

CUAC Rural and Regional Network Newsletter

May 08

Gas, water and electricity consumer issues in rural and regional areas

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It's not too late to respond to the CUAC review of the RRNN—if you have any comments or suggestions, please email kerry.munnery@cuac.org.au

'Working Together' Launched



Community groups and agencies joined CUAC staff at the launch of the CUAC funded Working Together project on 1 May 2008.

Working Together documents the Springvale Community Aid and Advice Bureau's work with the local community, utilities company AGL, and EWOV, to address utilities issues for newly arrived groups.

The report, prepared by Frain Consulting, is designed to be used as a model for other potential community partnerships

Working Together is available on the CUAC website.

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CUAC is an independent consumer advocacy organisation which ensures the interests of Victorian electricity, gas and water consumers—especially low income, disadvantaged, rural and regional, and Indigenous consumers—are effectively represented in the policy and regulatory debate.

CUAC believes all Victorians have a right to:

- ♦ affordable and sustainable electricity, gas and water
- ♦ have their interests heard in policy and regulatory decisions on electricity, gas and water
- ♦ not be disconnected from electricity, gas and/or water due solely to an inability to pay



Views expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily those of CUAC.

Affordability a major issue in ESC water price review

By James Henshall
CUAC Policy Officer

CUAC has strongly recommended a price cap for water for rural consumers in its latest submission to the Essential Services Commission (ESC).

The impact of proposed significant price increases and the implications for consumers are the central areas of focus in our recent submission to the ESC's Draft Decision on the Rural and Regional Urban Water Price Review 2008-2013.

Price paths and price changes

CUAC recommended that the ESC institute a price cap for residential customers at an agreed maximum level above which residential prices are not permitted to rise. Such a move would be fully in line with the Government's intervention in metropolitan residential water prices.

The Government recently announced an increase to water concessions in 2008/09 of 14.8% plus CPI to a maximum cap of \$182 per annum. This will be insufficient to provide real relief to low-income households facing price increases greater than that amount.

We encouraged the Commission not to approve price paths that will result in price shocks unless it is certain that:

- the impact on consumers is adequately understood by the customers of those water companies; and
- companies proposing a price path with steep price rises in the first year take account of impacts on affordability for customers, and have effective hardship programs in place to meet rising affordability-related difficulties.

Tariffs must be developed with affordability as a central criterion to ensure customers' ongoing access to water

The ESC's Water Performance Report (available at <http://www.esc.vic.gov.au/public/Water/>) clearly demonstrated that there are companies who take an aggressive and unhelpful position in relation to cus-



tomers in hardship – CUAC is particularly concerned about Goulburn Valley, Coliban Water and Lower Murray Water.

Financial Hardship

CUAC believes that water tariffs must be developed with affordability as a central criterion, to ensure customers' ongoing access to water. The ESC's approval of price changes and price paths should take into account the implications of price rises for households' disposable income and their capacity to meet regular household expenses. Rural and regional households are particularly vulnerable as average water bills are greater than for metropolitan customers.

Companies must therefore develop and implement comprehensive hardship programs to minimise the significant impacts of future price rises and ensure families retain safe and affordable access to water.

Given the degree of pressures on affordability, and the likelihood that companies will see significantly more consumers experiencing financial hardship, we recommended that the Commission consider requiring companies to report on a more regular basis on affordability measures. A six monthly public report, for example, would enable consumers and the ESC to more closely track consumers' experience

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Removing barriers to distributed generation

