ditches; It's Strictly Catch and Release

By JUSTIN SCHECK

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. -- Like most serious fly fishermen, Tom Teasdale has a little-known place where he finds peace in a river's placid waters.

Standing waist-deep and casting a hand-tied fly earlier this month, he pointed to his favorite deep pool. "This is the honey hole," he said.

Here, the fish are big. The strikes are frequent. And other anglers are kept at bay by the occasional bobbing diaper.

Mr. Teasdale's fly-fishing hole is on the South Platte River, at the mouth of a 6-foot-wide corrugated-metal drainpipe and downstream from a wastewater-treatment plant. The water has elevated levels of E. coli bacteria, according to government surveys. When Mr. Teasdale walks alone past the graffiti-covered overpass and down the littered trail in this Denver suburb, he brings his Glock 9mm pistol to ward off "shady characters."

Mr. Teasdale is a "brownliner," one of the growing ranks of fly fishermen who try to catch whatever lives in the muck close to home -- in drainage canals, cemented urban riverbeds and murky farm-runoff canals. Another of Mr. Teasdale's favorite spots is a muddy stretch of river behind a strip mall.

Brownliners enjoy fly-fishing's primary perks -- the suspense of watching a fly disappear beneath the water's surface, the struggle of man against beast, the spinning of fish stories. If that doesn't come with fresh water and clean air, so be it.

The pursuit is an affront to fly-fishing's traditional ethos. Since English nobles began using bamboo rods and whiplike lines to cast weightless flies to trout, the sport has been associated with pristine wilderness. "More than half the intense enjoyment of fly-fishing is derived from the beautiful surroundings," angling legend Charles Orvis wrote more than a century ago.



Mr. Teasdale used to fly-fish in the old-growth forests of the Pacific Northwest, casting for trout in ice-blue rivers. He released the fish he caught, out of respect for their beauty.

Now he spends about three days a week in water tainted by urban runoff. His quarry is often carp, a hardy relative of the goldfish with a suckerlike mouth and a coat of viscous slime. Mr. Teasdale, 26 years old, throws them back because he's afraid to eat them.

Mr. Teasdale isn't the first to loft a wet fly into an urban canal or algae-covered golf-course pond. But there was little unity among them until a Californian named Keith Barton started his blog.

Justin Scheck/WSJ

Tom Teasdale preparing to fly-fish on the South Platte River.

Mr. Barton was a die-hard trout fisherman until about 2000, when he was driving between the Sacramento suburb where he lives and far-Northern California, where limpid trout streams drain the Cascade Range. Alongside the highway, Mr. Barton says, were farm ditches and stagnant creeks without a single fly

fisherman on their banks. He had an epiphany. "You see a lot of water going by, and you say: 'There's got to be some fish in there.' "

Exploring waters redolent of manure and marked by signs warning of mercury contamination, he caught pikeminnow, carp and bass -- species that traditionalists look down on as "coarse" fish. Mr. Barton soon realized that, whether a trout or sucker, "It swims away from you, which is really the only thing that most fishermen want."

Mr. Barton helped coin the name for his sport two summers ago. He recalls that a fly-fishing friend, Tom Chandler, called him to talk about "bluelining" -- scanning a wilderness map for the squiggly blue lines that represent remote streams and hiking into those valleys with a fly rod. Mr. Chandler had spent the day fishing in a cold, clear trout stream fed by Mount Shasta glaciers.

Mr. Barton had spent the same day casting his line into a slough littered with sofas, old cars and goat carcasses. "I told him what I'd just wiped off my shoes," recalls Mr. Barton. During that conversation, he says, the men first talked about the term to describe Mr. Barton's fishing.

Mr. Chandler began talking about brownlining on his blog, troutunderground.com. Mr. Barton soon started his own blog, Singlebarbed.com.

Brownlining has since caught on among others. In Minnesota, fly-fishing guide Jean-Paul Lipton sells brownlining flies on his Web site; he charges anglers \$250 a day to pursue turbid-water species like white suckers. In Los Angeles, Sean Fenner ducks under the Glendale Boulevard overpass to cast for carp. Mr. Fenner called the Los Angeles River's concrete-lined channel -- seen in car chases on TV shows and films including "Terminator 2" -- an "underutilized body of water for fly-fishing."

In Glasgow, Alistair Stewart fishes for trout in holes on the River Kelvin known locally as Sanitary-Towel Pool and Petrol Pool. "There's this overwhelming smell of petrol when you're fishing it, and no one knows where it's coming from," he says. Though the river is cleaner than it was when dye plants operated on its banks decades ago, Mr. Stewart says he finds mannequins, spools of fiber-optic cable and "loads of shopping trolleys" in it.

Traditionalists would never make do with dirty rivers. Jeff Bright, a San Francisco photographer who flies into the Canadian wild to fly-fish for steelhead trout, says the wilderness lends an "almost spiritual" aspect to fly-fishing. He worries that abandoning that idyll to fish in polluted waters amounts to "sanctioning" nature's destruction.

That's fine with brownliners. "I count on their elitism to keep them away," Mr. Teasdale said as he headed from a suburban Denver parking lot toward his honey hole.

Mr. Teasdale's fishing partners this day included Kyle Deneen, one of three corpulent authors of the Fat Guy Fly Fishing blog. Mr. Deneen lives on the bank of a famous Colorado trout stream, but he drove two hours to join Mr. Teasdale's waste-water expedition. "I wanted to fish for carp," said Mr. Deneen, who has the Fat Guy Fly Fishing logo tattooed on his forearm.

