COMMUNITY PLANNING
IN
CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT

AN EVALUATION OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATION IN
THE VICTORIAN SALINITY PROGRAM

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Salinity is a complex and difficult problem which has challenged Victoria in various guises since the turn of the century. Initially the Victorians saw salinity as a threat to agricultural land. But salinity is what is known as a ‘wicked' problem. Solutions to one form of the problem create new problems. Through the last 90 years we have learned that loss of agricultural land is but one facet of the salinity problem. Salinity can threaten water supply for irrigation or for household use. It can threaten important environmental assets such as wetlands, streams and plant communities. Finding solutions to salinity can be a balancing act between competing economic, environmental and social objectives. But perhaps the most important lesson we have learnt in the battle to control salinity is that technical solutions will often only go part way towards solving the problem.

In the 1970s and 1980s successive Victorian governments discovered, with the Mineral Reserves Basin Scheme in Northern Victoria, that a technically feasible solution was insufficient. A new realisation grew, that those closest to the land must play a major role in solving salinity, and the support of these communities was vital if any salinity plan was to implemented. That realisation led to the creation, in 1988, of a community planning program to develop salinity management plans for each of Victoria's major catchments and irrigation districts. The strategy was premised on the belief that no salinity plan will succeed without the support of local communities, and that the most effective means of developing workable plans is through a co-operative planning approach involving government, the public service and the local community.

The Salinity Program is a remarkable achievement of the Victorian rural community. Together with that other Victorian concept, Landcare, this strategy has become a model for community based natural resource management in Australia. After 5 years we have learnt much about the salinity challenge we face. We have a far better technical understanding of the causes and solutions and of the environmental and economic threat it poses. Most importantly, we have learnt much of the skills needed to successfully plan with the community. This report documents the outcome of a review of the salinity planning methods which have been used in program. It records what we have learnt, our successes and failures and shows just what one can expect to achieve when community planning is used to solve a ‘wicked' problem such as salinity.

Michael Blamey
Director-General
Department of Food and Agriculture
SUMMARY

This report reviews the implementation of community planning in 8 water supply districts or catchments under the Salt Action: Joint Action strategy. It recounts various methods of community planning and community consultation used in each of these districts and canvases the advantages and disadvantages of each. The districts were:

- Barr Creek drainage catchment
- Tragowel Plains irrigation district
- Campaspe West irrigation district
- Kerang lakes and Torrumbarry irrigation district
- Shepparton irrigation district and Goulburn and Broken catchments
- Nangiloc-Colignan irrigation diversion area
- Sunraysia irrigation district
- Avon and Richardson catchments

There are many lessons to be learned from the experience of the participants. The most important lesson is that nobody can provide recipes which will ensure successful and effective community participation. Different approaches are needed for different areas. We have described which methods were used successfully in which areas, and which were unsuccessful.

This report also evaluates the implementation of Salt Action: Joint Action against the principles of effective planning proposed by the Institute of Public Participation. We have concluded that the consultation processes we studied measure up well against these principles.

The process of public participation should be agreed upon between the agency and participants. Most participants had no significant role in determining the basic structure for community planning, although once they were involved, there were opportunities to influence the evolution of the system. Despite this, by far the majority of participants have accepted the present structure as far preferable to previous methodologies. We have two important and critical observations to make. First, the planning guidelines were drawn up too late. **Planning guidelines should have been available at the commencement of the process.** Secondly, too little formal emphasis was placed upon the importance of the gatekeeping role played by community working group members. Formal recognition of this role would have given it greater legitimacy in the eyes of both the members of working groups and the departmental officers supporting the working groups. Greater emphasis on this important role may have changed the direction of the Campaspe West plan. **Planning guidelines should give formal emphasis to the importance of gatekeeping.**

Public participation should start early in the decision-making process. In each case consultation commenced early in the planning process.

The objectives of the public participation need to be clearly stated and people need to be aware of the level of power being offered. The key question here is where consultation ends and decision making begins. This was unclear initially due to the late release of the planning guidelines. The Shepparton group initially questioned the guidelines, but other groups seem to have accepted them. The members of the community working groups we interviewed displayed a very sophisticated understanding of their relationship with government. They quite clearly perceived and accepted their advisory role and the degree of its influence on government decisions.

**Efforts should be made by the agency to identify all interested parties.** Many different methods were used to identify and appoint representatives to working groups. Local interest groups were well identified in most cases. This principle needs to be
maintained as a high priority. **Strenuous efforts must be made to ensure appointments to community advisory groups represent as many differing interests as possible, and further, these groups should not be seen as the sole source of community feedback.** We noted that community members often are overcommitted and can only maintain committed representation when it is clear that the planning process has significant and salient implications for them and their constituency. These implications may become clear only as the planning process develops. **Group membership should be more flexible, encouraging the appointment of new group members as the plan develops and new interest groups emerge.** Despite these precautions, it is inevitable the members of working groups will become unrepresentative of their community as they become immersed in the details of their planning task.

**Information should be available to all participants.**

We consider that generally information was available to all participants. It is less clear whether the information was always presented in a comprehensible form, and whether there was time to absorb and consider the information. This is particularly so with the LAAG group process. **For LAAG groups to operate effectively there needs to be two meetings of each LAAG group.** This recommendation has significant resource implications. The decision to run LAAG groups needs to be considered seriously and rejected if insufficient resources are available or community interest is low. Consultation may be best achieved through a number of concurrent processes.

**Participants should know how their submissions will be processed.**

The salinity planning experiences we have recounted all occurred during the early days of the Salinity Program. Processes were being developed on the run. It is clear that some working group members were unclear how their draft plans would be processed within government and were dissatisfied with the delays in this processing. **Working groups should be given clear indications of how government develops a response to their salinity plan and what the timetable for this response will be.** Speedy response would be aided by the maintenance of an on-going dialogue between district officers supporting their working groups and centrally located policy officers responsible for co-ordinating government response to plans.

**Adequate resources should be made available for the required tasks and meetings.**

Most working groups were well resourced to undertake their task. Initial inconsistencies with sitting fees were eventually ironed out. One major criticism is that there were problems in appointing and maintaining project officers to manage the development of plans. Several plans floundered for a period until the late appointment of a project officer. **Plans should not be undertaken without the early appointment of a project officer.** Some working groups were frustrated by a continual turnover in staff supporting the planning task. Staff filling base level temporary positions found it hard to refuse the possibility of a promotion or transfer to a permanent position elsewhere in the state. **Project officers in charge of planning should not be appointed at base level.**

One common criticism of the process of community planning in some catchments has been the slow progress towards implementation. Whilst it is easy to dismiss as simplistic calls for more ‘more works on the ground’ from populist orators at public meetings, this issue has arisen a number of times in our discussion of case studies as we questioned whether the planning process had been too long and detailed. Our evaluation of this criticism has varied depending on the circumstances in which planning progressed. The community planning process we have explored has produced a range of outcomes. With a little simplification, the range of outcomes can be classified into three general categories:

- **Consensus and community interest:** Some successful plans have emerged with widespread community support and strong government support.

- **Incidental involvement:** Some plans were developed in response to government initiatives, rather than community pressure. The incidental involvement of the
community resulted from their view of the plan as a subsidy source, rather than a solution. The problem was not salient to landholders. There was no community attachment to the issue addressed in the plan.

- Adverse community reaction: One plan was rejected by the local community. An adverse community reaction to a plan resulted when the plan proposed imposing unwanted compulsory costs on the community. Regrouping and rebuilding was required.

We consider there are two indicators of the likely outcome of a community-developed plan. The first indicator is the nature of the likely solutions to the salinity problem in the area. The likely solutions may be either voluntary solutions (farmers may decide independently of other farmers whether or not they wish to adopt the components of the plan) or compulsory (one in-all in) options such as community drainage schemes. While no plan fits entirely into either category, some plans, particularly those based around irrigation infrastructure, are dominated by solutions which require complete mandatory adoption by a group of landholders to be successful.

The other important determinant is the nature of the salinity threat. Is salinity seen as a salient personal management problem? For most landholders this only occurs when there is a current loss in production caused by salinity which is perceived as a management problem and is perceived as preventable. Perceptions of possible future loss are unlikely to be seen as a salient management problem. This feature is most obviously manifest in the difference between those plans initiated in response to local community pressure and those plans initiated by government. Government initiation is more likely to be associated with plans aiming to address downstream degradation of future losses or productivity.

Clearly neither of these criteria are useful alone as predictors of the likely outcome of a planning process. But in combination they can provide a useful insight into the likely outcomes of planning. There are four possible combinations of these two factors. The result is four different planning scenarios.

- Voluntary solutions, salient personal problem perceived: This is a 'Dream Run' plan. Little community opposition is likely and community planning will be constructive.

- Compulsory solutions, salient personal problem perceived: This is usually associated with a previous 'Grand Plan' which the community has desired for years. In irrigation areas this is often a desire for drainage schemes.

- Compulsory solutions, problem not salient: This is the 'Danger Plan'. In this case community support for any significant costs in plan implementation is unlikely. There is a great risk of planning going 'off the rails' and damage minimisation may be required. It is worth asking if a community plan is really needed in this case. If action is required, there may be a greater role for regulation or market-based solutions. It is probably a forlorn and misleading position to argue that significant community support for real change will emerge from any consultation process within such a planning scenario.

- Voluntary solutions, problem not salient: This is "Someone Else's Plan". Most people are not interested. They are unlikely to participate in planning or implementation unless a large incentive is offered.

Each of these different planning scenarios requires a different intensity of community planning.

Consultation in a 'Dream Run' is easy and constructive. However, there is little point spending too much time and money on consultation during planning; the money would be
better saved for implementation. Competent planning should lead to a consensus solution. Planning needs to be seen by the community to be well done, to prevent the plan collapsing, but beyond that, extensive formal consultation is an expensive luxury.

A `Grand Plan' requires special care. Resolution depends to a great extent on the cost of the plan imposed on the less-concerned majority. There is likely to be consensus if the plan is cheap, no action if the plan is more expensive, and the possibility of adverse reaction if the community perceives an imposition of unrealised aspects of the plan or feels unwarranted blame is being placed upon it. Consensus can be reached from a `Grand Plan', but it is more difficult to achieve than with a `Dream Run'. Community-based planning is crucial to work through the solution. The most important role of the members of these committees is to informally consult their constituencies as they make decisions. They need to know whether their decisions will be acceptable to the rest of the community. This gatekeeping role is crucial if consensus is to be achieved.

Consultation is easy enough as long as the `Grand Plan' dream is the most technically feasible solution and enough people have the problem. If the dream is not a solution acceptable to the wider community, represented by government, consultation is needed to ensure a solution is reached which enough people trust and which explains the lack of action on the `Grand Dream'.

It is well for both the planners and the working group members to be aware of the limitations of community-based planning. It is inevitable that the members of community working groups are unrepresentative of their community. They are interested in participating initially. Also, they learn more than the rest of the community while they are so deeply involved in planning. The community begins to associate them with bureaucrats. Because of the requirement of acceptability to the community, it is unrealistic to expect working groups to make the hard decisions economists might like them to make.

A `Danger Plan' is the worst possible scenario for any planner. It often results in the imposition of unwelcome compulsory costs on a majority of the members of the community, who do not see a current problem. Such a plan is a response to a concern held by a minority in the community, or a government perception of a problem. A community is unlikely to accept a compulsory plan if it requires the members of that community to bear what its members perceive to be significant costs to solve a problem faced by only a minority within the community or by others outside the community.

In a `Danger Plan', the community working group has to justify doing anything at all. If this type of plan is managed carefully it leads to a decision to take no action or a government decision to impose regulatory solutions. A `Danger Plan' can be stopped with little damage only if enough people who don't perceive a problem get involved or are made involved early enough to stop the plan.

The role of formal community consultation is not to ensure there is a plan, but to stop the planners going down a dead end. Formal consultation cannot save a doomed plan, no matter how well thought out the consultation program is.

A voluntary plan for something that is not seen as a salient problem by the majority is seen as "Someone Else's Plan" for someone else's problem. A plan in these areas is the result of the government perceiving a need for a plan. Community perception of a problem is likely to be selective. In some areas public attitudes about salinity are filtered by a strong social stigma over the admission of salinity damage on one's farm. In other districts salinity is sometimes seen as a serious problem for someone else. Any implementation will be driven by a government subsidy. Few landholders will bear significant voluntary costs. Because the community's motivation is based on receiving a subsidy, rather than being based on solving a perceived problem, the extent of community uptake will depend on the extent of the subsidy.
Successful implementation of the plan is dependent on continued government funding of the subsidy. As government is paying for the subsidy and the majority of the community is not interested in the issue, there is little need for government to also pay for consultation with people who don't want to be consulted. Low key consultation only is required, and that should focus on a negotiation over the extent of subsidy.

Clearly, planning could be improved if the likely planning scenario was known as early as possible. It would lead to more efficient use of government funds. The possibility of community backlash would be reduced. If the initial pressure for a plan comes from the community, are we facing a danger plan, a grand plan or a dream run. In each situation only a minority will be lobbying. Are the majority merely uncomfortable in a lobbying role, or do they not consider there is a problem and disagree with the vocal minority? The challenge for planners is to find out enough about each local community as early as possible to determine the likely nature of the plan. One answer to this question may be by conducting cheap market research.

We conclude our report with a plea for realism in expectations and care with rhetoric. Nearly everybody wants to achieve consensus. Planners must realise there is no magic consultation button which will eliminate conflict. Early Salinity Program rhetoric implied community involvement would lead to community ownership of both the problem and the solutions, and increased adoption of salinity control measures. After five years, experience has shown these early hopes and expectations to be unrealistic. With hindsight, much of the early optimism was naive. This is not to imply that this grand experiment in widespread community planning was a failure. It should not be judged by the unrealistic expectations of earlier years. It should be judged by what is achieved on the ground. To date there is much to be proud of. Yet the final judgement will not be made in this report, but by the historians of following decades.
PART 1: THE PLANNING PARADIGM
For 90 years between 1870 and 1960 the State of Victoria implemented a series of `closer settlement' policies for rural lands. Many closer settlement schemes were based upon the subdivision of large estates to create smaller selection properties. Others were based upon the development of unsettled land.

The first closer settlement schemes, the Selection Acts of the 1870s, faltered from both economic and environmental shortcomings. Selection properties were generally too small to be financially viable. In the north of the State this was compounded by the inability of the prevailing small farm systems to cope with dry summers and periodic drought. The government supported future closer settlement schemes and soldier settlement with public investment in irrigation works.

Irrigation development for closer settlement has resulted in a more closely settled countryside, but history has also revealed the economic and environmental shortcomings of this policy. Government expectations that irrigation settlers would be capable of repaying the full cost of irrigation development were illusory. Irrigation could not raise the profits of farms sufficiently to justify investment in irrigation. Unlike contemporary Californian irrigation development which inspired the Victorian `irrigationists', Victorian irrigation farmers were half a world from major markets and could not rely upon summer river flows generated by a melting snow pack. This distance from markets meant farmers could grow only low value unperishable products. The limited summer river flows necessitated far greater per capita investment in major headworks. For 70 years successive governments accepted an historic compromise that irrigation farmers paid only the operating and maintenance costs of public irrigation systems. It was not until the 1980s that this agreement between irrigation farmers and government was seriously questioned.

The major environmental failing of the irrigation schemes was rising watertables and subsequent soil salting. In some districts salting appeared soon after the arrival of irrigation water. Although worst in irrigation districts, soil salting was also to become a problem in some dryland farming areas. The destruction of native pastures and trees led to increased recharge of watertables and in some districts the eventual spread of dryland soil salting.

Until the 1970s the Victorian Government treated outbreaks of salt in irrigated land on an ad hoc basis, generally through the construction of drainage schemes. The Victorian Government bore the capital costs of these schemes. By the 1960s policy makers realised that rising watertables and declining water quality in the Murray River were a major catchment-wide problem and lasting solutions could only be developed on a catchment-wide basis. This realisation led eventually to the Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council agreeing to the `Salinity and Drainage Strategy'. This was essentially an agreement between the States and the Federal Government to allow limited disposal of saline groundwater into the Murray with compensation for South Australian water users.

More was needed than just agreement between governments for such a catchment wide strategy to be successful. In Victoria one major scheme was planned to create a series of evaporation basins in the lower Loddon catchment as a trade-off for the export of salt from the upstream Goulburn catchment. The scheme imposed costs on one community to achieve benefits for another community. The scheme was partially implemented in the 1960s. Attempts to implement further works halted in the 1980s as the Rural Water Commission faced a class action suit by local landholders. The source of the grievance was a plan to build an evaporation basin in the landholders' district. The litigants feared a leaking evaporation basin would salt neighbouring land. These fears were further exacerbated by a planning approach which allowed little role for local landholders in the development of the project.
The controversy over this `Mineral Reserves' evaporation basin was the catalyst for a reappraisal of planning methods used to develop salinity control projects. The rural water sector in Victoria adopted a new style of planning which relied upon community involvement in project design and implementation. The new strategy was called `Salt Action: Joint Action'.
NEW MODELS OF COMMUNITY PLANNING

The key to the new planning model was direct community participation in the development of catchment plans to combat salinity. Community participation in the Salt Action: Joint Action program was based around the work of community based regional or catchment working groups. In various irrigation and drainage districts and river catchments around Victoria small community working groups composed of community representatives were brought together to develop salinity management plans. There were no definitive guidelines about the composition and formation of working groups or the size of a planning area. Salinity control sub regions were to be ‘areas in which salinity problems have a common cause, effect or downstream consequence and within which planned salinity control measures are likely to be effective’. This flexibility resulted in a great diversity in the size and nature of communities working in the program. There was less diversity in the membership of groups. Membership was often dominated by farmers, but often also included representatives of broader interests: local shires, local environmentalists, urban water users and representatives of government departments.

The task of each of these groups was to develop a salinity management plan for presentation to government. This plan was expected to have the support of the catchment community. It was obviously unrealistic to expect the community working groups to achieve this unaided. The Government provided support to the groups with technical support groups composed of government scientists, planners and policy advisers. In theory these groups had no power to make decisions about the content of salinity plans, they were merely to advise the community working group. Again, there were no definitive guidelines on membership of these groups. Membership was predominantly drawn from four government departments and instrumentalities: the Rural Water Commission, Department of Agriculture, Department of Conservation and Environment and the Department of Water Resources. The major skills represented were water engineers, agricultural scientists, hydro-geologists, environmental scientists, economists and social scientists.

The Government's invitation for the community to be involved in salinity planning was not an invitation without constraints. In 1988 the Government released planning guidelines for the working groups. These guidelines set out a format for salinity plans to follow (see text box). The guidelines required planners to evaluate proposals from economic, environmental and social perspectives.
Required format for salinity plans set out in `Government Guidelines for the preparation of Salinity Management Plans.

FINAL PLAN FORMAT

PART 1: THE SUB-REGION

1.1 Relevant Characteristics of the Sub Region:
   To include hydro-geological, land and water use, current salinity, environmental, economic, social profile, interactions with other regions.

1.2 The `No Intervention' Scenario

PART 2: SALINITY CONTROL OPTIONS

2.1 Objectives

2.2 Examination and Selection of Options

2.3 Evaluation of Options
   To include economic, environmental, social and administrative evaluation.

2.4 Preferred Options

PART 3: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PREFERRED OPTION

3.1 Participants, Allocation of Responsibilities, Administrative Arrangements

3.2 Cost Sharing Arrangements

3.3 Incentives and Sanctions

3.4 Implementation Schedule

3.5 Monitoring and Review

Two of the most crucial aspects of the guidelines were those relating to `cost sharing' and to `community support'. Government expected salinity plans would involve local and regional
communities taking responsibility for their problems and would have community support. The cost sharing guidelines were based upon the `beneficiary pays' principle, and to a lesser extent the `polluter pays' principle.\textsuperscript{13}

\textquote{While the State has an important role to play in providing resource for salinity control, regional and local communities must be prepared to help themselves.}'

\textquote{Contributions by communities at local and regional levels should reflect both the extent to which these communities derive benefit from salinity control and the relative inputs of local farming, water management and disposal systems to the worsening of the salinity problem.}\textsuperscript{14}

Those who were to benefit from the salinity control work would pay the cost of the necessary investments. This was a major departure from the long established precedent of farmers paying the operation and maintenance costs and government paying capital costs of irrigation infrastructure investment. The interaction between these two major guidelines was to prove a crucial feature of the new participative planning process.

Community working groups were given deadlines within which to present their plans to the government. On presentation the plans would be assessed by government according to whether the plan was compatible with guidelines, technically feasible, supported by wider public comment and compatible with the salt disposal guidelines of the Murray Darling Basin Ministerial Council's Salinity and Drainage Strategy.\textsuperscript{15}

The new rules for cost sharing were balanced against a new commitment to community involvement in planning for salinity control. This latter commitment was promoted under the title \textit{Salt Action: Joint Action}. \textit{Salt Action: Joint Action} was written on the basic assumption that community participation in salinity management is essential to achieving a successful solution to the problem. The strategy stated that:

\textquote{The success of the program... will depend as much on community participation as on government resources: communities living in salt affected areas must be responsible for managing the problem and resolving issues at the regional level.}'

\textit{Salt Action: Joint Action} was based on local ownership of problems and local involvement in developing management strategies. Government and planners hoped the new process would take the heat out of catchment salinity planning. The community now had responsibility for difficult local decisions. No unwanted solutions would be imposed upon the community.

There was also hope that community involvement would stimulate community ownership of salinity problems and lead to increased adoption of farming methods which prevented further increases in salinity:

\textquote{The sub-regional planning process will bring different groups together, promote a better understanding of the problem and encourage effective co-ordinated action by groups across the sub-region. Community initiation of, and commitment to, sub regional planning will be essential if actions of local groups are to be lasting and effective.}\textsuperscript{16}
Documenting the program

Since the publication of Salt Action: Joint Action in 1988, seven community salinity plans have been completed and another eight are in the final stages. This project attempts to evaluate the community planning process. Within the basic framework of the Victorian Salinity Program there is considerable scope to undertake different strategies to achieve the goal of a community supported salinity plan. There are different strategies to form and compose groups, differing strategies for consulting with the rest of the catchment community and different strategies for interacting with government. These differing strategies used by the various groups and their outcomes are a rich source of experience which may benefit others. In the following chapters we have attempted to document and discuss community participation strategies which have been used in the Salinity Program. There are five major facets of community participation which are of particular interest:

- The method used to form the community group to undertake the task of developing the management plan.
- The way in which the group structures itself and manages its week to week activity.
- How the group consults with its local community on the developing content of its management plan and deals with interest groups within its community.
- The working relationship formed between government officers and the community group.
- Quantification of the extent of commitment to community planning by community members and government officers.

Evaluating the program

In any review one of the most crucial questions is the criteria which are to be used for the evaluation of the outcomes. In the case of community based planning for salinity, there appear to be three basic criteria which could be used:

- Final outcomes: the actual outcomes on the ground such as a successful salinity mitigation program or a working adjustment scheme.
- Intermediate outcomes: development of an implementable plan which has the support of the community of common concern, including the farm community, broadly based interest groups, and government departments.
- Process: the degree of confidence in the planning process amongst those groups with an interest in the outcome.

History will eventually judge the Victorian Salinity Program on the basis of tangible outcomes on the ground, the first criterion. However, it is clearly too early for this review to use this criterion. Evaluation of the intermediate outcome goal is simpler in most cases. The answers are more evident. Some conclusions can be drawn from the plans which have been
produced. These conclusions form the final chapter of this report. Initially we will have to focus mainly on the process, the third criterion.

Principles on which to evaluate the process of community planning are fairly well agreed upon in the literature. The Institute for Participatory Planning, U.S.A., developed a set of features which it considered important in planning an adequate public consultation or participation program. These features are:

- The process of public participation should be agreed upon between the agency and participants.
- Public participation should start early in the decision-making process.
- The objectives of the public participation need to be clearly stated.
- People need to be aware of the level of power being offered.
- Efforts should be made by the agency to identify all interested parties.
- Information should be available to all participants.
- Participants should know how their submissions will be processed.
- Adequate resources should be made available for the required tasks and meetings. Where appropriate (e.g., for travel and large time commitments), costs for participants should be reimbursed.

One other point could be added to this list:

- Commitment to the process of community based planning should not take over from commitment to the actual task. Has the process of planning become ‘bureaucratised’?

This is only one set of principles among several, but it shows the kinds of questions which need to be asked about community participation strategies to ensure the process is both appropriate and seen to be appropriate. It is clearly difficult, if not impossible to gain objective answers to many of these questions. What can be gained is an overview of the opinions of those involved in the process of community planning. A major activity in the review has been to seek the opinions of the participants:

- What have been the objectives of individual and organisational participants?
- What are the participants' perceptions of their success in achieving these objectives?
- What are the participants' views on the implementability of the plan?

On the basis of this information we undertake the following tasks:

- Describe the advantages and disadvantages of various participation options.
- Evaluate the various participation strategy options on the basis of various criteria, for example:
  - equity of access to the participation process;
  - representativeness of participation;
- in the case of consultation, the extent to which the community has influenced the outcome, as measured by the changes they may have forced on the plan;
- acceptability of the resultant plan to government and to the community;
- the comparative resource demands of plan development.

- Make recommendations on how to choose a participation strategy appropriate to a particular situation.

There is considerable experience of community based planning within the Victorian Salinity Program. It is hoped that by recording and passing on this experience we can ensure that the community participation strategies used in future are as effective and efficient as possible and that time and money spent on community participation strategies is effective.

How the review was conducted

This review covers eight areas for which Salinity Management Plans are currently being developed or implemented in Victoria, within the Victorian Salinity Program. These areas are:

- Shepparton Pilot Program region (irrigation and dryland).
- Tragowel Plains sub-region.
- Campaspe West sub-region.
- Kerang Lakes sub-region.
- Barr Creek catchment.
- Avon-Richardson river catchments.
- Nangiloc-Colignan sub-region.
- Sunraysia sub-region.

The research for this review was carried out in five stages:

1. Review of the history of each area.

2. Quantification of the resource commitment to community based planning. Working Group minutes and other records were analysed to determine the frequency and duration of the meetings, and the attendance at the meetings and the scope of issues covered. This was to quantify the commitment required of working group members.

3. Focused personal interviewing with the participants. Those interviewed in depth included 66 Community Working Group members; 33 facilitators and departmental officers; 10 central policy officers and representatives of umbrella group representatives such as CCV and VFF. Further detail of the interview schedule is included in Appendix 1. A schedule of questions asked is included in Appendix 2.

4. Survey of a wider community: A random sample survey was undertaken of rural people in one area, the Tragowel Plains, where a management plan had been developed, in order to evaluate quantitatively the representativeness and effectiveness of the participation strategy. The results of this survey are reported in summary form in the chapter on the Tragowel Plains. A fuller report of the survey is included in Appendix 3.
5. Clarification phase: Where the perceptions of issues or events differed between people involved with a particular management plan, clarification was sought from the minutes of the meetings of that working group and by re-contacting key participants. All community members interviewed were given copies of draft chapters describing their planning areas to read and comment on our interpretations.
PART 2: THE COMMUNITY WORKING GROUPS
The first case study we consider is that of the Barr Creek Project Team. The experience of catchment planning in the Barr Creek was an important influence in shaping the Victorian Government's salinity strategy, Salt Action: Joint Action.

History of salinity action

The Barr Creek, near Kerang, is a tributary of the Loddon River. The Creek rises to the south west of Cohuna near Kow swamp. Approximately 70 kilometres to the north-west it flows into the Lower Loddon River. In between the Creek traverses a predominantly flat riverine plain landscape of 66 000 hectares.

Much of the catchment of the Barr Creek was subdivided into Closer Settlement and Soldier Settlement irrigation blocks early in the century. High watertable and salting problems became evident in the catchment within a few years of the commencement of irrigation. In the south of the catchment salting appeared along the Macorna channel. In the east salting developed in the orchard blocks of the Cohuna Irrigation District. Here the area of salt affected land grew from 80 hectares in 1911 to 400 hectares in 1913.

The Victorian Government responded to the rising watertables and soil salinity by constructing drainage channels. Emergency drainage works were built in the 1920s to safeguard parts of the Cohuna Irrigation Area. Drainage of the majority of the catchment was completed in a major employment generating program during the 1930s depression. With intermittent extensions during following decades, a total of 550 kilometres of drains was constructed. The Barr Creek was deepened and straightened to increase its drainage capacity. The drainage works were not able to totally save the closer settlement farms in the Barr Creek catchment. In the Cohuna area horticulture disappeared, and was replaced by dairying. Salting on the lower flats forced many settlers off their farms.

Despite these setbacks, the catchment is today a productive dairying district. It includes the towns of Leitchville and Cohuna, and is farmed by 480 landholders. It is mainly an irrigated dairy district, with some irrigated mixed cropping and grazing farms.

Many of the drains constructed in the Barr Creek catchment were dug deep enough to intercept the highly saline regional groundwater table. The drainage system thus not only drained surface runoff, but also the highly saline groundwater which seeped into the drains. The Barr Creek drainage system was to became the largest single measurable point source of salt entering the Murray River, contributing 200,000 tonnes of salt to the Murray River in an average year. It has been estimated that Barr Creek contributes 5 per cent of the salinity measured in the River at Morgan in South Australia, where Adelaide draws part of its water supply.

