



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

## **TABLING STATEMENT**

### ***Science Overcoming Salinity: Coordinating and extending the science to address the nation's salinity problem***

**ANN CORCORAN MP  
DEPUTY-CHAIR, HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING  
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND INNOVATION**

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The Science & Innovation Committee was sent out to enquire into the coordination of the science to combat the nation's salinity problem.

This inquiry was set up to try to discover whether best science is readily available to, and/or being used by those on the ground addressing the problem of salinity.

We wanted to know if the science and research being done in Universities, by CSIRO or by the Cooperative Research Centres set up for the purpose is actually getting to those on the ground

This inquiry was not about the salinity problem in itself. Formally we were not interested in why we have this problem, nor were we formally interested in the many solutions that are being put forward.

Our task was to focus on if and/or how the science being done is available to other scientists and those responsible for land management and implementation of salinity programs.

The decision not to be interested in what is causing salinity or in the many solutions proposed was a deliberate one and a very sensible one. It was sensible because we needed to stay focussed on the question and also because a lot of work has already been done on causes and solutions. However this is a very interesting area and it was actually quite hard to ignore it as we listened to the evidence being given to us.

It was hard to ignore partly because the area is a fascinating one; but mainly it was hard to ignore because of the enthusiasm of those giving evidence on the subject.

Both on field trips and in the more formal sessions we met many people who were absolutely determined to solve this problem. We met people who had installed programs or systems and who had achieved a measure of success. They were justifiably proud of their achievements and keen to share their experiences.

As a result of this Inquiry what we did find in simple terms is that there is a lot of information out there but that no-one really has a good overview of what is around or where it is.

Ironically I wonder if this situation has occurred because of the seriousness and immediacy of the salinity problem. There has been a concerted effort by many people to address the situation.

Scientists have done lots of work and so too have many land managers. The trick now is to make sure everyone is aware of what is around or at least know that research is available and to ensure that it is accessible.

The situation is not confined to the rural areas. We saw plenty of evidence of salinity being an issue in urban areas. We saw evidence of urban land managers taking steps to address the problem. Again though, it is not clear that urban land managers are aware of work being done by others on this problem.

This feeling we got of lots happening, but perhaps happening in some degree of isolation, may not necessarily be always a bad thing. There is some credibility in the argument that every area is different and has its own problems and therefore its own solutions. And again it is hard not to get drawn down the track of trying to assess this theory because as interesting as it is we were on a different mission.

The main thrust of the recommendations is therefore about getting a handle on what is around.

We have a number of recommendations which essentially call for

- an audit of all the salinity research and development undertaken by all agencies in Australia

- and for a register of all this research.

This should be extended to solutions and systems developed through trial and error by those on the land as well as those developed through more formal research and development methods.

There was also the call for solutions to be found that are economically viable. It mustn't be forgotten that salinity occurs on public open space and also urban areas but obviously most often on land being used for grazing or cropping and that people's livelihoods are involved.

It is clear that not every situation can be addressed by a solution that ensures the continuation of the current land use. The point is fairly obvious and it is that if science is to propose alternative methods or alternative land uses then these must be economically viable if the land owner is to be encouraged to stay on the land.

I would like to record formally my thanks to the Committee staff for their hard work on this very interesting inquiry – Catherine Cornish, Jerome Brown, Zoe Smith and Suzy Domitrovic.

Finally I want to record my appreciation of the work of all the members of this Committee on this Inquiry. Especially the Chair of the Committee, the Member for Eden-Monaro for his drive and unflagging commitment to the job.

Whilst not everyone was able to attend all the sessions in nor out of Parliament, there was a sense of common purpose amongst the all the members. This sense of common purpose is very encouraging for the future of tackling this very pressing and immense problem which we simply just must conquer.