



# Nathan Rees MP

## Minister for Emergency Services

## Minister for Water

### NEWS RELEASE

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## GROUNDWATER BOREFIELDS OFF THE AGENDA

NSW Minister for Water, Nathan Rees said today that the Government had decided to shelve construction of proposed borefields in the Southern Highlands and Western Sydney.

Mr Rees told Parliament that Sydney's water saving efforts and the easing of the drought conditions with recent rainfall had allowed the Government to halt construction of groundwater borefields at Kangaloon in the Southern Highlands and Leonay and Wallacia in Western Sydney.

"It was an emergency measure and the emergency is over," Mr Rees said.

"The borefields were a measure developed in the face of extreme drought when our dam levels were getting critically low. It is sobering to remember that early last year our dam storages were around 33 per cent.

"But what few people realise is that without our emergency drought measures – water restrictions, recycling programs and transferring large volumes from the Shoalhaven river for the past several years – Sydney's dams would have been closer to 10 per cent at the beginning of last year. That is simply alarming.

"In that context we pulled out all stops to source additional water for Sydney. The most significant is the desalination plant, now under construction.

"The bore-fields could also augment supply but by a really very modest amount – a small fraction of overall supply.

"Many people have raised concerns about extracting this water and possible effects. Environmentalists, farmers and local residents have made their feelings plain.

"Now, with the luxury of good reserves in our dams and desal on track to provide huge volumes - using 100 per cent renewable energy - by the summer of 2009/10, we can afford to put the bore-field option on the shelf. It can be quickly reactivated and produce water within 18 months if we ever find ourselves in extreme drought again in the future.

"But for now, it's off the agenda," Mr Rees said.

The move has been welcomed by diverse groups. Jonathan Bell of the NSW Farmers' Federation and local cattle farmer said: *"This is a sensible approach."*

*"It is legitimate to explore this resource and examine the benefits and environmental impacts; however other options in the Metropolitan Water Plan should be implemented first."*

*“If dam levels did again head towards critical we can quickly construct the bore-fields as an emergency measure,” Mr Bell said.*

And the Executive Director of the Nature Conservation Council, Cate Faehrmann, said: *“I congratulate the government on its very sensible decision not to proceed with drilling Kangaloon's aquifers.”*

*“This is an important step towards a sustainable water supply for Sydney and it's encouraging to see the Government listening to the local community's concerns in this instance.*

*“This is the right decision, for the local community, the environment and the people of NSW. The Nature Conservation Council of NSW looks forward to continuing to work with the State Government on securing a safe and sustainable water supply for Sydney,” Ms Faehrmann said.*

Development at Kangaloon will be halted at the point where land acquisitions, planning approval and tender design are complete, to enable reactivation without delay in future emergencies.

Studies on emergency ground-water began when Sydney's dam levels dropped below 40 per cent and found that borefields could provide up to 30 billion litres of water a year for more than two years as an emergency drought relief measure.

“The lemma Government is securing Greater Sydney's long-term water supplies through a record \$5 billion investment program over the next four years,” Mr Rees said.

“And Sydneysiders have joined in the water saving battle in a huge way - using the same amount of water now as we did in 1974 with a million more people.

“The lemma Government's Metropolitan Water plan has delivered diverse and secure drinking water options for the future that give certainty to families and investment security to business,” Mr Rees said.

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