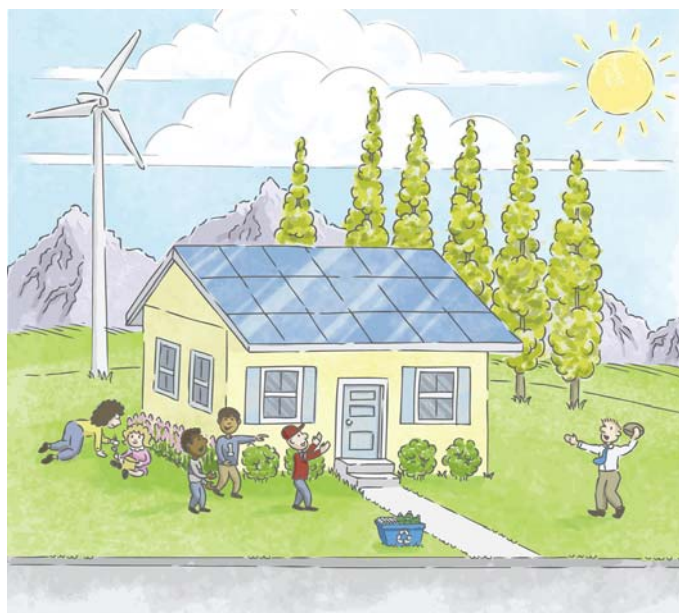
Tosh Szatow
CUAC Policy Officer

CUAC was encouraged to see Environment Minister, Peter Garret, announce action to streamline approvals of rebate claims on solar hot water systems on 22 April.

The announcement comes hot on the heels of CUAC research into barriers to distributed generation (DG) part of which highlighted the need to address costly delays in processing claims for solar electric systems (the report is available on www.cuac.org.au) While we can't claim full responsibility for the announcement, we were close!

The announcement highlights the need for government policies to be backed with operational efficiency. In the case of solar electricity, delays in processing rebates can leave installers bearing significant cash flow risks that ultimately undermine their confidence and willingness to take on installation work.

On the surface, these issues appear to be relatively minor. However they are real practical impediments to consumers taking up government incentives on such products. Ultimately, these impediments reduce the effectiveness of government programs and may result in lower than predicted uptake rates. Without understanding such issues, low uptake rates may be blamed on consumer willingness to pay resulting in either higher rebates or scrapping of rebates, both of which fail the consumers best interest.



As the title suggests, CUAC's research into barriers to DG sought to look past commonly held assumptions and beliefs on barriers to DG. By interviewing people engaged in the industry on a daily basis, the report draws out the practical issues that confront those organisations and individuals implementing DG and suggests ways to resolve them.

CUAC looks forward to seeing a similar commitment from Minister Garret's office for streamlining rebates on solar electric systems.

Beyond Free Market Assumptions: addressing barriers to distributed generation is on the CUAC website www.cuac.org.au.

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with the new price increases, and provide information to government to consider in making its decisions about the level of concessions.

Guaranteed Service Levels

We remain disappointed that a large majority of the water businesses will not be applying a Guaranteed Service Level (GSL) scheme during the regulatory period, and applaud those that will: Barwon Water, Central Highlands Water, Western Water and Wannon Water.

We strongly supported the view that a GSL scheme should be introduced by those other busi-

nesses, given that around 90 per cent of the Victorian community (including customers of metropolitan water businesses) will be provided with a guaranteed minimum level of service. The Commission should strongly encourage those businesses that will not be applying a scheme to institute one early in the regulatory period.

CUAC's submission to the ESC Rural and Regional Urban Water Price Review 2008-2013 is available on the CUAC website www.cuac.org.au.

The Budget in brief

The Federal Budget brought down a range of initiatives in the areas of energy, water and sustainability. Significant announcements include:

Major commitments

- \$130 million over four years to Tackling Climate Change – Australia’s Farming Future, administered by the Dept. of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to help primary producers adapt and respond to climate change.
- Water reform has been allocated \$12.9 billion over 10 years through the *Water for the Future* plan. \$1 billion is allocated to the national Urban Water and Desalination Plan, through which cities and towns of 50,000 or more will be eligible for funding to establish new sources of water supply through the use of desalination, recycling and stormwater harvesting.
- The introduction of a ‘cap-and-trade’ emissions trading scheme in 2010. An additional \$37.3 million over four years is being provided to the Dept. of Climate Change to develop the scheme.
- A commitment to achieving a 20 per cent share of renewable energy by 2020.
- Funding for clean coal and renewable energy through \$150 million for the Energy Innovation Fund, specifically solar technology research; \$500 million for the Renewable Energy Fund, targeting geothermal energy and second generation biofuel technology; and \$500 million for the Clean Coal Fund.

