



What's on

Saturday, May 9, 10am, Rally at the desal pilot plant site gate, Lower Powlett Road, Wonthaggi. Speakers, music, surprise guests and BBQ, places to stay and camping spots for the weekend available. Details: Stephen, 0407 811 778; Jessica, 0407 307 231.

Sunday, May 17
Climate change human sign at St Kilda Beach. Bring your T-shirts and signs and let our governments know you care about climate change.

www.watershedvictoria.org.au/events

They said it

"Water isn't publicly owned. Water is already privately owned, in my view. The concept of water as an essential service seems to have eliminated most of the debate about the options ... the thinking around the essential service concept is the single biggest constraint to reform and change.

David Downie, managing director of the Victorian Government's Office of Water,

"In the case of the desalination plant, investors' financial problems are an opportunity to reconsider a project that was of dubious merit in the first place.

"It has always been mysterious why desalination should be preferred to recycling on cost grounds. If plans to upgrade purification and return water to dams had gone ahead, Melbourne's supply would have increased by a quarter — sooner than the desalination plant, at more than twice the energy efficiency and about a third of the cost.

"The Government should look to cheaper, environmentally safer options for resolving Melbourne's water shortage instead."

The Age editorial, March 10, 2009

"This is the Rudd government helping fund a huge greenhouse gas and salt-producing factory to supply extra water for a government which is way behind world's best practice in collecting rainwater, storing stormwater and reusing and recycling water currently available."

Australian Greens leader Bob Brown

"I would count Australia among the 'hot stains' — a nation destroying its water heritage in order to remain an economic powerhouse and lulled by successive political leaders into thinking that this is just a temporary drought and that technology will save the day.

"Australian governments of all stripes are also busy building expensive, energy-guzzling desalination plants that will further pollute the fishing grounds and coral reefs."

Maude Barlow, the UN's senior adviser on water issues, speaking at a Sydney water forum



In the groove

Watershedders took their message to the latte belt this month, distributing some 15,000 postcards and leaflets to households in the Melbourne state electorate.

Melbourne MP Bronwyn Pike (the Minister of Education) is the most vulnerable minister and one of the most vulnerable of all Labor MPs, with a majority of just 1274 at the 2006 election.

The Greens would require a swing of just 2.02 per cent at the next election to win the seat.

Residents were asked to sign the postcard (featuring a typically cutting cartoon by our own Colin Suggett) for delivery to Ms Pike.

Left: it might look like a prayer group but it's actually Watershed members folding some 14,000 leaflets at the Melbourne Zoo before heading out for the letterbox drop.

Rally against desal plant

For over two years, anti-desal campaigners have organised rallies, meetings, film showings, debates and briefings, outlining the real costs of the project and putting forward practical alternatives to an energy-guzzling desalination plant on the Bass Coast.

Despite the spiralling costs of the pilot plant itself, the scarcity of data, criticism of the project from experts inside and outside the government, as well as doubts about financing the project, Brumby and Holding push ahead.

An announcement of the preferred bidder for the project is expected soon.

Enough is enough. More and more locals and Melbourne residents are waking up to the real cost of desalination, to the environment and our pockets.

It will be stopped, if enough of us take action, rally and refuse to pay for a project imposed on us without consultation and against expert advice.

Rally at the desal pilot plant site gate, Lower Powlett Road, Wonthaggi at 10 am on Saturday, May 9.

There will be speakers, music, surprise guests and a barbecue.

Places to stay and camping spots for the weekend are available, so spread the word to your city friends!

The rally is being organised by Watershed Victoria and Melbourne supporters.

For more information, call Stephen on 0407 811 778 or Jessica on 0407 307 231, or visit www.watershedvictoria.org.au.

Le truth

Last month, *La Monde* newspaper investigated the two giant French water companies Veolia and Suez (Degremont), which head the technology arms of the two consortia tendering to build Victoria's desalination plant.

France's most respected newspaper, *La Monde* discussed the companies' rise to dominance in water and waste infrastructure in many countries, and the growing backlash from the community.

For a link to the full article, visit www.watershedvictoria.org.au

Still waiting

As Watershed members know, the Brumby Government has never disclosed an engineering, scientific or economic analysis to justify its backflip from its re-election water policy of recycling and conservation. Consultant reports to the Government obtained only after concerted FOI requests do not support the desalination option.

As then premier Steve Bracks said of desalination before the 2006 election, "The energy generation is enormous, the intrusion on the community is enormous and, of course, it's extraordinarily expensive."

Our water crisis now has been exacerbated by Premier John Brumby and Water Minister Tim Holding's refusal over the past two years to implement real support for water tanks, for retrofitting dual-flush toilets and other measures that could have provided significant drought relief straight away.