Also along on the trip was Michael Gracie, a Denver tech consultant, who met Mr. Teasdale at Denver's Discount Fishing. Mr. Teasdale manages the shop, where he offers novices advice on where to fish and sells brownlining flies that imitate a carp's diet of crayfish, muck-dwelling insects and cottonwood seeds.

Messrs. Teasdale, Gracie and Deneen walked past a pile of crumpled beer cans into a slow-moving section of brown water. Standing on blocks of broken concrete, they set up beneath the drainpipe. Discarded tires dotted the riverbed. On warm summer days when families have picnics upstream, Mr. Teasdale said, diapers often bob down the river.

Mr. Teasdale cast upstream and let his flies sink to the bottom. His fly rod doubled over when he set his hook. "Oh, it's a big one," Mr. Gracie said, stumbling around to net the fish as it swam in circles. "It's a channel catfish!" Mr. Teasdale exclaimed. He'd never caught one here before.

"It's about 10 pounds," he said, releasing the fish.

Back at his fly shop at the end of the day, the storytelling began. "I caught a 15-pound catfish," Mr. Teasdale announced.

The Wall Street Journal

Tally ho: Deer, bear takes see increases

By **ROB STREETER**, Special to the Times Union

First published in print: Thursday, March 19, 2009

March is typically the month when the statistics from last hunting season are released, and this month stats from both the bear and deer hunting seasons have been released.

Starting with the deer harvest, the official report from the Department of Environmental Conservation is that there was a 2 percent increase over the 2007 season. Last year's harvest total for the deer season was 222,979, up from 219,141. The season total fell below the 5-10 percent increase that was projected for the year.

The 2008 deer take included 105,747 bucks and a total of 117,232 antlerless deer.

Deer populations are managed based on objectives set for individual wildlife management units. The objectives are set through citizen task forces made up of landowners, farmers, foresters, conservationists and hunters. In each wildlife management unit, these task forces set a desired population level based on the buck take per square mile.

While the overall deer take increased somewhat over the previous years, the population levels in 50 percent of the wildlife management units were below the objective set by the task force groups for those individual units. The population levels in 29 percent of the WMU's were at or above the objective levels.

As is typically the case, the Western New York counties had the highest harvest numbers with Yates (12.7 deer/square mile), Steuben (9.5), Genesee (9.4), Livingston (9.1), and Allegany (9.0). In terms of the buck harvest, the top counties were: Yates (4.6 bucks/square mile), Allegany (4.2), Orange (3.8), Wyoming (3.7), and Steuben (3.7).

One of the high points for 2008 was the 15,651 14- and 15-year-olds who purchased the new Junior Big-Game License. The Junior Hunters bagged 3,900 deer during the season. Another plus from last season was the fact that DEC tested 2,940 deer for chronic wasting disease including 1,100 from the CWD containment area and none of them tested positive.

The harvest results are statistically based projections of the take based on data gathered from hunters who report the game they bag and from deer checked by biologists at meat processors and other locations. Personal observations may vary from the numbers.

In my case, the number of deer seen in the area where I hunt during the archery season is about the same as the last couple of years. The area we hunt during the firearms season seems as if the population is down sharply. In fact, none of us saw a deer during the gun season there. There were some tracks, but no sightings.

What worries me more is the winter kill we have seen locally. Deer count is up in the area behind my house and unfortunately, there have probably been 20 or more that have been killed by cars within two miles of the house along NYS Route 5.

While the deer harvest was similar, bear hunters had a banner year last year. The harvest numbers for two areas set records, those being the Allegany and Catskill Ranges.

Bear numbers have been increasing in the southern part of the state. In addition, bears have been expanding their traditional range, spreading out into areas where they were not typically found before, so much so that additional areas were opened for bear hunting in the southern part of the state in recent years.

Last season, hunters took a total of 1,295 black bears, a 16 percent increase over the 1,117 bears harvested in 2007. In the Allegany region, hunters took a record of 193 bears, which was way over the previous record total of 120. In the Catskill region, hunters took 520 bears, which surpassed the 2005 record of 494 bears.

In addition to the increases seen in the Catskills, the season was also good in the Adirondacks, where hunters took 582 bears, up from 544 taken the previous year.

The data shows the vast number of bears hunters bag come coincidental to other forms of hunting. Bowhunters get chances at bears while on stands for deer. Deer hunters in the Adirondacks take their share of the bears while on whitetail hunts.

Data taken from bears is extensive. Biologists are able to collect age and sex information from tagged bears. Age information is collected through the use of aging a tooth from the bear.

These are the statistics from the previous season. For hunters with concerns, there are plenty of opportunities to interact with the biologists who produce the data. Biologists routinely meet with sportsmen's groups, and you can always give them a call or send an e-mail if you wish to voice an opinion. They also can provide additional data which includes information collected for decades on the deer populations in various areas.

One thing is for sure, there are no guarantees when it comes to hunting, and the sport lies in putting in the time and developing the skills it takes to score.

Finally, don't forget the Great Northeast Outdoor Show is coming to Albany this weekend. The show will feature plenty of great family entertainment and a host of experts to give seminars on a number of outdoor topics. This event is a great way to look at all the latest products and get some ideas for this year's adventures.

Rob Streeter is an outdoors columnist for the Times Union.