

15 October 2003

The Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee  
On Science and Innovation  
Suite R1 – 116  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Standing Committee on Science and Innovation Inquiry into the coordination of the science to combat the nation's salinity problem.**

I refer to the above inquiry and would like to focus on the following particular terms of reference:

*"b) linkages between those conducting research and those implementing salinity solutions, including the coordination and dissemination of research and data across jurisdictions and agencies, and to all relevant decision makers (including catchment management bodies and land holders)".*

**Background**

Landmark is Australia's largest supplier of inputs to Australian farmers and has a significant share of the wool, livestock and rural property marketing business. It also provides finance and insurance packages to farmers.

Landmark became a wholly-owned subsidiary of AWB Limited on August 29, 2003. It is therefore part of Australia's largest agribusiness and has direct communication with around 100,000 farmers.

Landmark has 250 agronomists on its staff, which are a valuable resource in providing advice to farmers on agronomy, land and soil management, and water use.

As an expression of its commitment to sustainable agriculture, Landmark is a commercial partner of the Cooperative Research Centre for Plant-based Management of Dryland Salinity (hereafter referred to as "the CRC").

The CRC is at the "cutting edge" of research and development to provide new plant-based land use systems that will lessen the economic, environmental and social impacts of dryland salinity and thereby help to sustain rural communities.

(Please refer to the separate submission by the Dryland Salinity CRC which Landmark fully endorses.)

### Landmark's role

Through its involvement with the CRC, Landmark is able to play a valuable role in the education of its staff and land managers, particularly primary producers. In fact, Landmark will be a vital partner in the extension and commercialisation of the CRC's research outcomes.

The education program is being conducted over a number of stages. The first stage is in the form of workshops to introduce participants to the causes, indicators, effects, linkages to other land degradation issues and management of dryland salinity. The second stage will take the form of a formal CRC project based around increasing the area sown to lucerne by farmers as a tool for managing water levels and salinity.

The first stage workshops, which have taken place around Australia, have been jointly organised on behalf of the CRC for Plant-based Management of Dryland Salinity, the state government agricultural agencies, other CRC partners and Landmark and they are an integral part of Program 1 of the CRC's structure.

Program 1 (Education, information exchange and technology adoption) is responsible for overseeing all education and extension activities within the CRC. These include a number of communication projects designed to facilitate the application of farming systems using perennial plants across Australia.

Scientific information presented at the workshop sessions demonstrates that a more complete understanding of salinity is becoming available and the core partners of the CRC are working closely in sharing the research with land managers, with the Landmark workshops being a major vehicle.

In excess of 450 land managers, Landmark staff, landcare and government agency staff have so far benefited from these workshops.

Feedback from producers and other land managers at the workshops and to the Landmark staff back in their branches clearly indicates that they are seeking more face-to-face assistance on managing dryland salinity.

There is a clear acknowledgement of the problem, although most are unaware of the full extent of the impact that already exists in the areas in which workshops have been held. Most landholders have very little understanding of the causes, effects and management of dryland salinity and its linkages, other than somehow land clearing is involved.

There is also an awareness that state government agencies have fewer resources than they once did to deliver information one-on-one or to groups.

From the experience gained at the workshops by the Landmark staff and their daily work in-field with land managers, it is obvious that much of the available scientific information is yet to find its way to the largest group of people who can have a significant impact on dryland salinity.

We therefore see Landmark's role of working with the CRC partners, including the supporting state agencies, and using our own contacts and resources, as providing a significant boost to the extension and education process.

Our experience has shown that the process requires a commercial approach if it is to have an impact. Land managers are responsive to solutions which have positive and measurable commercial outcomes. The same philosophy applies to companies, like Landmark, which service the rural sector.

Costs to commercial companies in the delivery of natural resource management services, including education, preclude them from the full involvement they may wish to have. It is difficult to obtain commercial returns in this area of activity at the present time.

The continued input of resources by the Federal Government through structures like Co-operative Research Centres is essential if companies like Landmark are to continue the delivery of communication and educational programs on natural resource management. The CRC structure provides a platform and a resource base within which Landmark can work by providing a reasonable level of support funding and in-kind participation.

**Recommendations:**

1. That the Commonwealth note:
  - (i) the value of the increasing involvement of commercial enterprises like Landmark in providing avenues for the dissemination of research findings on dryland salinity to land managers and
  - (ii) the significant benefit that the CRC structure plays in facilitating this involvement.
2. That the Commonwealth work with the agribusiness sector to develop strategies to encourage the sector to become more actively involved in the education and extension process.

**Further information:**

Should you require any further background to this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me at Landmark on 02 9335 6282 or alternately, please contact the Landmark Salinity Project Manager, Kevin Graham on 07 3842 7732.

Yours sincerely,



**David Coombes**  
**General Manager - Marketing**

