

Preface

Salinity Solutions — Working with Science and Society

The understanding and management of dryland salinity in Australia has advanced considerably in the last decade. Given the potential impacts of salinity and the large investment, at a range of levels and scales, in the problem, good critical science that supports the actions of the decision makers is paramount. This special issue of *Australian Journal of Experimental Agriculture* ensures that the relevant science is being rigorously tested and evaluated. It contains selected papers from the Salinity Solutions Conference held at Bendigo, Victoria, in August 2004 that was organised to communicate the state of knowledge in developing solutions to manage dryland salinity throughout Australia.

The conference was structured around some of the programs of the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Plant-based Management of Dryland Salinity. The CRC was established in July 2001. The conference was timed appropriately as the CRC is now producing results of interest to the wider community. The conference also allowed the CRC to interact with others involved in salinity management, and both CRC and non-CRC work was presented.

The theme of the conference and of this special issue, *Salinity Solutions—Working with Science and Society*, highlights the important partnership between science and the community in providing appropriate solutions to address dryland salinity across Australia. State and federal agencies through a range of providers including the CRC are investing significantly in salinity research. The recently completed National Dryland Salinity Program provided a forum for coordinating and targeting these investments, and research efforts by various CRCs, state and federal research providers and, increasingly, the private sector are continuing.

At the same time, a strong community infrastructure of catchment management bodies, farming systems groups and Landcare groups has developed in Australia with the ability to focus community and government investment in natural resource management. Increasingly, and especially through the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, and

the National Landcare Program, communities are playing a larger role in managing natural resources.

One of the objectives of this conference, therefore, was to strengthen links between science and society. Scientists were required to step outside their research findings, and through a series of keynote addresses, challenge conventional thinking and stimulate discussion and debate. This process provided scientists with a greater understanding of the community's needs and knowledge and in turn, the community gained perspectives from the science that will help them to make their investment decisions. This partnership between science and society is essential for the development and implementation of realistic and achievable approaches to dryland salinity management.

The conference was organised and hosted by the Department of Primary Industries Victoria, the Department of Sustainability and Environment Victoria and the CRC for Plant-based Management of Dryland Salinity. It was sponsored by the Grains Research and Development Corporation, the National Dryland Salinity Program and the North Central Catchment Management Authority.

This special issue provides a snapshot of the current scientific thinking concerning dryland salinity. Substantial advances in knowledge have occurred in the last decade, and there is no doubt that the knowledge will advance further in the coming decade and beyond.

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