

# The Big Picture

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“News to use & amuse”

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## Making sense

It can be pretty hard trying to make sense of the mass of contradictory information that confronts us. There's too much of it, most of it is totally irrelevant to us, and there're far too many reports from people with a vested interest presented as 'impartial', plus various commentators earning money by voicing particular opinions.

The maze of conflicting data can be seen in almost any public material, from climate change to the financial crisis, from refugee policy to the war on drugs.

There are ways through this. Intelligence agencies sift through masses of contradictory and ambiguous data and apply methods to help them reach reasonable conclusions. Doctors and psychologists have a range of tools to help them reach sensible approaches to treatments.

Unfortunately, most (all?) of our governments appear to either have never learned these same lessons, or they prefer to barge ahead according to their predetermined ideas, party dogma and ego driven fantasies of self importance.

A fine example appeared on TV this week, when climate scientists reported that emissions targets needed to be significantly increased over the 5% - 15% levels set by the federal government. Penny Wong, in a subsequent interview stated that 'yes, we're well aware of the science but we're the government and we have to weigh that with other factors like the state of the economy...'

In her statement she displayed a profound ignorance of the role and purpose of science, relegating rigorous evidence based findings to the same status as the desires of fossil fuel lobbyists.

Now we're seeing more contradictory stories appearing about climate such as Miranda Devine's [global warming scare](#) article that basically attacks scientific ideas.

Ms Devine and Ms Wong miss the point entirely, as do so many apologists for the existing system.

The point is that there is substantial evidence that we could be facing major problems due to climate changes. It is therefore in our interests to act to protect ourselves from any such changes, in the same way that it is in our interests to have a first aid kit handy, or have lifestyles that help to avoid diseases. It is a matter of sensible risk management.

Greg Robert's Australian article about [Antarctic ice increasing](#) is but another example. Is the ice increasing? Is it decreasing? I don't know, but the implications of it melting are serious and worthy of consideration in setting policies.

Surely one useful role for government is to help protect populations from harm.

When we look at the financial crisis, which appears to be created by debt fuelled growth reaching unpayable levels, we can see many opportunities to live with a smaller ecological footprint

that could also help to protect us from some of the ravages of climate change. This is because the crises are a result of our own economic and social choices.

As a consequence, there exist opportunities for us to modify our lifestyles to improve the quality of our lives (e.g. slow, green living) and reduce our expenses (e.g. limit consumerism) while simultaneously improving our health (e.g. organic foods, fewer chemicals, cycle to work).

The opportunities offered appear well worth considering however they have disappeared in the peurile conflicts created when vested interests fight change in order to protect their own power and income.

Instead of rational and healthy consideration, we're once more apparently pressed into taking sides in a conflict.

The fact is that we don't need to take any side because the existence of sides is illusory. It is a creation of people and it is entirely possible to take a position that is on no side.

Take the pulp mill, which has hardened community attitudes and driven a deep wedge into Tasmanian society. We can take the position that we support developments that are properly and independently assessed (as was originally promised) and oppose any that could pose risks to our health or other local businesses.

It is clear from such a statement, how we can get developments up and running, and what kinds of action are likely to get resistance. By sticking to our principles we demonstrate that they are worthwhile, we demonstrate the behaviours and standards that we expect to live by and we create certainty for investors and community members.

The problem created by our pusillanimous governments is that their actions, statements and policies are creating and compounding uncertainty. Their actions are destructive (Murray Darling Basin, Hospitals) and their policies increase uncertainty (bail outs instead of removing root causes). They then act to create 'certainty' by favouring particular groups.

It almost looks like a pattern – create uncertainty then offer certainty in exchange for political and financial support for the party.

Whatever the case it is both unnecessary and undesirable.

Social groups don't do well when constantly involved in internal conflict and faced with an uncertain future created by their own governments' inability to manage according to known principles.

