

# Restoring Nature's Balance

# The War on Salt

## What is the Government Doing?

### KEY FACT

More than one-third (36%) of WA's divertible water resources is saline or brackish. A further 16% is marginally saline.

WA has 70% of all salt-affected dryland in Australia.

The War On Salt starts with the community and goes right to the highest level of Government. A Cabinet committee of Ministers headed by the Premier and Deputy Premier is a clear signal of the strength of the Government's commitment.

Policy advice to the Cabinet Committee is provided by the State Salinity Council, which draws together government and private expertise in science and technology, conservation, forestry, farming and other relevant areas, including the community environmental movement.

The State Government will allocate significant funding from its own resources and will negotiate with the Federal Government for a fair share of Natural Heritage Trust money. The Commonwealth has responded positively in high-level preliminary discussions which have already taken place

Private investment in new technologies and partnerships in commercial plantings will be strongly encouraged.



The State Government has declared war on Western Australia's salinity problem. It will be a long and costly war, but it has to be fought. And it has to be won.

**The creeping menace of salinity is WA's biggest and most dangerous environmental problem.**

**Environmental, economic and social damage caused by salinity affects every Western Australian.**

## What Will Be Done

- **Research and introduce improved management of crops and pastures to maximise water use.**
- **More innovative use of trees, particularly on a commercial basis.**
- **Protect and repair at-risk and affected catchments for water supply and conservation values.**
- **A large-scale, long-term tree planting program, using a variety of species capable of succeeding in different rainfall zones and on different types of soils.**
- **A new and rewarding partnership with farmers to maximise the speed, scope and effectiveness of planting programs.**
- **Establish and maintain a flow of information to all sectors of the public to keep The War On Salt high on the community agenda in the long term.**
- **Provide incentives for farmers where commercial options alone will not adequately control salinity.**

### KEY FACT

It is calculated that \$3 billion will be needed over the next 30 years to fix the problem - and that 3 million hectares of appropriate trees and shrubs will have to be planted.

Farmers lose productive land. As a consequence, the community loses the economic and social benefits of a viable industry.

Country towns are affected financially and socially. Property is damaged. Communities go into decline.

City people suffer less directly - but just as much.

Salinity threatens the billions of dollars agriculture contributes to the State economy each year which helps to maintain the high standard of living we all enjoy.

City water supplies are also threatened as rivers and streams turn saline.

Our rivers, wetlands, forests and plains become so threatened by salt that entire eco-systems are at risk and with them the native plants and animals from which much of Western Australia's unique character is derived.

Salinity is already serious. But it is getting worse at an accelerating rate. Every one year delay in fighting back now adds two to three years to the time needed to restore nature's balance.

**For More Information.....**

call the Salinity Information Office on 1800 674 897



# What's the Problem?

Salt from the ocean has been blown onto the land for tens of thousands of years. Billions of tonnes of salt have been washed into the soil by rain and stored deep in the soil profile.

Much of the State's wealth has been created by replacing deep-rooted trees and shrubs with shallow-rooted seasonal crops, such as wheat. These crops do not consume water at the same rate as deep-rooted plants thus disrupting the balance between water use, rainfall and water table levels. Over time this has allowed the water table to rise and bring the salt from the subsoil to the surface.



# The Good News

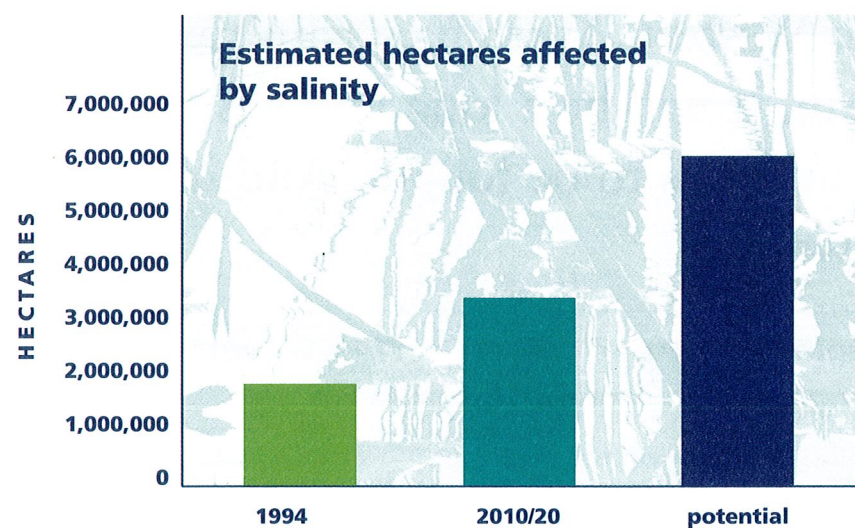
**Salinity can be beaten.**

The way to restore nature's balance is to increase water use across the landscape.

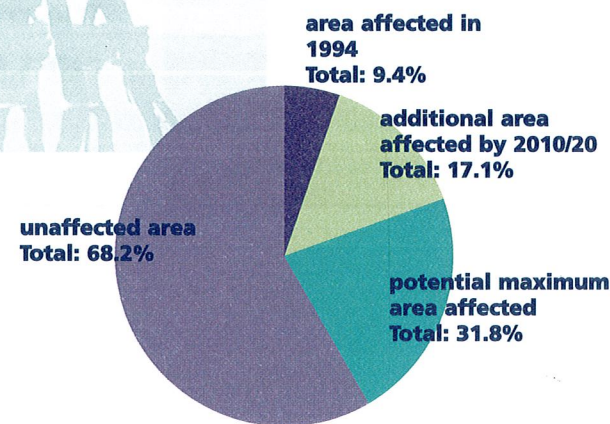
In principle this is simple - plant trees and other deep-rooted perennials which take water from the soil and evaporate it through their leaves, thus lowering the water table and sending the salt back into the subsoil where it is harmless.

Some of the plants capable of doing this have already been identified and although more research is needed, The War On Salt can start right now.

Valuable progress has already been made by many farmers and community groups.



**Estimated proportion of cleared land affected by salinity**



**KEY FACT** About 1.8 million hectares of WA's farmland is already salt-affected. Without immediate action, that area will double in the next 15-25 years.

**KEY FACT** It is estimated that there is between 100 and 10,000 tonnes of salt in the soil beneath every hectare of the South-West.

## What Harm Does Salt Do?

Salt damage goes further than affecting plant growth. Nobody escapes. City people are affected every bit as much as those in the country - it is just that the effects are less obvious.



Salt gradually degrades streams and rivers - sometimes 200 kilometres or more from the source of the salt. This makes the water undrinkable and unusable for irrigation, and destroys entire habitats of native wildlife.

In the worst-affected areas, rising saline water tables are even undermining buildings and vital community infrastructure, such as roads.

## What We Need to Win

The major weapons needed to defeat salinity are:

- Leadership
- Money
- Commitment
- Coordination
- Communication

Previous attacks against the salt menace have been fragmented, poorly targeted and under-resourced.

This time, the State Government has the will to achieve success.

The War On Salt is a far-sighted 30-year integrated campaign which starts immediately.

**KEY FACT** It is estimated that WA is already losing some \$64 million a year in agricultural production because of salinity, and the rate of loss is increasing.



## Everybody Fights, Everybody Wins

In the front-line are WA's farmers. It is on their land that salt will be defeated by improved farming systems and the planting of vegetation which lowers groundwater.

They will be reinforced by Government leadership and coordination, by adequate funding, by the provision of expertise and research, and by the support of the entire WA community.

Everybody is in this fight because everybody stands to lose if salinity continues. And everybody will win from its defeat.