

Salinity Inquiry Submission No. 53.....
--

22 October 2003

Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Science and Innovation  
Suite R1 – 116  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**RE: Inquiry into coordination of the Science to combat the nation's salinity problem**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Whilst acknowledging the depth of the Salinity Problem in other States, we in Queensland are fortunate to be faced with the responsibility of taking preventative action in most cases rather than repair. This, while placing us in the "Box Seat" to achieving the aims of the Salinity Program, also means that the Science to match is not available.

Much of our groundwater has not been mapped, soil types and rainfall patterns (summer rainfall) are different. We have different cropping patterns. These all contribute to the need to consider solutions applicable to our circumstances. Add to this the long period of drought in Queensland and it becomes more complex to match the Science available to guarantee the strategies needed to combat existing outbreaks and prevent further degradation.

The outline of your inquiry alludes to geophysics etc but this is very costly and ground truthing needs to still be carried out, which has been estimated to cost \$49 million to map Queensland areas.

Because of the hold ups for various reasons, the Strategic Investment Programs have been late commencing and results from these studies will not be ready for Regional Bodies as they draw up their plans and Regional Investment Strategies.

What we do have in our favour are a number of landowners who have recognised the problem of Salinity Outbreaks on their properties and through being observant, innovative and committed to saving the land have instigated activities that have made a turn around. Their experience and endeavours need to be documented to assist others just as much as scientific research.

This is applied Science. The people with the greatest knowledge of our landscapes and the changes made to them over the years are the long term land owners. Their combined observations will be critical to making decisions for the best outcomes for responsible natural resource management. Information from those on the ground regarding "event happenings" will

be critical to greater understanding and should be regarded as contributing to the "science" available.

We already have scientists questioning other scientists' "pronouncements" and deductions.

Australia is a very old country. Salinity in some of our river systems is documented in early explorers papers, so it is not a new happening. Therefore the solutions are unlikely to be easy and one size fits all.

I have been and still am a farmer of many years, and have witnessed many times when studies were based on misinformation and thus the results arrived at were flawed. This has sometimes caused much angst and unnecessary cost because someone's idea became "fact" after being repeated often enough.

In answer to your question as to the role the Commonwealth should play in the dissemination of Science in the Salinity Program, I would contend that the Commonwealth needs to acknowledge that decisions should be made on the best information available, not just on present scientific observations.

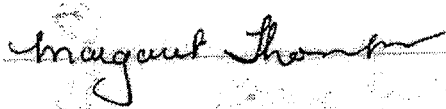
Investment by Regional Bodies should be able to be made on best available information. The definition of Science needs to be broadened to allow innovation to be used in the prevention of the spread of salinity. We do not "know it all" and if we wait for Science to prove it, we may be involved in reparation rather than prevention.

There are a number of landholders who have succeeded in turning their saline patches into productive land again. Many of them would not agree with the scientific theories. I suggest it is important to monitor these successes and accept that all knowledge on this subject does not rest with those with degrees.

It concerns me however, that Projects based on "applied science" and information may not be approved because the people making the decisions on whether they meet the criteria, will disallow them on the basis that they are not based on "pure" science.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this short submission on my concerns regarding science and salinity.

Yours sincerely,



**Margaret Thompson**