In 1968 the then Victorian State Rivers and Water Supply Commission (SRWSC) embarked on a major plan to reduce the amount of salt entering the Murray River from the Barr Creek by diverting some of the salt flow to an evaporation basin. The motivation was in part to earn the right to discharge saline effluent from the upstream Shepparton irrigation district into the Murray. The nearby Lake Tutchewop had been isolated from its natural drainage system to protect water quality in the Torrumbarry irrigation system. Lake Tutchewop was used as a large evaporative basin. A pumping station installed on the lower reaches of the Barr Creek pumped salty water from the Creek into Lake Tutchewop. The SRWSC devised operational rules to maximise the impact of diversions from Barr Creek on downstream Murray salinity.
Diversion was timed to coincide with low flows in the Murray and high salinities in Barr Creek.

The major technical factor limiting the annual load of salt which could be disposed to Lake Tutchewop was the volume of water which could be evaporated from the basin. The scheme is most effective when low volumes of highly saline water are pumped from Barr Creek. This maximises the quantity of salt transferred to Lake Tutchewop. Highly saline low volume flows occur in summer when the inflow of saline groundwater into drains is not diluted by rainfall runoff. The summer flows of saline groundwater are diluted, however, by freshwater draining from irrigation properties and from Rural Water Commission supply structures. Reduction of these summer flows of fresh water into the drainage system would increase the operational efficiency of the Lake Tutchewop system and decrease the salinity of the Murray River downstream of the Loddon. Reducing the summer freshwater flows would entail changes in management practices of both the farming community and the water supply agency.

The Barr Creek provided policy makers with a difficult challenge. Social priorities had changed since the 1930s. The issue which now interested the water authorities was not a desire to reduce or control salinity in the Barr Creek catchment, but a desire to reduce the salt load on the Murray River to achieve benefits for others outside the catchment. It would be necessary to interest farmers in making changes to their farm which had a downstream benefit, but little benefit to the individual farmer undertaking the works. It would be crucial for any catchment plan to have the support of landholders who would hold much of the responsibility for its implementation. How was this to happen?

In 1982 the SRWSC engaged a team of consultants to develop a strategy to improve the efficiency of the Lake Tutchewop Scheme. A Catchment Consultative Committee of local representatives was formed, according to SRWSC practice, to be a focus of consultation with the community. In April, 1984, the consultant team produced a draft report which recommended strategies to decrease the summer flow of fresh water from irrigation farms into the drainage system. The main measures proposed were:

- A 50 per cent subsidy for whole farm plans
- A 50 per cent subsidy for the construction of approved water recycling systems.
- Waiving the charges for diversion of water from drains.
- Introduction of transferable water entitlements.
- Modifications to the system of water pricing.

The report was presented to the local community in a series of public meetings. At these meetings local farmers and groups raised serious concerns. They questioned the costings, proposed incentives and data on which the report was based. They also criticised the lack of drainage recommendations. In response the SRWSC extended the terms of the consultants' contract to allow study of drainage and water re-use costs. The final consultants' report was presented to a Ministerial Task Force in September 1985. The Task Force decided to refer the new report to small working group composed of local community members who would be charged with converting the report into a local action plan.

A month later the Catchment Consultative Committee considered the consultants' report and the recommendation to create a working group of local community representatives to develop an action plan. While supporting parts of the report, the Catchment Consultative Committee also supported the proposal for a local group to re-work the report. The Catchment Consultative Committee believed the information in the report was not presented in a way
which was readily absorbed by the community and there was no opportunity for detailed analysis by the community. The Committee also questioned the technical data on which the consultants' plan was based. It believed the consultants' plan had been based upon information supplied by the SRWSC which overestimated the contribution of irrigators' management practices and underestimated the contribution of leaking SRWSC structures to fresh water flows in the Creek.

Forming the working group

The first step in redeveloping the plan was the formation of a new community working group. The Catchment Consultative Committee established a new, smaller working group to review the consultants' plan. This working group consisted of 6 community people, with 2 departmental officers acting as technical advisers and planners.

The convenor and secretary were from the Rural Water Commission (RWC, formerly SRWSC). All the working group members were farmers. Most were older, experienced farmers, with large farms and more time to devote to community affairs. They were well known in the district, with a wide network of contacts in the community. One had been a member of the RWC irrigators' advisory board for 30 years. Some of the working group members had served on the original consultative committee overseeing the consultants' report.

The working group members were representative of the community in terms of land use, but not from other points of view such as age or interest groupings. Some members argued this did not matter, what mattered was that the group contained farmers with background knowledge and interest in salinity who could understand the strategy and could act as a contact point for information distribution. Certainly it is important for a working group member to talk informally to many people in the community about the developing plan, and those with a wide network of contacts are more able to do this. However, such people tend to talk mainly to those in their own social grouping.

Only one working group member did not fit the 'mould'. The one woman on the group, Margot Henty, was the only member new to farming. She was also a geography teacher. Before the working group was formed, she wrote letters to the consultants, Department of Agriculture and local newspapers protesting about the lack of community consultation. Her interest resulted in her being asked to become a member of the working group. This is an unusual way to get onto a working group, but the end probably justified the means, as Margot's skill at explaining things made her a valuable contributor at public meetings.

The role of government officers

The Barr Creek working group was well supported. There were two full time project officers, one from the Department of Agriculture (DA) and one from the Rural Water Commission (RWC). There was also a part time community education and administrative officer. The departmental officers did not have a vote on the working group. This helped ensure the community members on the working group took responsibility for their decisions. The departmental officers were enthusiastic and keen. Their strong personalities helped create and maintain enthusiasm. The working group members reported having an excellent relationship with them.

However, some members expressed concern about the guidance the group received from the departmental officers. By the time planning had finished, they felt they had been led. They
came to think that some issues had been editorialised off the agenda by the departmental people. The results the group arrived at were just what the department people wanted.

This is not a criticism of the Barr Creek Project specifically, rather it is a comment on the nature of planning in the Victorian Salinity Program. It is a natural consequence of the departmental people `educating' the community working group members to understand the problem and the possible solutions. They train the community members to their way of thinking. Where the departmental advisers have a strong personality they may educate the community representatives to be like more like themselves.

Developing the plan

In their final report the working group described their task as having passed through four stages. The basis of the community rejection of the original consultants' plan was disagreement over the base data. The community doubted a number of crucial matters. The first task the working group set itself was to check the validity of the data. The working group conducted a `drain walk' to verify some of the base flow assumptions. In its final report the working group made specific findings on the weaknesses of the original data:

- Channel leaks were underestimated by up to 6 times.
- Channel outfalls were underestimated by half.
- Drainage diversion by farmers was underestimated by half.
- Irrigation runoff was less than estimated.
- The value of landforming and reuse systems to both farmers and the catchment plan was overestimated.

The next task was to evaluate all the strategies proposed by the consultants and the community, 36 in all. Ten strategies were selected. The group then explored the costs and benefits of each strategy and determined appropriate incentives and sanctions. . . . the cost sharing.

The community representatives met as a planning group on 11 occasions in 18 months. The members said they needed this many meetings to come to comprehend the consultants' report and to understand the salinity problem, its causes and the potential solutions. In retrospect, this was really a small number of meetings compared with the experience of other working groups. Unlike working groups which have been established more recently, the Barr Creek working group already had a report on which to base their work. The group changed many parts of the consultants' report. However, much of the technical work needed for the new plan had already been done by the RWC for the consultants. In line with standard RWC practice, working group members were paid a fee of $50 per meeting they attended. Opinion was divided on the value of payment. Some members appreciated the payment. Others said it did not matter; they would have contributed just as much without payment.

The plan

The working group's new plan contained many elements in common with the original consultant's report. However, it proposed major changes in the cost share borne by the community, a reduction in the targets for reduced farm runoff and an increase in works to reduce leakages from RWC structures. The major components were:
An 85 per cent subsidy for whole farm plans.

An 85 per cent subsidy for re-use systems in the lower catchment.

Waiving charges for diversion of drainage water.

A program of works by the RWC to reduce leaks from supply structures by 50 per cent.

Consulting with the community

In developing its plan, the working group needed to produce a document which would have the support of both the local community and the wider community as represented by the government. The working group attempted to keep the local community informed through three meetings with the Catchment Consultative Committee and through regular newspaper articles. With the completion of a draft plan, the working group embarked upon a more comprehensive consultation phase using LAAG groups.

The Barr Creek working group was the first Victorian salinity group to use Local Action and Advisory Groups (LAAGs). LAAGs are small groups of neighbours who gather to discuss the management plan. They are like a discussion group, but with a geographic clientele rather than an industry based clientele. A working group member (not a departmental officer) attends the group meeting to answer questions, but the chairmanship of the meeting is left to one of the neighbours. The LAAG leader is selected by the working group.

Every farmer in the area is supposed to be invited to a LAAG meeting. The idea behind LAAGs is that a farmer is more likely to participate in a small LAAG meeting than a large public meeting. LAAGs are supposed to be less intimidating to those not used to attending public meetings, and to those who could be dominated in a larger forum. In Barr Creek there were about 50 LAAGs, with roughly 12 farmers in each group. The plan was well formulated when the LAAG meetings were held. The LAAG meetings were to sell the plan to the community and to refine it. For the process to work, the LAAG leaders needed to be able to explain the plan without assistance from the working group. The working group selected LAAG leaders who they believed `could talk and liked talking'. An information booklet was provided and two information nights were held by the working group for LAAG leaders.

The level of involvement in the LAAG groups was high. Each LAAG had only one meeting. Attendances varied, for example one working group member had only 8 out of 15 LAAG members at his LAAG meeting. From the catchment of 480 farm properties, a little over 300 landholders attended a LAAG meeting. People have to see a meeting, even a LAAG meeting, as important enough to take the time to attend. People cannot be forced to participate if they do not want to be involved.

Some participants questioned whether the LAAG process was as efficient as it could have been in transferring information about the plan. The two main issues were whether one meeting was sufficient and whether the LAAG group leaders knew enough about the plan. Some working group members suggested that one LAAG meeting was not enough for people to understand the plan and make informed and useful comments on it. They would have supported two meetings, with time for thinking about questions in between the meetings. Whether more than one LAAG meeting is required, and whether people being consulted need a full understanding of the plan they are being consulted about, are difficult questions to answer. There were other ways in which interested people in the Barr Creek Project Area could have participated in the project. Public meetings were held in the six different districts within the project area.
It is possible that some LAAG leaders did not understand the plan sufficiently after just two meetings. Some working group members criticised this lack of training. With limited resources it is difficult to commit enough time and money to consultation to ensure that everyone understands everything; you have to do the best with what you can. This is a weakness of the LAAG system. Those explaining a plan at a public meeting usually understand the plan well.

Dealing with dissent in a LAAG process is a delicate issue. Some LAAG leaders were against particular elements of the plan, and spoke out at the LAAG leaders’ meetings. The project officers said they knew some would be against the plan when they were chosen but, as one project officer said:

‘You have got to let the people sell what you have got to implement. If they cannot sell it, it should not be implemented.’

This dissent was dismissed at the time. This is an inevitable problem using a two stage LAAG process. No plan will be accepted by all. The challenge is to incorporate constructive dissent into the plan.

A final issue which needs to be considered is the resourcing needed to run a LAAG consultation. A LAAG system takes much time and effort to organise. It is much harder to organise than some other consultation methods, such as public meetings. Used to their full advantage LAAGs are also probably most effective when used in conjunction with other consultation methods. Although the LAAG process achieved a high participation rate, it should be noted that most of the additional public consultation meetings were well attended. The exception was Leitchville where there was little in the plan to benefit the farmers, and attendance at the public meeting was poor.

Despite these concerns about LAAG meetings, most of those involved thought the LAAG process worked well.

**Presentation to government**

The final plan was presented to Government in late 1986. The plan had already been presented to a Cabinet task force in a draft form some three months earlier, prior to the LAAG consultation phase. In its final report the working group was able to argue that it had strong support from the community on the basis of the results of the LAAG consultation. The Government accepted the plan in 1987.

**Implementation**

Once the Barr Creek plan had been approved by the community and the government, it had to be implemented. Overseeing implementation was the responsibility of the Barr Creek Project Team. The Project Team had six community members, one from each district within the project area. The community members of the Barr Creek Project Team were elected by the Barr Creek community for a two year term. Public meetings were held in each of the six districts. Each area had to nominate a person to go onto the Project Team. All but one nominee were elected unopposed. The additional nominee was then co-opted to the Project Team.

Only two members of the Project Team had been on the working group. This would have given a reasonable balance of some continuity and some new ideas. All the Project Team members renominated at the end of the two year term. The Project Team decided to replace
the co-opted member with another person. This caused some dissent within the group, with some members considering that an election was fairer than co-opting. However, interested people can be hard to find in some areas, and if people are willing to be involved without being formal, voting members of a working group or project team the group may be better off co-opting them. It is difficult to not allow them to remain involved. Nevertheless, if co-opted members are to be replaced it must be done with care.

Originally, the Barr Creek Project Team was chaired by one of the project officers, John Ginnivan. He was the only government officer to be chairman of a community working group in Victoria. The community members of the project team did not appear to object to this unusual arrangement. He was certainly unaware of any criticism of his chairmanship.

However well the arrangement worked, it may not have looked appropriate to outside observers. A project officer can do more than enough of the agenda setting without being chairman also. He felt strange being the only government employee at the regular working group chairmen’s meetings. Eventually he pressured the project team members to elect a chairman from one of their number and they did so.

The dual project officer structure from the planning period was retained for implementation. There is still one project officer from each department. Much of their role is in supervising and inspecting farm works (mainly water reuse systems and whole farm plans) to ensure they qualify for the subsidies in the plan. The heavy subsidies are because the works are seen to benefit the Murray River more than they benefit the Barr Creek landholders, so the government should pay a high proportion of the cost.

Early in the implementation period there were plenty of farmers eager to construct subsidised water reuse systems. The heavy subsidies accelerated the demand and there was always a backlog of farmers waiting for the project officers to check their designs. The project officers cultivated this backlog by promoting reuse systems heavily because it served two purposes. Short supply helped to stimulate demand. More importantly, the project had to be seen as a success for it to continue. The fact that they could not keep up with demand was an excellent indicator of the success of the project.

However, the backlog of applications is becoming increasingly harder to maintain. The earlier adopters were the more innovative farmers who might be expected to adopt anything more quickly than other farmers. These farmers may have adopted reuse systems with a lower subsidy level. Now that these farmers have installed reuse systems, farmers remaining are those who are less likely to adopt them. This may be for various reasons: lack of money, lack of perceived need, or other priorities.

There are plenty of reuse systems around for neighbours to see and plenty of farmers with reuse systems to do the extension work by promoting the systems to their neighbours. This will help maintain demand until a point is reached when those farmers remaining without reuse systems would be highly unlikely to adopt them. The more reuse systems are installed, the harder it becomes to convince the remaining farmers to install them. This is a normal component of the process of diffusion of any new idea. There will come a point when we must decide that the level of adoption achieved is the best that is reasonably possible, and scale down the publicity and extension effort. This is not a cause for despondency, rather realism.
The development of salinity

The Tragowel Plains Irrigation Area is located midway between Bendigo, Echuca and Kerang. It is centred around the small town of Pyramid Hill. The Tragowel Plains have been irrigated for nearly 100 years. Irrigation development arose out of the hardship and suffering of the selectors who tried to closely settle the plains in the 1870s. Many selectors were forced off their farms by a combination of poor returns, lack of capital and the droughts of the late 1870s.22

The selectors of the Plains successfully lobbied the State Government for irrigation development to ease their plight. The initial irrigation water supply in the 1890s was drawn from a dam developed upstream on the Loddon River. This supply proved inadequate and State investment in irrigation infrastructure continued over the next 70 years. In 1912 a channel from the Waranga Basin reached the Loddon River, supplying water from the Goulburn River system. The channel placed increased demands on the storages on the Goulburn River and within two years a drought exposed the over-commitment of the available water. In 1927 the SRWSC built another dam at Eildon on the upper Goulburn River. It also built a new channel supply from the Waranga Mallee Channel into the middle of the Plains. This provided a gravity supply across much of the plain. In the 1960s the enlargement of Eildon Reservoir dramatically increased the amount of water available to Tragowel farmers.

The Tragowel Plains are a flat natural flood plain. In places the slope of the land is less than a metre in every two kilometres. The plains are drained by many ill defined small creeks and anabranches of both the Loddon River and Bullock Creek. Originally, when the heavy rains came, every five years or so, the plains flooded and only slowly drained. Settlement brought roads, levee banks and, eventually, irrigation channels. All interrupted the tenuous natural drainage lines, exacerbating the winter flooding of the plains. Irrigation further reduced the effectiveness of the natural drainage lines on the plains. Summer irrigation water flowed into the normally intermittent creeks. This radically changed the ecosystem of the creeks. Cumbungi weed does not survive in intermittent streams, but it develops dense thickets in perennial shallow streams. It quickly dominated the now perennially wet shallow creeks of the plains. The thickets slowed the drainage, widening the area of permanent inundation, spreading the cumbungi habitat, and further exacerbating the winter flooding.

Despite the summer shortage of water, the winter flooding was unwelcome, waterlogging the soils and hindering access to paddocks for long periods. Crop and pasture production was reduced and prolonged flooding dramatically increased the recharge of ground water. Irrigation itself exacerbated the watertable problems by leaving large areas of the plain with wet subsoil before the natural autumn break. When the winter rains came there was little remaining water storage capacity in the soil and rain penetrated the soil directly to the watertable.

The watertable of the Loddon flood plain began to rise soon after the commencement of irrigation. In the 1880s the watertable was eight to ten metres below the surface. In 1890 the water table depth was four metres; by the turn of the century it was only two or three metres from the surface. By the 1920s the first visible salt appeared on either side of the Macorna channel in the north of the Plains, where the drainage was almost totally cut off. The salt proceeded to spread north and south from the channel.23 The plains were flat and saline discharge areas spread widely, unhindered by local topography. There was little elevated land above the influence of the high watertable.
Because of the extensive soil salting, farmers on the northern Tragowel Plains cannot use irrigation water as productively as irrigation farmers in many other parts of northern Victoria. Some say that farmers on the plains have learned to live with salinity by following conservative farming strategies. Investment in farm improvement is minimised. Old fences are repaired rather than being replaced with new ones; water reticulation is rarely upgraded. Fertilisers are used sparingly; and new equipment purchased rarely. There have been good reasons for following this conservative investment strategy. Salt affected land does not produce the profits of unaffected land and cannot support as many overhead costs. Farm debt levels need to be lower to forestall the cyclic downturns in commodity prices or the more recent experience of high interest rates. Investing in farm improvements on salt affected land has a greater than average risk of investment failure.

Two solutions to salinity on the Tragowel Plains have long been advocated: drainage and improved irrigation techniques. As with nearly all irrigation areas, the history of irrigation on the Tragowel Plains is a history of lack of drainage. It is also a history of landholders campaigning for drainage. Records of a local irrigators' advisory board show agitation for drainage going back to 1929! A network of deep drains protects the neighbouring Barr Creek irrigation area. In the 1960s the SRWSC began work to extend this Kerang East drainage system south into the Tragowel Plains. Work ceased when the system had extended only a little into the northern borders of the Tragowel Plains. The deep drains which had snaked through the Kerang East district flowed salty throughout the summer. Extending the drains into the Tragowel Plains would have increased the salt flow into the drains. Continuation of the drains threatened a significant increase in salinity of the Murray River.

Following this disappointment, the Shire of Gordon (which covers much of the Tragowel Plains) established the Bullock Creek Improvement Trust (BCIT). In 1970 the BCIT embarked on a program of 'shallow drainage' as an alternative to the 'deep drains' commenced by the SRWSC. The program consisted of cleaning out and enlarging existing drainage lines and digging new shallow drains. The BCIT is a local success story. It is run by commissioners from the local area, most of whom are farmers, and administered by Graham Hall, the Gordon Shire Engineer. Local farmers like the BCIT because it is run by farmers and, whilst conscious of environmental considerations, is seen as 'practical'.

Like calls for improved drainage, calls for improved irrigation methods as a panacea for salt have a long history on the Tragowel Plains. Despite the drawbacks which are now apparent, the flatness of the Tragowel Plains was a major attraction to early irrigators. The first irrigators could start irrigating with very little preparatory work; a supply channel and branches were all that were needed. When the farmer dug a series of holes in the branch channel, water flowed out over the plain. This practice came to be known as wild flood irrigation. Once the water left the branch channel, it was uncontrolled. Although the land was generally flat it was riddled with 'crabholes', small circular depressions between five and fifty metres across. With wild flood irrigation, water collected in the crabholes leaving the higher areas of the paddock dry. The water ponded in crabholes and either evaporated or percolated into the watertable.

Fifty years ago farmers were exhorted to use horse and buckboard to level their land, eliminate the crabholes and create border check irrigation layout. Border check layout achieved better water control by dividing the farm into rectangular watering bays. The supply channel was at the top of the bay and the drainage channel at the bottom. The sides of each bay were raised mounds of earth called checkbanks. The checkbanks stopped water flowing sideways out of the bay, forcing it to flow down the bay to the drain. Removing cross slopes on bays was beyond the capacity of the buckboard. This meant bays had to be built to fit the slopes of the farm. Bays were no wider than 15 metres to ensure water covered the whole of the land in the bay. This full coverage gave better leaching of the soil and helped to keep salt from the soil surface, but the down side was that farms were divided by checkbanks and
channels into very many small irrigation bays. The large number of bays made irrigation a
time-consuming task.

The introduction of more powerful tractors in the 1960s meant larger volumes of soil could
be shifted. Where properties were regraded the irrigation bays were made much larger,
leaving fewer bays on a farm. Watering became a less arduous task. With fewer, longer bays
it was easier to achieve an effective drainage system. The introduction of laser beam
controlled landforming equipment in 1977 allowed farmers to achieve very even slopes in
their reshaping of their irrigation bays. This provided the key to radical relayout of irrigation
farms. A farm of many small bays could be transformed into a farm with a small number of
wide and long bays with no cross slope.

Laser grading is expensive, costing over $1000 a hectare. Land which is laser graded is taken
out of production for at least a year. Despite this, the innovation was at first rapidly adopted
on the Tragowel Plains. A laser graded relayout of pastures greatly eased the burden of
watering for irrigation farmers. Farmers also seemed to gain increased production from
relayed out paddocks because of improved drainage. Dry high spots and waterlogged low
spots in the paddock were eliminated. Irrigation was easier, so was often more timely in
application.

At some stage the belief grew that laser grading would help control salting by limiting the
amount of water reaching the watertable. This idea spread through the farming community.
By 1982 probably 60 per cent of farmers in the irrigation areas of northern Victoria believed
laser grading would prevent the encroachment of salinity. A third of farmers believed
existing salt damage could be controlled by laser landforming and relayout. But on the
Tragowel Plains the initial enthusiasm for laser grading was soon replaced by caution. The
results of relayout were often disappointing. Pasture regrowth after laser landforming was
much slower than expected, sometimes pasture did not re-establish at all. On salt-affected
land the *salt-line* on paddocks did not retreat down the paddock as expected; sometimes it
advanced up the paddock once vegetative cover had been removed by the grader. These
difficulties were compounded by historically high interest rates. Laser grading seemed a safe
investment with a 12 per cent interest rate and an assumed single year loss of production after
landforming. The investment turned sour as interest rates rose to 22 per cent and the
unproductive period after laser landforming over high water tables stretched to two or three
years. The Tragowel Plains Sub Regional Working Group grew out of the experience of
three farmers who found themselves in financial difficulty as their laser grading investments
turned sour.

On the weekend of May 31-June 1 1986, the Natural Resources Conservation League of
Victoria convened a Salinity Update public forum in Kerang. Joan Kirner, then Minister for
Conservation, Forests and Lands, spoke about the government's salinity projects in the
Kerang region and other parts of Victoria. Some Tragowel Plains farmers who had
experienced failed land layout projects attended.

There was conflict at the forum as to the value of laser grading. Don Naunton, a local farm
consultant with a wide knowledge of the Tragowel Plains, was one speaker. He said many
farm development projects on areas with high water tables *have not generated sufficient
income to come anywhere near servicing the commitments on the salinity loan, even under
the concessional terms available*. The Tragowel Plains area was not included among
government salinity projects. Ken McDougall, one of the farmers who had attempted
redevelopment, attempted to attract attention and funding to the area. He moved a motion to
support the establishment of a Land Protection Group on the Tragowel Plains. The resolution
was passed.

Ken was told the establishment of a Land Protection Group would require a public meeting,
so he called a meeting of concerned landholders at Macorna school on 14 July 1986. Those
attending included six local farmers, some representing the Bullock Creek Improvement Trust (BCIT) and the Kerang Irrigation Region Salinity Action Committee (KIRSAC), both being local organisations concerned with salinity and drainage. Also at the meeting were local consultant Don Naunton, and representatives of the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) and four government departments. Notable among the government employees present was Sharman Stone, a sociologist who grew up on the Tragowel Plains and was then working with a government department. She was one of the architects of the developing Salinity Program and its focus on local groups.

The meeting resolved ‘that an interim Tragowel Plains Land Protection Group be formed with the following objectives:

- To alleviate salinity related hardship in the Tragowel Plains
- To identify salinity control strategies
- To have these strategies implemented.’

The meeting appointed a sub-committee to firm up these objectives and to put them to the Cabinet Task Force on Salinity. The sub-committee consisted of Sharman Stone, Ken McDougall, Don Naunton, and senior Department of Agriculture (DA) officers in the region Roger O’Farrell and Mac McArthur. It met on 22 July 1986. The Cabinet Task Force accepted the sub-committee’s proposals and on 4 August 1986 agreed that DA should establish and convene a Tragowel Plains Sub Regional Working Group with wide community representation. The role of the working group was to:

- ‘identify salinity related issues requiring resolution
- liaise with and involve the local community
- produce a sub-regional management plan supported by the community for submission to the Cabinet Task Force.’

The DA was also instructed to report to the Cabinet Task Force on salinity related hardship in the Tragowel Plains area. Money was also allocated to employ a person to organise and assist community involvement in the development of the management plan.

Forming the working group

Roger O’Farrell, a senior extension officer with DA at Echuca, was the first convenor of the working group. His first task was to form the group, and he used an extension approach to finding the names of appropriate people to be members of the working group. He didn't know the Tragowel Plains area at all when given the task of setting up the group; the area had at that time little contact with extension services. Roger progressively visited prominent people in the community (such as police, hospital management, business people, community organisations) and asked them who they thought were prominent in the community and who they represented. Effectively he asked who were the leaders in the community, who was active in the community and who had the confidence of the community. He wasn't looking for names of interest groups, but of leaders in the community.

Roger O'Farrell obtained 40 or 50 names. On drawing up a matrix of people and the group they represented, he found that some people represented three or four organisations. These people covered most organisations in the community, such as social, sporting and fraternal organisations. He approached these people and asked them if they would be prepared to be
involved as a member of the working group. All agreed. A public meeting was held in the Pyramid Hill Hall on 9 October 1986 to elect members to the new working group. Roger ensured that all the people he had selected were nominated at the meeting. All were elected.

The farmers whose experiences had led to the formation of the working group were in the north of the Tragowel Plains, where the salt problem was greater. The working group was originally intended to cover the Pyramid Hill Irrigation Area, which consisted mostly of this northern part. At the public meeting, farmers from the Dingee-Calivil Irrigation Area to the south of Pyramid Hill who had attended saw that they would not be included. They realised that if they were not included in this management plan they would be unlikely to be included in any other plan. They asked that they be included. The southern area had much less salt than the original, northern area. The inclusion of the southern area was not universally accepted, however it was the wish of the meeting that they be included. Some representatives of that area were nominated and accepted at the meeting.

With a history of constant agitation for drainage and the problems of the farmers who had redeveloped their farms, there were several people in the Tragowel Plains eager to become involved with the new working group. The farming areas within the sub region were all well represented. The group consisted almost entirely of farmers, with a reasonable balance of dairy farmers and graziers. Among the farmers on the group there was a range of types, from traditional, conservative people through to more innovative types.

Members of the Bullock Creek Improvement Trust and the chairman of KIRSAC became members of the working group. The three shires covering the Tragowel Plains were represented by local farmers, and the shire representative role merged with the community representative role. Some working group members were elected to local councils during the life of the group. The two government departments involved were each represented, DA by Roger O'Farrell himself and the RWC by Gordon O'Brien, the RWC District Engineer in Pyramid Hill.

A key working group member was Graham Hall, the Shire Engineer with the local Shire of Gordon. Graham had been Shire Engineer since 1973, and had masterminded the Shire of Gordon and BCIT drainage initiatives. He was able to deal authoritatively with drainage experts from the government departments. He carried the working group in drainage matters and gave the group technical credibility. Here was one working group member who didn't have to be taken up a learning curve about technical matters.