Household

- As part of the Water for the Future initiative, rebates of up to \$500 to help install rainwater tanks and grey water facilities in up to 500,000 homes.
- \$300 million over the next five years to provide Green Loans for Australian households. Low interest green loans of up to \$10,000 will be available to assist families to install solar, water and energy efficient products.
- Bringing forward \$25.6 million to the solar rebate scheme to bring the allocation to \$56.6 million. The scheme will also now be means tested, and only households with an annual taxable income of less than \$100,000 will be eligible.
- \$150 million over five years to the Low Emis-

sion Plan for Renters program to provide rebates to accelerate the installation of insulation in up to 300,000 rental households.

- A One Stop Green Shop linking schools, business and families to Commonwealth, State and local government energy efficiency programs funded to \$3 million.
- A 10 star energy efficiency system rating the efficiency of appliances at \$14 million
- Low Interest Green Loans of up to \$10,000 for up to 200,000 households for the installation of solar, water and energy efficient products

Business

Small and medium sized businesses will be able to apply for up to \$200,000 towards energy efficiency of existing buildings through the \$90 million Green Building Fund.

Manufacturers will be able to apply to the Re-Tooling for climate Change program to improve the efficiency of their production processes. Grants between \$10,000 and \$500,000 for up to a third of the cost of each project will be allocated to small to medium sized manufacturers who improve recycling and efficiency.



Upcoming Forum: Improving Alternative Energy Supplies

CUAC and Regional Development Victoria are planning a forum on the opportunities, risks, impediments, costs and benefits of securing alternative and renewable energy supplies.

The Forum will be held in Melbourne in July. (A date has yet to be confirmed.)

If you would like to be put on a contact list for further information, please contact James Henshall at CUAC on (03) 9639 7300 or 1300 656 767 or email james.henshall@cuac.org.au

Sustainability fund winners

Regional Victoria has been well represented in the third round of the Sustainability Fund, announced on 23 April. The grants support initiatives that foster sustainable resource use and have economic and social benefits for Victorians.

Regional projects include:

- Gippsland Dairy Board: *Green Cleaning for dairies – new sustainable systems for cleaning farm milking equipment.*
- Ballarat Renewable Energy and Zero Emissions (BREAZE): *Climate change action – a model for community action groups.*
- Mount Alexander Sustainability Group: *Creating a Climate of Change.*
- Resource GV on behalf of Association of Victorian Regional Waste Management Groups: *Sort and Save – RWMG transfer station promotional campaign.*
- KR Castlemaine: *The sustainable safe recycling of effluents from regional food processors.*
- Phillip Island Landcare: *Sustaining Coastal Communities – connecting the street to the land.*
- Towong Shire Council: *Sustainable watering of recreation reserves using treated effluent and/or stormwater.*
- Gippsland Regional Waste Management Group: *Gippsland regional waste collectors and recyclers*
- North East Victorian Waste Management Group: *Applying the waste hierarchy to organic waste management in North East Victoria.*
- Ausplaztik: *Regional Victoria's Mobile Landfill Waste Shredder – Beast into Beauty*
- City of Whittlesea: *Growling Frog Golf course Subsurface Irrigation.*

Thirty-four projects have been granted funding for a total of \$6.5 million.

For more information go to www.sustainability.vic.gov.au.



Land and Biodiversity Workshops



The Department of Sustainability and Environment is running a series of workshops for community input into issues of land and biodiversity at a time of climate change.

