



Drumbeat: July 11, 2010

Posted by [Leanan](#) on July 11, 2010 - 9:05am

Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

[Arid Australia Sips Seawater, but at a Cost](#)

In one of the country's biggest infrastructure projects in its history, Australia's five largest cities are spending \$13.2 billion on desalination plants capable of sucking millions of gallons of seawater from the surrounding oceans every day, removing the salt and yielding potable water. In two years, when the last plant is scheduled to be up and running, Australia's major cities will draw up to 30 percent of their water from the sea.

The country is still recovering from its worst drought ever, a decade-long parching that the government says was deepened by climate change. With water shortages looming, other countries, including the United States and China, are also looking to the sea.

"We consider ourselves the canary in the coal mine for climate change-induced changes to water supply systems," said Ross Young, executive director of the Water Services Association of Australia, an umbrella group of the country's urban water utilities. He described the \$13.2 billion as "the cost of adapting to climate change."

But desalination is also drawing fierce criticism and civic protests. Many homeowners, angry about rising water bills, and environmentalists, wary of the plants' effect on the climate, call the projects energy-hungry white elephants. Stricter conservation measures, like mandating more efficient washing machines, would easily wring more water from existing supplies, critics say.

Desalination has also helped dampen the enthusiasm for a "big Australia," the previous, immigration-friendly government's projection that the country's population will rise to 36 million in 2050, from 22 million now.

get bigger and the very big get very bigger. India's population -- now at 1.2 billion -- will have a 33 percent growth to 1.6 billion. China goes from 1.3 billion to 1.4 billion. Sub-Saharan Africa -- areas which can least afford a baby boom -- generally will experience a doubling of population.

The U.S. also will have a 33 percent population growth, from 305 million to 405 million. What is amazing is 80 percent of that growth will be the result of immigrants or the children of first-generation Americans -- specifically 47 percent by immigrants and 33 percent by American born children of migrants. Only 18 percent will be descendants of today's residents. Avely, in halting drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, he's committing a fearsome folly.

[Another 1,500MW to be added to national grid by December](#)

LAHORE: The national grid will have another 1,500MW by December this year that would help curtail the power shortage, a senior government official said on Saturday.

...In order to make electricity affordable, an energy mix is the need of the hour and, therefore, the government spends all its energies on the use of indigenous resources such as hydropower and local coal in Thar, as well as imported coal, the minister said.

[Dispute on Oil Spill Panel Flares Before First Meeting](#)

WASHINGTON—The independent commission appointed by President Barack Obama to investigate the Gulf of Mexico oil spill will hold its first formal meeting Monday, but it is already at the center of several battles raging in Washington.

Republicans and some Democrats in Congress have questioned panel members' competence and ideological leanings. They note that none of the commissioners has any experience in petroleum engineering, and that several have spoken out strongly against offshore drilling.

[BP may cut payments to 40,000](#)

NEW ORLEANS -- BP has decided to reduce payments to tens of thousands of people whose claim files are incomplete, the secretary of Louisiana's Department of Children and Family Services said.

"This action is irresponsible and in complete contrast to BP's repeated promise that they will 'make things right,'" she wrote in a letter sent Friday to federal oil spill claims administrator Kenneth Feinberg.

[Obama is fostering energy crisis](#)

WASHINGTON -- From somewhere --inside the White House or the Department of Energy -- United States President Barack Obama is getting some pretty awful advice.

It's bad enough that he's been persuaded that there's a Nirvana Land of windmills and sunbeams in the future of electricity. But much more gravely, in halting drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, he's committing a fearsome folly.

[Abu Dhabi reluctant to invest in BP: report](#)

Abu Dhabi is reluctant to invest in British Petroleum (BP), a report said, only days after the British company's chief was thought to have sought investment from sovereign wealth funds on a visit to the Gulf state. Citing sources, the Middle East Economic Survey said it "understands that Abu Dhabi has signaled a reluctance to buy into BP," in its latest edition to be published tomorrow.

"Sources close to Abu Dhabi investment funds said that they are already in court over a Citigroup investment and that the move would be too politically charged and there are too many unknowns," the MEES newsletter said.

