

Alex Growden  
92 Glenbawn Drive  
South Lake, WA, 6164  
20/03/2002-03-2002

Professor Peter Newman  
Director, Sustainability Policy Unit  
Policy Officer  
Department of the Premier and Cabinet

Dear Professor Newman,

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to write a submission on Focus on the Future: opportunities for sustainability in Western Australia. I am currently studying Certificate IV in Land Management and I have been brought up in Merredin, Rural Western Australia for half of my life.

Before writing this submission I approached many of my friends and family, asking them what sustainable resource needed more attention. To my surprise the majority said that more attention needed to be paid to the increase in salinity affected areas in the wheatbelt region, as it is having a dramatic affect on the land. People would like to see the land sustained as one of our most vital resources. I know that salinity has been a known problem in my local community for at least 50 years with little strategy in place to address concerns. I was somewhat surprised that only recent extensive media coverage of the salinity problems in Western Australia has been affective in reaching the people I spoke with here in Perth.

A lot of salinity in wheatbelt region is connected to land degradation. I believe that this is as a result of Farmers not receiving accurate enough information from Government Organisations, or feel they are unable to change their farming practices for financial reasons.

I believe that there is much that can still be done in the farming community to encourage the regeneration of salt affected areas. To find out more information I read 'Sustainable Agriculture' composed by the "Standing Committee of Agriculture", it made interesting reading. However, with all the research, committees, consultants, proposed ideas and solutions, I believe it is of little benefit if our farmers are unable to successfully implement some of these ideas.

I have received some feedback regarding ways to encourage farmers to assist in sustaining the land:

- Try to discourage farmers to continuously crop the same paddocks year in, year out, as the land is unable to cope. Encourage farmers to get back into sheep and wheat farming, not just cropping as this will initiate crop rotation and the use of less chemicals against weeds.
- Reward for farmers who build contour banks and dams sufficient enough to catch excess water on their properties.
- Government Officials or inspectors should be put in to place to inspect farms in order to encourage farmers to be more accountable for sustaining for the land.

- Planting of more trees.

Over the years, the impression that I get from older farmers is that Salinity is only a problem if it effects the loss of productivity. These attitudes along with the attitude of loss of native flora/fauna can be addressed in the new generation of farmers through education and some enforcement. I believe that if farms were inspected, assessed and the farmers were given set standards to reach with proper incentives and rebates in place, the land quality might increase. It is in the farmer's best interest to minimise salinity in order to keep productivity and land value as well as encouraging good land management. Unfortunately there are some people who do not attempt to regenerate salt effected areas on their property and continue stocking and cropping the salt effected areas, increasing the salinity. How will we know if this problem is increasing or decreasing if farms were not inspected?

Revegetation of salt affected areas throughout the wheatbelt will need a vast number of workers. If this were converted to a 2-3 month seasonal planting every year, it could encourage people to come to the wheatbelt towns for work. If there were local trained coordinators, this could allow the seasonal work to be unskilled. For this reason, small towns that offer little tourism could attract people each year to help relieve financial pressures at the same time.

Whilst this view is particularly focused on the farming community, the Government bodies managing these regions should be just as accountable. For example, I was told that Merredin's excess town water is becoming an alarming concern for some farmers. It is alleged that the town water is being tipped into Cohn Creek, which flows through a number of farms, into the Bandee Salt lake System and into the Avon Catchment. Local farmers are saying that this is poor management of a valuable resource. Every year the creek is increasing in size and is becoming a large contributor to the salinity (this particular issue is currently being addressed). These practices and many more need to be re-assessed and policed. Combined accountability, education and enforcement could see us utilise this resource in a manner that will see a longer future for our land.

Yours sincerely

Alex Growden