In Brief

Water interception a reform risk

A significant volume of surface water and groundwater is unaccounted for as a result of land use activities outside current water entitlement regimes and planning frameworks, says a report produced for the National Water Commission.

The Surface and/or groundwater interception activities: initial estimates report, released in June, found that 5600 GL of water annually is intercepted by forestry plantations (2000 GL/yr), farm dams (1600 GL/yr), stock and domestic bores (1100 GL/yr) and overland flows (900 GL/yr). This equates to almost 25 per cent of all the entitled water on issue in Australia.

‘These are significant uses of water which need to be brought within the water planning and management fold, both to manage current activities and guide future growth,’ says National Water Commission CEO, Ken Matthews.

In agreeing to the National Water Initiative in 2004 (a national blueprint for water reform), all Australian governments committed to manage current activities and to identify the regions where water interception activities are of greatest concern within their jurisdictions. 

Wendy Pyper

More information
Interception report:
http://tiny.cc/vgtf8

Pinus radiata plantations near Mt Gambier, SA, 1993.

Urban turbine for Australia

A US-designed wind turbine will soon be available for use in urban and suburban Australia, thanks to a partnership between Nevada-based Windspire Energy™ and Australian-based AllSafe® Energy Efficient Products.

The 9.1 m tall, 1.2 m wide Windspire turbine operates silently, due to a unique propeller-free, vertical-axis design, and can generate about 2000 kilowatt hours a year. The turbine works best in average wind speeds of 18 km/h. Energy generation can be tracked in real time and surplus power can be sold back into the grid.

‘Windspire operates with three sets of tall, narrow airfoils that catch the wind, while spinning around a vertical axis,’ says AllSafe Director, Mark Hawley.

‘As the rotor turns, a generator converts the energy into electricity, and a grid-tie inverter converts the electricity from a direct current to an alternating current.’

The turbine is currently used by businesses, residences, schools, parks and museums in 18 countries and should enter the Australian market later this year. It is expected to retail at a price comparable to similar output solar photovoltaic systems.

The Windspire-AllSafe partners are now working to certify the turbine for the Australian market, making it eligible for Renewable Energy Certificates.

Wendy Pyper

More information
Windspire Energy:
www.WindspireEnergy.com
AllSafe: www.all-safe.com.au

Mandatory disclosure amendments welcomed by building industry

Recent amendments to the Building Energy Efficiency Disclosure Bill 2010 have been welcomed by the Property Council of Australia who previously opposed key aspects of the Bill.

The mandatory disclosure scheme for commercial buildings requires owners of offices of more than 2000 square metres to reveal the energy rating of the base building at the point of sale or lease. Such ratings are based on ‘NABERS,’ the National Australian Built Environment Rating System, which the Property Council says has ‘well known technical flaws’.

Prior to the amendments Property Council CEO, Mr Peter Verwer, said that the scheme ‘should focus on the base building performance and the tenant lighting aspect should be scrapped’.

Announcing the concessions to the Bill on June 16, Senator Penny Wong said that transitional arrangements will be extended so that only a NABERS assessment will be required for the first year of the scheme; that the lighting tool will become a mandatory component from the second year; and that penalties will be reduced.

Mr Verwer said that while closer monitoring and review of the scheme will be essential, ‘the changes mean a more workable and effective set of rules to guide disclosure and gives the industry a firm basis for moving forward’.

Wendy Pyper

More information
The Building Energy Efficiency Disclosure Bill:
http://tiny.cc/elecw2
Property Council of Australia:
http://tiny.cc/6e84a

Commercial building under construction. Disclosure of information about the energy efficiency of large commercial office buildings is mandated at the point of sale, lease and sublease.

Mark Fragos, CSIRO