[Farmers feel the heat as temperatures soar](#)

This summer's lack of rain and prolonged high temperatures are presenting significant problems for farmers and could even lead to price rises in the shops, experts have warned.

[Arid Australia Sips Seawater, but at a Cost](#)

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[Will oil be coal?](#)

Peak Oil, a point where the world's oil production tops off, may be around the corner, somewhere between now and 2025.

Add political uncertainty and speculative frenzy to the mix. The no-brainer result: bumper prices for the world's primary energy source.

There is growing consensus that a barrel of oil at \$100 (and plus plus at times), at constant 2008 prices, might be the norm for a large part of the next 20 years.

For a foretaste of possible hubris, look no further than the world's last primary energy source: coal.

[Peak Oil and the Myth Behind Our Energy Independence](#)

Yet, as I noticed more Hummers showing their gas guzzling faces than usual, I couldn't help but shake my head and wonder whether or not the American public has forgotten about \$150/bbl oil.

After all, it's only been two years...

But the re-emergence of Hummers aside, there was something else that captured my attention.

The public is about to get blind-sided by the upcoming peak oil crunch.

[India enters brave new world](#)

As protests on the subcontinent showed, people are not going to give up cheap petrol without a fight. But subsidies on fossil fuels are giving the market a bias against the crucial introduction of renewable energy.

[BP reportedly in talks to sell Alaska oil field](#)

LONDON — BP is in talks to sell up to \$12 billion of assets, including its big stake in Alaska's Prudhoe Bay, the largest oil field in North America, The Sunday Times of London reported.

A sale would be the latest of several steps the beleaguered oil giant is taking to raise money to pay for damages from the disastrous oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the Times said.

[BP Makes Progress in Changing Oil-Capture System at Leaking Well in Gulf](#)

BP Plc is making progress on removing a device capturing oil from its leaking Macondo well in the Gulf of Mexico, as it prepares to install a more efficient collection system.

BP plans to have a new seal on the gushing well sometime within the next week and the company said it will take two to three weeks to connect all the surface vessels to the wellhead. BP's target is to collect as much as 80,000 barrels a day, more than the estimated amount of the leak, Kent Wells, vice president of exploration and production, said in a conference call from Houston yesterday.

[Tests: No crude oil in tar balls found along Florida coast](#)

U.S. Coast Guard lab findings defy the longstanding belief that a regular ingredient of at least some of the tar balls that for years have turned up occasionally on state beaches is either crude spilled during offshore drilling or oil that seeped from natural vents under the Gulf.

Of the 192 batches of Florida tar-ball samples sent since mid-May to a Coast Guard laboratory in Connecticut, the vast majority have turned out to be lumps of heavy fuel oil, dark and syrupy as molasses and commonly used to power oceangoing ships.

[Ownership of hybrid vehicles jumps in Hawaii](#)

Hawaii motorists faced with rising gas prices boosted their purchases of hybrid vehicles sharply over the past year, according to a new report.

There were 32,014 hybrid and other alternative-fuel vehicles on the road at the end of June, up 36 percent from 23,503 in June 2009, the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism said in its Monthly Energy Trends report. That was more than double the average of 15,193 hybrid and alternative-fuel vehicles registered in 2006.

[Egypt Plans to Build \\$700 Million Solar Power Plant, Al Ahram Reports](#)

Egypt plans to build a 4 billion Egyptian-pound (\$700 million) solar power plant in the south of the country, Al Ahram newspaper reported today, citing Electricity Minister Hassan Younes.

[Solar-powered light bulb is one Denver inventor's brilliant idea](#)

In his spartan Capitol Hill office, Katsaros explains how Nokero, the affordable, durable, sun-fueled light, can help the 1.6 billion people worldwide without electricity and wean them from burning dangerous kerosene lamps.

"You know how much money we could save on kerosene?" says James Marshall, a Liberian living in Parker who will soon be distributing Nokero bulbs in his homeland, where there is no network for electrical distribution.

[Spain Said to Save \\$1.5 Billion With Cuts for Wind, Solar Thermal Power](#)

Spain will save consumers at least 1.2 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) through 2013 by cutting the subsidies they pay to wind farms and solar thermal plants, a person familiar with the government's analysis said.