A criticism has recently been levelled at the predominantly farmer based composition of salinity working groups. The working group is representative of the farming community of the Tragowel Plains, but not of the town of Pyramid Hill. This composition is partly a result of self interest and self selection. The group began with wider representation, but those who made it representative of the town (such as the Principal of the Pyramid Hill Higher Elementary School) did not, for various reasons, remain on the group. Casual vacancies were filled by invitation from the working group to people the group knew to be interested. Even some of these new members stopped attending after a few meetings. As one working group member commented, the group was 'representative of the community that wished to attend'. As the plan concerned mainly farming matters, those that wished to attend were mainly local farmers. Some of them also represented non-farming interests (such as the local hospital, churches and community groups) but they were all farmers.

The approach Roger O'Farrell used meant interest groups did not get a chance to nominate a representative. However, the working group members and departmental officers involved approved of the approach used, with comments such as: 'Some people who are nominated (by organisations and local councils) to committees never turn up,' and 'Single interest groups should not be represented. If their cause is good enough other representatives will pick it up
anyway.’ In any case, selection methods used ensured that all local groups which would be expected to be represented, were represented.

Most people on the working group had already shown their commitment to the community in other ways. The members acted in the best interest of the whole community, whereas if they had been elected to represent a particular group they may have felt pressure to act as an advocate for that group. Roger O'Farrell thinks this made for a working group better able to work together and achieve its aim, without as much argument as in other sub-regions. Because the key people in the community were on the working group, there was nobody outside the group agitating against it.

Developing the plan

On 30 October 1986 the first meeting of the working group was held in Pyramid Hill. The working group met in 44 meetings over the following four years. During this period they and their planning support group not only developed a salinity plan for their area, but also helped define the process of community planning to be used in the Victorian Salinity Program. For this reason, and because it is seen as a very successful example of community planning, we will explore the experiences of the group in some detail.

The process of developing the plan occurred in six relatively different phases: seminars, work planning, reports, integration, consultation and implementation (see Figure 5.1). The following sections consider each of these phases in detail.
Milestones

Consultants commence:
1988 Budget Bids:
Work Plan:

Launch and handover:
Government response:
Presentation to Cabinet:
Departmental response:
LAAG consultation:
Implementation:
Consult:
Integration:

Reports

Seminars
Meeting No. 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26 28 30 32 34 36 38 40 42 44

Reports
Social Impact:
Soil Salinity Survey:
Hydrogeology:
Subsurface drainage:
Environmental conditions:
Stream Management:
Surface Drainage:
Flood management:
Farm Situation:
Water supply:
Draft Strategy:
'Draft Plan':
Salt Loads and Drainage:

Figure 5.1: Work Schedule of The Tragowel Plains Working Group
Orientation and Seminars

In all salinity groups the first few meetings are occupied with defining roles and tasks as each member assesses the worth of the group and what he or she may contribute and achieve. Because he was the instigator of the working group, Ken McDougall was an obvious choice as chairman. As he was working at night, he thought he might have difficulty fulfilling this role. At the first meeting there were no other nominations for chairman and he was elected unopposed. Some daytime meetings were held to fit in with his commitments. His deputy, Ron Dixon, left the district after a few meetings and resigned. He was not replaced. Ken said sometimes he thought he lacked support without a deputy chairman.

Ken McDougall took his role as chairman seriously. His farm was in the small area where the Barr Creek catchment and Tragowel Plains area overlapped. He had been a LAAG leader for the earlier Barr Creek management plan. Because he was involved in community affairs he was asked by some neighbours to join the Barr Creek Project Team, which was implementing the Barr Creek plan. This was after the Tragowel Plains working group was established. Ken joined the Barr Creek Project Team for a term because he thought the lessons he would learn in implementing the Barr Creek plan would be valuable when the time came to implement the Tragowel Plains plan.

The first 13 meetings were occupied by initial formalities and a series of seminars presented by technical advisers from government departments on technical aspects of salinity on the Tragowel Plains. Seven seminars were held in the Pyramid Hill Hall. The working group tried to hold the seminars every two to four weeks, meeting after each
seminar to discuss the material presented in the previous seminar. The seminars were presented by local and Melbourne departmental officers. A range of topics was covered, including regional ground water flows, surface drainage, farm productivity improvement and social issues.

Roger O'Farrell, the first convenor, brought his extension philosophy to the position. He thought the community should be allowed to develop the plan without restrictions imposed by technical people from the departments. He hoped the seminar series would provide the forum in which working group members would consider and evaluate various proposed options for the final plan. Roger took notes from the seminars. He hoped these notes would form the technical basis for the plan. The seminars summarised current knowledge for the members of the newly-formed working group, who were at the time faced with a massive learning task. They introduced the topics to the community and provided information in an easily understandable form. They also served to introduce the working group to the community. Although the seminars did not draw large attendances, the fact that they had been held gave the working group a position of strength with the community.

The major output of the seminar series was a set of initial recommendations written by Roger O'Farrell and Sara Fitzroy-Moore, the newly-appointed community development officer.

Project planning

This rather informal method of developing a plan was eventually overtaken by a more structured approach. The establishment of a planning support group was part of the original proposal for the project, and was part of the government guidelines for community salinity planning. A planning support group was introduced with Bob Wildes, DA’s Salinity Program manager as its convenor. The support group's first meeting was held on 11 June 1987. The planning support group introduced a more formal planning structure, which was to see the process through to completion.
Figure 5.2: Work plan for the Planning Support Group
The role of the planning support group was not to be simply a technical group. Its role was to coordinate the efforts of the various departments and consultants working on technical aspects of the plan in the most effective way. The planning support group had to act on or respond to any requests from the working group. Before embarking on any projects the planning support group had to receive the approval of the working group.

Although notionally having two representatives from each department involved, the composition of the planning support group was flexible. The only member of the group full time on the project was the project officer. Apart from a central core attending most meetings, other departmental members attended when it was relevant. The working group was represented by its chairman, Ken McDougall. Graham Hall attended some meetings. The departmental representatives on the working group attended regularly. More DA officers attended planning support group meetings than officers of any other department, and they attended more often. This is not surprising, because DA was the lead agency for the project. However, it does serve as an indicator of the extent of DA's support for the
plan. It also reflected the likely focus of the developing plan. With little hope for infrastructure change, most of the solutions were farm oriented.

The planning support group had strong leadership in Bob Wildes and a strong technical overview in Clive Lyle, an agricultural engineer based at Tatura. Clive set a structure and a timetable for the technical work (see figure 5.2). He wrote the brief for the employment of a consultant to consolidate the technical work into an integrated solution. This did not come until a year after the working group had been established. Initially there was a feeling of despondency that the area had little hope. However, the consultant's report enabled the planning support group to achieve a clear vision of an integrated solution.

The choice of consultant was crucial to ensuring the best conceived and most integrated plan was achieved. Consultants are sometimes criticised for obtaining data from the departments and providing material the departments themselves could have provided at much less cost. The true benefit of a consultant is achieved when someone with extensive local knowledge can provide an independent view to integrate the issues. In this situation a consultant is well worth the money. Don Naunton and Rob Rendell won the consultancy for their firm ACIL. Don clearly had a good understanding of the issues and Rob had previous experience developing the Barr Creek salinity plan.

On the surface this period could be interpreted as a time when the driving force behind the plan shifted from the community working group to the departmental support group. Such an analysis would underrate the political and strategic understanding of the more influential community members on the working group. Some actively supported these changes with the aim of increasing the legitimacy of the group and its plan in the eyes of government.

The reporting period

The working group tried to have frequent meetings to keep them short (see figure 5.3). Sometimes this meant fortnightly meetings when major reports were received and important decisions made. Between meetings 15 and 27 the working group received ten formal reports from members of the technical support group and from consultants. Some of these reports represented information already presented in the seminar series. Unlike the seminar series, these reports were presented as professional documents which legitimised them and allowed all interested parties to study the issues presented at leisure. Other reports were new to the group.
Figure 5.3: Interval between meetings of the Tragowel Plains working group.

One which provided the group with new information was a social survey of farming families on the Tragowel Plains\textsuperscript{39}. The survey was conducted by The Bendigo College of Advanced Education, assisted by DA and the Institute for Family Studies. This detailed the financial and social impact of laser grading, high interest rates and low commodity prices on the farming families of the district. Another new report was the lower Avoca River flood study. The most important additional information came from the combination of two surveys. A financial survey conducted by the consultant Don Naunton explicitly documented the financial position of farming on the Tragowel Plains. When combined with the results of a soil salinity survey of the same properties, the working group was presented for the first time with concrete data on the financial impact of salinity and the likely financial implications of possible farm management options.

Technical reports were discussed in planning support group meetings before they were presented to the working group. The members of the planning support group did not always agree with each other. There was sometimes tension in the meetings, certainly more often than in the working group meetings. The planning support group tried to resolve their differences of opinion in their own forum, to present a united viewpoint to the working group. Ken McDougall attended all planning support group meetings as a representative of the community working group. He tried to protect the working group from the tensions within the planning support group. The working group usually accepted the reports presented by the technical people without asking for changes or rejecting reports.

Faced with this steady flow of reports, the working group initially established several subcommittees, but disbanded them. Most of the working group members we interviewed thought subcommittees were unnecessary. They said it was better to have the entire group involved in making decisions. They had broad views and were willing to discuss all aspects
of the plan in full working group meetings. One member suggested the lack of subcommittees prevented the group from doing detailed work. He did concede that subcommittees would have slowed the group down and that the finer points of detail could be sorted out during implementation. As he said, `we had deadlines to keep, enthusiasm to maintain, government funds to get'.

Integrating the reports

After receiving ten reports at the rate of almost one a meeting, the next task was to integrate these into a coherent set of recommendations to form the basis for a plan. What followed was essentially a process of exploration and negotiation within and between the planning support group and the community working group.

Here the consultants Don Naunton and Rob Rendell played a major role. Rob's experience in developing the Barr Creek salinity plan provided clear guidance in how to proceed. There was to be no risk of another Barr Creek experience. As a first step, the working group again considered all the fundamental conclusions of the reports it had received. Only those which were accepted by the working group would be used in the final plan. The working group then considered each of the recommendations made by the planning support group, consultants and members of the community working group. The outcome was the skeleton of a surprisingly coherent plan.

A major plank of the plan was the completion of the shallow drainage scheme. As much of the drainage of the northern half of the plains was completed, this was of greatest interest to those in the south in the Calivil and Dingee districts. The other major plank of the plan was a subsidised soil salinity survey with the new EM meter. This meter operated in a similar manner to the more common metal detector, using electromagnetic flux to measure soil salt levels. The EM meter made possible cheap mapping of salt levels on farm properties.

The EM meter survey demonstrated the extent of salt damage was greater than many had anticipated. For many farms, the limiting factor to improved production was not shortage of water, as had previously been assumed, but a shortage of unsalted land. In the north there were many farms with little unsalted land. Many farms on the Tragowel Plains had insufficient low salinity land to offer any prospect of long term viability under current patterns of agriculture. Farmers were watering large areas of land from which they could hope to make little income.

More precise local measurement of soil salinity provided a new way to look at farms on the Tragowel Plains. The use of the EM meter demonstrated the inability of both farmers and advisers to accurately assess the extent of salting in a paddock. Land which had not been fertilised in many years looked remarkably similar to land with moderate salinity, both being covered by rushes and unproductive grasses and growing no clover. This helped explain why some people claimed success at reclaiming land and others claimed reclamation was financially untenable. Laser grading and fertilising the unsalted and unfertilised land produced quick results. The same treatment of ground with similar appearance but with moderate salinity levels was less successful. By the time the salted land responded, the debt and interest to be paid made the investment problematic. There were rewards for concentrating water, but only if it was concentrated onto the better unsalted land. But the identification of this land was not always obvious. The EM meter provided a cheap method of identifying appropriate land. Farmers would be able to find out the soil salinity level of their paddocks to determine which paddocks could be developed profitably. This may have helped prevent the hardship suffered by those farmers whose experiences led to the formation of the working group.

The survey of soil salinity was to be an integral part of the whole farm planning package recommended in the final plan, together with further farm drainage and modest restructuring.
assistance. The plan would encourage the gradual restructuring of irrigation on the plains as irrigation water was moved from salted to unsalted land.

Members of the community working group were concerned that the land which was no longer irrigated would quickly degenerate into salty wastes. This point was one of the matters of greatest debate in the forming of the final plan. As a solution, the working group asked the government to extend the existing subsidies for tree planting to include fencing and planting of salt tolerant vegetation on saline soils. Much of the northern Tragowel Plains was originally treeless and covered with saltbush. It was originally hoped that planting saltbush would be a return to the original native vegetation and the advice of earlier advisers. Further investigation of the economics of saltbush has shown this to be overoptimistic in present conditions. Tall wheat grass and similar halophytes will be planted instead.

Consultation and community education

Government guidelines required consultation with the community. The group members were also shrewd enough to ensure that not only did they consult, but also were seen to consult extensively. The result was a plan that was generally acceptable to both the government and the community, and a plan that each group could see as a success.

Community education

The State Government expected that community working groups developing salinity management plans would consult closely with their community. Consultation remained a continuing activity in the development of the Tragowel Plains plan. Before the community can be consulted they must have some understanding of the subject of the consultation. Understanding requires awareness. In this respect the people of the Tragowel Plains were ahead of the rest of Victoria. Salinity was visible. People admitted the existence of a problem. However, many had learned to live with salt and did not think it was a big problem. They did not realise the full extent of the salt that would be shown by the working group's soil salinity survey. While they were developing the plan, the working group members concentrated on informing the community about the extent of the salinity problem in the area and their task in developing a plan to combat salinity.

The initial salinity seminars were the beginning of this process. About 45 people attended each one, usually the same people. This represented about 5 per cent of the adult population of the plains.

Other community education avenues were also employed. Printed media were used extensively. Several newsletters were distributed. A 12 page supplement was produced for insertion in the local newspaper, the Kerang Northern Times, in March 1988. The Irrigation and Salinity Bulletin contained articles written by several local departmental officers giving an historical background and practical farm management advice. It covered the whole Kerang district, not just the Tragowel Plains area, so it was relevant to other management plans in the area as well. Only one article was specifically about the Tragowel Plains plan, an article about the soon-to-be-formed LAAGs.

Before the working group was established, Gyn Jones, the senior extension officer with DA in Kerang decided to set up a research and demonstration farm in the Tragowel Plains, to investigate and publicise ways of improving the productivity of the Plains farms. Although this project was independent of the working group, the farm came to be set up early in the life of the working group. Because the aims of the working group and the research and demonstration farm were similar, the working group was involved with the establishment of the farm. The group had a say in where the farm would be and what would be grown. An ad-
hoc sub-committee of the working group was formed to establish the farm. The research and
demonstration farm and the field days held there became valuable extension tools for the
working group and its salinity management plan. Even the mishaps informed people.

This continuing publicity maintained an awareness of the community working group. Some
strategies were more useful than others. Most respondents first heard of the plan from one of
two sources, the newspaper supplements or directly from someone involved in planning (see
figure 5.4).

This personal contact between the community and working group members played a major
role in the development of a successful plan. The Tragowel Plains is not a large area. It has a
small population. The working group members were able to get around the area and talk to
people. The best method of consultation is people talking to other people. The working
group members had to ensure the plan they were developing would be broadly acceptable.
They acted as gatekeepers for the community, ensuring that only proposals acceptable to the
community became part of the plan. This was sometimes a frustration to departmental
officers when a working group member voted in favour of a proposal at one meeting, then
announced at a later meeting that he was against it. This was not fickleness. The person in
question had spoken to other farmers in the meantime and they had informed him that they
did not accept the proposal. This style of informal consultation was a major reason for the
acceptability of the plan.

Formal consultation with the local community

With the completion of a draft plan, the working group decided to manage an intensive
formal consultation to clearly show the government that the people had been consulted. The
chosen method of consultation was through LAAGs (Local Action and Advisory Groups).

Figure 5.4: First source of information about the plan.
There were some public meetings, but these were mostly for information and to launch the LAAGs. A year after the release of the plan we conducted a survey of the Tragowel Plains farming community to determine the effectiveness of the consultation strategies used by the working group. The full report of this survey is presented in appendix 4. The following discussion of the LAAG process is based upon the results of this survey.

The area was divided into 51 LAAGs. On average a LAAG contained 10 landholders. A landholder leader was appointed for each LAAG, with responsibility for calling a meeting of the group, explaining the plan and collating the group's comments. Seven LAAG leaders were working group members. LAAG leaders were chosen who were both well received in their group and able to understand the plan. This is sometimes a difficult combination to achieve but appropriate people were found. The LAAGs were established in early 1988, but were not required to meet until late 1989 when the draft plan had been released. This is an important point: LAAGs should be established only when they are needed, otherwise momentum is lost. Not only does the delay make the working group appear disorganised, it also allows a lapse in people's enthusiasm. Nevertheless, people took the LAAG meetings seriously.

Typical of the care taken with consultation in the Tragowel Plains was the brochure produced for use with the LAAG meetings. For the release of the draft management plan in August 1989 two documents were presented. One was the draft plan itself, a 100 page technical document intended mainly for government, departmental officers and other groups who would be commenting on it. The other was a fold-out glossy brochure summarising the plan, to be sent to the local landholders. In line with salinity bureau policy the brochure was produced to a uniform design, similar to brochures for salinity management plans in other parts of Victoria. The brochure was appropriate as a general guide to the plan, but did not explain the plan to the local landholders in sufficient detail for it to be useful as a reference at a LAAG meeting. The newly appointed project implementation officer, Mark Gardner, and his team wrote their own 16 page colour booklet which explained the components of the plan and asked for separate comments on each of the recommendations in the plan. The brochure became the farm community's major source of information about the plan contents (see Figure 5.5).
The brochure treated each of the components of the plan separately. For each component it discussed the issue, gave the working group's recommendations and explained them, then left space where landholders could write their questions or comments on that component. This helped prevent farmers forming their overall reaction to the plan on the basis of their opinion on one or two recommendations only. If farmers are uneasy about a couple of aspects of a plan and they are asked about their reaction to the plan as a whole, their reaction to the aspects they don't like will influence their opinion more than their reaction to the majority of components they have no argument with. This is a normal human reaction. This method of forcing people to make their comments on the different components of the plan separately was a much better method. People couldn't criticise the whole plan on the basis of one element they did not accept.

The LAAG leaders were invited to the launch of the draft plan in the Pyramid Hill Hall in August 1989. Almost all attended. After the launch the project team leader explained their role to them. Two information sessions over four hours were then held to explain the plan to the LAAG leaders. The leaders were put into three groups for this. Most achieved a good understanding of the plan after this training. At these meetings the LAAG leaders were given copies of the consultation booklet to distribute personally to the members of their LAAG before the meeting. They were also given copies of a special LAAG response sheet to fill in and return to the working group. To ensure the plan was explained adequately in the LAAG meetings, a working group member attended each meeting. Each working group member attended between two and six LAAG meetings. Typical of the working group's approach of selling its plan to government as community-based with extensive consultation was the group's description to Cabinet of where the LAAG meetings were held: 'LAAG meetings were held in local homes, community halls, fire sheds, church halls, on banks of creeks and in

![Figure 5.5: Sources of information about the plan.](image-url)
sporting clubrooms throughout the region.\footnote{43}

The LAAG system took a lot of time and effort to organise, but the working group recognised it was worth the effort. It rejected public meetings because it wanted the government to be impressed with the extent of its consultation. The Tragowel Plains plan is now widely regarded as one of the most \textit{community-driven} salinity management plans in Victoria.

Community evaluation of LAAG groups

The LAAG process and preceding publicity ensured that nearly everybody interviewed had heard of the plan. Every farmer was supposed to be invited to a LAAG meeting. According to the working group, 69 percent of resident landholders attended a LAAG meeting, 93 percent of resident landholders contributed comments, 43 percent of non-resident landholders commented and, overall, 75 percent of all landholders contributed comment.\footnote{44}

The community recognised that the LAAG system gave them their best opportunity to comment on the plan, though not all of those who attended LAAGs reported making any comments on the plan (see figure 5.6). According to our survey, eighty five per cent of the community believed they had an opportunity to comment on the plan. Fifty percent said they actually commented on it. Forty four per cent believed the working group took notice of their comments, though only 20 per cent believed the government took notice.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig56.png}
\caption{Perceived opportunities for comment on the plan and use of opportunity to comment.}
\end{figure}

Of the 9 per cent of our sample who hadn't heard of the plan, some may not have been the farm decision makers involved in the consultation process for the plan. If this is the case, it
suggests that planners cannot assume information from LAAG group meetings will flow to other members of a household who did not attend the meeting.

The respondents to our survey expressed some concerns about the plan, but there were no widely held concerns. This indicates that there is general acceptance of the plan. Recognition of good aspects in the plan was much stronger than concern about poor aspects.

Despite this general agreement, there is still a question about how LAAG groups deal with dissent. Some farmers who were out-voted in their LAAG meeting were concerned their opinions were not presented to the working group, only the majority opinion was presented. They thought everyone should have the chance to send in their ideas individually. This is a problem whenever responses to questions are aggregated at more than one stage in the process. As Roger O'Farrell commented to us, `consultation is each landholder having an opportunity to voice their opinion about all aspects of the plan.' But this opinion must be heard by those in a position to make the decisions, in this case the working group. If the LAAG leader presents to the working group a set of aggregated results only, then the working group cannot see the diversity of opinion in the area. Also, LAAG leaders are chosen who are already leaders in the community. Without necessarily meaning to, LAAG leaders tend to discourage dissent within their LAAG. All the information must be made available to the working group. Allowing people to respond individually if they wish is a reasonable compromise, although the inconvenience of having to respond individually might filter out some valuable comments.

An alternative outlet was available for those who were dissatisfied with the LAAG process. Landholders wishing to make individual comments were encouraged to write their comments in the spaces provided on the booklet and send this to the working group. Eight landholders who either could not attend a meeting or wanted to comment individually used this option. The other possible approach would have been individual voting instead of LAAGs. Such a voting system requires careful planning, as the members of the Campaspe West working group discovered. We will discuss their experiences in the following chapter.

Formal consultation with the wider community

Consultation with the wider community beyond the Tragowel Plains required different strategies. We have already seen something of the Tragowel Plains' innovative approach to dealing with interest groups in the way interest groups were represented on the working group. The only organisations formally represented on the working group were the DA, RWC, DCE and VFF. Both the DA and RWC representatives attended regularly, but the VFF representative was from the Melbourne head office and attended only two meetings. There was no formal relationship between the working group and other interest groups in the area. Interaction was purely informal, through working group members also being involved with these other groups. Consultation does not have to be formal to be effective. The only real benefit of formal consultation is that it is seen.

Copies of the draft plan were sent to each of the three shires covering the Tragowel Plains, accompanied by an offer to speak to the councils about the plan. A number of councillors for the Shires of Gordon and East Loddon were members of the working group and others were LAAG leaders. Their involvement in the development and consultation process made a formal presentation to these councils unnecessary. Both councils provided written comments in support of the plan. The Kerang Shire covers a smaller part of the sub-region and, although the Shire President was a member of the working group, the rest of the council had little exposure to the plan. A formal presentation of the draft plan was made to the Kerang Shire Council. Along with formal presentations of the draft plan to a meeting of irrigation designers and to the Kerang Lakes Area working group, this was the only formal consultation undertaken with interest groups in the area.
Consultation with government departments provided the most challenging responses to the plan. The working group and the planning support group received a new report from the Rural Water Commission on the salinity implications of further drainage. The plan was changed with the introduction of a moratorium on drainage in the saltier areas of the plains. The Department of Conservation and Environment criticised the methods of digging drains, resulting in minor changes to the plan.

Implementation

The final six meetings of the working group were devoted to beginning the initial implementation of the salinity plan and waiting for a formal response from Government. The major tasks included developing initial guidelines for implementation of incentives and forming the implementation committee. The working group held its 44th and last meeting on 23 October 1990, almost four years after it began. By then the members had heard that the Government accepted most of what they had proposed. The changes required of their plan relating to drainage were no surprise, having been thoroughly explored following the responses of individual government departments some months earlier.

The implementation committee first met on 29 November 1990. The members had to be selected according to the new government guidelines for membership of implementation committees. Among the 17 members are eight members of the original working group, including Ken McDougall, Graham Hall and Russell Smith, the elected chairman of the implementation group. This is a good balance of experience and freshness. Overall, the implementation committee appears more conservative than was the working group. That more conservative members of the Tragowel Plains community are now getting involved with the plan and its implementation indicates the acceptability of the plan to the whole Tragowel Plains community.

The local community has supported the plan, particularly the concept of a soil survey as an integral component of a whole farm plan. In two years of implementation, there has been a strong and increasing demand for soil surveys. The soil surveys have been undertaken by teams of local residents employed and trained by the local plan implementation team.

Evaluating the plan

The Tragowel Plains community working group's plan is seen as a success in the State's Salinity Program, yet earlier in its development there was much pessimism about what could really be achieved. Producing a salinity management plan for the Tragowel Plains was going to be difficult. The Tragowel Plains is arguably the most salt affected farming area in Victoria. It had few real options for salinity control. There were no obvious methods of recovering salted land. The community itself had a reputation for conservatism. From this position the working group achieved a plan which is seen widely as one of the successes of the Victorian Salinity Program. After four years' work the members achieved a plan which has the enthusiastic support of most local farmers and the government. How did they do it? Why was their plan such a success? Why has there been such a turnaround in perception?

We believe there are two major reasons why the plan itself is well supported by the local farming community. The salinity problem was salient and the solutions were perceived as fair and voluntary.

The salience of salinity
Tragowel Plains farmers are willing to accept that they have a salt problem, arguably more so than are farmers in other parts of Victoria. In our survey landholders were asked which of the following statements they thought best reflected their situation.

1. Salinity is not a problem, or only a minor problem in the local district.
2. Salinity is, or will be, a problem in the district, but I do not anticipate a problem on my property.
3. Salinity is a problem which is increasing in the area and is likely to affect my farm in the future.
4. Salinity is already affecting my farm.

Note that the question measures a person's appraisal of salinity hazard, rather than the salinity hazard itself. The answers to this question are compared with the responses from a sample of Shepparton district irrigators interviewed in August 1989 in a University of Melbourne unpublished research project (see figure 5.7). Later research by Melbourne University has shown that the level of concern over salt in the Shepparton district did not increase markedly between August 1989 and August 1990.

The salinity hazard perceived by Tragowel Plains farmers is much greater than that perceived by Shepparton district farmers. This is not surprising, because salinity in the Tragowel Plains is more obvious than it is in the Shepparton district. A much greater number of Tragowel
Plains farmers than Shepparton farmers said that their farm was already affected by salt. Fewer were in each of the three lower hazard categories. Ten Tragowel Plains farmers expressed concern at the restriction imposed by the categories. They felt that, although salinity was already affecting their farm, they were able to control it. For comparison purposes, these farmers were put into the fourth category.

If acceptance of a problem is necessary for someone to be motivated to act, then the Tragowel Plains farmers are more likely to participate in salinity planning for their area than are farmers in other districts. They are also more likely to participate in consultation activities. There is also likely to be greater interest from the general farming community at the formal consultation stage. The working group was dealing with a significant problem which was affecting people's incomes. If substantial segments of a community do not accept the existence of a salinity problem the working group's role is made much more difficult.

A largely voluntary plan

We suspect that the bureaucratic preoccupation with processes and conduct is not fully shared by the community. The community is more interested in the content and outcomes of the plan. There is general community acceptance of the Tragowel Plains salinity management plan. In many cases this is because it involves drainage. It is not surprising that Tragowel Plains farmers want drainage; they have been campaigning for it for many years. The working group answered the key community concern, drainage (see table 5.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Number of mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drainage</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-operation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil salinity survey</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting trees</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing off salty areas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>92</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: more than one response was possible.

Table 5.1: Aspects of the plan perceived as 'good' by Tragowel Plains farmers.

The working group was careful to ensure the rest of the plan was voluntary. There were no compulsory costs for controversial structures. There is nothing in the plan which is likely to upset people. The different items of assistance provided are generally uncontroversial. The plan leaves people alone if they want to be left alone. Because of this, the plan was generally seen as fair. The working group members had taken care throughout the process of developing the plan, to ensure it would have community support. They adopted the role of true gatekeepers for the community, ensuring the plan was what the community wanted.
Lastly, the community knew the solutions were going to work. The BCIT had already demonstrated the benefits of improving the drainage. Everybody benefited; there were no losers. Apart from the drainage, everything in the plan was voluntary. No-one was compelled to participate. The plan was seen as fair.

Realistic bidding

Within the government departments the Tragowel Plains plan is often seen as a successful plan. We see three reasons for this positive perception: community support, realistic bidding and the creation of a new solution. Plans in other areas have attracted comment from far fewer people. This is partly an outcome of the size of the planning area which made wide consultation possible, and also because of a deliberate policy of the group to play this game successfully. The participation rates for the Tragowel Plains plan, as measured by our survey, are unlikely to be matched in other, larger, planning areas.

