

Salinity Inquiry Submission No. 5

Ref. No: 140204
Contact: Bryan Short

22 September 2003

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

Dear Sir

Applications for Best Science in Australia's Salinity Programs

I write in regard to your Inquiry, which is seeking submissions on the coordination of science to combat salinity problems.

As you are probably aware, the City of Wagga Wagga was the first urban area to recognise that it had a problem of rising saline watertables. This became apparent from visible signs such as damage to residences where bricks were turning to powder, dying vegetation, sporting grounds becoming unplayable, and roads deteriorating well before they should have. Subsequent economic analysis identified that the cost to the community would be \$180m over the next 30 years if nothing were done about it.

Council recognised this phenomenon in 1993 and with no one else accepting that it was a problem set about investigating and coming up with solutions. Council drew extensively on the resources of CSIRO and the former NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation. It also used consultants and entered into partnerships with private organisations to explore various solutions. For the last 6 years, Council has been implementing a number of strategies and carrying out remediation work

Hence Council has a wealth of knowledge and practical experience in applying science and technology to the management of urban salinity.

In regard to putting good science to use, Council has continued to promote an understanding of, and expertise in managing salinity by the community. Council has a deliberate policy of sharing this information across the state and further, through formal and informal processes.

22 September, 2003

These include:

- Releasing information through the media
- Mounting "Salt Expos" at events like the annual Leisure and Garden Show
- Funding staff to present at salinity forums and conferences Australia wide
- Making publications about salinity freely available
- Conducting "Urban Salinity Tours" for politicians, agencies and interested groups
- Designing, printing and implementing education packages for schools
- Fielding specific inquiries from private citizens
- Liaising with the Local Government Salinity Initiative team
- Supporting Landcare Groups in their salinity management projects
- Making all information available on a web site

Council has staff permanently engaged in those activities listed above, because it realises that no matter how good the "salinity science" is, this science has to be translated and understood by residents. People have to know what they have done, what they are doing, and what they could do, if we are to have any hope of managing salinity. For this reason, the Wagga Wagga Council would make a strong argument for not looking at good science about salinity in isolation, but also the means of transferring the information to the people who are part of the problem, and therefore need to be part of the solution.

Council offered its experience to State and Federal Governments in the form of an application for National Action Plan funding to set up a national project, on education and demonstration of these activities. The program is entitled *The One Stop Shop for Managing Urban Salinity*. A copy of this submission is attached. Although the submission has been submitted to Federal and State politicians as well as the Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Board, there has been no positive response.

In regard to tackling salinity in urban areas, this project embraces all the elements of your terms of reference. However, it has sat idle, awaiting development of blueprints and funding guidelines and a will to do something on the ground. I recommend it to your Committee and trust that you might see its worth and convince your fellow parliamentarians to move forward with it, a classic example of using best science in a salinity program.

Yours faithfully

Bryan Short
Director of Asset Management
Wagga Wagga City Council
PO Box 20
Wagga Wagga NSW 2650

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