



AgForce Submission

Inquiry into Coordination of the Science to Combat the Nation's Salinity Problem

Date: 6th November, 2003

AgForce is Queensland's peak rural lobby group that represent over 8 000 primary producers. AgForce represents Queensland's Cattle, Sheep, Wool and Grain producers.

AgForce believes that it represents the views of producers 'on the ground' whom manage the majority of land throughout Queensland. AgForce welcomes the opportunity to comment on salinity research and will look forward to future input. AgForce holds the following views.

Adequate knowledge exists on the management of saline and saline threatened land

- Existing research has identified a range of land management practices which can limit or cease the spread of salinity
- Currently adequate funding is being provided for technical salinity research via a range of government and non-government institutions and through the provisions of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality
- The challenge currently for landholders is early identification of salinity at the property scale and the implementation of site-specific land management practices so that salinity is most effectively managed.
- Hazard maps add little towards fighting salinity at a property scale as they:
 - They only assess salinity hazard encompassing a large number of salinity processes
 - The maps were designed as a first step informing regional natural resource management planning processes
 - They provide a relative ranking within a catchment and do not compare the entire state

Innovative and Capable farming sector that is often underestimated

- Producers can and do play a vital role in 'balanced ecosystems'

- There seems to exist an institutional reluctance to deliver to landholders the ability/capability to identify and manage salinity at the property level,
- It is only when adequate information can be produced at the property scale can landholders affect management change,
- Producers need some simple tools at the property scale to do a risk assessment so that 'hazard' sites can be selected on the property scale,
- There is a need to develop these tools and then engage the landholder to implement these tools and then implement modified (if needed) land management practices,
- Within the risk assessment framework there needs to be a hierarchy of risk (e.g. rainfall between 600mm and 1 500 mm, with additional local land attributes such as soil types so that detailed risk assessments can be carried out.

III-equipped Implementation Mechanisms

In order to achieve effective management of salinity technical and scientific information alone are inadequate. Rather what is needed is a clear understanding of a producers operating environment encompassing the motives behind the decision making process when reviewing land management practices

Essential to effective landholder consultation, participation and subsequent implementation is:

- Adequate technical and scientific information at the property scale including a property scale risk assessment framework
- Effective dissemination and education of the property scale information
- Effective landholder consultation whereby landholders are informed and then participate in the setting of regional priorities
- The implementation of effective mechanisms to induce land management changes that will limit the threat of salinity
 - This may include the use of market based incentives including compensation when production is limited due to conservation measures
 - Why has the Water Use Efficiency program in Queensland been so successful – as it truly delivers no regrets or 'win-win- outcomes'?
- The provisions of assistance for landholders to effectively monitor the outcomes of salinity reducing land management practices

- A preparedness to re-evaluate land management changes in order to arrive at land management practices which represent the optimum solution and hence a 'win-win' solution for all

AgForce believes that it is essential to adequately engage and motivate landholder to implement land management changes that will benefit the whole of community.

None of the above will work without long term bipartisan commitment from all levels of government to provide the best scientific rigour and foster the best Natural Resource Planning we can afford.

There has been a tendency to create positions that manage policy and regulatory outcomes. This has been at the expense of scientists working with landholders on providing the information systems and decision support tools with which local people can make risk weighted decisions for land and natural resources that have been allocated for agriculture.

The use of information based decision making at the property scale will maintain our environmental & agricultural systems in harmony with landscape capability at far less cost than a purely regulatory approach.

There must be strong overwhelming desire by governments to provide incentives and frameworks for community based solutions where regional people can solve regional challenges.

AgForce represents 8000 natural resource custodians whose greatest wish is to have a consistent & transparent policy that will maintain our land for the future of all Australians.

These people cannot do it alone nor should they, as all Australians benefit from sustainable landscape planning, all Australians should contribute to the long term future of our land. AgForce's solution to the conflict and chaos that has enveloped natural resources in the past five years will restore the trust that has clearly been missing.