Likewise, they closed off detailed assessment of sustainable options. Why? It ignores commercial common sense, it flies in the face of due diligence and governance responsibilities, and it smacks of corruption.

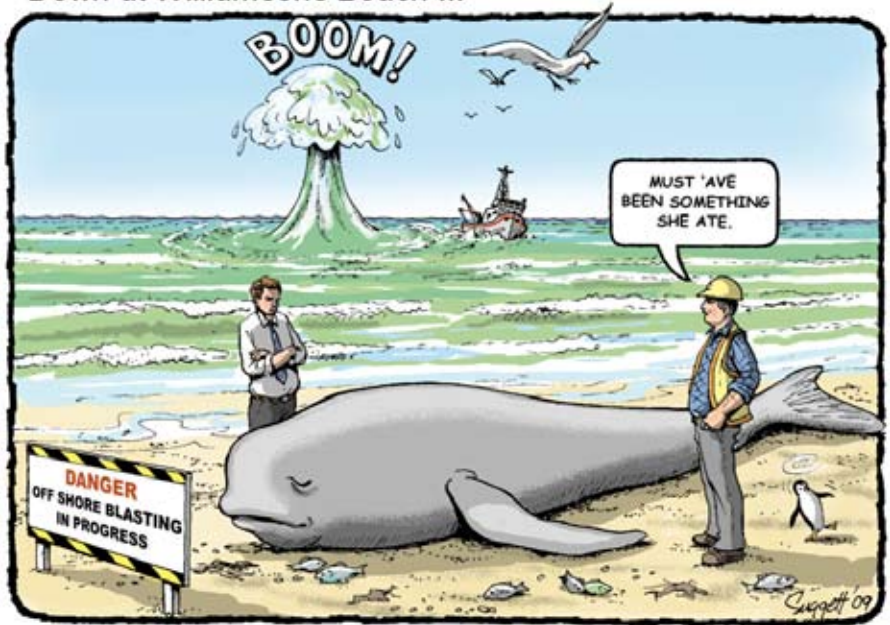
We are yet to discover what led the Brumby Government to the desal backflip but no doubt it is fuelled by the self-interest of the foreign desal corporations peddling these projects to generate big profits for themselves.

Here come the Yanks

Another corporate threat to water as an essential service became evident last week courtesy of an article in the Weekly Times, 'Yanks raid water'.

Sadly, this is not an April fool's joke. California-based Summit Global is reported as buying \$20 million of Australian irrigators' water. Summit Global's chief marketing officer, Matt Dickerson, is reported as saying

Down at Williamsons Beach ...



"There are few areas where we can execute our strategy, but Australia is one of them. We're in a position to monetise these assets and act as a water bank as well."

A water bank in the past constituted a dam, a reservoir, a ground water resource, not a financial asset. Can we rely on Premier Brumby's previous assurance about water remaining in public ownership? We know it will be produced by a foreign multinational if desalination proceeds, we know they are seeking financial sweeteners for the project, and now we see an overseas company trading in our water. What is the impact of our free trade agreement with the USA?

Will this over-ride the principle of maintaining public ownership of our water?

We're not alone

The signs are worrying, and make our fight against this project all the more important. It is one of a number of such water supply fights around Australia, and the Australian

Water Network (AWN) has now been launched to co-ordinate these activities Australia-wide.

Maude Barlow, a senior advisor on water to the United Nations, helped launch AWN. More news soon.

Meanwhile, the battle here goes on. It was distressing to see whales and sharks dying adjacent to the desal pilot plant site. Watershed through Chris Heislars is calling for careful scientific assessment to see if recent construction activities are to blame, a process DSE was not prepared to implement by its own initiative.

This tragedy certainly attests to the significant presence of these species in our local waters, a fact not recognised by the Government "papers" – it would be erroneous to dignify them as "studies" – prepared for the EES.

A lot of great letters of support in the papers – keep it up.

Stephen Cannon
President, Watershed Victoria



watershedvictoria

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Membership

Name

Email Phone Mobile

Address

Cost, \$15 individuals, \$30 households. Amount paid: Receipt required?

Please indicate if you would like to help in the campaign, eg. distribution, publicity, fund-raising, manning caravan

Give membership form and subscription to a committee member; OR
Post form plus cheque or postal order to Watershed Victoria, Dalyston PO, 3992; OR
Direct deposit to Bendigo Bank. Account name: Watershed Victoria. BSB: 633 000. Acc No: 134 991 850. Reference: Your name

Watershed Victoria

Watershed Victoria is a community group that seeks alternatives to the Government's proposed desalination plant on the Bass Coast. It replaces the Your Water Your Say community group, which was forced to cease operating last year when the State Government won legal costs against it.

Together with Plug the Pipe and the Clean Oceans Foundation, Watershed Victoria forms the Victorian Water Forum, which is campaigning for sustainable water solutions for Victoria.

