

Salinity Inquiry
Submission No. ...73.....

Mr Jerome Brown
Committee Secretary
Standing Committee on Science and Innovation
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



ENGINEERS
AUSTRALIA

Re: Inquiry into coordination of science to combat the nations salinity problem

Dear Mr Brown

On behalf of Engineers Australia, I would like to submit the following for consideration by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Science and Innovation inquiry into coordination of science to combat the nations salinity problem.

Engineers Australia has over 70,000 members. The impact of salinity in urban and rural areas is key issue for our members, a number of whom work in areas relating to salinity research and management. Engineers Australia also supports innovation in salinity management through the National Salinity Prize, and a technical conference series on salinity.

This submission will consider how research and management of salinity can be better coordinated through stronger linkages between Federal and State agencies conducting salinity research, reviewing research priorities and expanding the role the National Dryland Salinity Program (NDSP).

**STRENGTHEN LINKAGES BETWEEN STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AGENCIES
RESEARCHING AND MANAGING SALINITY**

It is not clear what role Federal agencies play in State and Territory salinity strategies. Although all States and Territories have established research and management linkages through organisations such as the NAPSWQ and NDSP, State Government salinity strategies do not outline how these linkages will fit in with their plans to manage salinity. For example, the NSW and South Australian Government's Salinity Strategies have research linkages with the Murray Darling Basin Commission, However, the NSW and South Australian strategies do not outline what research linkages they have with other Federal agencies and what these linkages will achieve. The Western Australian Government's *State Salinity Unit* also fails to outline what linkages it has with Federal agencies.

Engineers Australia believes that the role of Federal agencies and programs role in State salinity research needs to be clearly outlined. This will provide an opportunity to consider

how effective the different programs are in helping to combat salinity and whether they overlap.

REVIEW RESEARCH PRIORITIES AND WIDEN THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL DRYLAND SALINITY PROGRAM

In improving linkages between different agencies, Engineers Australia believes that the Federal government also needs to review salinity research priorities. Current Federal directions in salinity research are dominated by a focus on mapping, monitoring, evaluation and capacity building. Emphasis should be placed on engineering solutions as part of an overall management package that also incorporates ongoing scientific investigation, innovations in agricultural management and community consultation.

The National Dryland Salinity Program is a key program for salinity research. Engineers Australia believes that it should be given much greater responsibility and resources to act as the agent for coordination and dissemination of research for dryland and irrigation salinity. The NDSP should be revitalised as the National Salinity Program for Research and Development. This program would undertake the following actions:

- Invigorate the existing leadership role in salinity funding, knowledge management and coordination by the NDSP to ensure the development of targeted programs of R&D in salinity.
- Remove coordination of research and development activities from administrative programs such as the National Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust and coordinate them within management systems like that provided by NDSP.
- Coordinate data and information management through a single entity, preferably the National Land and Water Resources Audit.
- Ensure investment in national programs and their coordination is matched by the capacity of industry, State and regions to implement actions. This will require a much greater involvement of users and potential beneficiaries in the early stages of program development. The adoption of salinity management options is far more effective when communities and landholders are involved in the research and development.
- Coordinate research programs with State and Territory salinity strategies to help avoid overlap of research between different levels of government.

Engineers Australia is happy to further assist the House of Representatives Science and Innovation Committee with additional technical information relating to salinity coordination and management, if it is required.

Thankyou for giving us the opportunity to comment on this inquiry.