

m e d i a r e l e a s e

Date: 9 December 2003

**Subject: URGENT GOVERNMENT ACTION NEEDED
 TO CREATE EXTRA SNOWFALLS FOR WINTER**

Australia's largest hydro-electricity company today called on the NSW Government to urgently enable the Snowy Mountains to receive vital extra snowfalls by next winter – and create much needed additional flows for the Murray River system.

Snowy Hydro Limited Managing Director, Mr Terry Charlton, said: “Without urgent Government support, the country's premier snowfields and river systems will come under further stress and degradation.

We have the expertise and the know-how to significantly increase snowfalls in the Snowy Mountains – all we need is Government approval to proceed.

Extra snow in the region could be a reality by next winter, but for that to occur we need a response from the Government by the end of December to enable us to properly implement the required six-month lead time.”

The State Government is currently considering a proposal from Snowy Hydro to undertake a six-year cloud seeding trial in the Snowy Mountains, in southern New South Wales.

The trial has the potential to generate 10 per cent more snow per annum in the region, and create an extra 70 Gigalitres – or 70 billion litres – of extra flows for the Murray River system.

An independent panel of experts has endorsed the trial believing it would not cause any adverse environmental damage.

Mr Charlton's comments follow the release of a report by the United Nations, which warns global warming could wipe out the Australian ski industry by 2070.

Key benefits of the trial, known as the Snowy Precipitation Enhancement Trial (SPET), include:

- ❑ Contribute to offsetting the significant adverse local effects of climate change on the alpine region of New South Wales;
- ❑ offset the continuing decline in the Snowy Mountains' snow pack;
- ❑ enhance the protection of alpine and sub-alpine habitats. In particular, snow dependent species such as the endangered Mountain Pygmy Possum and Corroboree Frog are likely to benefit from a more reliable snow cover;

- ❑ maintain security of water flows in the Murray and potentially Murrumbidgee catchments for both environmental and extractive use; and
- ❑ support the generation activities and hedge products demanded of Snowy Hydro Limited by the National Electricity Market.

Cloud Seeding

Cloud seeding is a modern water management technique whereby small quantities of silver iodide would be dispersed into specifically-targeted clouds passing over the Snowy Mountains, to increase snowfall.

It is not intended to produce rain – only snow - so that the Alpine environment is enhanced, while spring run-off delivers improved flows downstream.

As part of its submission, Snowy Hydro commissioned an independent expert panel to report on the potential environmental impacts of the SPET.

The panel’s key conclusions were the SPET will:

- ❑ not have a significant adverse impact on the environment, and would not be likely to significantly affect the environment;
- ❑ not have a negative impact on precipitation in areas downwind of the target area. The likely impact is in fact a small increase in precipitation in those areas;
- ❑ not impact on the conservation values of the Kosciuszko National Park;
- ❑ have the potential to act as a benchmark for future scientific investigations and environmental initiatives consistent with global climate change research initiatives.

Mr Charlton said: “For more than 40 years, there have been small increases in both maximum and minimum winter temperatures in the Snowy Mountains region.

Climate change and declining snow cover present a very real threat to the local environment – and communities downstream that rely on water flows from the Snowys.

Snowy Hydro’s proposed trial is a unique opportunity to significantly address these effects on the environment.

We request the State Government to support our proposal in the time frame required for this urgent and important environmental initiative.”