

# 'Food bowl' dropped while food imports flood in

by Bill F.

The latest example of the inability of the Australian ruling class to cope with climate warming and the effects of globalisation is the report from the Northern Australia Land and Water Taskforce, which rejected the concept of the Top End becoming a new 'food bowl' for Australia.

Until now, Australia has been able to grow its own food and export quality produce around the world. Australian grains, meat and fruit have attracted top prices on the world markets and have sustained farming and agricultural communities for many decades. A good 40% comes from the Murray-Darling basin, now crippled by drought and the excessive irrigation demands of crops such as rice and cotton.

Even though the Taskforce found that the north of Australia received annual rainfall of a million billion litres, it concluded that there was not enough water to sustain a new large 'food bowl' development. The agricultural potential of the region was only considered in terms of groundwater supplies, and did not look at surface water run-off and the possibility of new dams and pipelines.

Independent Queensland MP Bob Katter was critical of the report, saying "If you don't build dams up there you become a net importer of food, because half the Murray-Darling is closing down." In raising the issue of food security, Katter pointed out that the Mitchell River in northern Queensland is now the biggest river system, the Murray-Darling second, and the Burdiken River, south of Townsville, is third. The northern third of Australia has a combined run-off of 305 million megalitres.

Like the poem *Ancient Mariner*, it's a matter of "Water, water, everywhere, but not a drop to drink."

## Profits come first, people second

Australia's capitalist system, dominated by foreign imperialism, lacks the vision, the investment resources and a national coordinated plan to take advantage of the situation and develop the north in a balanced way that promotes conservation and tourism alongside sustainable agriculture. The simple reason is the profit motive. If capitalism can't make a (short term) profit, it just isn't interested.

The US-Australia Free Trade Agreement has made matters worse by turning Australia into a dumping ground for US produce, while denying Australia access to US markets.

Look at what's been happening with



fruit and vegetables. In the last six months of 2009, Australia imported more produce than it exported - \$826 million in, \$749 million out. While 20% of imported fruit and vegetables comes from New Zealand, China is catching up fast. The supermarket monopolies

are sourcing cheaper produce from overseas and Australian growers and suppliers are being squeezed out.

While the traditional right-wing has been most vocal in its criticism of the report, more progressive sections of the people have always held the dream

of developing the north for the benefit of all. A people's anti-imperialist, democratic government will mobilise the enthusiasm of the people to achieve the historic dream of opening up the north and bringing the waters of life to the south.

## Nuclear energy company buys Solar Systems

Edited posting from  
[savesolarsystems.wordpress.com](http://savesolarsystems.wordpress.com)

**"Solar Systems was to build Australia's first large scale solar power plant in Mildura. Key investor TRUenergy (which also owns Yallourn brown coal power station and mine) decided not to put more money in without finding further funding partners. This was at the time the financial crisis hit, and Solar Systems subsequently went into receivership, making 100 workers redundant.**

"The Mildura solar power plant was planned to power all of Mildura, 45000 homes, and create over 1000 jobs. The Brumby and Rudd governments, while promising \$125 million between them, have consistently refused to guarantee it goes ahead.

"After a long administration period and several protests by the Save Solar Systems campaign, Solar Systems has been sold to Silex, a company involved with the nuclear industry and uranium enrichment. Their media release promotes nuclear power, which is deadly and not a solution to climate change.

"Will the Mildura solar plant still be built and if so when? Silex media release states: "Following completion of the acquisition, Silex will conduct a 12 to 18 month technology commercialisation program in parallel with business development and marketing activities, with the aim of commencing commercial project activities in 2011. This program



The gates are closed - another failure of the capitalist market economy

could then lead to the construction of a 2MW pilot facility in Mildura (potentially a precursor to a -150MW power station)."

"While government says \$125 million remains on the table, 2011 is after both state and federal elections. The Mildura power plant should be a condition of sale, construction should start now. Climate change means renewable energy has become an essential service. Government must guarantee the Mildura Solar Power plant is built. This should be just the start of a transition to 100% renewable energy.

"Despite the threat of abrupt climate change, the market has failed to deliver; renewable energy in Australia is only around 6% of total electricity supply. It was government that built all existing coal fired power stations; government must take responsibility for the transition to renewable energy.

## The CPRS won't work

"The federal government says we should rely on their version of carbon trading, the CPRS. Yet this is a con; carbon trading is further reliance on the market to solve market failure. Treasury modelling shows it won't reduce Australian emissions before 2035, and even that is assuming "clean coal" works.

"The CPRS will see the biggest polluters - brown coal, black coal, gas, oil and aluminium, get billions of dollars in handouts and windfall profits from the sale of free permits.

"Building large scale renewable power stations would reduce emissions, but carbon pricing can't guarantee they are built. We need government policy that starts building now - not just Mildura, but renewable energy across Australia."