The workshops will contribute to a White Paper, due for release in 2009, which aims to:

- set the direction for Victorian Government policy and investment priorities in natural resource management, land health and biodiversity for the next 20-50 years
- consider how environment and natural resource management activity at the regional, catchment, local and farm scale, and on public land, is contributing to Victoria's overall environmental health
- make sure Victorian Government policy and investment is responsive to new threats and opportunities.

A Consultation Paper was released in April 2007, and over 360 submissions were submitted in response. These submissions informed a Green Paper which was released on 6 April 2008. This paper is another stage in the process towards developing the final White paper, which is the statement of the State Government's policy and intentions. It outlines the ongoing decline in land health and biodiversity and discusses approaches for addressing these issues.

You can have input into the process in two ways: making a formal submission – see details at www.dse.vic.gov.au – or attending a workshop.

Workshops will be held in:

Shepparton: 23 May 9am – 2pm
Mildura 26 May 11am – 4pm
Melbourne CBD 30 May 9am 1pm
Leongatha 3 June 12pm – 5pm
Traralgon 4 June 11am – 4pm
Bairnsdale 5 June 9am – 2pm.

You need to register your interest and have confirmation that a place is available to be able to attend.

To register your interest, or to get copies of the Green Paper or view previous papers and submissions, go to the website www.dse.vic.gov.au.

Programs to assist power upgrades

On Farm Energy Program

Farmers in eastern Victoria will receive \$1.8 million in funding from the State government to upgrade their electricity supply.

The funding to distributor SP AusNet will help farmers secure reliable energy by upgrading Single Wire Earth Return (SWER) to three phase electricity.

SP AusNet is expected to contribute \$5.4 million to complete the projects, worth \$9 million.

The funding is particularly aimed at dairy farms, which require considerable electricity.

A further \$1.8 million has been allocated to Victorian customers of the electricity distributor Powercor, and is part of the \$4 million On Farm Energy Grant program.

Farmers wishing to apply for On-Farm Energy Grant program funding should contact SP AusNet on 1300 360 795 or Craig Eyes at the Dept. of Innovation Industry and Regional Development on 03 9651 8121 for more information.

Regional Electrical Access Program (REAP)

REAP recognizes that the cost of new and upgraded electrical connections in regional locations can be significant and is usually much greater than a similar project in urban areas. Electrical upgrades and new connections are provided by the electrical distribution companies (Powercor and SP AusNet in regional Victoria) and the customer's contribution is calculated in accordance with a guideline from the Essential Services Commission. However, the customer's contribution can be significant if the local powerline is distant or does not have adequate spare capacity, resulting in a need for major works to meet the power request. REAP provides a grant of up to 50% of the customer's contribution where the customer is a business and the works will improve the local energy capacity availability for surrounding properties.

Contact: Glenne Drover Dept. of Innovation Industry and Regional Development on 03 9651 8124 for more information.



Smart Water Fund grants

The Smart Water Fund announced a range of grants to regional projects amongst others Round 5 recipients on 9 April.

The Smart Water Fund is an initiative of Melbourne's water businesses – City West Water, South East Water, Yarra Valley Water – and the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Regional Open Projects included

- a proposal by City of Greater Geelong for treated wastewater from the Barwon Prison sewage treatment plant to be diverted to irrigate the nearby Elcho Park Golf Course;
- a project from the Bendigo Harness Racing Club to research and trial alternative harness racing track surface materials to determine the effectiveness of reducing water use substantially on harness racing tracks;
- a plan by the Baw Baw Shire Council to install and demonstrate a greywater system for use in toilet flushing at the Shire office.

The Smart Water Fund will soon release its Round 6 Funding Program. The Fund will offer \$5 million towards innovative projects that undertake water conservation, recycling and biosolids management in Metropolitan Melbourne and Regional Victoria. Consumers are encouraged to start thinking about innovative solutions that may be eligible for funding.