The working group is also seen as having been politically realistic. To ensure government money is spent wisely and equitably on salinity management plans, the government naturally imposes guidelines. Not all working groups have adhered to these guidelines, some groups seeing them as inappropriate. The Tragowel Plains working group, however, followed the guidelines closely. 'We made a decision to follow the rules and make suggestions how to change the rules,' said one of the departmental officers. Refraining from making ambit claims endeared the working group to the government and increased the likelihood of government support for the plan. As one working group member commented: 'If you want government funding you have to look as though you are responsible and toeing the line.' The group stayed within the government's guidelines. There were no dreams of grandiose projects. All the members really wanted was drainage. That was all they asked for, so the government supported them. Admittedly, they had little to lose because there really were no grand solutions. They were also aware that they could not just export the salt downstream. They were able to turn potential handicaps into tactical advantages by emphasising the reasonableness of their requests. Therefore, they increased the probability of government support.

The process of developing government guidelines was slow. In the early days, as they were being developed, the guidelines were unclear. Vague as they were, these guidelines were all the working groups had to work with. The guidelines are clearer now, and new working groups have the benefit of the experiences of earlier established working groups to guide them. As one of the early groups, the Tragowel Plains working group was fortunate that the senior government officers working with it understood the guidelines early and helped the group understand them and work within them.

Now that the plan has been accepted and implementation is beginning, the group members are perhaps only now starting to realise the level of power the government has given them. All the government money to be spent in the Tragowel Plains area on salinity and irrigation matters must be financed through the management plan and approved by the implementation group. This gives the community group a lot of power, because people who want a salinity or irrigation project undertaken in the area now have to lobby the community group instead of the government. One working group member said, 'At the finish we had more power than we thought we did. We found out we had power too late.'

The third reason for the perception of success has been the development of a new solution to an old problem. The prevailing expectation of the supporting research and extension officers was a re-statement of the earlier departmental recommendation to concentrate water on perennial pasture. The group was fortunate to undertake its planning as a new and cheaper technology to measure soil salinity was being introduced. The EM-38 meter allowed a significant improvement of the irrigation concentration recommendation which previously had been received with deserved ambivalence.
The planning process

We have canvassed the main reasons for the positive reception of the Tragowel Plains Salinity Plan. In this section we will recount some of the reasons given by the participants for the success of the process in producing this plan. The main reasons given are the commitment and representativeness of the working group, the co-operative relationship with the departmental support staff, the technical support and the use of a key consultant.

A major strength of the Tragowel Plains working group was the membership of the group. A range of working group members is critical; there is no point having people of only one persuasion on working groups making decisions on behalf of the whole community when they cannot hope to represent the whole community. Roger O'Farrell's method of selecting the members was unusual but effective. The smooth operation of the working group attests to the strategic selection he made. Roger believes the working group acted as a working group for the whole area, because they were not locked in as representing a particular pressure group. They were a group of people, each with a mix of responsibilities to the area, rather than just one vested interest. The members were not necessarily seen as representatives of organisations, they just happened to be involved in a few organisations. The members of the group (as is the case with all the salinity groups we have studied) made a major commitment to their task. Most committees have people who drop out, and this was no exception. However, average attendances of working group members declined only marginally over the life of the group (see figure 5.8). The selection process was effective if judged by the core of committed members who remained involved to the end.

One of the criteria by which community planning has been judged is that those who need to be involved have the capacity to be involved. Historically, the departments had different policies regarding payment of their landholder committees. DA did not pay theirs, while the RWC paid a meeting and travel allowance. Since DA was the lead agency for the Tragowel

![Figure 5.8: Attendance by working group members.](image-url)
Plains plan, the Tragowel Plains working group was not paid an allowance. Some time after the working group began, the issue of payment for working group members arose across the state. To achieve uniformity, DA began paying sitting fees to the working group members on plans for which it was lead agency. Tragowel Plains working group members thus did not receive sitting fees until the group had been operating for some time.

A working group must be able to attract all types of people to its membership. This means people with small farms as well as large farms. It is easier for someone with a large farm to afford to not be paid for attending working group meetings than someone from a small farm. Some of the members with smaller farms may have found it difficult to get away from their farms to attend meetings. However, the working group did attract the services of these farmers without sitting fees initially. The sitting fees are not so large as to encourage people to take on the job for the money: you would have to want to do it. A member of another working group has calculated his remuneration at about 3c an hour!

The relationship between the community and the government was truly co-operative. A working group was formed which was cohesive. It had a positive outlook and supported the efforts of the departmental officers. The members were not suspicious of the officers. The group did not run on confrontation. The attitude of the working group members encouraged the departmental officers to contribute much more time to the plan than their work required. They gave not just time but commitment and support.

In the later survey an overwhelming majority of the local community perceived the plan to be a joint effort by both community people and government officers. Three respondents mentioned specifically that, although the plan was a joint effort, government had the final say in the content of the plan. Some respondents saw the plan as developed by the community alone, but very few saw it as a government effort only. The effort put into publicly emphasising the co-operation between community and government in developing the plan has resulted in high community awareness of the joint process.

Again, this co-operation should not be interpreted as acquiescence to departmental politics. It is very easy for working group members to become like statesmen and to come to accept constraints and conditions under which government officers are used to working, but which the community has never accepted. Several years close cooperation between government officers and working group members makes convergence of their attitudes and beliefs about what is achievable inevitable. If anything, the planning process shifted many of the departmental officers involved in the process towards advocacy for their clients on the Tragowel Plains.

The Tragowel Plains had strong support from government officers. Several departmental officers were involved in its management. Many were senior officers. It is unlikely that other all other working groups will be supported to the same degree. This is partly because the people were available at the time, whereas they are fully occupied now. Also it is because the working group treated them well. As Roger O'Farrell said, `the community were supportive of the plan and constructive, so departmental officers were willing to get involved'. They contributed not only work time, but also their own time after hours. An average of six government officers attended each of the working group's 44 meetings, three quarters of which were held during the evening (see figure 5.9). They would not have done this unless they felt appreciated and supported by the working group.
The consultant employed, Don Naunton, had a detailed knowledge of the nature of the local salinity problem. He played a key role, laying the groundwork for the planning support group's restructuring of the fragmented issues into an integrated solution. The technical basis of the plan floundered until the consultant's report became available.

Some questions about the planning process

The intensity of the planning process

One question we need to ask is whether the intensity of effort made to develop this plan was necessary. Would the original simple planning process through the seminar series have been adequate to the task? Although put together in a hurry and modestly presented, we can see in retrospect that the 44 page document produced after the seminar series contained the basis of the plan which was to emerge after another 20 working group meetings. This raises a question about the value of the more detailed and intensive planning which was to follow. We believe the planning process provided two main benefits: legitimacy and reflection.

It is clear that the initial recommendations report lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the State Government instrumentalities. Obviously the more formal planning process legitimised the plan by allowing the development and analysis of the data necessary to argue the merits of the plan components. This legitimacy was to be crucial in gaining the support of government for the final plan.
Less obviously, the planning process provided time for all parties to come to understand the true implications of the plan. Most working group members interviewed suggested the group needed all the 44 meetings to get through the work, though one or two could point to occasions were time had not been used as well as it might. The value of this time can be seen in the group's reaction to what was to be the key component of the final plan: concentration of irrigation water on unsalted soil. This was proposed in the initial recommendations released at meeting 13 and met with little comment. Many members of the working group did not fully grasp the implications of this proposal until again presented by the consultants as a key option some 15 meetings later. Discussion of this proposal was to dominate the following two meetings. Obviously the initial presentation of this idea in the seminars had not stimulated a full consideration of its implications.

High staff turnover

Over the years the management structure of the working group has changed greatly. The working group has always had a convenor and a project officer, but their roles have changed. Initially, the convenor of the working group was to be a senior DA officer who would spend some of their time managing the project, in conjunction with their normal duties. The project officer was a full time appointment, to be a facilitator and minute secretary. This was the approach adopted by the first incumbents.

The first project officer was Sara Fitzroy-Moore. A livewire, she adopted the facilitator approach. She set up an office in Pyramid Hill and lived in the town. She got involved in various community activities, not necessarily directly related to salinity (for example the Rural Women's Network), but certainly appropriate for a facilitator.

Sara Fitzroy-Moore left after two years and was replaced briefly by Peter McLeod, before Mark Gardiner took over as project officer in February 1989. In August 1989, when the draft plan was presented to government and the community, Mark's project officer position became that of implementation officer. Initially he was based in Echuca, but an implementation office has now been set up in Pyramid Hill. Mark was an experienced irrigation extension officer from Echuca who used an extension approach for implementation. He was more of a project manager than a project officer. He had a small team working with him in implementing the plan. Consequently the position was at a higher level than it was previously.

The first convener supporting the project was Roger O'Farrell. In late 1987 Roger was replaced as convenor by David Thomas, acting manager of DA's Echuca office. After a few weeks, David Thomas was replaced by the new permanent manager at Echuca, Bob Pitman. By this time, the convenor's role was declining in importance. Much of the convenor's original workload was being taken by Sara Fitzroy-Moore and Ken McDougall as they acquired experience. After six months Bob Pitman moved and the convenor's role was taken by two scientists from DA's Institute for Irrigation and Salinity Research, Tatura: first Clive Lyle then Mike Young, who undertook the demanding task of compiling and editing the report and saw the project through to its conclusion.

The high turnover of staff could be seen as unsettling and in some areas it would have been. While a meaningful community involvement may lengthen the planning period of a project, staff turnover is more likely to become a problem. The working group must take responsibility for project continuity. The chairman of the Tragowel Plains working group worked closely with the planning support group throughout the planning period. This helped forestall any difficulties associated with staff turnover.

As we indicated in our first section, history will eventually judge the worth of the Tragowel Plains plan. The success of the plan so far is no sure indication of long term success. The future of the Tragowel Plains is not all rosy. The salt will not go away. The calls will still
come for irrigation water to be cut off. The cost of irrigating soil less productive than in the rest of the state may eventually force irrigation off the plains.

The Tragowel Plains plan is about living with the salt. The working group recognised some restructuring was necessary, but included only a small amount in the plan. This gatekeeping kept the plan acceptable to the community while satisfying the critics. No-one votes themselves out of a job, especially a community working group. Some day wider restructuring will be necessary. The Tragowel Plains plan pushes that day as far into the future as possible.

In an attempt to come to terms with salinity Tragowel Plains farmers are now encouraged to survey their farms for salt with the EM meter. For most farmers this identifies which land is safe to develop. For those farmers with insufficient unsalted land to allow any development the only long term options are to accept a declining standard of living or sell their land. For most farmers, the EM survey will indicate there is enough unsalted land to provide a chance of financial viability in the medium term. In the longer term, with the inexorable rise of the water table the Tragowel Plains will become more saline; and the low profitability of farms will mean that this land may return to being nearly as empty as when Mitchell saw it.
History of salinity action

The Campaspe West sub-region is a group of 76 farms on the western side of the Campaspe river, next to the town of Rochester. It is bordered by the Campaspe river to the east and the Waranga-Mallee Channel to the north, and to the south and west there is virtually no irrigation. The sub-region covers only a small area, 5700 hectares, of which 3400 hectares is irrigated. All but 20 of the farms are dairy farms.

The sub-region has two parts. One part has been irrigated for many years. This part contains mainly mixed irrigation farms which are not intensive. The other part, 3000 hectares, was developed only recently. It was one of the last Victorian closer settlement schemes. This Closer Settlement Area was developed for intensive dairying by the then Rural Finance and Settlement Commission. The first of the 57 properties were irrigated in 1967 and the last were released in 1976. Blocks were sold not to the highest bidder, but to those applicants whom the Rural Finance and Settlement Commission considered the best qualified. The Commission offered a very generous package to successful applicants. There were hundreds of applicants. The high application rate allowed the Settlement Commission to hand pick people with the skills to ensure the scheme was a success. Thus the farmers lucky enough to take up blocks were in no way typical of the average Victorian dairyfarmer. They were the sort of farmer the Rural Finance and Settlement Commission believed had the best chance of succeeding.

Because the settlement was new, there was no existing community structure when the farmers came together. It was quite unlike the Tragowel Plains, for example, where many farming families had been in the area for generations. The few pioneering families in Campaspe West were outside the settlement. Also, there was resentment toward the government from some farmers who had had part of their land resumed for the settlement.

Some farmers in the Campaspe West settlement claim that the Commission was advised that much of the remaining undeveloped land was a salt risk and irrigation development would be inappropriate. Certainly the historical evidence of the need for caution was clear. To the immediate north are two other irrigation settlements, Ballendella and Bamawm. Both were once dotted with citrus orchards on the lighter soils and pasture on the heavier soils. The first irrigation water flowed to Ballendella in 1909. By 1925 salting had destroyed pastures on lower ground and within a few years many citrus groves were also badly salt-affected. Deep drains provided some respite for the orchardists, but today only a few remnants of the orchards remain.47

The State Rivers and Water Supply Commission constructed the settlement supply channels to minimise leakage by lining them with clay and also constructed a drainage system. Despite the provision of surface drainage, high watertables developed quickly in the area and salinity problems emerged in the late 1970s. The last properties released in 1975 and 1976 were on the lowest land in the settlement, closest to the Waranga Mallee Channel on the settlement's northern boundary. High watertables and soil salting developed on a number of these farms within a few years of farmers taking over these properties.

In 1979 an Interdepartmental Committee was established under the chairmanship of the RWC to oversee technical investigations into the emerging salinity problem in the area. Groundwater pumps were installed on a trial basis and monitoring was undertaken. Several reports were written. High watertables were measured to be within 2 metres of the surface over 60% of the irrigation area and to within 1 metre over 15% of the area.48

Watertables
were highest in the lower land at the north of the settlement. A soil salting survey showed clearly that the areas of serious salting in 1981 were nearly all in the northern half of the settlement.\textsuperscript{59} It also showed that there was salting sufficient to affect clover production on properties in both the north and south of the settlement. An economic study of affected and unaffected farms had measured the extent of economic loss from salt.\textsuperscript{50} The survey concluded that the dairy farms on salt-affected land were profitable, but the profitability was maintained by using extra inputs: more feed and water.

By 1983 the extent of the salt problem was well explored, both physically and economically. Despite all this documentation, a survey of community perceptions of the problem revealed vastly differing views of the same problem across the settlement.\textsuperscript{51} There was disagreement over what caused salt, whether it would spread, whether it was serious and even whether there were many farmers suffering because of the salt. Generally, those from the north perceived a much greater salt problem than those from the south.

In 1982 a small group of 15 landholders formed the Campaspe Salinity Action Group. Their aim was to lobby politicians and bureaucrats to get government action and to create awareness of the salinity problem in the local community. They came mostly from the north of the settlement, which was more salt-affected. They wanted a plan which would guarantee the continued operation of existing groundwater pumps and possibly the installation of further pumps. The alternative seemed to be the gradual destruction of the farms of many of the group members. They succeeded in lobbying for the investigation program to be stepped up. Then came their major achievement, the inclusion of Campaspe West in the first wave of salinity management planning.

There were good arguments for a plan in the area. An active group wanted a salinity management plan. The area was small and manageable and had natural boundaries. The salinity problem in the area seemed self-contained. With some lateral thinking, the community working group members produced a plan they thought would solve the problem. A survey told them most of the community agreed with the principles behind the plan. Yet the plan in detail was soundly rejected by the community. What went wrong?

Forming the working group

Once the government had decided to develop a salinity management plan, a working group had to be formed. This was not easy because the group of people who would be directly affected by decisions of the working group was larger than just the population of the sub-region. Drainage systems which emanate from the sub-region reach the Murray river via the Bamawm Drainage System and the Campaspe river. Other irrigators pump water out of both these systems. Water users on these systems downstream of the Campaspe Irrigation District are potentially affected by any salinity management plan in the Campaspe West sub-region. It was decided that these downstream diverters should be involved in the management plan.

There were existing interest groups whose members wanted to be involved. The Campaspe Salinity Action Group had been lobbying for something to be done about the salinity problem. Its members were involved in early discussions. The Bamawm Drainage Diverters had established a committee to coordinate water supply in the drainage system. They were also consulted, initially through their executive and then at their 1986 annual meeting. Representatives of these two groups, along with representatives of the RWC's local Irrigators' Advisory Board and the Campaspe River diverters, met to make recommendations on the structure and objectives of the working group.

The recommended composition of the working group was nine community representatives and three government officers. The irrigators from the north of the sub-region would have
three representatives, those from the south of the sub-region two, and the Campaspe river diverters and the Bamawm drain diverters would have two representatives each. The three government departments involved DA, DCE and the RWC) were each to have one representative. Separate representation from the north and south of the sub-region was sought to reflect the range of views on salinity throughout the area.

A public meeting was advertised to ratify the proposed structure of the working group and to elect the representatives. Prior to the public meeting all irrigators and diverters were sent information on two occasions. The first mailing contained some background material on the local salinity problem and reasons for forming the working group. As well, there was a self test questionnaire on salinity and a copy of the booklet *Saltland in Victoria*. The second mailing outlined the proposed membership and objectives of the working group.

The public meeting was held on 17 February 1987. It was chaired by the local MLA and attended by over 60 landholders. After some discussion on the government's salinity policy and local salinity problems the meeting endorsed the proposals for the composition and objectives of the working group. Nominations were called for and the meeting elected the representatives.

The working group members

The three representatives from the northern end of the sub-region were all active members of the Action Group. They had an obvious interest in getting something done about the salt. Representatives for the southern area were harder to obtain. A number of people were approached by departmental officers but declined involvement. People were not interested enough to want to be involved. Most farmers in the southern area did not think they had a salinity problem and did not think they needed to be involved. Eventually two suitable and willing representatives were obtained. The two representatives of the Bamawm drain diverters were selected by the diverters group. The two representatives of the Campaspe river diverters were the only two who were interested. One said he kept trying to enthuse the others without success.

This is a clear illustration of the problem of obtaining representatives from a less-than-enthusiastic majority. If the plan is to be developed by the community, the majority must be properly represented. They cannot be represented if no-one is interested enough to represent them. A plan developed by and for an enthusiastic minority is not really a community plan. However, if that minority is the only interested group, it is hard to blame them for producing a plan that suits their view of the problem. The question also arises as to whether a plan should be developed at all.

The working group had people of high standing in the community. The northern area representatives included the president and secretary of the Action Group. One of the southern area representatives was a local Rochester Shire councillor. The Bamawm drain diverters' group had two executive members on the working group. One of the northern area representatives and one of the Campaspe river diverters were members of the RWC's local Water Users' Advisory Board. A member of the Shepparton region salinity working group, the SPPAC Irrigation Sub-committee, was an observer on the committee from May 1988.

The shire councillor resigned from the working group in June 1988. As the plan was almost complete and about to be presented to the community for comment, and as willing representatives were not forthcoming, he was not replaced. However, the Shire of Rochester had nominated one of its councillors to attend the working group meetings as an observer (non-voting) from September 1987. Being a councillor of two shires, and with a large farm in the sub-region, he was able to attend few meetings. It is difficult to find local councillors
with spare time available to attend more meetings at the best of times. Only the most dedicated would attend meetings regularly without having voting rights.

The more serious problem was that the resignation and non-replacement of one of the southern area representatives left almost half the sub-region with only one representative halfway through the life of the working group. Also, this was the half of the sub-region which did not think it had a salinity problem. The northern half of the area had three representatives throughout. With two working group members from the south and three from the north there was reasonable balance, but with only one from the south it would have been difficult for that member to represent his constituency effectively.

It is hard to say how representative the working group members were. Those from the north had been active in a lobby group over several years and were eager to be involved with the working group. Those from the south were the only ones of several approached who were willing to participate. The Campaspe river diverter representatives were the only river diverters who were interested. The Bamawm drain diverters chose their own representatives. Other people who could have been selected as working group members might have been no more representative.

No matter how representative of the community they are at the start, working group members become unrepresentative through working with the departmental officers, learning more about the salinity problem in the area and, more importantly, the constraints to salinity control. More important than their representativeness is the effort they put into gatekeeping. The working group members have to ensure that the decisions they make will be acceptable to the community. They cannot assume that because they accept a decision the community will also. They must talk to people in the community informally and find out if their decisions are acceptable as they make the decisions. The formal consultation period, whether before or after the draft plan is released, is too late: the working group already appears committed.

However, it is possible for the working group members to receive confused signals. One working group member said that he had consulted the people he represented. His neighbour had told him the plan was good, but now disagreed with it. "It's hard to say who you represent", he mused. As public support for the working group's position waned the members came gradually to represent only themselves and their own farms.

The planning process

The work of the community group

The working group held 36 meetings between February 1987 and December 1989. Most meetings were well attended. All three northern representatives, both river diverters and one drain diverter attended more than 80 percent of the meetings. Attendance of community members was constant throughout the life of the working group, only decreasing after the official launch when the group was winding down its operation (figure 6.1). Attendance of departmental officers decreased once the plan had been formulated, which is to be expected (figure 6.2). The frequency of meetings was fairly constant (figure 6.3).
Figure 6.1: Attendance of working group members.

Figure 6.2: Attendance of departmental officers.
Figure 6.3: Interval between working group meetings.

The interdepartmental committee had been conducting technical investigations for several years, so much of the technical work required for the development of a plan had already been done. This saved time and allowed the working group to keep up a steady pace without having to wait for technical work to be done. There was very little wasted time. However, it meant that the working group had to work hard to learn about the technical constraints the plan faced. The working group members did not object to the heavy workload because they saw the planning process as worthwhile. A heavy workload is far less damaging to morale than wasted time, as long as the work is seen by the participants to be worthwhile.

As a small group, the working group hardly needed sub-committees. The group had three sub-committees, but they were fairly low-key, meeting about ten times. They were used to evaluate the salinity control options available to the group. Only working group members were on the sub-committees, and members were on only one sub-committee.

The chairman of the working group was Allan Johnson, one of the Bamawm drain diverters. He did not expect to be nominated, but accepted the position when one of the members nominated him. He had had some experience of public life. Allan did not adopt a very public role as a spokesman for the working group.

His election as chairman was unusual because he was not from within the sub-region. Along with the other three downstream representatives, he was only there to protect downstream drainage interests. There might have been some advantage in a perceived impartiality between the north and the south of the sub-region. However, it is surprising that a working group member whose role was to protect downstream drainage interests was elected chairman. It could be argued that one of the representatives from within the sub-region should have been chairman because of a more intimate involvement with the salinity problem of the sub-region. Despite this, there were no complaints about Allan's chairmanship. It would not have been easy to balance the competing interests in meetings.

When the working group was established, few members knew each other. Several meetings were required before they came to know each other, their style, their ideas, what they meant
when they said things. This time is necessary for a group to begin to function properly, and all new groups need it. It should not be seen as time wasted.

The role of government officers

Effectively, Campaspe West had a technical support group for several years before the establishment of the working group. The Interdepartmental Committee, convened by the RWC, had been established in 1979. In 1986 it was restructured into the Technical Advisory Committee, under the chairmanship of DARA. It had members from DARA, RWC, DWR, DCE and the RFC. However, there were no community members of the working group on the Technical Advisory Committee. For effective communication, at least the working group chairman and possibly another working group member should be on the support group. The Committee was convened by Ken Sampson, a senior DARA extension officer in Echuca. Ken was also the convenor of the working group. Ken was the key departmental person involved with the plan.

Campaspe West has had several support staff. Gillian Hetherington conducted research and extension work with the RWC in Rochester until November 1987, when she transferred to Kerang to take up a permanent position. This illustrates the problem of temporary positions preventing continuity of staffing. David Lawler took over her position. Since June 1989 he has been Implementation officer, based with DARA in Echuca. David had both farming and extension experience. For two years the working group also had the assistance of Lisa Warn, a trainee salinity officer with DARA in Echuca. For a small area, it was well supported with departmental staff to both manage the project and conduct the required technical work.

The plan

The structure of the working group pitted four separate interest groups against each other. People came onto the working group with fixed positions. The representatives and most of the farmers from the north of the sub-region were affected by salt in some way, expected salt to spread to the rest of the sub-region and wanted something done about the salt as soon as possible. The southern farmers and their representatives believed salt was a problem of sorts in the north of the sub-region and would stay there. They were not terribly worried about salt affecting their own farms, which helps explain why so few took an interest in becoming a representative for the south. The Bamawm drain diverters wanted to protect their irrigation water supply from further saline drainage water disposed into the drain from the sub-region. The Campaspe river diverters held similar concerns for the Campaspe river. According to one observer, working group members even polarised on where they sat in meetings.

The salinity problem in Campaspe West was different from the problems in the other plans. Planning in Shepparton was just beginning, and was not going into the level of detail required in Campaspe West. The Tragowel Plains drainage problems were to be solved mainly by improving the existing drainage lines. In the Barr Creek catchment the problem of convincing farmers to adopt measures to benefit downstream water users more than themselves was solved by incorporating heavy subsidies in the plan. The problem in Campaspe West was how to dispose of the salty water.

The issues were so arranged that it seemed one of the four interest groups had to lose. The northern representatives were committed to saving the northern farms by pumping groundwater. The pumped salty groundwater had to go somewhere. Costs had to be shared. Disposal of salty water into the Campaspe and Bamawm systems in summer was unacceptable to the representatives from those districts. That is why they were on the working group in the first place. Disposing to the Campaspe in winter was unacceptable environmentally. On some farms the water was too salty to be reused on that farm alone. It
would have to be shared around a number of farms. There were too few farms to effectively recycle the water in the northern part of the sub-region, but it could be recycled over the whole sub-region.

The working group proposed a system of groundwater pumps to protect the whole sub-region. Pumping was to be reduced by one third by implementing a range of measures on farms. Another third of the saline groundwater would be pumped to the top of the sub-region and mixed with the channel water. The salinity of the resulting *shandy* was to be kept to a level which would not significantly lower production. All farms would share the burden of the increased salt load at a level which would have little effect on individual farms. The last third of the groundwater was to be discharged down the Bamawm drains in winter to the Murray. For the working group, this was their best chance for a sound and fair plan, but they had to ensure the community would accept the proposal. This would be a test of their gatekeeping. Would the other farmers agree to saltier water? Would they agree to paying extra for their share of the costs of the groundwater pumps?

The community rejects the plan

Once the working group had decided on the direction of the plan, a summary document was prepared and posted to all irrigators in the sub-region in March 1988. Working group members and officers from DARA and RWC then personally interviewed the irrigators using a standard questionnaire. They wanted to learn the farmers' reaction to the developing management plan and to obtain feedback necessary for further development of the plan. In particular the committee wanted to assess the landholders' response to the principle of pumping groundwater back into the Campaspe Irrigation District (CID) channels. A number of factual questions were asked, such as 'Are there parts of your farm without access to the RWC drain?'. However, the survey did not ask directly whether farmers approved of the plan to pump salty water uphill to be mixed into the supply channel at the top of the sub-region. Instead, it asked a number of questions of principle. The most important were:

- 'The Working Group believes that there is a serious salinity problem in the CID. Do you agree?'
- 'The Working Group believes that all irrigators contribute in part to the salinity problem. Do you agree?'
- 'The Working Group believes that groundwater can be safely re-used within the CID providing
  - the salinity level is kept below a maximum of 900 EC
  - adequate sub-surface drainage is available.

Do you accept this approach?

Sixty three of the 74 irrigators were interviewed. Over 90 percent of them agreed with each of these three principles. The working group took this to indicate the community accepted the principles upon which the plan was based. This was a dramatic change from the polarised views of the salinity hazard reported in a 1982 survey of the area. With this vote of confidence from the community, the working group continued refining the plan.

As the details of the salt recycling plan became clearer to the community, the community's confidence in the working group and the plan evaporated. Many people in the community became alarmed. The summary document and the questionnaire had mentioned water reuse within the sub-region, but had not suggested explicitly the salty water might be pumped to the top of the system so everyone would have to share it. Most farmers would not have imagined this was an option. It seemed that many who had agreed with the basic principles had not
anticipated they would be asked to bear the cost of those principles. Community concern and opposition mobilised over a short period while the working group was continuing with its program of community consultation.

Once details of the plan were finalised a pamphlet in newsletter form summarising the plan was prepared and posted to all irrigators and downstream diverters in September 1988. This pamphlet stated clearly that the plan proposed piping the collected groundwater to the head of the channel. It also suggested that irrigators would be charged an extra $5 per megalitre for their water.

The pamphlet was posted together with an invitation to attend one of four public meetings being held to explain the plan and receive comments. The working group had tried large public meetings earlier and saw they could be dominated by a vocal minority, so they held four smaller public meetings. They were accused of trying to ‘divide and rule’ the community. During these meetings some landholders expressed concern at the high costs the plan would have them bear. The working group responded by reducing the costs to the landholder. Opponents accused the working group of using ‘rubbery figures’, changing the price ‘every five minutes’. Some saw the reduction in the price as a cynical attempt to ‘buy’ support. Chronic mistrust of the RWC made the objectors sure the costs would be increased quickly.

Well-meaning attempts to explain the insignificant impact of the proposed increases in channel salinity raised even greater concerns when the irrigators discovered their water was already significantly saltier than irrigation water in the Goulburn Valley. People remembered the earlier survey and accused the working group of having used slanted, leading questions in the survey. It became known that two working group members had sold their farms and remained on the group. This became yet another reason to mistrust the working group. Normally it would not cause concern, but when the community is looking for reasons to mistrust a committee, any minor issue becomes major. The working group was beginning to think it could do nothing right in the eyes of the community.