The reduction coming from a cut in the price paid for clean energy may be as much as 1.3 billion euros, said the person, who asked not to be named because the analysis is confidential.

[Study: Smart meters not enough to save home energy](#)

"Smart meters in and of themselves are just not 'smart' enough to get the job done for consumers and our economy," says John A. "Skip" Laitner, director of economic and social analysis at the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, which produced the report.

If U.S. utilities went beyond "smart meters" to give customers detailed information about how they're using power, Americans could cut home electric use as much as 12% and save at least \$35 billion over the next 20 years, reports ACEEE, a nonprofit advocacy group.

[New Analysis Triples U.S. Plutonium Waste Figures](#)

WASHINGTON — The amount of plutonium buried at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington State is nearly three times what the federal government previously reported, a new analysis indicates, suggesting that a cleanup to protect future generations will be far more challenging than planners had assumed.

[Clean coal dream a costly nightmare](#)

Sold on a promise of cheap, clean electricity, dozens of communities in Illinois and eight other Midwest states instead are facing more expensive utility bills after bankrolling a new coal-fired power plant that will be one of the nation's largest sources of climate-change pollution.

As the Prairie State Energy Campus rises out of a Downstate field, its price tag already has more than doubled to \$4.4 billion — costs that will largely be borne by municipalities

including the suburbs of Naperville, Batavia, Geneva, St. Charles and Winnetka.

The communities are locked into 28-year contracts that will require higher electricity rates to cover the construction overruns, documents and interviews show. Municipal officials told the Tribune they expect costs to soar even higher before the plant begins operating next year.

[Cape Cod vacation home has green roof, solar panels](#)

Horowitz, managing director of ZeroEnergyDesign, says her goal is to create the right aesthetic in as energy-efficient way as possible. She starts by creating a tight envelope or exterior.

"Think of it as a pyramid," she says. "The envelope comes first, then the appliances, then renewables" such as solar or wind. The house has a 2.5 kilowatt rooftop solar array that provides 30% of the home's electricity.

[World's smallest houses turn heads](#)

They're cute, eco-friendly, easy to clean, low cost and sometimes even mobile. What's not to love about tiny houses? Do you really need all your stuff?

[Strange case of the disappearing islands](#)

In September 2009 it was reported that, in spite of being on maps for centuries, the tiny island of Bermeja, in the Gulf of Mexico, could no longer be found.

The Mexican Government sent out planes and boats and used satellites to try to find it but it was gone. And, along with it, a large claim Mexico was making in the hydrocarbon-rich waters of the Gulf. Some in Mexico said that, clearly, the CIA had blown up their island to subvert their stake.

The United States' response was clear: no island, no claim.

[Grass 'greener' when artificial](#)

According to the United Nations, the GCC countries are among the world's highest per capita water users; UAE residents top the table by consuming an average of 550 litres a day each, 80 per cent of which is produced by expensive desalination.

[Nonfiction review: 'The Flooded Earth' by Peter D. Ward](#)

Is global warming the cataclysmic threat that Al Gore and the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change proclaim it to be? Or do powerful natural forces like variable solar output, plate tectonics and volcanic activity dwarf the climate impact of human-generated greenhouse gases?

[Global warming: Honolulu climate change meeting to be held Friday](#)

HONOLULU (HawaiiNewsNow) - It looks like global warming may be affecting Hawaii at an alarming rate. Climate change experts say temperatures are rising at higher elevations -- faster than the global average.

And the amount of rain is declining.

Freshwater sources are also shrinking.

[Scientists expected Obama administration to be friendlier](#)

Reporting from Washington — When he ran for president, Barack Obama attacked the George W. Bush administration for putting political concerns ahead of science on such issues as climate change and public health. And during his first weeks in the White House, President Obama ordered his advisors to develop rules to "guarantee scientific integrity throughout the executive branch."

Many government scientists hailed the president's pronouncement. But a year and a half later, no such rules have been issued. Now scientists charge that the Obama administration is not doing enough to reverse a culture that they contend allowed officials to interfere with their work and limit their ability to speak out.

"We are getting complaints from government scientists now at the same rate we were during the Bush administration," said Jeffrey Ruch, an activist lawyer who heads an organization representing scientific whistle-blowers.



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