

MEDIA RELEASE

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Report into cloud seeding on the West Coast

Hydro Tasmania and the West Coast Council have agreed to work together to improve communications and address community concerns over the annual cloud seeding program.

The independent report prepared by SGS Economics and Planning of Hobart was released today.

Commissioned jointly by Hydro Tasmania and the Council in mid-2007, the report addresses the region's rainfall regime and the effects of cloud seeding, develops a socio-economic profile of the West Coast, outlines an assessment of the social and economic impacts of the program and provides a range of possible responses for further consideration by both parties.

Hydro Tasmania CEO Vince Hawksworth said the report was an important step forward. While acknowledging the differences of opinion that remain about the variability of weather patterns and the amount of scientific debate on cloud seeding, both parties recognised the importance and benefits of working together.

As a direct response to concerns raised by the community about a lack of information about the cloud seeding program, Hydro Tasmania will:

- Improve its communication of cloud seeding flights by reporting in to the local radio station – 7XS - and the council, immediately after a successful flight has been completed as well as any non-seeding flights.
- Ensure the information on cloudseeding flights is updated daily on the Hydro Tasmania website.

Hydro Tasmania is also keen to work with Council to establish a community consultative group similar to the Lake Margaret community consultative group, which has been instrumental in progressing the future of the heritage-listed power station. The new group will be charged with improving relations between both parties and providing a forum for further initiatives in response to the independent study.

Mr Hawksworth said Hydro Tasmania would also address concerns raised over seeding outside target areas to determine if there are options to move the cloud seeding flight paths further away from population centres.

While the 2008 seeding season began on 1 April, Hydro Tasmania agreed not to seed over West Coast catchments pending the outcome of the study. Seeding flights over the region will resume

immediately when the conditions are right.

“Hydro Tasmania believes very strongly that cloud seeding plays a small but significant role in boosting rainfall over hydro storages in what has been one of the wettest parts of the State since records began,” Mr Hawksworth said. “The independent study backs this up.

“It is important to recognise that on average Hydro Tasmania only seeds the West Coast storages in the King and Upper Pieman catchments about 13 times per year.

“However, we recognise that community perception in the region has been negative towards the program and Hydro Tasmania, largely as a result of a lack of information being available, as well as a lack of understanding about how cloud seeding works.

“This has created mistrust and some misunderstanding which we want to address.

“As a result of the study, we will take some immediate actions in the area of communications in particular and then work through possible initiatives with the Council and the community.”

Mr Hawksworth thanked the Mayor Darryl Gerrity and the West Coast Council for its co-operation with the study and said he looked forward to an ongoing positive working relationship with the region.

Key findings of the Independent Study

Rainfall and variability

- Rainfall has been high on the West Coast since the beginning of weather records.
- Rainfall in Queenstown averages around 2500mm a year.
- There appears to be a shift in seasonal patterns with increased rain in spring and drier autumns and winters over the past 100 years.
- Most extreme rainfall events occur during storms when cloud seeding does not generally take place.
- Queenstown may experience an extreme rainfall event coinciding with seeding once in a 10-year period.

Cloud seeding methods and effectiveness

- Various studies on cloud seeding in Tasmania point to a conclusion that cloud seeding is effective.
- Cloud seeding does not lead to more rainy days but to more intense rainy days.
- Cloud seeding does not create clouds, but only enhances precipitation from clouds
- On average Hydro Tasmania conducts four seeding operations per month. The number of flights is roughly twice that number because conditions can quickly change after take-off.

- The most common seeding target area is the Gordon catchment.
- There is some evidence that suggests some unintended seeding occurs outside the targeted areas though this is no more than suggestive.
- There are no apparent adverse environmental and health effects from use of the seeding agent silver iodide.

Socio-economic profile of West Coast

- Mineral wealth and average incomes in the region have not translated into high levels of health and wellbeing. The relative isolation and wet climate have been noted, but lifestyle factors and lack of focus in preventative measures and health education have been identified as significant issues.

Social impact assessment

- The greatest number of people who think cloud seeding affects their town are those furthest from the target areas (Strahan and Zeehan) and least likely to have any direct effects from cloud seeding
- There is significant scepticism that targeting of the cloud seeding program is very accurate.
- The community has poor information about cloud seeding and this has resulted in making it harder for the community to distinguish the effects of cloud seeding from general rainfall.
- There is a barrier of mistrust for a substantial part of the community to receiving information from Hydro Tasmania.

Economic impact assessment

- The annual costs associated with natural high rainfall in the region are in the order of \$20 million. The highest possible additional cost of cloud seeding is around \$185,000 a year with a minimum of about \$20,000 a year.
- Statewide net benefit of cloud seeding ranges from \$3.7-\$7 million
- Cloud seeding does not increase the number of rainy days and so is expected to have reduced effects on tourism and events.
- Naturally occurring, heavy, frequent rainfall creates substantial costs for residents, while the impacts of cloud seeding are very limited because seeding takes place on average only 20 days a year, affects a small part of the region and has a modest effect on total rainfall in areas affected.