

Minister says Tibet water diversion not feasible

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(Reuters) The controversial scheme to channel water from Tibet to the Yellow River is unnecessary and not feasible, according to China's top water resources minister. The proposed system of tunnels stretching 300km, and costing more than the US\$25 billion (UK£13.26bn; EUR€19.6bn) has the potential to be one of modern China's most technically challenging feats. Water Resources Minister Wang Shucheng however, voiced deep reservations about the huge undertaking. *"In terms of today's scheme to develop the west, I will say three things: it is unnecessary, not feasible and unscientific"*, said Wang, giving what he called his personal *"academic"* opinion to an audience of scholars at the University of Hong Kong. The so-called Western route of China's South-North Water Transfer Project would involve harnessing rivers from the Tibetan highlands in the Himalayas to supply Qinghai province and other poor western areas. *"With regard to this Western water transfer route, of all the experts that I know, not one endorses this plan"*, he added. Wang said that the government had yet to take a decision. More than 600 medium- and large-sized cities in China were now suffering *"serious water shortages"*, said Wang, given more than a decade of near double-digit economic growth, droughts and an expanding population. Wang said the cost of transferring water from Tibet to the Yellow River could amount to 20 Yuan (UK£1.30; US\$2.5; EUR€1.96) per cubic metre, much higher than the 3 Yuan per cubic metre it would cost to conserve water using various technologies. *"From a financial perspective, it's essentially not feasible"*, he said.

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