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Louise Gell
Secretary
Senate Committee for Environment, Communications,
Information, Technology and the Arts
Parliament House
Canberra
ACT 2600



Dear Ms Gell

Inquiry into the extent and economic impact of salinity in the Australian environment

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the Australian Senate's Inquiry into the extent and economic impact of salinity on the Australian environment.

The North Central CMA's approach to salinity mitigation is guided by our *Regional Catchment Strategy 2003–2007* (copy enclosed), which provides resource condition targets and management targets for assets including biodiversity, dryland, irrigated land, water resources, and waterways and wetlands. In addition, the regional Land Management Plan – the Second Generation Salinity Management Plan re-written to include a focus on regional assets as well as threats – provides a more detailed description of the regional approach to combating salinity.

Salinity mitigation works in the North Central region are largely delivered through:

- river health works focussing on erosion control measures, establishment of riparian buffer strips, and riparian protection and enhancement works
- a targeted salinity program consisting of ten targeted areas (see enclosed brochures) in which the Victorian Department of Primary Industries delivers, on behalf of the CMA, on-ground works including perennial pasture establishment, native vegetation establishment and protection, farm forestry, gully restoration, and protection and enhancement of waterways and wetlands

These projects are supported largely by funding provided through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, Natural Heritage Trust, and Victorian State Government programs.

The CMA's Corporate Plan for 2005–06 contains, as a major initiative, a critical review of the North Central Dryland Salinity Program. Through our collaborative linkages with the CRC for Plant-based Management of Dryland Salinity, we are involved in a research

program entitled SIF3 (Salinity Investment Framework 3), which commenced in August 2005. This program is designed to investigate the appropriate management response given a particular dryland salinity situation; for example, whether incentives, land retirement/ stewardship or penalties would be the most appropriate intervention. The program, due to be completed in North Central in June 2006, is reliant on the Catchment Analysis Tool (CAT) – a modelling system being developed by DPI and being used by North Central to consider scenarios and appropriate interventions.


In terms of the role played by CMAs and the support received by these agencies to assist them to achieve national goals, I would provide the following additional feedback:

- the regional approach necessarily taken by CMAs is appropriate to efforts to mitigate the effects of salinity: local-scale, appropriate decisions can be implemented as required. Additionally, CMAs are able to demonstrate leadership on diverse natural resource management issues – this cannot be achieved using a 'centralist' approach
- we have concerns regarding the Federal Government's decision to support the implementation of airborne geophysics as a tool to determine the location of dryland salinity as it appears that the technique does not necessarily detect saline groundwater*.

The future success of salinity management in Victoria depends on further funding from initiatives such as NAP, NHT and State investment. The scale and significance of the issue is massive and therefore a significant and sustained investment is justified. The year 2007–08 is the last year of NAP, and the issue of future funding urgently needs the attention of Governments.

I would be pleased to provide further elaboration of these points if required, and thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

Yours sincerely



Damian Wells
Acting Chief Executive Officer

att Regional Catchment Strategy
Targeted salinity brochures (2)