

Search Criteria

Model	Model C: Technological Development
Industry	Wool Industry
Focus/Level	Industry
Purpose	Creating knowledge
Outcomes	Development of a management practice
Special Interest Groups	Other
Design and Implementation	Designed by researchers/experts managed by farmers/Community

1. Project Title:

Sustainable Grazing from Saline Land (SGSL) (a sub program of the Land, Water & Wool Program)

2. Funders:

Australian Wool Innovation Limited (AWI)
 Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA)
 CRC for Plant based Management of Dryland Salinity (Salinity CRC)

3. Providers:

CSIRO Livestock Industries
 Department of Agriculture Western Australia
 Department of Primary Industries Victoria
 Department of Primary Industries NSW
 Primary Industries and Resources South Australia
 Private consultants

4. Key Contacts:

Dr Warren Mason – SGSL Subprogram Co-ordinator
 Mike Wagg – LWW Program Manager
 Lu Hogan – Sustainable Production Systems Program Manager, AWI

5. Industry/Issue/Geography:

Industry: Wool Industry (and sheep)

Issue: The SGSL sub-program is based on two premises:

1. the spread of dryland salinity can be reduced by making better use of the rain that falls and convert it into pasture and animal product
2. unproductive saltland can be turned into a valuable component of the total feed supply

Geography: High rainfall and sheep/wheat zones of WA, SA, Vic, NSW and Tas

6. Project Context:

Some 7900 woolgrowers nationally have reported salinity as an issue on their properties. 17m ha of land is used for wool production in the high rainfall and sheep/cereal zones of Australia – an area equivalent to 16% of that total is already affected by salinity. This area of land has lost or is in the process of losing its productivity and much of its commercial value. Around 4.7m ha of agricultural land in the high rainfall and mixed farming zones are presently considered at high risk. Further salinised land is often visual affront and poses severe environmental threats to wetlands and waterways.

Livestock production is one of the few activities that can make productive and profitable use of saline land and therefore address the potentially negative impact on the environment and on the property owners/managers.

7. Project Niche (Specific Objectives):

By 2005, SGSL will have developed a network of woolgrowers in regions that have salinised (or high risk) land and will be supporting that network to share and build on local knowledge and experience. This support will include packaging existing information, undertaking new and applying known research, and local demonstration/testing of options that assist woolgrowers to:

- utilise already salinised land to its productive/profit potential for wool growing;
- reverse the negative environmental impacts associated with saline land; and
- restore woolgrowers personal pride in their property, their management and their product through increased productivity, visual amenity and \$ value of their salinised and threatened land

8. Philosophy/Approach:

The woolgrower network approach is based on the philosophy that woolgrowers are more likely to undertake on-farm research aimed at improving productivity of saline land if they are given the opportunity to define and address research questions of interest to them, on their properties in a supported environment. Support is provided in the form of technical experts, funding and a database to centralise data collection from all the producer sites.

This approach:

- creates producer ownership of the productive advances made;
- builds woolgrower capacity and confidence to make research decisions, define and take advantage of opportunities through on-farm research, communicate their research and findings to other growers and researchers, network and operate within a larger national producer network; and
- creates pride in their saline land.

Five national research projects were also established to undertake new research into saltland grazing systems. The national projects were established as rigorous, replicated

scientific trials and conducted by Salinity CRC scientists. The National projects were also designed to add value to the producer network projects.

9. Resources, Management and Staffing Structures:

Funding - \$9,159,950.00 over 5 years – 30% on the producer network

- In-kind contributions from State Agencies in WA, SA, Vic and NSW, the Salinity CRC and CSIRO Livestock Industries

The SGSL sub-program is managed by a part time Co-ordinator.

The producer network is made of 127 producer groups across Australia (69 – WA, 13 – SA, 20 – Vic & Tas, 25 – NSW). Each state has State Committee with Independent Chair and a state Executive/Project Officer for technical support. State Committees meet approximately 4 times per year.

Initial consultation with farmers indicated that they would prefer SGSL activities to be 'delivered' through their existing groups, rather than have them form new, SGSL groups. Therefore, SGSL provides very little in terms of 'group support' such as facilitators, and focuses on technical support and financial support for the on-farm trials.