Go to the Smart Water website

www.smartwater.com.au to see the full list of Round 5 recipients and for details of Round 6. You can subscribe to a free newsletter to keep you in-



Social Inclusion and Energy Issues ACOSS 2008

The importance of energy issues in issues of social inclusion was acknowledged at a major conference on Social Inclusion, held in Melbourne in April.

The ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Services) National Conference was attended by a wide range of community sector, government and business representatives, and was opened with speeches by Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Premier John Brumby, Senator Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion, and Brendan O'Connor, Minister for Employment Participation.

Climate change, essential services and equity was one of nine workshops held on the second day of the conference along with health, diversity, housing and other major issues areas.

Participants in the workshop documented that energy is an essential services that needs to be supplied equitably, affordably, reliably and sustainably. Low income consumers, disadvantaged and vulnerable consumers were acknowledged to be at the highest risk of exclusion from equitable access.

The particular issues of rural and remote areas were recognised in terms of unreliable supply and reduced access to reticulated gas.

Challenges arising from climate change included the potential for low income consumers to experience more adverse impacts, combined with less capacity to adapt or to benefit from climate change policies and programs.

It was argued the equity principles should be established for consideration in policy debate about climate change, for example that 'no low income household should be worse off as a result of climate change or responses to climate change.'

Delegates also discussed the need for safety net arrangements to ensure a carbon price does not further disadvantage low income households.

The group suggested strategies including the need for high levels of consumer protection for the national electricity and gas markets; and pricing essential energy and water services in a way that ensures access to reasonable minimum quantity. It was noted that more information was needed about quality of housing stock and programs to increase energy efficiency.

ACOSS is finalizing the Conference Papers, which will be available from www.acoss.org.au.

Latest from EWOV

The Electricity and Water Ombudsman Victoria (EWOV) has found there are increasing numbers of complaints where the customer has contacted the energy or water company more than once.

'This shows there is still room for improvement in companies' internal dispute resolution processes,' said Ombudsman Fiona McLeod.

EWOV has released Resolution 25, its bi-annual newsletter which summarises the issues it has dealt with in the previous six months. The report covers complaints from July to December 2007.

The most common issue across all utilities in that period was billing, which included complaints about bills being too high, errors, and queries on fees and charges.

Overall, there were 9,463 cases, up 6%. EWOV achieved a total of \$587,607 in redress for customers.

EWOV also had independent research conducted on customer satisfaction levels through a survey of 5,193 (10.6%) of customers for the period. The research found that 90% of the customers surveyed rated EWOV's service as very good or excellent and 97% would recommend EWOV to a friend. The researchers concluded the EWOV was in the class of world's best practice.

There are two new information sheets on the EWOV website. They are:

Electricity, Gas and Water Meters, which explains how these meters operate and are read, and includes information on Interval Meters; and

Electricity, Gas and Water: Information for new Transitional Housing tenants. This includes information for people in transitional on how to set up and close accounts, deal with marketers and get help with bills and provides space for workers to add in details of local electricity, gas and water companies.

Resolution 25 and the information sheets can be downloaded from the EWOV website at www.ewov.com.au.

New Resource

Commonwealth Dept of Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries has released the 2008 Social Atlas for Rural and Regional Australia which 'describes the pattern of social and economic change of people and communities in non metropolitan Australia'.

Free download available at:
<http://www.affashop.gov.au>

Low income residents miss out on natural gas benefits

Eastern Access Community Health (EACH) has completed a study into the impact of gas extension on fuel poverty in the Upper Yarra. Results suggest that people on low incomes are generally not getting the benefits of access to natural gas.

The study was funded through a CUAC Executive Officer Grant, with the aim of examining equity of access to the roll-out of reticulated natural gas for consumers in the Shire of Yarra Ranges.

The target group for the study was:

- o home owners on low incomes
- o tenants in private rental accommodation
- o tenants in public housing.

The project examined whether the extension of gas to the Upper Yarra had met the viable alternative fuel needs of residents of Upper Yarra, with a particular focus on low-income households.