The working group searched for a fair way to consult formally with the farmers on the sub-region. LAAG groups had been tried in Barr Creek, and had proved successful there. However, groups had never fared well on the Campaspe West settlement. Even the legendary dairy discussion group guru, Jack Green, had experienced difficulty establishing and running small groups there some years before.

Following pressure from opponents of the plan, the working group decided the only fair way to assess the opinion of all the sub-region farmers was to hold a secret ballot with a public counting of votes. One suggestion considered by the working group was that the irrigators be asked their opinion on each component of the plan, with a final question on whether they agreed with the plan as a whole or not. It was decided, however, that the question on the ballot read: ‘Do you agree with the Campaspe West Salinity Management Plan? Yes or No, If No, why not?’ It was also decided that each family would have one vote, irrespective of how many farms they owned or how large their farms were. This angered the objectors, who thought the decision discriminated against people with larger farms or more than one farm.

Seventy landholders responded to the ballot. The working group counted the votes in the local hall on 7 December 1988, and invited landholders to attend. Fifty two votes were against the plan, and only 18 were in favour. The most common reasons given for rejecting the plan were the cost of the plan and the sharing of costs mentioned by 27 landholders), and the reuse of groundwater in the channels 25 mentions). The working group was disappointed some of the comments showed a lack of understanding of the plan, but agreed most concerns were genuine. The group acknowledged that their community education could have been improved. They also talked about keeping going with the plan despite low approval.
The group looked to the government for guidance, but it seemed to the group that, not only were they being ignored by the community, they were being ignored by the government also. The working group had been asked by the government to produce a draft plan by that time, so they did not think they had time to modify the plan and obtain community approval for the modified plan. They were unsure of how the government would react to their existing plan or to any modifications. They decided the best option was to present the existing plan to the government as the best plan that could be produced for the area.

The government's response

The official release of the draft plan to government and the community was delayed until 11 August 1989, a wait of several months after the plan was ready. The government waited until the Shepparton region plans were ready. The launch of the Campaspe West draft plan was held in Shepparton, in conjunction with the launch of those plans, rather than by itself in Rochester. It was more efficient for the government to evaluate several plans at once, but frustrating for the community which had to wait for the other plans to be completed. In accordance with government policy, both government and the community were then given several weeks to comment on the draft plan. The fact that it was the same plan the community had rejected almost a year earlier left the objectors thinking the working group was trying to bulldoze the plan through despite the overwhelming objections.

Once the draft plan had been released, the key objectors organised themselves into an informal group. They hired their own consultant to prepare a response to the plan. In many respects it was a measured attempt at an alternative plan. Uncontroversial farm management measures in the working group's plan were supported. The arguments with the working group were mainly restricted to the key points of opposing groundwater pumping costs and the reuse of salty groundwater throughout the sub-region. Eighty percent of the farmers signed a declaration supporting the objectors' plan, including one of the working group members. By this time the issue was no longer polarised between north and south. The objectors were spread throughout the sub-region, not just in the south. Some of the most vocal objectors were in the north. The polarisation was between the working group and almost everybody else. The isolation of the working group and departmental officers was such that they were not invited to the objectors' meetings.

The government responded to the working group's proposed plan with a compromise proposal similar to the objectors' plan. The farm management measures in the plan would be retained. These were never compulsory. Groundwater pumps were to be installed in the north of the area only, phased in over five years, with the saline groundwater to be shared within the northern area only. Much of the pumped groundwater was to be discharged down the Bamawm drain. The government suggested a moratorium on installation of groundwater pumps in the southern part of the sub-region. The moratorium period was never specified, meaning it could be many years, if ever, before pumps are installed in the south. It could happen only when or if irrigators in the south were ready for the pumps.

The government's response was not a statement of intention, merely a proposal. It was still up to the community to accept or reject the proposal. A series of meetings was held between departmental staff and a core group of objectors to explore whether a new strategy was possible. This led to a decision that it was worth forming a new working group. Roger Standen, an experienced DARA officer from Shepparton, became involved to replace Ken Sampson.

An implementation group was formed at a public meeting in Rochester. The key objectors are well represented, with an overwhelming majority. Some members of the original working group stood for election, but were defeated. Only one member, the representative nominated
by the VFF, was a member of the original working group. The group contains representatives from different areas of the sub-region. They were elected by the whole sub-region, not by people from their own area. Farmers from one area voted in the election of representatives of the other areas. With most farmers objecting to the working group's plan, it was unlikely that any members of the original working group, now pariahs, would be elected to the new group. Although styled as an implementation group, the new group is also another planning group. Its first task was to firm up the original objectors' report into an implementable plan.

Why did the planning ‘fail’?

There are numerous views of why the planning in Campaspe West failed. Most are extreme views. Some say the community did not want to take responsibility for its salt. Others think the working group were puppets of a faceless and untrustworthy bureaucracy. We believe it was a combination of factors.

It is easy with hindsight to suggest improvements to the planning process in Campaspe West. The southern part of the sub-region should have had better representation. The working group members should not have allowed themselves to become so unrepresentative. Outside help should perhaps have been obtained for publicity. The questions in the first survey could have been worded better. The ballot should not have offered such a stark and simple choice. Instead it should have asked for opinions of the various parts of the plan separately. However, even if the working group had done all these things the plan probably would still have been rejected by the community. The conflict and resulting failure of the planning process should not be blamed on the individuals involved or the planning process used.

Irreconcilable interests

It was never going to be easy to produce a plan which would reconcile the competing interests represented on the working group. The working group managed to develop a clever and technically innovative plan. However, in the process of developing the plan, the group never managed to convince the community that such a complex plan was needed. Some members of the community did not have a salinity problem. Some did not consider they had a problem. Other members of the community were still waiting for the government to pay the bill. The working group's plan did not offer much to those without a salt problem or those who believed they would not have a salt problem. It cost them more money and gave them saltier water. Those people would have to be altruistic to have accepted the plan. People with existing protection against salinity had it at no cost. Why would they want to pay for protection? ‘We are the first group who seriously considered not passing the problem on to someone else. This is why it was rejected.’, suggested one working group member.

There were other reasons for the rejection. No-one could agree on who were the beneficiaries of the plan. They couldn't agree on who were the polluters. There was no consensus whether the beneficiaries or the polluters would pay for the plan, and how much they should pay. Perhaps the only way to resolve such irreconcilable differences is through mediation. The government's strategy appears to be to leave it alone and wait.

Where there are such irreconcilable community interests no complex, compulsory plan is likely to be acceptable. There are too many doubts over how the system would work, whether it would work, who would benefit, who should pay and who would control it. The Campaspe West community has indicated a preference for a simpler, voluntary plan. In areas where salinity is not of great concern to landholders, this is likely to be the only acceptable type of plan.
Community education difficulties

The Campaspe West working group had no community education officer readily available. The community education officer in Shepparton was fully occupied on the SPPAC plan, and the officer in Kerang was not appointed until late in the Campaspe West planning process. Consequently, the working group and project officers had to do their own community education. They might have been able to get help with community education and publicity from elsewhere, but there were no obvious opportunities.

The farmers who were chosen to settle the area were of similar age, with some years of dairying ahead of them. Between the establishment of the settlement and 1987, when salinity planning began, only eight blocks had been sold. Of these, three were bought by local farmers. As more original owners retired the property changeover rate increased markedly. Between 1987 and 1990 18 properties in the sub-region changed hands. Many were bought by people from outside the area. The changing population made community education, and even planning, difficult.

Community education was low-key but well organised. Apart from surveys and newsletters already mentioned, there were field days, public meetings, visits to meetings of community groups, bus tours, discussions, reports of research trials, articles written for publications and a continued extension presence in the area. Most events were poorly attended. The material might have been improved by the polish that could be provided by an outside expert in community education or publicity, but that is probably the only criticism of their community education that could be levelled at the working group.

With the benefit of hindsight, the working group members made some observations to us:

`Perhaps we should have sold the benefits more, rather than the disbenefits. We thought we were. If we'd realised what would have been better at the time, we'd have tried it.'

`It's all in human nature. We used to think you could explain to people, but you have to be a salesman. The facts of life aren't good to sell.'

`People expect to be sold everything.'

`The working group was regarded as an elitist group which was disregarding the community. The working group didn't know how to communicate with the community.'

`It was impossible to relay the amount of information that we had to digest in 2-3 years at a public meeting dominated by a couple of people.'

There can be no question about the earnestness of the working group's consultation and community education, or of their motives. Their actions are well documented. They did not attempt actively to hide aspects of the plan from the community. Objectors claimed they were not kept informed of the working group's activities and deliberations; however the working group complained they kept everyone informed but no-one listened.

Late identification of interest groups

The Campaspe West sub-region was such a small area, it was difficult for the working group to relate to other groups in the community. It was only a small part of the Shire of Rochester. The Shire had representation on the group, but the representatives rarely attended working group meetings. The major interest groups which needed to be informed and involved were
represented on the working group anyway, even if the strength of the representation was not
great. The Action Group in the north of the settlement was well represented by three
influential members. The Bamawm drain diverters' group had the working group chairman
and another member to represent them. The Campaspe river diverters had their two most
interested members on the working group. The only group poorly represented was the
irrigators in the south of the sub-region. Attempts had been made to secure greater
representation from the south, but the landholders approached were not interested. With
hindsight, this was the group which most needed to be represented.

Campaspe West was unusual among salinity sub-regions in having direct representation on
the working group from downstream drainage interests. In the Kerang area, downstream
drainage interests from the Tragowel Plains had their own working groups, Kerang Lakes and
Barr Creek. Downstream interests potentially conflicted with Tragowel Plains interests, yet
they were not represented on the Tragowel Plains working group. It was a matter for
negotiation between working groups.

Guideline ambivalence

At the time the Campaspe West working group was established, the government guidelines
for preparation of salinity management plans were still being formulated. Guidelines are
necessary for the government to evaluate one plan in comparison with other plans around the
state. However, even as the working group was preparing its plan the guidelines were being
changed. This created extra work for the group, which had to ensure its plan would conform
to the new guidelines. It also created uncertainty as to whether the guidelines would be
changed again. The working group's uncertainty about the government's reaction to the plan
would also have made planning difficult.

There is another problem with guidelines. Working group members, through working with
departmental officers, may come to appreciate the need to satisfy guidelines in order to obtain
government support. However, the community might never reach this stage of acceptance.
As one working group member observed: 'All the technical work that is done, is done to
satisfy the boffins in Melbourne. It ends up driving a wedge between the working group and
the community, unless the community are kept well informed of what the working group is
doing. All the work we did, we became experts, too far removed from the community.' And
even if the community is kept informed, it does not always listen.

Power of the working group

The working group members faced a dilemma in their exercise of power. In a formal sense,
the government gave them the power to deal directly with the cabinet ministers. This was the
power given to all such groups. Their formal power was enough for them to produce a plan.
Even so, the guidelines restricted the working group's options and thus their power. They
could not just tip the salt down the drains or into the river.

To get the plan implemented the working group needed informal power with their local
community. It needed community support. In this informal sense, the group had little power.
The different interest groups in the community disagreed on what was needed. Some did not
believe they had a salinity problem. Some did not have a salinity problem. The community
had not learnt to accept the government guidelines. The group faced an extremely difficult
task, producing a plan which was acceptable to both community and government.
Lessons for the future

The plan being developed by the new committee may not be that recommended by the working group, but it is the plan the community wants. If it is what the community wants then no amount of consultation engineering can make the community accept any other plan. Consultation cannot be expected to change the community's mind. The purpose of consultation is to make sure the community gets the plan it wants, not the plan the government or some other body wants. If the government reasons the community should be involved in preparing a plan so they will be more inclined to co-operate and be involved in implementation, then those involved have to accept the plan the community wants. A working group plan is only a community plan if the community accepts it throughout the planning process. No matter what departmental officers or working group members think is the best possible plan, if the plan is to be a community plan then everyone must accept the plan the community wants.

Those who organised the objections to the plan said that at the time the working group was formed they had not realised the possible consequences in a plan. The only sure way to interest people in something which does not concern them is to confront them with a real threat. The Campaspe West plan did just that, but it took until the end of the planning phase to do it, and alienated the working group members from the community in the process. This is too high a cost. Perhaps if the working group's plan had been suggested by a consultant the community might have motivated itself enough to form a representative working group to develop a more acceptable plan.

It may be several years before a comprehensive salinity management plan for Campaspe West can be considered. By that time the salinity problem is likely to have increased. A visible problem is a greater motivation to act than a possible future problem. Those farmers who want to retire now will have done so. Those who purchase the farms will be sufficiently comfortable with managing their new farms that they can then consider the complexities of salinity management. In the meantime, simple, voluntary solutions are all that the community is willing to tolerate.

From the point of view of the process, planning has been a failure. But from the point of view of the local landholders, they have obtained the plan they wanted, even if it is not the working group's plan. Perhaps it has not been such a failure after all. To the Campaspe West farmers, the Campaspe West plan was complex, expensive and compulsory. The plan required that the farmers trade-off these undesirable factors against protection from salinity. However, for the farmers of Campaspe West, a salinity problem is not yet a reality. They do not see salinity as a problem worth solving. Particularly when they see the solution as a greater and more expensive threat than the problem.
SHEPPARTON IRRIGATION AREA AND
THE GOULBURN-BROKEN CATCHMENT

History of salinity action

The Shepparton irrigation region lies on the riverine plains of the Goulburn and Murray Rivers in the area roughly bounded by Cobram, Murchison and Echuca. Approximately 280,000 hectares of land are irrigated, mainly for pasture, but with significant areas devoted to horticulture on the better soils. The Shepparton Irrigation Area is supplied with water from the Goulburn and Broken river catchments. While much of the upper catchment is forested crown land, the predominant land use for mid-catchment areas is dryland grazing.

The development of the Shepparton irrigation region was an outcome of the social policy objectives of many successive Victorian governments. From the passing of the first Selection Bill in 1860, right through to the completion of the Heytesbury and Campaspe West schemes in the mid 1970's, successive Victorian governments have promoted closer land settlement and irrigation development in northern Victoria. The reasons for this policy were initially as a response to the popular working class demand to unlock the land from the control of the squatter elite of the 1840s and 50s. The government envisioned a closely settled and prosperous countryside as an outcome of the selection initiative. The fact that this vision was at variance with the land resource and climate of the day was lost on both the government and the electorate.

Government invested in public irrigation schemes as a response to the failure of the selection policy in the face of drought and inadequate property size. Irrigation settlement provided a means of continuing the closer settlement policies and related social priorities of governments. In the Shepparton irrigation region early development was controlled by irrigation trusts set up by local authorities. In 1905 the trusts were taken over by the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission (SRWSC). New social priorities drove the next wave of irrigation development from 1915 onwards. The need to maintain voluntary recruitment during wartime and to accommodate the social pressures of demobilisation lead to the continuation of the closer settlement policy under the name of soldier settlement. Many communities in the Shepparton irrigation district grew from soldier settlement. Following the Second World War, the government renewed its commitment to the development of irrigation. The most tangible evidence of this commitment was the rebuilding of the Eildon reservoir, dramatically increasing the water available to the Shepparton irrigation area.

The historic enthusiasm for irrigation development was not initially matched by enthusiasm for digging drains. The need for drainage as an integral component of irrigation systems was well known at the turn of the century. Despite warnings, the established pattern was construction of delivery channels in periods of development enthusiasm and belated drainage works only when salting threatened an irrigation settlement or when the state undertook public works to alleviate unemployment during the Great Depression. Generally, drainage development lagged behind supply channel construction. The floods of the mid 1950s put drainage on the agenda for a time, but by the late 1960s, when the development of the Shepparton irrigation water supply system was essentially complete, large areas of the district remained undrained.

Some members of the irrigation community took on the task of lobbying the government to complete the region's drainage network. In 1966 the Victorian Irrigation Research and Promotion Organisation (VIRPO) was established to promote irrigation research and the
economic and social benefits of irrigation in Victoria. Drainage was a major item on VIRPO's agenda.

In 1974 floods caused widespread waterlogging in the Goulburn Irrigation Region. Watertables rose dramatically and many fruit trees died. The floods highlighted the lack of surface drainage in the region. VIRPO was concerned about salinity and drainage but was uneasy about lobbying the government because its membership included a number of employees of government departments. VIRPO was instrumental in forming the Goulburn Irrigation Region Drainage Action Committee (GIRDAC). GIRDAC was a community organisation, which was able to put pressure on the government and the government departments for better and more co-ordinated drainage and salinity control works in the region.

Lobbying by GIRDAC was one of the influences which prompted the then Victorian government to support an investigation into salinity control by an all-party parliamentary committee on public works. Between 1976 and 1982 the committee heard evidence on the salinity problem in Victoria. With a change in government in 1982, an all-party parliamentary committee was established to inquire into all aspects of salinity and its control within Victoria.

Ministerial Task Force on Salinity

Following the release of the Parliamentary Committee's report in 1984, the government established a Ministerial Task Force on Salinity and committed itself to a major program of salinity control. In 1985 the Task Force decided to establish a regional pilot program to plan for salinity control across a major catchment, in line with the principles of integrated catchment management. The Task Force noted that 'taking into account the characteristics of the particular region, it will be necessary for the local community to be actively involved in planning for salinity control by setting objectives, determining priorities and allocating responsibilities with assistance from Government specialists as appropriate'.

The purpose of the pilot program was defined as 'to help determine and demonstrate the most effective procedures by which a fully integrated salinity control program can be established within a region.' The Task Force stated that it was `interested in learning, for example, how best to:

- ensure that action by landholders and the various Government agencies within the region is properly co-ordinated;
- involve the regional community in the preparation of salinity control plans;
- implement research programs that will guide us as quickly as possible to the best solutions;
- share the costs of salinity control more fairly and efficiently;
- provide a co-ordinated and effective farm advisory service;
- implement a more effective community education and liaison program; and
- fully integrate salinity control with other aspects of land and water management.'

The Ministerial Task Force selected the catchments of the Goulburn and Broken Rivers in which to undertake the pilot program, having also considered the Campaspe River catchment. The selection was `based principally on:
the need to encompass a major catchment if the links between the causes and effects of salinity are to be taken into account;

- the existence of a wide range of major salinity problems in both the irrigated and non-irrigated areas, and the potential for these problems to increase substantially;

- the obvious willingness of the regional community to participate in the trial program.'

This latter point was a recognition of the successful lobbying from people within the Goulburn-Broken catchment. The Goulburn-Broken region was said to present `challenges that typify the difficulties in coping with salinity at present:

- there is often considerable uncertainty about the links between the causes and symptoms of the problems;

- in some cases there is a long delay before the effects of actions on the salinity regime become evident;

- the region is linked to other parts of the Goulburn Murray Irrigation District and to the Murray River.'

While emphasising that the selection of the Goulburn-Broken catchment did not imply that it was necessarily the worst-affected region in the state, the Task Force noted that the problems confronted in the region were no easier to solve than elsewhere in the state. The pilot program had to face realistic issues. The pilot program was to `supplement our knowledge of how best to pursue the on-going salinity programs throughout Victoria.'

Forming the working group

Creating the structure

As a first step the Ministerial Task Force requested the creation of a `Pilot Program Establishment Team'. The team members were senior scientists and extension officers from the Goulburn-Broken region and from Melbourne. Most of the members of the Establishment Team were regional people with a sound understanding of the region, and who would be closely involved with the Pilot Program as part of their work. The team was asked to `report on:

- the appointment, funding, location and operation of the Program Management Team (PMT)

- the component projects

- the form of community involvement in the program; and

- a timetable for establishment of the pilot program.62

The Establishment team recommended that a Salinity Pilot Program Advisory Council (SPPAC) be formed. This advisory body was to be the major form of community involvement in the Pilot Program. The Establishment Team also recommended the creation of a `Program Management Team', a group of government officers which would administer the Pilot Program.
By the time of the Establishment Team's final report in March 1986, many of its recommendations had already been submitted and approved. The Pilot Program had already been formally launched by Ministers Kirner and McCutcheon in Benalla on 19 September 1985. Two members of the Establishment Team, Graeme David and Darrel Brewin, were subsequently appointed to positions with the Program Management Team.

The Ministerial Task Force agreed that SPPAC would comprise up to 15 people from within the region. The provisional composition of the group was to include:

- five technical representatives of departments
- a person experienced in community education
- a landholder from each of the dryland and irrigation areas
- a councillor from each of rural and urban local government
- approximately five persons appointed from nominees of special interest groups.

After further consideration of the role of departmental representatives it was agreed that the technical representatives of departments should be non-voting participants in addition to the twelve to fifteen members of the Council. SPPAC believed this was a good decision. The point of a community advisory council is that community members make the decisions. Decisions have to be seen as community decisions. It should be sufficient for the departmental representatives to advise the council members, then let them make the final decision. Government officers had full rights to enter debate and discussion, but not vote. Because of their knowledge, departmental representatives can exert substantial influence on outcomes without needing the power to vote. Also, community people could not avoid taking responsibility for tough decisions by saying the government people outvoted them.

Appointing the members of the Advisory Council

The Ministerial Task Force accepted the recommendation of the Establishment Team to form a Salinity Pilot Program Advisory Council. An advertisement was placed in twelve regional newspapers calling for nominations, with a closing date of 12 December 1985. The advertisement was also sent to 77 organisations by the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs. Thirty one nominations were received for the fifteen positions available.

The nominations were screened by the Establishment Team, and a short list sent to the Ministerial Task Force for the final selection. In nearly all cases, the recommendations of the Establishment Team were accepted. The initial appointments were for a period of twelve months. This was extended subsequently and all SPPAC councillors have had the option of continuing throughout the life of the Pilot Program.

The reasons for favouring this method of nomination and selection over public election were detailed in a later draft report:

- as most people's awareness of and interest in salinity was minimal a public ballot would attract little interest outside of individuals or groups already interested or involved and numbers of votes cast were likely to be small
- because of the scale of the region (25 municipalities) few nominees would be widely known and voting success would be likely to be dependent on those with the ability to influence sufficient numbers locally and other contacts to vote
the public ballot system could well result in a significant imbalance in representation into defined geographical areas (e.g. irrigation vs dryland) with the implication that some 'imposed' constraints could need to be established prior to elections being advertised.

the nomination selection system enabled expressions of interest from a wide cross-section of the community, and enabled selection of a council with wide representation from many community sectors.\textsuperscript{64}

The message from the interviews we conducted was that the need to ensure the right people were on SPPAC overrode the need for the selection process to appear to the community to be totally democratic. Both SPPAC members and departmental officers stressed the need both to have people with a proven record in the community and to ensure that the representation was balanced. It was argued that it would be unlikely either of these would be achieved if members were elected at a public meeting unless the nominations had been decided beforehand anyway. Election at a public meeting would have been more appropriate if there was widespread interest and concern about salinity in the community.

Who decides which people are 'right' for the task of representing the community is a more challenging question. The members of the Establishment Team, who did the initial screening of the nominations, were mainly local people who knew about salinity and the type of people who would work best on the Advisory Council. They knew they would have to work with SPPAC. It may have helped deflect possible criticism if there was at least one community representative on the Establishment Team. However, the same dilemma still exists: who chooses that person.

Many of the members of SPPAC were 'head-hunted' by the Program Establishment Team. Many were agri-politicians who had already established a high profile and were vocal in the community. There were also 'earther' people, perhaps without the well-developed political awareness, but certainly with a knowledge of what the community would accept and a willingness to talk to the community. In retrospect there have been few complaints about the membership of SPPAC. In view of the tough stand the members of SPPAC have taken in their dealings with the government, they can hardly be accused of being 'rubber stamps', chosen for their compliance.

The Establishment Team proposed that the Advisory Council elect its own chairman. However, the Ministerial Task Force decided to retain the option of appointing a chairman. It appointed John Dainton, a dairy farmer, dairy company director and former GIRDAC chairman as the chairman of SPPAC.

The representativeness of the Advisory Council

The Advisory Council represented the community of a whole catchment, not a sub-catchment as was the case with most other irrigation salinity plans. The representation covered dryland and irrigation farming (including horticulture, mixed farming and dairying), local government (from dryland and irrigation municipalities), the processing industry (dairy and horticulture), both tertiary and adult education, local media, agricultural organisations and a range of other associations with which members were involved.

It was difficult for a council of 15 people to properly represent such a large area. No matter how carefully people are chosen they cannot represent everybody. Some SPPAC members suggested deficiencies in the membership of the group, that there were not enough women, few people involved in business, few urban people, not enough representation from the dryland plains area, and poor municipal. Some of these concerns were alleviated when the four new members were selected to fill vacancies which arose a year into the program.
Not all nominations were from people who thought salinity was a problem. The selection process ensured that every member of SPPAC considered salinity was a problem. This more than anything else probably made SPPAC unrepresentative of their catchment community. In the mid 1980's many people in the catchment did not think salinity was one of their greatest problems. These people were not represented on SPPAC. To properly reflect community views, representatives of this persuasion could have been represented, but even if they remained committed to meeting attendance, the operation of SPPAC could have been made more awkward. This is a problem which faced many salinity community groups, leading to the conflict which undid the efforts of the Campaspe West planning group.

The planning process

The terms of reference of the Advisory Council, as approved by the Ministerial Task Force, were:

- to be a forum for assessment of the objectives, policies and projects of the Pilot Program and to recommend priorities for action
- to inform the regional community about the Pilot Program and its progress and enable citizens to participate in decisions about salinity issues relevant to them
- to advise the Ministerial Task Force and the Program Management Team about community attitudes toward salinity control within the region
- to review the role, structure and performance of the Advisory Council and report on its future operation to the Ministerial Task Force.

SPPAC was only intended to be an advisory council. Nowhere in these terms of reference is the development of a regional strategy mentioned. SPPAC's roles and responsibilities altered significantly during the early part of the group's life.

The RWC had obtained government approval to conduct the `Shepparton Region Salinity Options' study prior to the commencement of the Pilot Program. The usual approach of the RWC was to have both a technical and community advisory group for such a major project. The RWC had a technical advisory group but no community advisory group. The RWC suggested that SPPAC be the community advisory group for the study. The project proposal was presented to SPPAC at its second meeting in April 1986.

SPPAC immediately stated two important objections to the plan, that it didn't cover the whole area and that it wouldn't necessarily lead to action. SPPAC later expressed concern that it didn't include farm management measures. Changes in response to these criticisms increased the scope of the project considerably. After some discussion the plan became the Shepparton Land and Water Salinity Management Plan; the irrigation plan for short. This was to be SPPAC's plan, but it was to be managed by the RWC. Because of the size and complexity of the problem in irrigation areas, SPPAC spent most of its time on the irrigation plan.

The initial concept for the drylands of the catchment was for SPPAC to commission a report on salinity rather than a formal plan. However, the precedent of the irrigation planning process was transferred across to the dryland. Whereas project management and the responsibility to develop the irrigation plan could be left to the RWC, the dryland plan had to be managed by SPPAC itself. Much less time and resources were put into the dryland plan, compared with the irrigation plan. Less urgency was placed on the need for a dryland plan than on the need for an irrigation plan.
Despite their change in role, the SPPAC members' job was not to be technical experts. Their job was to superimpose the community's point of view on the plan being developed within the departments. They needed reasonable understanding of the technical issues, but it was never intended that they have deep technical awareness. Sometimes SPPAC members needed to be distanced a little from the technical detail so they could properly superimpose the community's perspective on the economic, social and environmental concerns onto the technical work from the departments. This distance was crucial, because it can be as hard for departmental people to grasp the community issues as it is for the community to grasp the technical issues.

The members of SPPAC were chosen for an advisory council, not a planning group. Most were able to adapt to this change in their role. There was some membership turnover early in the program. The local media representative and the dryland municipal representative resigned during the first year. In the second year, one member died and another resigned due to ill health. Replacements for the four vacancies were sought in the same way as for the original nominations. Emphasis was placed on representation from organisations within the community. Sixteen nominations were received. Those appointed were chosen carefully for the skills and contacts they would bring to the council, and the legitimacy they would add to its activities. They were the Mayor of Shepparton (also a stock agent and farmer); a dairy farmer, councillor and dairy company director; a rural journalist; and an agricultural contractor.

As its expanded role became obvious, SPPAC demanded and received sitting fees, a payment for travelling and for attending meetings. The members wanted the government to pay them because they thought the government would then take them seriously and listen to their advice. Payment also had the effect of forcing them to work harder and be more committed. The point must be made that sitting fees never fully reflected the participants' commitment of time and expertise.

The irrigation and dryland sub-committees

SPPAC worked through several sub-committees. There was an irrigation sub-committee, a dryland sub-committee, an executive sub-committee, a community education sub-committee and a research and investigation sub-committee. The delegation of members to the irrigation and dryland sub-committees was obvious. For the other sub-committees the SPPAC councillors needed time to get to know each other before the right people could be put on the right sub-committees.

The irrigation and dryland sub-committees were delegated the task of developing the salinity management plans for their respective areas. The memberships of these two sub-committees were expanded with the addition of several community people who were not members of SPPAC. In the irrigation sub-committee, RWC advisory board members from the various irrigation areas were co-opted. In the dryland, the extra members came from LandCare groups, the Mid Goulburn Catchment Coordinating Group and the VFF. This approach of sub-committee augmentation took some of the decision-making pressure off the SPPAC members, allowed more people to be involved and spread the representation.