Each National research project (5) is managed by a Science Leader, with an appropriately qualified science team to undertake on ground works. A number of the science team members work on more than one national project, creating cross communication and sharing of learnings.

In most cases the project leaders from the national research sites are also members of the producer network committees to foster close linkages between the core research and the producer network sites and activities.

'SGSL Theme' leaders (Senior Scientists) have been appointed to co-ordinate similar and synergistic messages arising from the state based national science projects to assimilate and communicate cohesive findings to the wider wool industry.

10. Process/Methods Used:

State based producer committees were formed in WA, SA, Vic and NSW but the process differed slightly from state to state. As an example, in WA, an independent chair was appointed by SGSL management, in consultation with the WA Dept of Agriculture. Representatives were then sought from the 4 regional NRM groups, the Sheep Research Council and the Saltland Pastures Association. The committee's first task was to sort out the criteria for group project funding and for project development. Almost any aspect of saltland management for livestock production was considered to be within the scope of the SGSL project.

Existing groups were invited to submit expressions of interest, outlining what questions they wanted to answer on the saline land they were interested in. These 'invitations' went out through a raft of existing network, but always included newspaper ads to ensure that no potential 'customers' were left out. From these 'expressions of interest', the State committees selected projects they believed met the criteria. If there were

issues that the committee wanted addressed or changed, this negotiation was undertaken by the State Agency project officer allocated to the project – wherever possible, this was done without the producer group needing to revamp and resubmit their ‘paperwork’.

11. Impacts to date (and evaluation approaches used):

A total of 127 producer groups (69 – WA, 13 – SA, 20 – Vic & Tas, 25 – NSW) are currently undertaking their own research projects, with funding support from SGSL. At this stage, there has been no formal evaluation.

12. Effectiveness:

Anecdotally, the researcher/producer model has worked very well, and is strongly supported by the State Committees and the groups who have been funded to seek answers to their own questions. The model has ensured the National projects maintained focus on productive solutions due to practical producer involvement whilst maintaining their scientific rigour.

The producer network has valued the technical input into their projects via the links with the research teams.

13. Project Documentation available:

- Land, Water & Wool revised Business Plan 2005
- Land, Water & Wool Project Guide - offers a detailed overview of the LWW research portfolio
- SGSL Fact sheets – Projects and products
 - The SGSL Producer Network in WA
 - Productive Solutions for Salinity Management
 - Insights – Case studies on how farmers are successfully managing saltland for profit and sustainability

14. Issues:

While the SGSL producer/researcher has worked well, during the course of the project issues have arisen. Examples are:

- producers and researchers needed to gain mutual respect for one another, i.e. researchers needed to understand the practical skills and experience of producers and producers needed to understand that researchers would like to see some scientific rigour around the producer trials.
- Particularly in WA, managing the strong demand for funds for producer trials required considerable work. But due to the strong demand and quality assessment that was required, a strong series of producer groups/trials was formed.
- Due to geographical spread of the producer networks, it was important to realistically understand the time and costs involved in ensuring the network worked together and are cohesive. Further, it was extremely important that adequate resources were allocated to ensuring cohesion existed and was sustained.
- Because the SGSL producer network is vibrant and producers are enthusiastic positive expectations have been created about the future of SGSL beyond the

scheduled end of the project. This has created a positive issue, because the project must end yet such an enthusiastic and committed network remains that has much to offer. To address this, funding partners clearly stated their intentions for the project i.e. it will end. The producer network has since taken control of its own future and is assessing its options of other potential funding organisations.

15. Comments/conclusions:

Anecdotally, the researcher/producer model has worked very well, and is strongly supported. The project has 13 months left to run and management is looking forward to extending practical advice regarding productive uses for high risk and salinised land.

16. Review Methods:

Land, Water & Wool has a formal Program Monitoring and Evaluation Plan based on Bennett's Hierarchy. Framework logic questions relating to the sub-program level are currently being embedded into regional milestone reporting requirements. It is intended that by embedding the questions into milestones it is less threatening to regional co-ordinators, regions will be collecting contributing data as-they-go-along and prevent regions for having to understand Bennett's Hierarchy in detail.

At completion of the program, M&E data will be compiled in a final Evaluation report of the whole Program and individual sub programs. LWW management is currently 'ghosting' the final report which will assist in collecting relevant data from the regional projects.