

Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands – people, profitability and potential

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Abstract

Last August, the Federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss, launched Land, Water & Wool - the most comprehensive natural resource management program ever undertaken by a major rural industry.

Land, Water & Wool is a partnership between Australian Wool Innovation Ltd (AWI) and Land & Water Australia focusing on research and extension specifically for sustainable wool production. Meat & Livestock Australia and Australia's National Dryland Salinity Program also support the partnership.

Today, I am pleased to officially launch one of the major activities within the Land, Water & Wool Program.

Australia's wool industry has embarked on the most integrated natural resource management initiative ever undertaken to productively manage dryland salinity on-farm.

Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands, the biggest sub-program of Land, Water & Wool, is a producer-driven initiative that provides significant opportunities for wool producers to access new, low cost and low risk management options for saline land.

Over the next four years, the *Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands* initiative will integrate three key components into profitable and sustainable systems to maximise whole-farm gains, and reduce the salinity risk.

These components include:

- An active network of livestock producers with salinised land to build on and share local knowledge and experience;
- Packaging the best current information on managing saline land for livestock production; and
- Investing in practical research into profitable and sustainable saltland options that reduce the environmental and social impacts from saline land.

Land Water & Wool and its *Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands* sub-program demonstrate the commitment from AWI to enhancing the level of wool producer skills and knowledge in managing the natural resource base.

This investment is vital in ensuring the long-term commercial viability of wool enterprises, and the communities that support these farms, by productively working to reduce the risk of dryland salinity.

Importantly, as with all industries that utilise our natural resources, prevention is better than cure.

It must be emphasised that this initiative is not a substitute for wider on-farm management efforts to prevent dryland salinity - salinity remediation should always be the priority.

However, there are millions of hectares where such efforts are simply not going to be possible, and Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands is all about making profitable use of those hectares.

A national survey recently completed for Land, Water & Wool found that 41 per cent of wool producers surveyed indicated they had areas on their property affected by salinity.

In Western Australia, this level is 78pc - nearly double the national average determined by the survey.

Of the Western Australian wool producers surveyed, 70pc had more than 20 hectares of saline land on their properties - we are not looking at a situation where one or two hectares of salinity are appearing.

With the support of Australia's leading rural research and development corporations, existing groups such as PUR\$L can now link into the new Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands initiative.

Such groups can share their experiences with others in the industry and actively participate in practical research and development.

By investing in this new partnership, AWI aims to help the wool industry to significantly develop and improve both the productivity and sustainability of grazed saltland.

We are doing this by supporting and facilitating producer-driven, practical research partnerships across Australia.

Through Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands, we want wool producers who are aware they have a salinity problem - and want to do something about it - to customise a grazing system for their areas of saline land.

In Western Australia alone the investment in new on-farm research will be worth more than two million dollars over the next four years.

This is a great opportunity for wool producers, scientists and salinity managers to learn how they can assist and benefit through existing networks.

The producer-dominated Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands Co-ordinating Committee has recently commissioned the first 12 producer research sites in the sheep-wheat and high rainfall zones of Western Australia.

This follows the establishment of the first major research site at Tammin, which will be managed by CSIRO.

Other major research sites and producer research sites will soon be established across Australia to support the specific on-farm salinity research needs of wool producer networks.

The research sites will investigate sustainable management options for saline lands.

Such options will include the development of new pasture mixes and grazing strategies, to assist wool producers to make productive and environmentally considerate decisions about the use of the land.

Many wool producers have got enough saline land to become actively involved in the Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands initiative.

As this conference demonstrates, many are also keen to do something about it.

As we will hear this week, some wool producers are already making money out of their saline land - and doing a good job of managing parts of their farm which may have previously been considered unproductive.

Sustainable Grazing on Saline Lands aims to build on this experience.

It aims to help other wool producers to also take pride in their saltland management achievements and think differently about salt-affected areas of their farm.

Sharing this experience through existing industry networks will help the Australian wool industry to extend the pool of knowledge and practical experience to other land managers in a whole range of circumstances who may also want to get involved in the wider Land, Water & Wool program.

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