The irrigation sub-committee was better organised than the dryland sub-committee. It held three times as many meetings and its records were much better kept. The dryland meetings appear to have been less formal. It was not until the second year of the Pilot Program that a full dryland plan was commenced.

Enthusiasts of whole-catchment planning have criticised the Pilot Program's sub-committee structure for being too formal, dividing up the catchment and weakening the whole-catchment approach being piloted in the region. However, the salinity problem in the two areas is different. It requires different research and different solutions. The connection between the
two, the whole catchment philosophy, was gained in full SPPAC meetings. The two sub-committees developed the plans and SPPAC made the policy decisions.

The dryland and irrigation representatives understood their own area's problems well, but most had little appreciation of the problems faced by the other area. Most drylanders knew little about irrigation, and few irrigators could understand the drylanders' preoccupations. The sub-committee structure allowed the plans to be developed by those who understood the problems, then integrated when the members achieved greater understanding of each other's problems. The sub-committee system increased the number of meetings the members had to attend.

Those involved agreed the irrigation sub-committee worked well, and the dryland sub-committee less well. The irrigation councillors were more like agri-politicians than the dryland councillors, and thus more vocal. The chairman of the Irrigation Sub-committee, Leon Heath, had an Agricultural Science degree and a long standing interest in salinity and drainage matters. SPPAC tended to concentrate on the irrigation plan more than on the dryland plan, spending more time discussing irrigation issues. This was made necessary by the size and complexity of the problem and the possible solutions in the irrigation area. However, the diffuse nature of the problem in the dryland required a less intensive approach to planning.

The planning burden

SPPAC met for 34 meetings over a period of approximately three years whilst developing the irrigation and dryland plans. This count of meetings does not include the deliberations of the irrigation and dryland sub-committees. Most of the members of SPPAC already had a high profile in the community. Most had other commitments and found the time commitment a burden, but they made an effort to contribute to SPPAC. Being a member of SPPAC entailed giving up many days to attend meetings. The full Advisory Council met monthly for an all-day meeting. Between these council meetings sub-committee meetings were held. Several members were on more than one sub-committee. At the peak there were more than two full day meetings per month, plus three or four nights reading and preparation. For those closely involved, such as those chairing SPPAC and the sub-committees, it meant two or three days per week at the peak. Not everyone who agreed to join SPPAC anticipated this level of commitment.

Despite the large time commitment required, the members of SPPAC said they needed all that time, because of the volume of work they had to get through. Some admitted to a lack of knowledge in certain fields, but said they learnt quickly. As members of a pilot program, they had no precedents to guide them. They may have wasted some time in the first year, but it could be argued they needed that time to understand their role. It is unrealistic to expect community people walking into a major project such as this to be productive immediately. It takes time to build up sufficient technical knowledge to make proper decisions.

Some members also blamed the slow processes of government for the time taken. The problem was the speed of response of individual departments, not the relationship between the departments. Forcing the departments to work together and integrate their activities was seen by those involved as a major success of the Pilot Program.

Technical and administrative support

The Program Management Team
Management of the Pilot Program was vested in the Program Management Team (PMT). The Establishment Team recommended that the PMT comprise four full-time staff, a Program Coordinator, two Assistant Coordinators and a Clerical Officer. The Ministerial Task Force accepted this recommendation. The PMT was intended to be separate from the departments. It could thus deal directly with the regional managers of the departments, rather than go through the usual organisational channels.

Two members of the PMT had been members of the Establishment Team. Graeme David, from MPE in Bendigo, became Program Coordinator and Darrel Brewin, an extension officer from DCE in Benalla, became Assistant Coordinator for the dryland area. The Assistant Coordinator for irrigation was Stuart Brown, who had been an extension officer with DA in Shepparton.

For administrative and resource purposes the PMT was located with DA at Shepparton. An office was established in the State Public Offices in Shepparton, in a separate wing from DA to ensure the Pilot Program appeared independent. It also had a separate telephone number from DA. For policy purposes, the PMT was accountable to the Cabinet Committee, via the Salinity Bureau of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The purpose of the PMT was `to identify and demonstrate the effective ways of establishing a fully integrated salinity control program at the regional scale’66. The PMT was responsible for coordination of the Pilot Program in the region and for providing executive support to SPPAC. Its functions, as originally specified, were:

- to co-ordinate existing salinity control activities
- to initiate new salinity control activities where deficiencies are identified
- to encourage community participation in existing and new activities
- to promote community awareness and education in salinity control'.

The four positions were advertised in mid January 1986 and the four appointees commenced work at the end of April 1986.

It was originally intended that to create a balance between coordination of research and of advisory services, one Assistant Coordinator would be drawn from a research background and one from an extension background. The position descriptions and advertisements reflected this intention. However, this approach did not recognise the differences between the irrigation and dryland areas in aspects of land use, social structures and salinity control methods.

Before the appointees were selected, it was decided that a more appropriate balance to gain acceptance of the Pilot Program in both irrigation and dryland areas was to draw one Assistant Coordinator from an irrigation background and one from a dryland background, with each understanding the respective land use types, research needs and advisory services. Program Coordinator Graeme David, in his Final Report, said 'this was in retrospect a sound decision which has best met the emerging needs of the Pilot Program'.

This decision made it more difficult to follow the regional, catchment-based approach which was supposed to integrate the irrigation and dryland areas. In practice this integration was difficult: the two Assistant Coordinators tended to keep to their own areas. On their own admission, they didn't interact properly and had little understanding of the problems and solutions in the other area. Realistically, irrigated and dryland agriculture are so different it would be difficult to find experienced people with an appreciation of both.
The task certainly warranted two Assistants, and there is probably no satisfactory division of responsibilities that ensures each person understands the other's position. There is always this danger in a multi-disciplinary team. Separate research and extension Assistant Coordinators would have been worse for communication. There have been too many instances of researchers and extension officers not understanding each other's perspectives. On balance, the needs of the irrigation and dryland areas were so different they required separate Assistant Coordinators.

Temporary secondments and staff turnover

The PMT members were seconded to the Pilot Program for a three year period, the intended life of the Pilot Program. In at least two cases they were not replaced in their former positions. The use of temporary secondments to remove officers from within their departments had an unintended staffing consequence. At the start of the third year staff on the Program Management Team began to think of their future. Both Graeme David and Darrel Brewin obtained positions elsewhere, leaving before the three year Pilot Program had finished. Darrel Brewin was replaced by Brian Garrett, also from DCE Benalla, for nine months to complete the dryland plan. Stuart Brown became Program Coordinator, and the irrigation Assistant Coordinator's position was not filled. Stuart left the program after the presentation of the draft plan and was replaced by Bill O'Kane, formerly the Community Education Officer for the Pilot Program.

This turnover of staff disturbed the SPPAC members. Several suggested to us that the PMT members should have had greater security of tenure, or at least a longer term contract. Staff turnover created several problems. Continuity of management is important in a project. Experienced replacement staff were difficult to obtain. The project lengthened, putting staff on even shorter-term funding. Senior staff numbers dwindled from three to one.

Technical support from the departments

The arrival of the PMT and SPPAC upset the established departmental order, and relationships took time to settle. Salinity was a new, high-profile government initiative. SPPAC had power over the departments in a way not seen before. It was responsible to a committee of ministers, not just one minister or department. It could bypass departmental officers and deal directly with the ministers. This power was used by SPPAC several times during the life of the Pilot Program. The departments were not used to dealing with advisory councils who didn't have to answer directly to a department. Each department became accountable to SPPAC, and the departments were conscious of this scrutiny. The members of SPPAC saw the role of departmental officers as technical advisers and advisers of their department's policies, leaving SPPAC to make the decisions. SPPAC put pressure on the departments and the departments struggled to come to terms with integrating salinity into their programs.

SPPAC made the departments cooperate, sometime by force, sometimes through cajoling. The members of SPPAC saw this as perhaps their greatest achievement. SPPAC kept questioning and challenging the answers it was given, compelling the departments to provide greater detail or co-operate to resolve technical differences. The PMT's and SPPAC's independence meant they could deal directly with regional managers of the departments (or with the cabinet committee with major problems). Regional managers' meetings were instituted. Opinions of these forums varied. Some said they never worked; the regional managers delegated others to attend for them. Others said the meetings were valuable in getting people from the different departments working with each other.

The irrigation sub-committee was supported by the Project Management Advisory Committee (PMAC). This group was responsible for ensuring the technical competence of the support
work for the irrigation plan. PMAC was chaired by Keith Collett (RWC, Melbourne). It included representatives of the departments involved, the Program Coordinator and irrigation Assistant Coordinator from the PMT, the chairman of SPPAC, John Dainton, and the chairman of the Irrigation Sub-committee, Leon Heath.

Officers involved varied in their perceptions of the degree of departmental co-operation. Some said the high profile of salinity made the departments get involved to protect their interests. Others said salinity was not a high profile with the departments and the independence of the PMT made the departments back away.

Departmental officers played an active role in the deliberations of SPPAC and its sub-committees. Originally the departments were to have voting representatives on SPPAC. This was changed so that all members of SPPAC came from the community. Departmental representatives still attended meetings, but on the basis that they were invited to attend by SPPAC. While SPPAC had no formal, voting departmental representation, for it to work properly it needed departmental people to be present. SPPAC recognised this. Government officers had full rights to enter debate and discussion, but not vote. In practice they have enough influence in forums like SPPAC without needing to vote.

The SPPAC members were very appreciative of the work of the PMAC and the PMT. Some members noted occasional problems, particularly in the early stages. They relied on the information the officers provided, and were sometimes confused when the experts couldn't agree. They found it more difficult to work with officers who were involved with the program for only a short time. Most significantly, they said some departments refused to cooperate or release information or were loath to provide the support SPPAC requested.

Most of the technical support to the irrigation plan was provided by the RWC, because of its expertise in irrigation water supply and drainage engineering. The irrigation plan was managed by the RWC, although it was SPPAC's plan. The RWC saw a regional salinity strategy as a high priority, with or without SPPAC. It had been proposing a regional drainage strategy before SPPAC was established. The RWC realised that SPPAC would have an important role in dealing with salinity issues and accepted that it would be better to work with SPPAC than against it. RWC representation on SPPAC was never formalised, but Bill Trewhella, a senior RWC engineer from the region with an encyclopaedic knowledge of salinity, attended nearly all SPPAC meetings and Irrigation Sub-committee meetings.

In contrast, the dryland plan did not have a department or technical advisory group to manage the planning process. Darrel Brewin, the Assistant Coordinator for the dryland, managed the dryland plan for SPPAC. He established the conceptual form of the plan. Darrel saw himself not only as the process manager, but also as the technical information supplier. ‘The whole process depended on the agenda papers I supplied’, he said. Decision making by the dryland sub-committee came from these agenda papers.

DA and DCE supported SPPAC with less enthusiasm than the RWC. These departments were not party to the original RWC plan and may have seen themselves as playing a secondary role. Kevin Ritchie, DCE’s assistant regional manager (resource conservation), attended most SPPAC meetings and Dryland Sub-committee meetings. DA regularly had officers at most meetings, but had no consistent representative. Both Stuart Brown and Darrel Brewin observed (and they were not the only people who made this comment) that their former departments tended to treat them as the resources the departments put into the Pilot Program. This is despite the fact that their positions with the Pilot Program were secondments and the PMT was supposed to be independent of the departments. They didn't report back to their former departments because they had to maintain the independent identity of the PMT. The attitude of the two departments may not have been intentional. If an organisation such as the PMT is established anywhere in the future, the expected roles of those involved should be stated clearly.
Negotiating on behalf of the community

The planning guidelines

Despite SPPAC's position of power within the Salinity Program, the final decision on implementation of the plan was up to the government. One member commented, 'We were given enough power to produce the plan, but we weren't given enough to implement it.' SPPAC could make recommendations, but could not allocate funds. Another member said, 'Power is handling money. If the government does not spend money on what we ask for, we have no power.' Essentially SPPAC was given power through government recognition of SPPAC as representing the community. This allowed the government to negotiate with SPPAC as a proxy for the community. The government exercised its own power by setting the guidelines within which it would accept negotiation.

There were two major points in the guidelines which caused SPPAC concern. The first was that the beneficiary of any salinity control works should pay the cost of implementing those works. The guideline was counter to the long-established precedent of governments paying the capital costs of irrigation development and irrigators paying the operating and maintenance costs. It was at variance with local farm and community expectations. Another major plank of the guidelines was that any plan presented to government should have strong local community support.

For SPPAC, convinced of the future threat of salinity, the interaction of these two guidelines threatened political difficulties. SPPAC firmly believed something needed to be done about rising watertables. In this concern they were not representative of local landholders who were less concerned about the long term threat of salinity. These guidelines for community cost sharing were likely to result in a plan in which local farmers were asked to pay significant sums to control a threat about which they were only mildly concerned. There was a danger such a plan would not be accepted by the local community. Yet the government had indicated that it would only support a salinity plan if it had wide community acceptance. SPPAC adopted four strategies to overcome this potential conflict.

Community education

The first strategy was community education. SPPAC mounted a publicity campaign to convince the community that salinity control was important for the district. The campaign aimed to lessen local resistance to paying for salinity control and to keep political pressure on the government.

Before the Pilot Program commenced, few people in the Goulburn Valley were aware of salinity, and many of those who were aware of it kept quiet for fear of creating a stigma and possibly reducing property values. The Pilot Program changed all that. It set out to raise community awareness and understanding of salinity, and it was very successful. In a series of unpublished University of Melbourne surveys, a sample of Shepparton Region irrigators were asked how they appraised the salinity status of their farms. The proportion admitting that their farm could be affected by salinity in the future increased from 37 percent in 1987 (99 irrigators sampled) to 61 percent in 1989 (84 irrigators sampled).

The Program Management Team and SPPAC concentrated on building awareness in the first year, beginning with a television announcement introducing the word salinity into people's vocabulary. Then they built up a basic community understanding, a little at a time. The employment of a full-time Community Education Officer for the Pilot Program, Bill O'Kane, allowed material to be prepared professionally and presented with polish.
There was extensive print and electronic media coverage on the salinity program in general and on key issues relevant to both management plans. The relationship between the Pilot Program and the local media was excellent, and was carefully cultivated by the PMT. This relationship showed it was not necessary to have a local media representative on SPPAC.

Two coloured brochures were produced to raise awareness of the extent and spread of high watertables in the irrigation region. Called Salinity: the Underground Flood, they showed the depth of watertables on maps of the district and how the area with shallow watertables had spread. Because they were so shocking, these `creeping watertable' maps probably did more than the other community awareness materials to encourage landholders, local government, non-agricultural interests and sundry sceptics to become concerned. The colour brochure for the dryland, Salinity: a Delicate Balance, was less shocking, but there was less with which to shock people. Four SPPAC Chat newsletters were distributed widely in the irrigation area. The last, giving an overview of the plan was direct mailed in the Country News bulletin of the Shepparton News to approximately 8000 rural households within the region.

The final stage of the campaign focused on farming and urban opinion leaders. SPPAC ran seminars for local businesses, such as the banking and real estate fraternity, local government and churches to inform them about the salinity problem and how it affected the whole region. It organised flights over the area for community leaders such as councillors, so they could see the extent of the problem.

The first draft plan: cost sharing and equity

SPPAC's second strategy was to spread the cost of salinity control as widely as possible across the community. The Council proposed that farmers, Local Government, State and Federal Government should share the cost equally. The third strategy was to develop a plan to protect all the irrigation region from salinity: if all farmers were protected from salinity the cost could be spread equally across the region, avoiding the divisive arguments about who benefited and who paid which had bedevilled previous attempts at salinity control schemes. Finally, the members of the Council used their salinity plan to mount arguments against the government's financial guidelines used for the economic analysis of the impact of the management plan.

`Although we were working within government constraints, we never felt the need to be constrained by them. We raised our differing opinion to government. It was hard to find out what it (the constraints) meant, then we couldn't go along with it because the community wouldn't go along with it. We had government people right up to Graham Hunter (manager of the Salinity Bureau) advising us of constraints, but we felt we didn't want to compromise. We had to present to government something that the community would adopt, rather than what the government wanted to hear.'

The first Shepparton draft plan proposed protecting all local farmers against high watertables, a strategy which required extensive capital investment. In 1989 a third of the Shepparton region was served by high-standard drains built by the government. In the proposed plan these drains were extended to a further 14 per cent of farms with the remainder of the region serviced by lower-standard community drains built and maintained by the community with a government construction subsidy and a capital of cost of $223 million. Groundwater pumping was to protect large areas of the region. Four hundred existing pumps were to be used to control groundwater with 426 new public groundwater pumps and 365 private pumps to be installed. Fifty evaporation basins were to be built. The estimated capital cost of the proposed sub surface drainage was $83 million. Areas without pumpable aquifers were to be protected by tile drainage in the future when cost effective methods had been devised.

The re-drafted plan
The State Government disagreed with the economic analysis and the cost sharing strategy of the plan. It requested a re-drafted plan which identified the most economically attractive areas for salinity control. This conflicted with the Advisory Council's aim of spreading the cost across all irrigation farmers, because such a plan would place the greatest cost on the largest beneficiaries. A new plan with fewer government built drains, fewer government groundwater pumps and new rules for sharing costs was developed. The new plan brought the contentious issues of cost sharing and equity into the open. The new plan also placed a much greater emphasis on the environmental costs of salinity; several wetlands which would be destroyed by rising watertables were identified within the region.

Consultation

With the release of the amended plan, SPPAC embarked upon a consultation program to test community support for its proposals. SPPAC followed a very different strategy from that used in other irrigation areas. While SPPAC tried to ensure that all landholders in the region were aware of salinity, it concentrated its consultation effort not on individual farmers, but on elected representatives of, and key people involved in, peak interest groups. It received some criticism for this policy. Former co-ordinator, Graeme David, argued in his final report:

- The region is too large (6000 farms, 500,000ha) and resources too limiting to attempt to consult every landholder.
- Salinity is still an emerging issue within the Shepparton region. Consequently, community concern on salinity is less than in areas where the salinity problem is more advanced. People would not want to be consulted individually.
- The scale of the region is such that the plan is a regional strategy, rather than a detailed management plan. It is not appropriate that individual landholders be involved until a specific management plan for their area is developed.

All the SPPAC members defended their approach. Some made strong comments like ‘If you want to get there quickest, and get the best results, you are far better off talking to informed people than uninformed people.’ Others were milder, suggesting that they didn't have the money to talk to everyone, and that if you work with the leaders, the information flows through to the ‘grass roots’ eventually.

Several consultation methods were used. During the development of the plan SPPAC tried to maintain links with other representative organisations. The members of SPPAC had been nominated by interest groups. They were supposed to report back to their groups, and most did, but they were also supposed to bring their group’s concerns to SPPAC, which fewer did effectively. This is a more difficult job. The community group which SPPAC dealt with most was GIRDAC. The two organisations had a close relationship: GIRDAC was kept well informed of what SPPAC was doing.

Discussions were also held with the five RWC District Water Users Advisory Committees (which were also represented on the Irrigation Subcommittee), landholder salinity and drainage groups, and VFF Branches and District Councils. Local government support was seen by SPPAC as particularly important. SPPAC meetings were held in almost every shire office in the region, and councillors and council officers were encouraged to contribute to the meeting. It was not a great success. Few people involved in local government were vitally interested in salinity. SPPAC was eventually able to convince the shires that salinity would have an impact on local government. All the shires in irrigation areas, as well as the City of Shepparton, agreed to contribute to the cost of the plan.
SPPAC's consultation to individuals was through the printed media and public meetings. Five topic-specific SPPAC Chat issues papers were circulated within the irrigation region, mainly to leaders of organisations and associations. The groups were sent multiple copies and asked to distribute them. These papers sought feedback on various issues: managing channel and drain salinities, financing farm salinity control, groundwater pumping, options for areas with no potential for groundwater pumping, and water pricing and salinity control.

Following the release of the final draft plan, SPPAC sponsored a series of public meetings held in various locations across the region. Attendances at these public meetings varied considerably. Some had 100 people, others were poorly attended. Only minor changes were made to the plans as a result of the public meetings.

Some of the members of SPPAC dealt as individuals with `grass roots' people. This was not necessarily a formal direction from SPPAC. They were asked, as SPPAC members, to talk to groups. SPPAC may not have known about all these events, as they were never properly recorded. Those who tried to do their own informal consultation sometimes encountered barriers. One member said:

'I represent an area that displays virtually no interest in the problem. I find it hard to communicate with the community. It's hard to communicate effectively when you become an expert. It's hard to pass the information on; it's a skill of its own.'

The community awareness and consultation program needed to be a joint departmental and community exercise, but it was presented to the public as a community exercise. It was masterminded by the PMT and the SPPAC chairman. SPPAC members were the public figures, not the PMT. As the former Coordinator, Graeme David, said:

'The program was projected as a community program, but the public servants have to sit back and let the community people get the credit. This is hard on the public servants, but it is important.'

SPPAC recognised that by consulting with the community it gained credibility with both the community and government. Consultation was a government guideline. The plans had to be acceptable to the community (or at least those who were given the opportunity to comment and exercised it) before they could be presented to government. The consultation at the end, after presentation of the draft plans, was done for government. The 'real' consultation with the community was done while the plans were being prepared. The members of SPPAC knew they were community representatives, and that their role was to ensure that the plans would be acceptable to the community. SPPAC made an effort to involve relevant people in discussions before it made a decision.

The next stage

The SPPAC councillors claimed several achievements. Obviously they have put together two salinity management strategies. However, when asked, this was not the achievement they mentioned first. The two achievements of SPPAC most often mentioned were cooperation between government departments and an increased community awareness of the salinity problem. Both were part of SPPAC's charter.

The whole-catchment approach as used in the Pilot Program is seductive. It offers the chance to establish a connection between salinity in the dryland and in the irrigation areas. It also ensures that all the factors potentially influencing the salinity of the region are within the boundaries of the study area (and able to be considered by the advisory council).
However, the whole-catchment approach does present certain problems. The Goulburn-Broken region was never going to be an easy region in which to undertake a pilot program; that is one reason the region was chosen. The size of the pilot region and the nature of the membership of the Advisory Council meant that much of its work would be political, rather than technical. The differences between irrigation and dryland areas made the two plans difficult to integrate. And although a regional strategy has been developed, there is still a need for detailed local planning within the guidelines of the regional strategy.

SPPAC has produced regional strategies, not detailed management plans. Calling them action plans may help convince a sceptical community that something is being done, but they are not action plans. Detailed planning at a local level is still required. This is the task of Salinity Plan Implementation Groups (SPIGs) and Community Drainage Groups which are being established, and Landcare groups. Local plans for specific areas within the pilot region will differ.

Implementation is now co-ordinated regionally by a new SPAC (no longer a `Pilot' Program) which contains four original SPPAC members. However, implementation is by necessity local and smaller area groups will need to become more prominent as issues become more salient at a local level. Implementation will focus initially on those areas where the greatest threat is perceived. Farmers in those areas will be more willing to pay their share of the costs of implementing the plans. The division of responsibilities between SPAC and the local SPIGs is proving a difficult issue as the groups attempt to define what actually SPIGs will do. An initial attempt to review the roles of each group could only conclude it was too early to make a decision as to the worth of SPIGs.

A survey of the views of SPIG members conducted as part of this review revealed a frustration with the rate of implementation of on-ground works and a belief that progress was being hampered by `a lack of response from landholders and other groups in seeking endorsement for works'. While the report identified the rural recession as a major reason for this poor response, one must wonder whether the poor response is an inevitable outcome when a community group composed of far-sighted individuals works on behalf of a large catchment community to develop a management plan to forestall salinity damage predicted to occur at some time in the future, rather than to solve salinity problems being experienced here and now.
History of salinity action

The Kerang Lakes area is one of the most diverse farming districts in Australia. It lies between the Murray River and the Mallee country's dry wheat and sheep farms. In the east around Kerang are grazing properties, where irrigators produce medium wool and early prime lambs. In the same area there are farmers who grow irrigated crops: wheat, sunflowers, millet or sorghum. On the Tyntynder flats immediately west of Swan Hill are irrigated dairy farms and many small hobby farms. On cultivated and cleared Mallee ridges which overlook the river and lakes of the district are horticultural settlements producing grapes, stone fruit, vegetables and melons. Today the Kerang Lakes community is concerned by four environmental problems: soil salinity, water supply salinity, flooding and degradation of wetlands. Solutions to any one of these problems may well exacerbate the others. At the heart of these problems is the complex water supply system.

Fresh water is drawn from the Murray at Torrumbarry Weir, and diverted west using natural watercourses and lakes where possible. Torrumbarry water is initially fresh, but as it travels west it becomes progressively saltier as it mixes with both saline groundwater and saltier water flowing north in the rivers and creeks it crosses. Tresco and Woorinen, at the end of the Torrumbarry system, receive the saltiest water to irrigate stone fruit and citrus trees. These crops are much more sensitive to salt than pasture and horticulturalists are concerned by any increase in salinity in the water supply. A major priority of the management of the Torrumbarry system is to minimise the salinity of water reaching Tresco and Woorinen. West of the Loddon River the Torrumbarry water is transported through what was once a natural flood overflow of the Loddon. Because Loddon flood water is often salty, the RWC tries to avoid sending any Loddon flood water down this natural overflow. When this cannot be avoided, the resulting salt flow will eventually damage the fruit trees at Tresco and Woorinen. Some estimates put the potential yearly cost of this damage at over $4 million. Downstream landholders believe protection of Tresco and Woorinen is achieved at the cost of increased flood risk for farmers along the lower Loddon and Avoca Rivers, though the Rural Water Commission disputes this.  

To environmentalists the supply system is a major intrusion on important wetlands. The nub of the wetlands problem is the disruption to the normal flow regime of the river and lake system. In some cases, such as the Reedy Lakes, this has benefits for the wetland environment. But other lakes which are never allowed to dry out are degraded as the waterlogged conditions kill trees and wildlife habitat. Some lakes are now rarely filled, becoming dry and progressively saltier. Others are kept full, but are never flushed. They also become saltier. The result is a series of problems along the length of the supply channel, presenting difficult decisions and complex trade-offs for planners.

One issue of high concern to the Kerang Lakes community has been the Lake Tutchewop scheme. The lake was once a flooding buffer and a high value wetland. The lake was removed from the Avoca river flow system to protect water quality. More recently the lake has been used as an evaporation basin for saline water from the nearby Barr Creek. Lake Tutchewop was but the first of a planned series of evaporation basins, culminating in a pipeline to Lake Tyrrell in the Mallee. The next part of the scheme was to have been the Mineral Reserves Basin about three miles from Lake Tutchewop, adjacent to the Tresco Irrigation Area. Landholder opposition to the plan culminated in a bitter class action against the Rural Water Commission. The Commission won the class action suit, but soon after the government announced it was not proceeding with the project for economic reasons.
Following the heated conflict over the Mineral Reserves Basin, the Victorian Government turned to community-based planning as a means of reconciling competing interests in the Kerang Lakes area.

Formation of the working group

Because of the competing interests in the area, water quality, soil salinity, flooding and habitat protection, the Kerang Lakes Area Working Group had to be formed in such a way that it was seen to be fair to all the interests. The composition of the group was rigidly structured and the process of electing the representatives was formal.

Each of five defined areas within the Kerang lakes project area had their own representative. These representatives were nominated by the irrigators concerned, usually at a public meeting. In one case a formal ballot was held to decide upon a representative, with 100 lake diverters voting for their representative.

Three more working group members represented various community issues. They were environment and conservation interests; social issues; and recreation, tourism and commercial issues. All three representatives were elected in a non-compulsory secret ballot of the 12000 adult residents of the sub-region. The elections were fiercely contested, just like a local government election, with advertising, doorknocking and lobbying. Unlike a political election, there was little interest and low voter turnout. It was difficult to enthuse the urban community about voting. Although this process was unquestionably democratic, it was costly. Those organising the elections had little experience in running elections. With such conflicting interests and a high level of concern in sections of the community, elections were probably inevitable. Elections at least demonstrate that a democratic process has been followed.

Because of the prominence of water management issues in the district, people with a long term interest in water management issues became involved with KLAWG. Some had been involved with salinity and flooding issues for many years. Others had a profile in other areas of the community. Tom Lowe, the conservation representative, is a local farmer who has lived in the area all his life. He is a renowned wildlife photographer.

The four municipalities in the area each nominated a representative. They were the Shire and City of Swan Hill and the Shire and Borough of Kerang. Such formal representation from urban interests within the sub-region is unusual for a working group. The sub-region is highly urbanised, however, as only 27% of the population lives outside Kerang and Swan Hill.

The four departments involved had a representative each. These departments were the Rural Water Commission (RWC), Department of Agriculture (DA), Conservation and Environment (DCE), and Water Resources (DWR). Both DCE and RWC were represented by their department's regional manager, DA by the officer in charge of the Kerang district office and DWR by a Melbourne hydrogeologist. The representatives were selected by their departments. Unusually for a community working group, the departmental representatives were able to vote at working group meetings. Departmental representation was structured as issues-based rather than department-based. The DCE representative treated his role as being there to represent conservation interests rather than his department. Similarly, the RWC representative regarded his task as representing water management issues. The role of DWR is interesting and unusual. The working group members requested that DWR be involved on the working group to cover hydrogeological matters. DWR was a water policy-making department independent of operational departments. It was able to adopt a `watchdog' role.
With twelve community members and four departmental representatives, KLAWG was a large group. A bigger group would be too large to be workable. A smaller group would be better for efficient function of the group, but would be unlikely to have been sufficient representation.

