

A new challenge for the clean energy sector



At the time this *Ecos* was going to press, the clean energy sector was still pondering the implications of the Federal Government's surprise announcement in late April

that it would postpone an emissions trading scheme for Australia until after the expiry of the Kyoto Protocol in 2012.

The announcement occurred just prior to the renewable sector's key annual conference – which had been planned on the premise of an emissions trading scheme that would set a price for carbon in Australia.

Clean energy leaders now say the lack of a clear pricing signal for carbon could discourage investment in renewable energy in Australia. Their hopes for

sector's future are now pinned on the government's mandatory renewable energy target (MRET), which will require 20 per cent of the nation's energy to come from renewable sources by 2020. Recent changes to improve the effectiveness of MRET are discussed in our overview of clean energy (p.16).

This issue also covers Australia's ongoing water availability crisis. We take a closer look at the findings of a scientific review commissioned by the Northern Australia Land & Water Taskforce, which is examining the feasibility of exploiting northern Australia's heavy seasonal rainfall for increased crop production (p.8). We also report on how Australia's irrigated rice farmers have been coping with reduced water allocations, and how researchers are helping them 'push the envelope' to maximise crop yields from each megalitre of water used (p.22).

Our story on p.10 reports on the

contentious debate about prescribed burning and salvage logging in managing bushfire-prone areas. And if you've ever wondered about the role methane emissions play in global warming, our story on p.20 provides a scientific explanation of historical and recent trends in atmospheric methane levels. While recent years have seen a worrying rise in emissions, scientists say it's not too late to act and return to safer levels.

Enjoy your reading,

Mary-Lou Considine
Editor

Note: Mary-Lou is continuing to coordinate Ecos while Managing Editor, James Porteous, has taken on other duties.

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