The study is particularly timely given the end of the State Government's Natural Gas Extension Program and the review undertaken by the Department of Human Services.

Among some of the findings of the study were

- Conversion to natural gas is relatively inexpensive and can provide up to 6,000 residents of the Yarra Valley with an alternative fuel source. Approximately 3,000 local households (50%) have converted to natural gas.
- Financial stress due to energy costs remains prominent in many parts of the Upper Yarra. The findings show that tenants in private and public rentals, and home owners on government, low or fixed incomes did not connect to natural gas. Tenants have little choice as landlords see no financial benefit in conversion.
- While the DHS Capital Grants Scheme has played an important role in assisting those Victorians in financial hardship with replacement of household appliances, the scheme would benefit many low income homeowners if it was broadened to include the purchase of gas heaters where the previous heating was electric.
- The Victorian government needs to address the issue of the unwillingness of landlords' to convert to natural gas. Whether the solution lies in mandated change to improve the heating efficiency of current rental properties, or other landlord incentive options is a key question.



- The Victorian Government needs to undertake tougher and targeted action to achieve energy efficiency in the private rental market.

Among the key recommendations from the study are for:

- The Victorian government to regulate minimum heating standards for all tenanted properties.
- The Victorian government to reappraise the rebate incentive packages in the Upper Yarra in light of its policies in *A Fairer Victoria*.
- The Department of Human Services Capital Grants Scheme be broadened to allow low income households to purchase gas heaters where the previous heating was wood or electric.

CUAC along with the Tenants Unions of Victoria intends to use the report and its findings in its discussion with Concessions, Department of Human Services, and the Department of Primary Industries in the extension of natural gas facilities.

The report also provides some insightful stories of some residents in the study area and the affordability issues they face.

Bernadette Douglas and Peter Gartlan from EACH co-ordinated the survey and report, which is available on the CUAC website www.cuac.org.au.

Study show water price does not affect consumption in drought

A CUAC funded research project has found that price increases are not effective in reducing water use in severe drought conditions.

'Water policy and its effect on regional communities' was released by the Centre for Regional Innovation and Competitiveness at the University of Ballarat this month.

CRIC devised a model to simulate the effects of various water policies on three regional communities – a high-stressed Western Victorian town, a moderately stressed Central Victorian town and a low stressed Eastern Victorian town. Ballarat as used as a larger-town comparison with the smaller towns.

Each town was developed as a model based on ABS data on population, income, retail sales, manufacturing activity, service, health and medical and environmental aspects.

To model the impact of different water policies, data was input to a model incorporating demand mechanisms and water supply infrastructure.

Pricing, regulation and behavioural water policies were examined using various simulations and comparisons.

The research concluded that the most price elastic part of consumer water demand has been eliminated following restrictions and voluntary reductions in water usage, though price increases do provide a catalyst to encourage consumers to install AAA technologies.

It also found that under severe water restrictions and high water prices, regional towns will suffer short term loss of jobs from traditional industries until new and lower water-using industries can be established. It notes that the limited wealth and scarce resources of high stress towns exacerbates their ability to make structural change.

Water trading is found to be a method of ameliorating water crises in high stress towns and obtaining income in low stress towns, but the report finds that trading requires infrastructure development and regulation to ensure efficiency and equity in sustainable use of water.

The report is available on the CUAC website, www.cuac.org.au .

Information for farmers on recycled water use

The Victorian Farmers Federation has produced a report on the use of recycled water, with funding from a CUAC grant.

'Issues for farmers considering the use of reclaimed water for agriculture' examines some of the risks, regulatory requirements and contractual arrangements involved in the use of recycled water.

The report includes information on:

- EPA guidelines and Environmental Improvement Plans
- Other legislation relevant to the use of recycled water
- The nature of legal agreements between supplier and users of reclaimed water
- Water quality standards
- General issues and advice around pricing
- Security of supply
- Risk sharing

The report argues that there is pressure from the community to use more recycled water, and from farmers to have access to it, but that not enough attention has been given to ensuring access arrangements are appropriate.