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## In case you missed it

### Financial mess

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Long, severe recession: IMF [Telegraph](#)  
G20 a circus for clowns: Costa [TheAustralian](#)  
Welcome to the New World Order: [ICH/Real News video](#)

### Governance & spin

Dismal record of State run projects [TheAustralian](#)  
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Gunns mill a step closer? [SMH](#)

### Climate/water

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Try again on carbon: Garnaut [TheAustralian](#)  
Current targets won't protect planet: CSIRO [TheAge](#)

### Health/education revolution/communication/defence

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Innovation dead in Australia [TheAustralian](#)  
Telstra could bring Rudd network undone [TheAge](#)  
NSW Ambulance defend 000 call handling [TheWest](#)  
000 sarcasm a disease [SMH](#)

### Economy/social/shelter/transport

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No way back on refugee issue [TheAge](#)

### World

You are being lied to about 'pirates' [ICH](#)  
CPAs MIA: Nader [CommonDreams](#)  
Susan Boyle's singing performance [YouTube video](#)

## Murray River a toxic open drain

### Why don't we care? THURSDAY 9 APRIL 2009

*Tim Stubbs, Policy Analyst from the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists, writes:*

For an 800km stretch of river people are advised not to enter the water, drink untreated water or bathe in water drawn from the river. Boiling the water does not inactivate toxins. These are the warnings for a river that has not reached the sea for over three years and is so toxic you cannot even wash your face in it.

Which third world nation is so badly abusing their natural resources that they think it is okay to turn a mighty river into what sounds like a stagnant drain? Don't they understand the importance of a healthy environment and the need to look after something as valuable as a river system? Where will they get their precious clean water from? These poor ignorant people need to make some serious changes.

This river is the Murray. Similar warnings are in place for the lower Darling and the Murrumbidgee.

### WHEN DID THIS BECOME OKAY IN AUSTRALIA?

The excuse that comes to mind is the drought. On Tuesday April 7 the Murray Darling Basin Authority released its drought update. It states that the inflow for the period January to March of this year was the lowest in the 117 years of records. The story gets worse. The update goes on to say that the inflow for the last three years is only 46% of the previous three year minimum which was back in the mid 1940's.

However the drought is only half the story. The update also states that there is 4,100 gegalitres of water held in public storages across the Basin. A check of the Authority's weekly update shows that in the Murray and Lower Darling alone over 870 gegalitres have been extracted in the nine months since July last year.

Last Tuesday the Authority also released an announcement on the Autumn watering of the Murray Darling "icon sites". Less than four and a half gegalitres of water is going to be shared amongst the 'icon' sites across the Basin. Who knows what will happen to all the other wetlands, floodplains and forests of the Basin which are so badly in need of a drink.

In November last year the Council of Australian Governments released a report on the progress with environmental water recovery in the Murray-Darling Basin. In the four years between June 2004 and September 2008 a total of 177.3 gegalitres has been recovered for the environment.

Most of us have no comprehension of how much water is in a gegalitre. Even so, it is easy to see that there is something very wrong.

The next excuse is to blame the irrigators. An irrigator is somebody who takes water out of our rivers to grow our food. We expect top quality produce at the lowest price possible. The irrigator is just a cog in the supply chain, just like the truck driver or the guy that lays the fruit out in the supermarket. The large majority of irrigators comply with a set of rules for how much water they can take. These rules are set by the governments we voted into power.

If we no longer want this national treasure to be little more than a toxic open drain we need to reset the system. We need to ensure we have enough water to keep the river, floodplains and

wetlands healthy and use what is left to grow more produce with less water. The potential impacts of climate change underline the need to make this adjustment sooner rather than later so that we are in a position to manage out future in a more proactive way than praying for rain.

Resetting the systems sounds like a massive task yet we already have two of the three parts in place. There is \$12.8 billion dollars in the Federal Governments' Water for the Future Program, we have the legislation in place to get the job done. The only piece missing seems to be the political will both at the State and Federal level. There is a lot of talk about getting things done but the figures and the algal bloom don't lie.

Peter Cullen was one of Australia's greatest water experts. Before he died he said, "I have always felt knowledge was better than ignorance, and we should try knowledge in this country because ignorance hasn't got us very far."

It seems we are finding it hard to change our habits.

*This article was published in [Crikey](#) and originally published on the Australian Science Media Centre's [Science blog](#)*

## Llewellyn and the pulp mill

Letter from [Peter Henning](#)

So-called Tasmanian Resources Minister, and current spokesman on behalf of the Tasmanian Government for Gunns, David Llewellyn, has welcomed news from Lindsay Street, Launceston, that Gunns will have a foreign capital stake of up to 50% to build the pulp mill in the Tamar Valley under the thoroughly discredited fast-tracked 2007 Pulp Mill Assessment Act (PMAA).

He is reported as saying "We are very pleased those positive moves are there". (Mercury, 11/4/07)

What the Minister is unlikely to be told by Gunns, and therefore will feel no compunction to act on, is his responsibility to the public as an elected "representative" of the people of Tasmania, which he swore to undertake as a member of the Tasmanian Parliament, and that is to tell the people what is going to happen (or has already happened, or is in train) to ensure the mill is built, pipelines and all, in the "public interest".

