



Your Partner in Grain

Salinity Inquiry Submission No. 44

Friday 24 October 2003.

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

By email to: scin.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

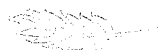
Grain Growers Association is pleased to take this opportunity to make a submission to the Committee Inquiry into coordination of the science to combat the nation's salinity problem, August 2003.

Grain Growers Association is a membership organisation that is concerned with increasing the welfare of grain growers and their communities through education, research and policy. Grain Growers Association holds a controlling interest in GrainCorp through a Foundation Share in that organisation and the ownership of 21.2 per cent of the ordinary shares.

Grain Growers Association has approximately 15,000 members who are located in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. Our members are primarily concerned with grain production in dry land environments in these eastern states.

Grain Growers Association recognise salinity as a major problem for both rural and urban communities. In particular Grain Growers Association is concerned by the reduction in arable farmland and the public costs to roads, rail and other rural infrastructure. It is also recognised that salinity is an issue that needs to be addressed from a community perspective both, rural and urban, with the inclusion of grain growers in that process. Many members of this organisation are presently actively involved in the management of salinity issues.

This organisation endorses an objective of salinity reduction through the four management options promoted by CSIRO Land and Water and the Australian dryland Salinity Assessment 2000. However, we also support a market-based approach to salinity reduction rather than a purely administrative approach particularly with respect to protecting at-risk regions.



Grain Growers Association Limited

20 White Street | PO Box 353 | Dubbo NSW 2830 | Phone: 1800 620 519 | Facsimile: 02 6884 9027

Email: enquiry@graingrowers.com.au

ACN 000 245 269 | ABN 25 000 245 269

It is our perception that the science of salinity is well developed in terms of the identification of the cause of the problem and the measurement of the magnitude of the problem.

Grain Growers Association supports market based solutions to reduce salinity. By this we mean that growers should be compensated for making land available for salinity reduction programs. We do not support the resumption of land for purposes where the land will become habitat for feral animals. An alternative is to provide financial and legislative support for the development of timber or bio-fuel based industries in particular zones of influence. These zones will require industry development support to provide infrastructure and properly trained staff for these new industries.

1. Use of Salinity Science

Members of Grain Grower Association consider that the science surrounding the issue of treating the problem has been adequate: however, it needs to be further developed particularly in the field of new methodologies (adaptation) or mechanism (engineering) for salinity abatement.

Grain Growers Association is concerned about the level of understanding and responsibility that landholders have and what they can do to both prevent and treat salinity problems. Salinity mapping and monitoring needs to be progressed further to clearly identify the following three geographical areas:

1. areas of cause (problem)
2. areas of effect (symptoms)
3. areas of influence (treatment)

The identification of areas of influence is the most critical of the three points. These areas must first be identified by good science and then a sub group selected on the basis of best value. The areas of treatment may overlap with either areas of cause or areas of effect. Growers in these regions need to be made aware of the options that they have available to them to assist with the treatment of salinity. As mentioned above Grain Growers Association supports the further development of management techniques and mechanisms for treatments within the areas of influence.

Grain Growers Association supports the concept of integrated farm management solutions to increase the adoption of new technologies and salt tolerant plant varieties. It is our experience that growers are satisfied with the progress in the development of salt tolerant wheat varieties.

2. Linkages Between Organisations

Grain Growers Association funds grower managed research in collaboration with other research providers such as GRDC, CSIRO and state Departments of Agriculture. In our experience this collaborative approach to problem solving makes better use of scarce resources and increases grower adoption of research results. It is our opinion that the CRC for Plant Based Management of Dryland Salinity is a model that captures the synergies between research organisations and it is hoped that this institution will aim to foster a collaborative relationship with growers.

It is fair to say that farmers are eager to do something to abate the problems of salinity rather than simply discussing them. They are disinclined to attend meetings where water access rights are mixed with salinity issues, as for many grain growers water rights may not be an issue they feel the need to address.

In terms of identifying a solution to the problem it may be useful for the salinity organisations to develop closer associations with industries such as sustainable logging, bio-fuels or fish farming. These organisations may be able to make a valuable contribution to the science to use surplus ground water.

3. Adequacy of Technical and Scientific Support.

Grain Growers Association supports the CRC approach to research and extension however there needs to be more linkages and training provided between professional extension staff in the areas of influence from the CRC to implement activities for these regions. By this we mean that extension staff should go out to growers equipped with information on salinity abatement programs and market based solutions. To reduce costs it may prove useful for extension staff to form alliances with the bulk handlers of wheat and oils seeds to promote solutions related to grain production.

Growers are satisfied that they can find information describing salinity when they need to. We are currently commissioning a study to identify how growers access information and how that information should be packaged to be of best value. There may be a need in the future for growers to be able to identify areas of salinity via satellite maps for their own properties. These maps may also be linked to solutions based programs that could recommend possible treatments for the effected zones. Unfortunately communications technology cannot adequately support this level of interactive mapping for many growers however it is something that may prove useful during the next five years.

Some growers have suggested that salinity is a problem that is dependent upon rainfall events. Growers are interested in the changing dynamics of the problem under different rainfall events and some have suggested that long-range forecasts should be linked to salinity issues and treatment.

Conclusion

Grain Growers Association is generally supportive of the science, organisational structure and extension surrounding the salinity issue. We have identified some areas where we believe that this could be done better in particular the developments of more science around market based solutions.

We thank for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry.

Regards

19 *Tereese Farrell for Tony Eyres*

Tony Eyres
Chief Executive Officer

22/10/03