It recommends that the ESC should regulate the price of recycled water in a way comparable to the regulation of irrigation water; that a manual be developed for reclaimed water agreements in Victoria similar to that published in Queensland; and that the Federation members are assisted to collectively negotiate prices and conditions with suppliers.

The report is available on the CUAC website www.cuac.org.au .





New sewerage system for Peterborough

A new Sewerage Scheme in Peterborough, 40 kilometers southeast of Warnambool, will replace the old and inefficient septic tank system.

The new scheme includes:

- 8.8 kilometers of reticulated sewers, transfer mains and property connections
- 4.3 kilometers of sewerage main to connect the treatment plant to the reticulated system
- Three sewerage pumping stations; and
- A system of recycling water from the Peterborough Water Reclamation Plant to irrigate land for producing pasture for the dairy industry.

The wastewater is pumped four kilometers from the town to a lagoon treatment plant where it will be treated to EPA Class B standard.

The project received \$900,000 from the Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Program. Peterborough residential landowner contributions have been capped at \$800 per household.

A community open day will be held on the Queens Birthday Weekend.

Halls Gap Water Harvest

Hall Gap Recreation reserve will benefit from a project for harvesting, diverting, storing and re-using stormwater. The project is stage one of a three-stage comprehensive infrastructure development program for Halls Gap by the Northern Grampians Shire. A second project involves harvesting and diverting water for wetlands/dam storage and re-using it for fire purposes as well as irrigating local parks and gardens. The State government provided \$250,000 to the Shire Council for the \$375,000 project, through the Small Towns Development Fund.

Coleraine Racing Club Dam

The Coleraine Racing Club is drought-proofing its racecourse by enlarging its dam. Coleraine hosts the oldest steeplechase in Australia, and last year celebrated its 150 birthday. The works were supported by a grant of \$23,000 from the State government.

Longwarry Food Park slashes energy use

Longwarry Food Park has introduced measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The company bought the Bonlac Foods factory in Longwarry in 2001 and recommissioned the plant for the manufacture of dairy powders. It also operates as a food park,

providing services to tenants such as electricity, drainage, water, compressed air, and research and development facilities. An new energy efficient boiler has replaced two 25 year old boilers, and variable speed drives controlling the Park's fans and motors have replaced superseded control technology.

Hepburn energy efficiency seminar

If you live or around Hepburn Springs, find out how to reduce your ecological footprint, save money, and make a difference to climate change at home at the Energy Smart Household seminar.

Date: 24 May, 9.30am-12noon

Hepburn Springs - Savoia Hotel, 69 Main Road

The cost is \$25 per person, or \$35 for two people from the same household. For more information contact Maureen Corbett on (03) 5348 2592 or mcorbett@giant.net.au.

Bores for Maryborough

Maryborough will get two new bores which are expected to provide up to 805 million litres of quality groundwater each year. The bores will tap into the Moorlort Deep Lead and will supplement Maryborough's surface water supplies from the Talbot, Evansford and Tullroop Reservoirs.

Rural Woman of the Year

The Rural Woman of the Year is Dunolly herb farmer Lisa Mahon. Ms Mahon runs the award winning Bromley Organics, which specializes in producing organic dried herbs. Part of the award is a \$10,000 bursary which she will use to research harvesting technology in both Australia and New Zealand and to expand and develop a stronger network of growers. Further information on the Victorian Rural Women's Award can be found at www.dpi.vic.gov.au.

Pamper day

Long time regional network member Cheryl Sanderson has organised her own 'Pamper Day' for local Myrtleford women. With no funding, Cheryl has single-handedly organised drought counsellors, service providers and guest speakers, as well as therapists, massages, facials, haircuts and nail treatments. Each participant will also receive a 'pamper pack'. The day is aimed to keep up the spirits of rural women in difficult times.