

15/10/03

The Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Science and Innovation  
R1 Sutie 116  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Ref: 151003-AP

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Inquiry into the coordination of the science to combat the nation's salinity problem**

The Murray Darling Association is a community based non-government organisation. It operates through a network of regions throughout the Murray- Darling Basin and provides a strong focus for Local Government and community participation in natural resource management issues of the Basin.

The Association is currently conducting a two-part investigation into Local Government and it's management of Dryland Salinity. We would like to comment not on the adequacy of the science but on applying it to salinity management options at the local level.

The South Australian Dryland Salinity project was based on Councils wholly within the Murray-Darling Basin in South Australia. It involved producing and providing councils with number of local salinity risk assessments. Councils obtained such information as depth to groundwater, groundwater flow systems, deep drainage capacity, soil salinity and extent of dryland salinity.

The mapping was composed using existing data from the National Land and Water Audit and from the South Australian Department of Primary industries (PIRSA). One of the most difficult obstacles within the project was finding suitable data in a useable format at the local level, which limited the information provided to Councils.

Technical data and information on salinity tends not to be integrated through the different government levels. We discovered that often the process of delivering this data and information becomes distorted and also costly to access for the local user. This means the quality of the data and information is less at this level.

Therefore, although councils are well aware of the impact of salinity on the landscape and its threat to public assets, they were reluctant to embrace the salinity risk assessments. It become evident that councils feel they don't have adequate information and data sets in the management of certain natural resource issues, and a direct consequence of this is the lack

of capacity and resources to use the latest technical and scientific information if available to manage salinity effectively.

The major concern of the Association is that Local Government have the potential to influence and promote effective catchment and land protection as they play major roles in land use planning, policy development, infrastructure provision, development approvals and land management.

They are also identified in the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) as key stakeholders in the achievement of salinity and water quality outcomes in NAP priority catchments.

In summary unless correct and useable data and information are readily available at the local level at minimal cost there are less options in the effective management of salinity at this level.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Najjar', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ray Najjar  
GENERAL MANAGER

Subj  
Closed  
16/10/03