Technical and administrative support

Management of the Kerang Lakes project was based with the RWC in Kerang. When KLAWG began operating, there was no project manager. A project manager, Garry Smith, was appointed to the Kerang Lakes Area Management Project after a dozen meetings. As project manager, Garry was effectively full time on Kerang Lakes business, although he spent some time on the business of other working groups.

The project manager was supported by a community liaison officer. The responsibilities of this position included community education, consultation and administration. The community liaison officer's role was administrative, rather than technical. The formality of KLAWG's operations and the frequency of their meetings meant the group required a high level of administrative support.

In addition to the project manager, an independent consultant was appointed to integrate the technical material into a co-ordinated management plan. There was some division amongst the working group membership over the continuing value of such a consultant throughout the project, but it is clear that the consultant played a key role in setting an initial work plan and developing an economic framework for evaluating proposals.

The key support for the working group came from its planning support group. This was created at the same time as the working group. Its membership included hydrologists, hydrogeologists, a biologist, agricultural scientists, an economist and a sociologist. The membership was drawn from all involved departments although it was dominated by hydrologists and the RWC. In practice the membership of this group was flexible and specialist expertise was co-opted when required.

Planning

The complexity of the issues facing the working group and the history of unease between government and the community ensured that the operation of the working group would be different from other working groups. The most obvious difference was the duration of planning. KLAWG worked for a considerably longer period than other groups, taking 84 meeting to finalise their plan. From our study of the minutes of their meetings we have divided the group's meetings according to the flow of planning tasks (see figure 8.1). In the following sections we discuss each phase in turn.

Developing procedures

Several early meetings were taken up with establishing rules for the process the group would follow. The operation of KLAWG has been very formal, in part an outcome of the complexity of interests and history of mistrusting the RWC.
NANGILOC-COLIGNAN SALINITY WORKING GROUP

History of salinity action

Nangiloc and Colignan are small irrigation communities on the Murray River, about 50 kilometres south-east of Mildura. The area was first subdivided for closer settlement in the early 1920s and leased to returning soldiers who grew vegetables using irrigation water drawn from the river. In its first years the settlement consisted of a small number of properties along the river side. Property development beyond the river margin was constrained by the limited capacity of most private pumping systems. One of the hazards of irrigation development in the Mallee is the development of perched watertables under irrigated crops. These perched watertables (localised high watertables) cause soil salinity and crop losses. Perched watertables are easily controlled by the installation of underground tile drains. The proximity of early Nangiloc and Colignan properties to the river provided irrigators with the advantages of natural surface drainage and easy disposal of tile drainage effluent to the river and a degree of natural sub-surface drainage of perched watertables.

Development of Nangiloc-Colignan accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s. The arrival of electricity and electric pumps in 1957 allowed farmers to develop properties inland from the river. The completion of the Hume reservoir on the upper Murray in the 1960s greatly increased the volume of water available for private diversion. Today there are about 160 horticultural properties growing mainly citrus and dried vine fruit.

As development moved inland from the river, tile drains were installed and initially drainage water was channelled back into the river. In 1969 the Victorian government responded to downstream concerns and instructed the State Rivers and Water Supply Commission to prevent any newly developed properties disposing of tile drainage effluent into the Murray River. The result in Nangiloc-Colignan was several years of unco-ordinated and often unsatisfactory drainage into makeshift holding basins, adjacent dry land areas, environmentally sensitive swamps or down tube wells into the regional watertable.

Since 1969, there have been several proposals for coordinated drainage of the area. Most of these proposals were prepared by the government in response to landholders agitating for a drainage scheme. The people of Nangiloc-Colignan have been trying since the 1960s to get government assistance and approval for a drainage scheme. A 1971 proposal was submitted for Federal government funding, but the funding program lapsed before the submission was considered.

A comprehensive drainage scheme developed during the late 1970s reached the stage of being a fully costed final plan in 1980. It was ready for implementation by the mid 1980s but was rejected by the government because of a low benefit/cost ratio. The Nangiloc-Colignan community developed a suspicion that any drainage proposal for their settlement would remain unimplemented.

Forming the working group

A public meeting was held in the Grand Hotel, Mildura on May 13th 1987 to explain the Victorian draft salinity strategy Salt Action: Joint Action. At the meeting it was announced that Nangiloc-Colignan had been identified by departmental officers as a possible sub-region for a salinity management plan. Another public meeting was held in the Nangiloc Hall on May 19th 1987 to gauge community reaction to this proposal.
The May 19th meeting at Nangiloc attracted 45 local residents including irrigators, dry land farmers and urban residents. Also in attendance were the regional managers of the RWC, DA and the DCE. The meeting voted unanimously in favour of the development of a community-based salinity management plan. Seven local representatives were also nominated to assist departmental officers with arrangements for a second public meeting, at which elections for a working group would take place.

During the following weeks, departmental staff visited thirty members of the community present at the public meeting at Nangiloc. They discussed the best way of forming a working group which truly represented the community. The sub-region was divided into ‘local areas’, all of which would be represented separately. There were to be four irrigation areas and two dry land areas. The two dry land areas are farmed by 24 cropping and grazing farmers. They were included because irrigation had caused soil salting on some properties and because drainage water could be disposed into salt basins on some of these farms. Past drainage proposals had proposed the use of these dry land basins on freehold land. In one case the owner of one of the basins was disturbed to find he had not been consulted about the possible acquisition of his land.

The seven nominated community representatives helped define the boundaries of the local areas within the sub-region. They said that two working group members from each local area would be required for the areas to be properly represented. The community representatives suggested approaches to ensure a large number of people attended the next public meeting to elect a working group.

At a public meeting on July 24th 1987 the working group was formed. Fifty four irrigators and dry land farmers attended. Most of the arrangements made by the steering committee were accepted by the meeting. However, the people from Iraak Island wanted to be represented separately, so the meeting decided to form a fifth local area in the irrigated area. The Iraak Islanders shared a strong concern for the health of a wetland damaged by salinity. Such flexibility in a public meeting is valuable. So often the agenda for a public meeting is so fixed that flexibility is not possible.

The meeting elected a committee of 14 working group members, with ten representatives from irrigated areas, two from dry land areas, a local environmentalist and one municipal representative. In all areas apart from Iraak Island the number of nominations did not exceed the number of positions, so no election was held. For Iraak Island there were three nominations for two positions. The losing nominee became the deputy representative for Iraak Island. The working group also included representatives from the three State Government departments involved.

The choice of area representatives was left up to the meeting to decide. No-one was primed up beforehand. Because Nangiloc-Colignan has a long history of tackling salinity (or at least campaigning for drainage) there were people in the district who were keen to be on the working group. One of the members elected to the working group had been a member of drainage committees for 20 years. He and the rest of the meeting were looking for a drainage strategy that would become more than just another report. There were sufficient nominations at the public meeting to fill the available places without having to create enthusiasm first.

In addition to the twelve area representatives a deputy from each local area was elected to attend meetings in the absence of a member. Deputies provided additional local knowledge to the working group and spread the load among more community members. The deputies could vote if one of their area’s full representatives was not present. For the deputy system to be effective it was important that the deputies had a useful role and that they had adequate power and responsibility to remain interested and involved. Allowing them to vote was one of these powers. Payment of sitting fees if the full representatives receive them was another.
Representativeness of the working group

The population of Nangiloc-Colignan is almost totally rural; there are hardly any urban residents. It is not surprising, then, that all but one of the working group members were local farmers. As seems to be the pattern with working groups, the municipal representative, Ron Vine, was also a local farmer. The only non-agricultural working group member was the environmental representative, Howard Browne. Howard lived in Red Cliffs, just outside the sub-region.

The working group members saw themselves as representative of the landholders in the area. They recognised they did not represent urban or industrial interests. A possible non-agricultural interest that might have been represented was those who used the river for recreation. Anyone who represented such an interest would have found it difficult sitting through many meetings about farm drainage unless they were also a grower. A working group in an area such as Nangiloc-Colignan can hardly be expected to contain members who are not farmers.

Some members suggested that large landholders were not well represented on the group. Such landholders tend to be more independent than small landholders because they can organise their own drainage systems. A number of these larger farms are managed by employed managers for their absentee landholders. Several of these managers were members of the working group. This was a contentious issue for the group. Some people felt that only owner-operators should be represented on the working group. They argued that managers did not have sufficient commitment to the district to be able to make proper decisions. They wanted the absentee owners, rather than their managers, to be on the working group. The managers countered this by saying that they had to be good growers and managers to get and keep their jobs. As a quarter of the irrigated farms were corporate farms, it seemed appropriate they be represented on the working group. The managers of the corporate farms had greater knowledge and experience to equip them for making decisions about salinity management than did the absentee owners.

The members of the working group were atypical in a number of not unexpected respects. The working group members were more experienced farmers. Few were young. Most of the group members were influential people, often with good contacts within local government departments. It is inevitable that such people end up on committees such as this.

The planning process

The first working group meeting was held on August 7th 1987. At the first meeting the group elected its chairman, Councillor Ron Vine, the municipal representative. Most, but not all working group members were happy with the choice of chairman. Ron's participation in public life and his previous involvement with salinity made him a sensible choice for the position of chairman. Group members varied in their perception of his chairmanship. Some perceived him as fair, giving everyone a chance to comment. Others suggested there had not been enough freely-flowing discussion. Ron was a well organised chairman and appeared comfortable with the role. He certainly has a much more public role than any other member of the working group.

Being on the working group required a substantial time commitment. The group met for 40 meetings between August 1987 and the presentation of their draft plan to the government in February 1991. The working group members were satisfied with the number and frequency of meetings. They said they needed that many meetings to keep up with the workload. However, most members did not realise initially how much time would be involved. They found it hard to make time to attend meetings, but recognised that they were committed to
attending. As one member said, 'if you take the job you have to be prepared to make the commitment.' However, some members and deputies attended less frequently towards the end of the planning process. This increased the workload of those who remained.

The meetings of the working group were not always meetings of people of common mind. The area representatives had strongly differing opinions on some issues. The Iraak Island representatives in particular often disagreed with the rest of the working group. This can be frustrating for those who like consensus and agreement in meetings. But it is probably better for their views to be aired in the forum of the working group than outside it. At least in the working group they were provided with the same accurate information as the rest of the group. If they were lobbying from outside they may not have the same access to information. The value of a working group is that it allows salinity management decisions to be made by community representatives based on the best information available. Working groups must be prepared to accept people with varying views. The inclusion of the dry land farming representatives and the Iraak islanders was one of the strengths of the group.

Reference groups

Initially, the working group operated as a review group, overseeing the production of the management plan by departmental officers. The group had little ownership of the developing plan. This is common to most salinity working groups: the working group overseeing the development of the plan by the technical support group is part of the Victorian salinity planning model. To give the working group greater ownership of the plan sub-committees (called reference groups) were formed. There were four such reference groups, for social issues, environmental issues, dry land and irrigation.

The reference groups were formed so working group members could look at detailed information and apply local knowledge in their field of expertise. The membership of the reference groups was worked out by the chairman in consultation with government officers, then suggested to the working group. The group accepted the suggestions. If the members had chosen their own group there may have been too many in the irrigation reference group.

The reference groups had several advantages. They gave the working group members a more constructive, hands-on, role. They allowed more work to be done. They allowed the working group members to express their thoughts in a smaller forum and to develop confidence in their own area of expertise. The reference groups met as required over 12 months and reported back to the working group. There were 4 meetings of the irrigation group, 4 social reference group meetings, 3 environmental group meetings and 1 dry land meeting.

Power of the working group

All working groups had the power to bypass departmental officers and deal directly with cabinet ministers if they were not satisfied in their dealings with the departmental officers. The working group was not afraid to use this power and found it valuable on occasions. However, there were enough cynics on the working group to remind the group that it was still dependent on the government's financial assistance. Comments such as 'we have only got power to suggest', 'without government finance we cannot do anything' and 'we have not got any power at all' indicate this view.

The power to go straight to cabinet was a real selling point in getting working groups established. It helped by convincing sceptical farmers who might have made good working group members that the government was serious about salinity and drainage this time. This power makes the departmental officers more accountable, because their information-filtering role is removed.
One way in which the government restricts the level of power given to the working group is by imposing guidelines. The guidelines enable the government to assess each management plan using the same criteria used to assess other management plans. The working group took a long time to come to accept the guidelines. Initially it did not see the need for guidelines to be so comprehensive. Eventually the working group adopted a deliberate strategy of following the guidelines closely. The reasoning was that this would predispose the government officers and ministers who would evaluate their plan to treat it favourably.

The role of government officers

The working group had a secretary from its first meeting. The first secretary was the RWC's local Irrigation Services Officer. The secretary's job was not a full time position. A full time project officer was appointed in April 1988, almost a year after the working group began meeting. This delay was too long for effective and efficient operation of the working group.

From that time the working group was supported by one secretary and two project officers in three years. Some members of the working group believed this level of staff turnover was regrettable. Part of the reason for the turnover lies in the nature of the position. The position was at Science 1 level, held by young scientists often in their first position. The position of project officer entails responsibility more appropriate to Science 2 than Science 1. This is particularly so if there is little supervision. Much of the work of a project officer is similar to that of an extension officer running a major project, since much of a project officer's work involves extension. If it was called an extension officer position it would be Science 2 or higher.

The second reason for staff turnover was the temporary nature of the position. If such staff have only temporary positions it is inevitable they will move on to better, more secure positions.

A project manager was appointed in April-May 1989 to manage the three plans to be developed in the Sunraysia area (Nangiloc-Colignan, Sunraysia, and Nyah to the South Australian Border). Although this appointment was early in the life of the Sunraysia working group and before the formation of the Nyah to the border group, it was two years after the Nangiloc-Colignan working group began. Tim Cummins, the project manager, has played a valuable role in coordinating the government efforts toward the three management plans in the Sunraysia area. At the end the working group was well serviced, but it was poorly serviced at the start when it needed guidance.

The Nangiloc-Colignan working group enjoyed a high level of technical support. Despite its relative isolation, Nangiloc is easy for departmental scientists from Melbourne to reach because of the air service from Melbourne to Mildura. It is possible to fly up and back in a day for a meeting. The technical support group also had plenty of old reports to which it could refer, to assist its work.

The working group members agreed that support from the departments in the area had been good. They had a good working relationship with the local departmental officers. Some group members expressed concerns about the various influences on local departmental officers. Comments included 'local departmental officers often have their hands tied by head office' and 'government officers don't want to go against government policy'. This indicates the dilemma in which departmental staff find themselves: are they working for the local community or for the government, and can they work for both?
Dealing with the community

Most of the activities organised for the public in Nangiloc-Colignan had a dual role of consultation and community education. It is difficult to split the activities up into the two categories. In that sense they were well planned: the two functions should be combined. This is particularly so in areas, such as Nangiloc-Colignan, which have no urban centres and virtually no urban population. In farming communities, community education is really extension, and consultation is a natural part of a good extension campaign.

Much of the consultation in the sub-region was organised by Mal Brown, the community education officer (salinity) with DARA in Mildura. Mal played a valuable role, not just in preparing and organising community education and consultation materials, but also in the development of the management plan. The position of community education officer was not written formally into the project management or technical support structure. This seems to be true of community education officers throughout the program. Their freedom to decide how they will perform the duties of their position is shared by many officers in the Salinity Program, but at least the other officers know where they fit into the management structure.

Community consultation

The working group consulted with the local community in several ways. A string of public meetings was used by departmental officers to set up the working group. Many of those attending the public meetings were interviewed later by departmental officers. In the early stages of the working group another set of local public meetings was held to inform the community about salinity and about the function of the working group. During early 1988 a detailed land use survey of all properties in Nangiloc-Colignan was conducted. By distributing and collecting the questionnaires, the working group members were able to do some informal consultation of their own.

In early 1989, local area meetings were held to discuss the salinity control options being considered by the working group and to suggest further options. Attendances varied greatly, being higher in the newer-developed areas. Perhaps the people of the older-developed areas thought they had heard it all before. A problem was that the six meetings were held in a week. They tried to do too much. Some people involved thought the meetings were a failure. A questionnaire and a report on the options and the preliminary option evaluations were distributed at the meetings and posted to all who did not attend the meetings. There were 68 replies. The community's perception (from the responses made) apparently differed little from the working group's evaluation.

The working group members had mixed feelings about consultation, their need to consult the community and their performance at consultation. Several members considered that the working group did not need to consult much because the community did not want to be consulted. They said that, for most issues, the working group was elected by the community to make the decisions for them. They made comments like `you get the feeling they've left it to us to get on with the job', and suggested that the public looked upon the working group members as the ones coming up with the plan. Unless the plan was likely to impose significant costs on the community, this would be a realistic approach.

Some working group members thought that the group had done everything it could to consult with the community. They said that despite the group's attempts, many people were not interested and attendances at meetings and field days had been disappointing. One noted that field days and publications may have created awareness, but not a willingness to do anything.

Other members said that the working group had not consulted well enough. Some suggested that the community had lost interest because they thought nothing has been done and that the
working group had not shown any signs of action. Not all working group members agreed on
their role. One said that it was 'not my role to preach what the working group was doing to
the community' although he also said the group may not have been consulting effectively
enough.

Community education

In March 1988 a short video, *Nangiloc-Colignan Community Tackle Salinity* was released. The video was based around a bus tour of the district by the working group. It was made available for borrowing free of charge in the three local general stores. This was a clever piece of marketing, because videos are in high demand in the local stores. Most residents took the opportunity to view the video. A colour brochure profiling the working group members and the local salinity problems was also distributed at this time.

Twelve newsletters were distributed to all landholders between June 1988 and Feb 1991. Field days were held in each of the five irrigated local areas in November 1988. The field days were conventional extension exercises about irrigation systems and scheduling, but they included a discussion of the causes and effects of salinity in the sub-region. They were attended by about 30 percent of irrigators.

The plan

The working group members expressed concern at the lack of salinity control options available to them. Most options had been ruled out because of their cost. Costly schemes devised in the past had not been implemented, and the group members were aware that some people in the community thought that the same fate would befall their plan. At the time of our interviews some members were resigned to the need to compromise, but other members were not willing to compromise.

The final plan, released in February, 1991, indicates realism prevailed. The economic guidelines under which the group worked made clear that expensive proposals to drain effluent inland would not be approved. Their plan proposed the development of ten small group drainage schemes within the irrigation area. Drainage from five of the schemes would flow into local basins or holding bays. The other five would drain into the Murray River with the irrigators paying for the downstream costs of this River disposal. This was an ironic proposal, given that it reversed the 1969 ban on disposal to the River which was the cause of the Nangiloc and Colignan drainage problems.

Whilst the combined group of ten drainage schemes was demonstrated to be economic, this was not true of each of the individual schemes. The working group argued against implementing only those mini drainage schemes with a positive benefit-cost ratio because the arbitrary nature of the drainage catchment boundaries would create inequities the group would find difficult to justify to their community. This strategy to achieve equity was approved by the community through a LAAG consultation. In trying to ensure everyone was a winner the Nangiloc-Colignan group followed the same strategy as SPPAC had proposed in their first draft salinity management plan. The government had rejected SPPAC's strategy, but agreed to Nangiloc-Colignan's proposal. Perhaps the smaller size of the Nangiloc-Colignan settlement eased government concerns over budgetary implications.
Salinity in Sunraysia

Sunraysia is Australia's largest arid zone horticultural area. The Sunraysia Salinity Sub-region covers 30,000 ha and embraces two distinct regions. Mildura, Red Cliffs and Merbein are contiguous, but Robinvale is separated from them by 80 kilometres. All four areas were developed as closer settlement and soldier settlement areas between the 1880s and the 1940s. The high cost of pumping water meant high value horticultural crops would be the major land use.

Salinity and waterlogging emerged as problems early in the life of the settlements. They were major problems in Merbein, Mildura and Red Cliffs until comprehensive drainage schemes were installed in the 1930s. Many of these schemes involved tile drainage to the numerous drainage basins ringing the Sunraysia area. Some properties without natural drainage disposed of their drainage water down shafts dug into aquifers. Other properties had no proper drainage.

With most farms having what was regarded as satisfactory drainage, there was no community pressure for a salinity plan. Any salinity problem in the region was not obvious. However, irrigation development has created a groundwater mound under the Sunraysia settlement, and this mound has increased the flow of saline groundwater into the Murray River. If the groundwater mound could be lowered or the flows of saline groundwater from the Sunraysia area into the Murray River could be intercepted, the salinity of the Murray could be reduced. The government saw this as an opportunity to earn salt disposal entitlements which could be redistributed elsewhere in the state. From a statewide perspective, if not a regional perspective, a salinity management plan for Sunraysia was warranted. Salt Action: Joint Action, the Victorian government's salinity strategy, therefore included a commitment to develop a salinity management plan for the Sunraysia area.

Formation of the working group

Officers of DA and the RWC called public meetings in each of the four areas to set up a steering group which would form the working group. These four meetings were advertised as information sessions, where people could find out more about salinity and efficient irrigation. Steering committee representatives were elected at these meetings. There was little interest. The meetings were not well attended and it was difficult to find people willing to become involved.

The steering committee met three times. It decided that the working group to develop the Sunraysia salinity plan should consist of two people from each of the four irrigation areas, along with representatives of other interests. These were conservation, the VFF, local government, the Sunraysia Water Board and the First Mildura Irrigation Trust (FMIT) which supplies much of Mildura's irrigation water. The steering group also tried to encourage people who the members thought would be able to contribute to the development of a plan to join the working group.

Two public meetings were held, one in Mildura and one in Robinvale, to elect the representatives to the working group. At the Mildura meeting, two representatives for the Mildura area were elected, then another three expressed a desire to be working group members. All five attended a preliminary working group meeting. At that meeting the five
went into a huddle and selected two of their number to be full representatives. The other three became deputy representatives. Similarly, one interested person from Robinvale became a deputy.

There was some initial unease about the inclusion of Robinvale in the sub-region. Having two separate areas covered by the one plan made integration difficult. However, if Robinvale had not been included in Sunraysia, it would not have been included in any salinity management plan. It was easier to include Robinvale in Sunraysia than to link it with Nyah, an irrigation district upstream of Robinvale.

Composition of the working group

Most working group members were growers. The urban areas had little representation, mainly because they had little interest in salinity. There were some urban people on the working group. The conservation representative lived in Mildura. One of the Merbein representatives, Sally Keens, was the local pharmacist. Sally attended an information meeting to hear a talk on salinity, went onto the steering committee, then became a member of the working group.

The working group members formed a reasonable cross section of the Sunraysia community. They were down-to-earth people, not agri-politicians as on some other working groups. Some of them were also involved in other agricultural organisations in the area, such as the local Irrigators’ Advisory board, the Australian Dried Fruits Association and the Sunraysia Fruit and Vegetable Growers’ Association. Only one member, Tony Panetta, a deputy representative, had a non Anglo-Saxon background. The group members' interest in salinity and enthusiasm for tackling it made them unrepresentative. This is unavoidable. People cannot be coerced into participating. The working group's challenge was to ensure their plan was acceptable not only to those who were concerned about salinity, but also the majority of people who were not.

The planning process

Operation of the working group

The working group chose to meet fortnightly. This was a greater time commitment than required for most working groups, which met monthly. The extra time commitment was partially alleviated when the group went into recess for about three months over harvest time. During this time the consultants and departmental officers were still working. This allowed investigations to be conducted without retarding the progress of the working group. It also allowed the project officer time for work other than providing secretarial and meeting support to the working group. During the early stages, field trips were held every alternate week for the members to familiarise themselves with particular problem areas in the sub-region.

The grower members noticed the time they spent off their properties. One said "you'd go broke if you were involved to the extent you'd like". The members thought the meetings were necessary to get their work done, although some suggested fortnightly meetings made for too great a workload. Fortnightly meetings might be valuable initially to educate the working group members about the salinity problem and their task, but it should be possible to decrease the frequency later.

Rather than breaking up into formal sub-committees or reference groups, the working group formed small sub-committees to investigate various ‘hot spots’ of salinity in the area. These groups met only for a short period. With working group meetings so frequent it would have been difficult to justify a sub-committee structure.
With so little community concern about salinity, anyone interested had to be kept involved. Creation of a role as deputy representatives for those who were interested but could not be members of the working group was a clever way of achieving this. The deputies could attend any meeting, but could not vote or receive sitting fees unless one of the full representatives of their area was away. One of the deputy representatives, Roy Garsed, acted as FMIT representative for most meetings. The other two Mildura deputies remained involved as deputies.

The chairman of the working group, Owen Lloyd, was by his own admission a fairly reluctant chairman. His was the only nomination when the working group came to elect its chairman. Despite his professed reluctance, he was willing to undertake the role. As an experienced grower and a former member of the FMIT board, he was well qualified.

The working group accepted the need to work within the government guidelines for the development of salinity management plans. The guidelines prevented the group from doing some of the things it would have liked to do. However, the group regarded the guidelines as sufficiently flexible to allow it to achieve most of its objectives. These objectives were: 'To maximise sustainable development in Sunraysia, controlling watertables, land degradation and the region's contribution to River Murray salinity.'

The role of government officers

Sunraysia shared a project team with the Nangiloc-Colignan and Nyah to the S.A. border working groups. Each of the three working groups had a project officer, who was responsible to the project manager, Tim Cummins. Tim and the Sunraysia project officer, Lyndall Ash, were based with the Department of Agriculture in Mildura. The other two project officers were in the RWC at Red Cliffs. The officers of the two departments had a good working relationship.

The direction of the working group was planned by a small committee consisting of Tim, Lyndall and Owen Lloyd, the chairman. Tim was responsible for coordinating the government involvement in the three plans in the area. He began as project manager in April 1989, having been project officer for Sunraysia since the working group began in January 1989.

A project manager's role is difficult. Tim was careful about his role. He tried to inform the group about the consequences of any decision they might take, but left them to actually make the decision. He tried to direct the decisions of the group as little as possible, while giving them full information to make a decision. The working group members appreciated his approach. They realised he was trying not to make it a departmental plan with community embellishments. They knew he only intervened when he thought the group has not considered all points of view on a matter.

Dealing with the community

One of the requirements of the guidelines for salinity management plans is evidence of community support. Sunraysia is a large community, quite diverse socially, if not agriculturally. Few growers have considered salinity to be a problem since drainage was installed decades ago. The salinity problem is not visible or clearly defined. This made it even harder to convince the community to become involved with a salinity management plan that was more a government initiative than the result of community pressure. In this sense, consultation was inevitably going to be a two way process; the working group needed to encourage the community to understand the problem and the plan and needed also to anticipate the community's reaction to the plan.
One working group member observed, "It always worries me when you have to go to the public because you know they aren't interested. You have to either sensationalise things or provide an incentive." Sensationalism is not credible in the long term. Incentives might be acceptable to the community, but they must also satisfy the government. The working group was in a difficult situation.

Community education played a larger than usual part of the consultation strategy. Community awareness of salinity has increased through programs such as Watertable Watch in which test wells were sited in main shopping centre and community service advertisements on local television advised people when to water their lawns to minimise water loss to the watertable.

The plan

The Sunraysia salinity plan was released in November 1991. A major component of the plan was a package of recommended farm management improvements. These claimed to offer the farmer the chance to increase farm income by 10 per cent and reduce drainage flows by 25 per cent. The plan proposed incentives for whole farm plans, sprinkler system checks, sprinkler system design, water supply meters and the establishment of electric pumping systems. The aim of these incentives is to increase the adoption rate of improved irrigation systems from 2.4 per cent to 3.6 per cent of irrigators per annum. Perhaps a greater challenge facing the planners is encouraging the improved management practices needed to take advantage of improved irrigation systems. Irrigators who apply for the incentives will be required to undertake an accredited farm management course.

Other components of the plan aim to improve the efficiency of the irrigation supply system by gradually replacing leaking channels, strategic works to divert some drainage effluent away from the river Murray and an environmental rehabilitation program to restore degraded sites no longer needed for drainage disposal.

The Sunraysia area is unusual in northern Victoria because its salinity management plan will reduce the salt load on the Murray River, rather than increase it. This will provide extra salt disposal entitlements (or salt credits). The greatest challenge facing the working group is to determine what to do with the these salt credits. If the state government bears a large part of the costs of the plan it will want to reallocate the salt credits elsewhere in the state. This is likely to be in the Shepparton area. If so, the extra salt disposed by the Shepparton area will flow down river and give Sunraysia poorer quality water. This issue was not decided as this report was completed. The working group was consulting with the community through public meetings and using written material. LAAGs were considered to be an inappropriate consultation method given the 40,000 population of the planning region.
History of salinity action

The Avon and Richardson rivers flow from the hills between St Arnaud and Glenorchy, northwards through the Wimmera plains and into Lake Buloke near Donald. There are about 400 landholders in the combined catchment. The plains in the north and west of the catchment are cropping and mixed farming country, while the hills in the south-east are used mainly for sheep grazing.