The Minister must recognise that the public has a right to know (that is, that the public should be informed now), of any "positive developments" for Gunns, and just how it is proposed that Gunns be able to build their pipelines from Trevallyn to the Tamar, and how they will be able to build their pipeline on the east Tamar to the mill through private property. Or will they be able to bypass land where owners have no intention of permitting the pipeline to be built? If so, we need to know that as well.

It cannot be denied that it is clearly in the "public interest" that David Llewellyn, or David Bartlett or some other government spokesman on Gunns' behalf in the Labor Cabinet, inform the population of the Tamar Valley what the mechanisms are that will provide for any pipelines to be built.

But more than that, it is the responsibility of the Resources Minister, or some other Minister (even the Minister for Health, for her responsibilities should have something to do with matters pertaining to the health of people in the Tamar Valley in the future, or even the Minister for Tourism, just in case Hawthorn footballers have an interest in visiting the Tamar Valley) to tell

the people just how this is going to happen.

This is true for all the residents of the Tamar Valley, but particularly true for those who will have a pipeline built across their property against their will and without their permission. Minister Llewellyn has a responsibility to tell those people by what mechanism that will be done, whether by using the new planning legislation or some other means.

If Llewellyn does not believe it is his responsibility to inform the public how these things are going to occur, we should also know that as well.

Llewellyn cannot deny he is unaware of the massive consequences that will face the people of the Tamar Valley if the mill is built, (after all it will use more water than all Launceston uses in a year, and it will pump material into the atmosphere hot enough "to punch through the Tamar Valley inversion layer", if we are to believe one of Gunns' managers), and even though he and his colleagues could not care less about those consequences, he still has some moral and ethical imperative, surely, to explain how it is going to occur, and what legislation is going to be used to do that.

There is another thoroughly unedifying aspect to all this secrecy and deliberate failure to represent the interests of the people, which is quite frankly, rather sickening. Gunns has consistently made virtually identical statements to those they have made in the last few days about obtaining finance and naming construction dates for some years now.

It is well past time that the "news" about this matter be clarified by the Tasmanian government. It is beyond absurd that an elected government refuses to inform the public of the reasons for, or the credibility of, these repetitious statements by Gunns.

In that context, let David Llewellyn tell us all quite clearly whether the current statements by Gunns have any credibility, or are part of a routine, issued at various times when various timelines are approaching, such as permit limits issued under the PMAA. When do they expire Minister Llewellyn, and what does Gunns need to do to ensure they are extended when they do expire?

Most importantly, the public have a democratic right to know how Gunns is going to get their pipelines built so they can use 40 gigalitres of water annually. If we are told we don't have a right to know, at least we will know that another part of the democratic fabric of Tasmania has been torn up.

## Bail outs not in proportion

Articles from the US show that the bail outs are totally out of proportion to the problem. This from [ICH](#)

"Today five US banks according to data in the just-released Federal Office of Comptroller of the Currency's Quarterly Report on Bank Trading and Derivatives Activity, hold 96% of all US bank derivatives positions in terms of nominal values, and an eye-popping 81% of the total net credit risk exposure in event of default.

The five are, in declining order of importance: JPMorgan Chase which holds a staggering \$88 trillion in derivatives (€66 trillion!). Morgan Chase is followed by Bank of America with \$38 trillion in derivatives, and Citibank with \$32 trillion. Number four in the derivatives sweepstakes is Goldman Sachs with a 'mere' \$30 trillion in derivatives. Number five, the merged Wells Fargo-Wachovia Bank, drops dramatically in size to \$5 trillion. Number six,

Britain's HSBC Bank USA has \$3.7 trillion. ("Geithner's 'Dirty Little Secret': The Entire Global Financial System is at Risk", F. William Engdahl, Global Research)

These five banking Goliaths are at the center of political power in America today. Their White House emissary, Timothy Geithner, has concocted a rescue plan--the Public-Private Investment Program--which will provide 94 percent funding from the FDIC for the purchase bad assets. The program is designed to keep asset prices artificially high while transferring the bulk of the losses to the taxpayer. The plan has been widely criticized and has even raised a few eyebrows even among usually-supportive members of the establishment like the Financial Times...

If that is indeed the state of the major US banks, then Pepe Escobar's predictions ([ICH/Real News video](#)) could well be spot on.