

NATURAL RESOURCES

Desert Water Saved by Whales

➤ MILLIONS OF GALLONS of water will be saved during the Australian hot summer-November to March-in the arid areas by whales.

The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization has found a way of cutting down water evaporation.

Cetyl alcohol, a chemical extracted from whale oil, is used to lay a film over the surface of water. It restricts the water escaping to the air, but does not stop oxygen entering the water and keeping it fresh.

Cetyl alcohol is invisible and tasteless, and will be used freely in dams and reservoirs. It is harmless to animal life.

In ideal laboratory conditions the chemical cuts evaporation by 80%. Trials over the past two years in dams and reservoirs have shown a saving of between 20% and 70%.

Much of Australia's pastoral belt has a normal water evaporation rate of eight feet a year-often more than a year's rainfall. Scientists have been working to beat evaporation for the last 16 years.

Science News Letter, December 8, 1956



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