

4th September 2005

Inquiry into the extent and economic impact of salinity

Committee Secretary
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and Arts References
Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

I have lived and worked in the upper south east of South Australia for more than 40 years. In the late 80's and early 90's, there was a run of average rainfall years and landholders in the upper south east called for a flood mitigation scheme to try and alleviate the 'threat' of dry land salinity. The fact being a lot of the wet areas were historically salt water tree flats that we had tried to make into productive farming land. There was overwhelming support for a 'shallow surface water' drainage scheme to keep water moving to save prolonged inundation of pastures.

As it took many years for the initial drainage scheme to get started degradation continued and some landholders just accepted 'deep drainage' as the only answer once the scheme was somehow hijacked into a huge infrastructure, money using project without enough due diligence for the 'natural' environment as it was.

There has been little thought for the wetlands in the upper south east as the scheme has progressed. All of the wetlands apart from 'The Marcollat Watercourse' and 'The West Avenue Watercourse' have either a drain running alongside them or have been manipulated in some way. They are now no longer healthy ecosystems with an intact watercourse; as the scheme focuses more on 'productive farming.'

I think, before it is too late, the scheme needs to differentiate between cleared farming land and the last of the wetlands. We cannot afford to drain the last of these wetlands or we will have none left. The scheme was supposed to also make a commitment to keep the environment in a healthy state or enhance it – not impact on it adversely.

We now know much can be done with revegetation, strategic fencing to soil types and associated pasture renovation with deep rooted perennials.

The above, complimented with good management, will alleviate a lot of the perceived 'salt' / 'water' problems and with this in mind we need to 'stop' 'look' and reassess our thinking on further drainage in close proximity to our last precious wetlands.

Water is a very precious commodity in this dry country, lets be careful about draining the last of it away.

With regards

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