The Avon-Richardson salinity management plan is arguably the most community-driven dry land salinity management plan in Victoria. Community activity can be traced back to 1956. The area where Lake Buloke overflows in wet years is crown leasehold land. The local landowners who held these leases formed the Lake Buloke Landholders' Association in 1960 to protect their interests in the leases. This association activated whenever the members perceived a direct and serious threat to their leasehold rights and thus threatened their livelihood.

Awareness of salinity was limited to a few areas within the catchment, areas where land was obviously and directly affected by salt. This was mainly the Lake Buloke landholders, people in the hills, and those right on the river. The Marnoo branch of the VFF formed a salinity sub-committee. The St Arnaud branch of the VFF also had a land protection sub-committee which did works in the upper catchment to control soil erosion. These groups organised their own affairs, with no coordination across the catchment.

Avon-Richardson Catchment Improvement Scheme

By the late 1980s some influential farmers came to realise that a whole-catchment approach was needed to tackle the problems concerning the various farmer groups across the catchment: erosion, salinity and flooding. A public meeting of the whole catchment was held in Donald in July 1986. The meeting was advertised and held under the banner of the Lake Buloke Landholders' Association, assisted by the St Arnaud and Marnoo VFF branches and officers of the Land Protection Division of the DCE. Sixty people attended the meeting and a motion was carried unanimously to form a committee to investigate what could be done. Two months later the Avon-Richardson Catchment Improvement Scheme (ARCIS) was formed, with John Colbert as its president.

The ARCIS committee had about 17 members, mainly from the north and west of the catchment. It met regularly, about every 6 to 8 weeks. ARCIS was a community organisation: there were no departmental officers on the committee. Officers were invited to meetings when the committee wanted them. Local departmental officers from DCE and DA decided at the outset not to go onto the committee, but to support the organisation from outside.

ARCIS's achievements were limited. Members had different ideas about the purpose of the group. Some members wanted tree planting, others wanted planning. Not all landholders in the catchment were as enthusiastic as the ARCIS committee members. ARCIS was a mystery to many landholders. The regular newsletter Landline, although seen as valuable by department officers, did not reach all the landholders.
One of the objectives of some ARCIS members had been to develop a management plan for the area, but little had been achieved towards this goal. ARCIS needed a different structure to get started with planning and to promote greater local community awareness and involvement. A sub-committee was formed to set new directions for ARCIS. It consisted of 3 departmental people, Roger Standen (DCE Bendigo), Terry Lewis (DCE Horsham) and Tony Kent (DA Bendigo), and 4 community members. From this sub-committee came the suggestion of breaking up the area into cells.

The catchment was subdivided into 7 separate areas, called cells. For example, the Lake Buloke Landholders' Association became the Lake Buloke cell. The cells are social as much as geographic areas. The cell boundaries proposed by the sub-committee were altered by the community, through ARCIS, to take account of social boundaries. The cells were formed early in 1988. Each cell has about 50 or 60 landholders, with perhaps 25 or 30 active members and a core of about 5 who run the cell. They meet 3 or 4 times per year, and are run by an informal committee. Cell activities are varied. Among other activities they run cropping and pasture trials, measure ground water salinity, have meetings with guest speakers, conduct tours of their area and plant trees.

The cells channel enthusiasm at a local level. They are autonomous and can look at their own problems without referring to another cell. Cells bring together local people who probably know each other already and have similar salinity problems. The cells do not work in isolation however; they have ARCIS as a coordinating body.

Formation of the working group

In the early days of ARCIS many of its members did not want to get involved in a large government-sponsored salinity management plan; they feared they would lose control of any planning. They sent an early lesson about this to the departments when they rejected money which had been allocated by one government department for a facilitator and a needs survey because they believed it meant allowing ‘bureaucrats’ control over how the money would be spent. The farmers distrusted ‘bureaucracy’. Although the departmental officers could see the need for a management plan, they still had to promote the idea to the community. They soon found that this took time. ARCIS members wanted control of the funds and resented government deciding for them how to spend the money. Forcing the agenda would have destroyed the good working relationship the departmental officers had with ARCIS. Eventually ARCIS office holders were convinced to participate, but only after careful and persistent persuasion from the Salinity Bureau and DCE officers.

The final decision to form a working group stemmed from a meeting between ARCIS, the Salinity Bureau, and local DA and DCE officers in July 1988. The decision to participate offered benefits to all. To develop a management plan for their catchment ARCIS needed money, and to get money from the Victorian Salinity Program they needed to adopt a standardised working group structure, as sanctioned by the Victorian Government. The ARCIS committee was seen as having an inappropriate structure for a working group. It was too big. It was unrepresentative, with very few members from the east side of the catchment. Not all cells were represented on the ARCIS committee. ARCIS represented farming interests, not community interests. Salinity Bureau guidelines for working groups required balanced representation, including wider community interests as well as a range of farming interests.

ARCIS perceived that it faced a choice between maintaining its complete independence and working in partnership with the government. ARCIS members realised that the cell structure of ARCIS was not suited to developing a salinity management plan. The solution was to maintain the existing ARCIS committee structure and set up a new working group: the Avon-
Richardson Land and Water Management Group. ARCIS remained as a central body to oversee the cell activities and to keep lobbying on broader issues not necessarily related to salinity (such as mining proposals or legislation to control tree clearing). The working group had only one job: to develop a salinity management plan. ARCIS could continue its independent role. The ARCIS committee saw itself as more permanent than the working group. As one ARCIS committee member said, ‘the planning group are preparing a plan for ARCIS’.

The existence of ARCIS demonstrates that the community will get involved and stay involved with issues if it thinks they are important and immediate enough to warrant attention. The cells of ARCIS are capable of being permanent because they are large enough to contain a group of leaders committed to maintaining their cell. The cells are the basis of the working group and will probably be important in implementation. The working group is ephemeral, but the cells are likely to remain. ARCIS may have a useful role in dispute resolution at a catchment level. There are few organisations for land improvement so strongly controlled by farmers; it is not surprising that ARCIS members wanted to maintain that independence.

Composition of the working group

The working group consisted of one representative from each of the seven cells, plus two municipal representatives. Four shires had part of their municipality within the sub-region. The Shire of Stawell was represented through Alan Kingston of the Callawadda cell. The two formal municipal representatives were from the Shire of Donald and the Shire of Kara Kara. There was one woman on the working group, Fiona Burchell from Banyena. All nine group members were farmers.

An attempt was made, without success, to comply with Salinity Bureau guidelines to have other community groups represented. Advertising in the local press and the Bendigo Advertiser elicited no response. Talking to local groups did not generate interest. There were several interests which could have been represented, for example recreational interests on the local lakes. However, those outside the farming community had no desire to be involved. Presumably they saw salinity as a farmers' problem rather than everyone's problem. The St Arnaud Field Naturalists wanted to be kept informed of the working group's progress, but preferred not to be directly involved. Many of the potential representatives of non-farming group were farmers anyway. In a farming district with no major towns, this is not surprising. The working group decided not to actively chase or accept representation from groups that seemed only half interested. Positions on the working group were not advertised in Melbourne because those involved with forming the working group wanted local people on the group.

The working group justified not having wider representation in two ways. One argument was that no-one else was interested enough to participate. The other was that ‘we are all involved in other groups anyway’. For example Russell Reseigh, the Shire of Donald representative, was also involved in the local Field and Game association. The problem is that he would be seen by the public as representing the Shire of Donald, rather than both the shire and the Field and Game association. To make his involvement with both groups be seen to be active he needed to inform and consult with both groups regularly. The groups that were not represented were sent copies of the minutes of working group meetings, to at least keep them informed.

The working group saw itself as representative of the community to an extent. The members saw themselves as representative of the landholders, in terms of ages and views. However, they recognised they were not representative of those landholders who were not as interested in the salinity problem as they were. The community people we interviewed, particularly the ARCIS committee members, stressed the need for the plan to be developed by farmers, rather than departmental people or town dwellers, because the farmers were the ones who would
have to implement and help pay for the plan. No group can be completely representative, because representativeness is only an ideal. All that can be done is to make every effort to ensure that the working group is as representative as possible.

The working group had a reasonable balance of conservative and progressive farmers and enthusiasts needed to give it credibility with a wide range of farmers, together with the backing of an established local organisation. The lack of involvement of town people is a problem faced throughout the Victorian Salinity Program. Although people in the towns need to be kept informed of the issues and the working group's progress, there seems little point in trying to involve people who don't want to be involved. Any town dweller who is on the working group may not be representative of those the person was supposed to represent.

ARCIS and the cells used the formation of the working group as a chance to get some `new blood' involved. Each cell chose its own representative on the working group, rather than having the representatives elected at a public meeting of the whole catchment. Only two ARCIS committee members were on the working group. One of these was the chairman of the working group, Terry Simpson from Winjalllok, who was the driving force behind the St Arnaud VFF branch's involvement in the early days. The other was Alan Kingston from Callawadda. Getting new people involved was a major success for the cells; this may not have been possible without the cell structure. It is easier for interested people to achieve prominence in their cells and gain the confidence of cell leaders than it is for them to get involved with a larger organisation like ARCIS.

Just because few ARCIS committee members were not on the working group didn't mean that their views were not represented. Some people might have considered the cell representatives on the working group 'puppets' of the older, more influential ARCIS committee members in their cells. Those involved saw this as the high profile people in ARCIS being behind their cell representatives. Certainly the chairman of the working group (an ARCIS committee member) would have been unhappy if ARCIS attempted to interfere with the working group's activities.

The working group members were not necessarily younger than the ARCIS committee members. They covered a range of ages from mid-twenties upwards. A large age range is important because different working group members are able to talk to community people of different ages. Getting new people involved in local organisations is always difficult; getting young people in is even harder.

The planning process

The first two working group meetings were chaired by the project officer, Adrian Kennelly. This frustrated some of the working group members. The members were keen to have a strong chairman from the community. An assertive chairman is an advantage to a working group when dealing with government departments, but it is important that the chairman does not dominate the group. The chairman the group chose, Terry Simpson, had been restoring degraded land to a profitable state for many years and had been conducting a campaign to urge others to do so. He had definite ideas of the direction the working group should take. He was elected by the working group unopposed as chairman.

The working group faced time pressures and unrealistic deadlines. The government had committed itself to a completion date of 1989 for the Avon-Richardon plan in the policy document which launched Salt Action: Joint Action, the Victorian Government's Salinity Strategy. The group did not first meet until late 1989. The delay was an inevitable result of the cautious attitude of ARCIS towards involvement in the program. One could have anticipated these timetables would be broken as the group attempted to enthuse the rest of the
catchment community about the need to prepare and implement a plan. Few farmers in dry land areas consider salinity to be a serious personal problem. Most have other, more pressing, concerns.

Power of the working group

The working group members thought the group had enough power to carry out its aims. They also thought that the government would listen to them provided they stuck to their aims. The working group had the support of the ARCIS committee, which may have helped in their negotiations with the government. The views of working group members on following guidelines varied. On one extreme is the departmental officer's view, that guidelines about spending government funds are rules which must be followed. On the other extreme is the outspoken community member's view: 'If there is something of concern, I'm completely disregarding it.' The working group recognised that the government would not hand over funds without knowing where the funds were going. They didn't mind guidelines if the government put up the money. However, they did not see guidelines as a problem at the early stage in their planning process.

The role of government officers

As with the other dry land plans, the lead agency responsible for administration and co-ordination of the Avon-Richardson Land and Water Management Plan was the Department of Conservation and Environment. The sub-region was split between the Bendigo and Horsham regions of DCE. Supporting ARCIS effectively required co-operation between DCE extension officers in Bendigo and Horsham.

With formalisation of the planning process came the need for coordinated management. The Avon-Richardson working group was supported by Adrian Kennelly, a project officer based at the DCE office in Bendigo. Along with the project officers for the three other dry land salinity management plans administered by the Bendigo office of DCE, Adrian reported to the senior salinity planner with DCE in Bendigo, David Luke. The project officer's position was at Science-2 level, rather than Science-1, as with many other salinity planning projects. This allowed someone with more experienced to be employed. The Avon-Richardson sub-region shared a community education officer with the other three dry land regions whose project officers were based in Bendigo.

Adrian Kennelly came to Avon-Richardson without local knowledge and had to build up his local knowledge to gain credibility. He did this, but it reminds us that in its early years the explosive growth of Victoria's Salinity Program made the program hungry for new staff, many of whom did not have the experience or local knowledge expected of them initially. The rapid turnover of staff in temporary positions added to this problem.

Technical support for the development of the plan was the responsibility of the Avon-Richardson Land and Water Management Planning Support Group. This group consisted mainly of DCE officers, supplemented by RWC and DA officers and a project officer from the Shire of Stawell. Initially, the only overlap between the membership of the working group and the planning support group was through the project officer. He was keen to see the working group better represented on the planning support group. After three planning support group meetings the working group nominated three of their number to act as working group representatives on the planning support group. This overlap of membership between the two group was essential for the members of each group to build an understanding of the perspective of the other group. The relationship between the two groups is critical to the success of a plan because the working group has to be able to tell the scientists what to do and expect it to be done.
The technical support group tried to gather background technical information together early, to give the working group an understanding of the problem. Full access to background information and current knowledge early in the life of the working group makes it easier for the working group to consider options for salinity control.

The community members were happy with the role of the departmental officers. They recognised the need for technical expertise, as well as the involvement of government. The community members said their relationship with the departmental officers was good. Some people’s attitudes toward government officers had changed significantly, from disdain to enthusiasm for working with them. The working group members had come to see the departmental officers as working for the community as much as working for the government. One working group member commented that their local extension officer was ‘our man in the CF&L, rather than their man here’.

Dealing with the community

Consultation with farmers

Consultation with the rural community in the Avon-Richardson sub-region was given a head start by the presence of the cells. They act as an existing structure through which the community can be consulted. Other sub-regions have had geographic representation in their working group membership, but they have not had an existing structure of local groups. Consultation with cells is continuous. Cell representatives on the working group discuss the developing plan with their cell committees and at meetings of the cell members. About a third of the cell members attend any one cell meeting, with perhaps up to two thirds attending at least one meeting. It is not possible to get everyone involved. The third who never attend might have their views represented by those who do attend, but it is hard to know.

Cells are probably the most equitable way in which rural people in the sub-region can be consulted. Whilst those attending a cell meeting may not be fully representative of the farming population, they are certainly no less representative than any other organisation. Consulting with, say, the VFF branches would only reach the same people that consulting with the cells would reach. It may be even more selective than consulting with the cells. The cells were brought together by applying for and receiving funding for works on the ground. The catchment is nearly small enough for normal social interaction to cover the people who never attend cell meetings. This is one of the reasons the cells were set up in the first place.

Consultation with other interest groups

Even in the early stages of ARCIS, Roger Standen and Terry Lewis saw the need for the wider community to be involved in ARCIS. The farmers rejected this, thinking that they would be hamstrung by urban people interfering with their affairs. Most (but not all) of the farmers involved with planning we spoke to still thought this way. The departmental officers were still trying to convince them of the importance of going beyond the farms to involve and consult with the wider community. This attitude was held most strongly by the ARCIS committee members, but some people on the working group agreed with it. Those working group members only newly involved in planning were more likely to favour wider community representation.

Most of the farmers argued that it is they who will be paying for the implementation of the plan, therefore they are the ones who need to be consulted. They said it was not a closed shop, but they were wary of what they saw as ‘radical groups coming in and telling us what to do’. ‘Landholders are the ones who will make it happen. We don’t want outsiders telling us what to do, we want to make it happen from within.’ The departmental officers and some of
the farmers disagreed, and would have liked more involvement from the wider community. The lack of interest in the plan from the town people, despite efforts to get them involved, seemed to have dampened this enthusiasm. Opinion now seems to be that, although it is a pity that town people haven't been enticed into involvement, it is not critical for them to be on side unless the plan directly involves them.

Lack of representation from town people on a working group does not preclude their commenting on the plan as it is being developed. Several community organisations said they did not want to be directly involved, but would like to be kept informed of the progress of the working group. These organisations were sent copies of the minutes of working group meetings. As with any issue, while people do not see a problem they do not wish to get involved. As soon as they perceive a threat they will be quick to respond.

The poor representation of other interest groups on the working group will only be a problem if the support of the interest groups is essential to the successful development and smooth implementation of the plan. While the interest groups are not interested in being involved it is hard for them to argue that they should have been involved. All that is necessary is to keep them informed of the issues and options being considered, the decisions being made and the consequences for the group of the decisions. This sounds like a lot, but it is necessary to prevent the groups from possibly mobilising support against the plan at a later date.

Community education

Much of the so-called community education in predominantly rural sub-regions such as Avon-Richardson is undertaken as extension programs. This is certainly true of community education for a farming audience. Many of the ongoing community education methods (cum extension programs) in the Avon-Richardson area were instituted several years ago by departmental officers with the support of ARCIS. It was difficult to tell where ARCIS stopped and the working group began, in regard to consultation and community education. The regular ARCIS newsletter, Landline, was sent to every landholder in the catchment. Some air flights were organised so people could view the area's salinity problem from the air, to get a better overview of the significance of the problem. The cells have all had bus trips.

A valuable role taken by the cells was to organise cropping and pasture trials for their area. This enabled them to evaluate different crops and pastures. The trials were usually coordinated by a local farm consultant. The cells applied for and sometimes received external funding to finance the trials. Sometimes other sources of funding were necessary. The Lake Buloke cell struck a voluntary levy to assist with finance. The levy was low, about $120 per year for 350 acres leasehold. However, some landholders were not interested in paying even this low amount. If they couldn't even get people who were directly involved to pay for useful information, they were not going to attract interest from people in the towns.

Although town people weren't able to be enticed onto the working group, they still received some community education. The newsletter, Landline, as well as going to every landholder in the catchment, was sent to community groups in the towns. Free tours of the catchment were organised, but urban people did not go on them, even with a free lunch. Perhaps there really is no such thing as a free lunch: there is always a cost, even if it is only to your perception of your own role (or lack of one). If the people in the towns see salinity as something which does not involve them, they will see no need to participate. Nothing is a bargain unless you really need it!

The planners felt that, although community awareness was valuable, it wouldn't solve the salinity problem. The major problem needed to be dealt with first. They saw the achievement of greater awareness by landholders as progress and were less concerned by low awareness in the towns. They didn't see themselves as dealing with the wider community.
The planners did, however, see a role for community education in maintaining political support for salinity planning.

The plan

The Avon-Richardson plan was nearing completion as this report was finalised. The working group has met nearly 40 times to produce a plan which is a reflection of its independent stance. It will reduce the now traditional emphasis on tree planting for salinity control and place a greater emphasis on pasture improvement. The group sees more value in conserving existing remnant vegetation than in funding hilltop tree planting. A difficult issue the group faces is who implements the plan. The working group originally intended to disband after the management plan was developed. Although the ARCIS committee structure was not appropriate for a working group, it may with suitable `democratisation' make a satisfactory implementation group. A new structure to oversee the implementation of the plan will be recommended by the working group.

Perhaps the greatest emphasis of the plan will be for an increased emphasis on agronomic extension. The working group members are clear that the plan is firmly focussed on changes in farm management. One view is that `the plan won't be hard to implement, because most of it will be farm improvement'. On the other hand, some think that implementation will be the hardest part, because `we have to sell the ideas to the landholders, we have to prove that it works, and we won't be able to sell it to everybody. But the more people we involve, the better it will be.' They recognise that implementation will be slow, making comments such as `to change views you can't rush it', `it seems that slow's the word' and `farmers are conservative, you can't push them'.
PART 3: COMPARISONS CONTRASTS AND CONCLUSIONS
FORMING THE GROUP

Who pressures for action?

Knowing who pressured for the development of a salinity management plan is important information for anyone responsible for the formation of a community planning group. Some of the plans we have discussed, Tragowel Plains, Nangiloc-Colignan and Campaspe West, were initiated in response to community pressure for action to control salinity. Other plans, such as Sunraysia, were government-inspired initiatives, generally as part of the Salt Action: Joint Action commitment to develop salinity management plans in all sub-regions `known to experience or contribute to significant salinity problems'.

It is easy for the community and observers to perceive cynical motives on the part of government departments if planning was instigated as part of a government initiative, rather than as a result of community pressure. Few people in Sunraysia wanted `salinity planning'; it would be easy for informed members of the Sunraysia community to think the plan was driven by a desire to obtain salt disposal credits for use upstream. Similarly, it is easy for cynics to attribute the formation of a working group for the area from Nyah to the South Australian border to the RWC's desire to sell unallocated water stored in the Dartmouth dam. These perceptions can be fuelled by historic suspicion of government departments. This suspicion tends to be a product of the history of government involvement in an area. But where salinity problems are manifest mainly in the form of externalities, it is not surprising that the pressure for the development of a salinity plan may come from a government department, rather than the community. Where government departments are pressuring for resolution of a salinity externality in the face of community suspicion, the community planning process offers a means of improving relationships between community and departments and achieving progress. Community planning can answer both departmental and wider community needs.

On the other side of the ledger, one needs to be careful not to read too much into the description of some plans as `community instigated'. The reality of community pressure is never as simple as these few words may suggest. First, the community rarely acts as a single united entity. In areas where the pressure to develop a salinity management plan came from the community, there was only ever a minority of people in the community actively pushing for action. These people were unrepresentative of the wider community in that they were sufficiently motivated to devote energy to influencing government decisions. The majority of the community were too busy, too uninterested or too preoccupied.

Secondly, the simple perception of community pressure for action often overlooks the crucial role played by government officers. In the Victorian Salinity Program the development of the impetus for a community plan has often been the outcome of a partnership between community activists and `friends in the departments'. Even the most community-inspired plans required the efforts of departmental officers to guide the establishment and development of the groups. Ken McDougall's enthusiasm for action in the Tragowel Plains may have floundered had Sharman Stone not maintained momentum at the bureaucratic level for funding and group establishment. ARCIS may never have been established in Avon-Richardson without the efforts of Terry Lewis and Roger Standen in co-ordinating the various concerned groups in the catchment. The successful extension officer eventually becomes part of the community, and in this sense the distinction between community and government activity is necessarily blurred.
Setting the Boundaries

Community instigation is a valuable ingredient in a successful plan. However, in itself it is not the major determinant of successful planning. Community acceptance of the outcome of the planning process depends more on the nature of the outcome. The outcome is in turn a reflection of the commitment of all interest groups to achieving a mutually acceptable solution. Experience of environmental mediation in the United States points clearly to the unviability of environmental mediation where parties are not prepared for a compromise.75

Those facilitating the formation of a working group cannot be responsible for ensuring all parties have this level of commitment. But, assuming this level of commitment has or will develop, they must achieve two basic objectives. One of these objectives is to form a working group which includes all relevant interest groups. This is the philosophy of total catchment management. The other objective is to create a structure for a working group which will allow a group of committed individuals to work effectively to develop a plan.

These two objectives can be conflicting. The wider the representation of interest groups, the more difficult it will be for the group to work with common purpose and the less likely all members will be committed to find a mutually acceptable solution. One difficulty will be the increasing complexity of resolving conflict between interest groups. Another difficulty will be the sheer size of the group. Taken to its extreme the Total Catchment Management approach would see planning for the whole of northern Victoria take place within a single catchment, the Murray Darling Basin. To effectively represent all the interest groups within this catchment in a single effective representative group is obviously impossible.76 Exclusion of interest groups, whether by design or by unintentional practice, may result in a cohesive and effective group which proposes a plan unacceptable to an important unrepresentative constituency. The challenge for those facilitating the creation of a community working group is to find a balance between representation and effectiveness. We detected three differing approaches in the Victorian salinity program.

In the Tragowel Plains, the original impetus for planning came from an unrepresentative group in the plains community. With careful selection a group was formed which was reasonably representative of a community of approximately 440 farm households. The final plan satisfied the requirements of the most of this small local community. Immediate downstream interests were not represented on the Tragowel Plains Sub-Regional Working Group and were not satisfied with the plan. Negotiations over drainage from the Tragowel Plains were conducted at the working group level, between the Tragowel Plains and Kerang Lakes working groups. Government acted as an arbiter between the Tragowel group and the downstream Kerang Lakes group. We have called this the `closed sub-regional' method. It maximises the likelihood of the group achieving a common purpose by excluding direct representation of downstream interests.

The Campaspe West group consisted not only of representatives from the immediate community who would eventually vote on the plan, but also representatives from downstream interests - drain and river diverters. These downstream drainage interests had four seats on the working group. This is an `open sub-regional' method. The community rejection of the Campaspe West plan shows the difficulty that may be encountered even when accommodating all interest groups.

The third method is `regional planning' as was used in Shepparton. The Shepparton area was far larger and included many more households than a sub-region. The sheer size of the community necessitated a different approach to community education, consultation and composition of the working group. Here many interests can be found within an area, but the difficulty is representing all on the working group. This difficulty was partly overcome by
means of a separate sub-committee structure. Regional planning groups must sacrifice some of the closer contact and gatekeeping achieved by sub-regional planning groups.

In the end, a "community of common concern" will often define itself as much by the interests it excludes as by the interests it shares. Some exclusion of other legitimate community interests from any working group is inevitable. Those facilitating the formation of a group must ensure all interests within the confined community are included and government must ensure the interests of those not in the planning group can be considered. This will be in the form of clear guidelines which set out the boundaries within which planning groups can propose action, the requirement for wider consultation with the community beyond the planning area boundaries, and through dispute resolution when necessary. The planning group should be as small as possible while representing all necessary interests.

Appointing the Working Group Members

Several different methods were used to form the working groups. These methods covered a continuum from formal ballot, through public meetings to endorse representatives whose involvement had already been canvassed, to the selection of community-nominated representatives by government. Different methods were used in different areas, for particular purposes. In most cases the methods used can be described as appropriate because there was no opposition to the group membership. The key differences we observed were in the method of selection: voting or government appointment, and between those areas where there was strong community interest in planning and those areas where there was little community interest.

In the Kerang Lakes area there was strong interest in salinity issues from a segment of the rural population. This interest was reflected in the excess of nominations over positions available for some of the community representative positions. Departmental officers determined the interests who would be represented on the working group and representatives were elected in a formal ballot organised by the Electoral Commission. This resulted in a fierce election, with advertisements in the local newspapers. The election proved difficult to organise and only about a third of people eligible voted. Formal voting in this manner can be divisive and create early animosities. The representatives elected feel bound to fight for their constituencies. However, the Kerang Lakes area had a recent history of bitter legal conflict over salinity and no other method of selecting representatives may have been deemed acceptable.

The other extreme of membership selection involved the government calling for nominations from community groups, then making selections from the nominations received. This process was used to form SPPAC. There were twice as many nominations received as positions available. SPPAC members were first selected by a team of senior departmental officers, then these selections were reviewed by the Cabinet Committee. This process is appropriate only for regional groups, where it would be difficult for the community to be properly represented in decision making and where salinity control is not a "red hot" issue. Potential representatives would be known only in a small part of the area. Only a small minority of the community is concerned about salinity. Public meetings would be unlikely to get large attendances and turnout for any formal vote would be very small. In this situation the departmental representatives may be able to make a more strategic choice than the community.

A useful compromise method was used in the Tragowel Plains. Roger O'Farrell, who established the working group, hardly knew the area at the time. He found out who were the leaders of the Tragowel Plains community and chose from these leaders a group which could adequately represent all sections of the Tragowel Plains community. Everybody chosen was
able to represent more than one group in the community. Roger then called a public meeting to form the group and ensured all those members of his chosen group who wanted to be involved were nominated. The advantage of this method was that it ensured the members would act on behalf of the whole community, rather than just one constituency. Although the public meeting to form the group must be planned and in part orchestrated, it must be flexible. For example, the boundaries of the Tragowel Plains study area were changed at this meeting.

Any of these methods may be appropriate where there is high level of community interest in the planning issues. Community interest is often greatest where there is a high level of conflict and mistrust. Whatever method of forming the group is used, the group must have the confidence of the community. If there are deep divisions in a community, we suspect no method of selecting working group members can ensure representatives will represent the whole area rather than just their constituency. A formal ballot may be necessary for reasons of propriety. Formal voting is more likely to be called upon when mistrust is strong. When strong disagreements arose over the proposed Campaspe West plan, the objectors deemed that the only acceptable method of determining community views on the plan was by secret ballot.

In other circumstances, however, a ballot would involve unnecessary formality. For regional groups the nomination and selection approach used for SPPAC appears to be the most appropriate method of forming the group. For sub-regional groups the community should be able to play a more direct role in the selection of members. The method used to form the Tragowel Plains Working Group is a compromise between the other two methods and deserves to be considered by anyone forming a working group.

The secondary issue is what to do when there is an excess of nominations over positions. These people have commitment and skills which a group would be unwise to ignore. Where formal balloting has not been used, the best solution seems to be that used in Sunraysia and Nangiloc-Colignan, where those people became deputy representatives, who could attend working group meetings but only vote if the full representative was not present. It helps to maintain the enthusiasm of the deputies if they are given a responsible role, such as membership of a sub-committee. Deputies are an excellent way of spreading the responsibility for decision making somewhat wider without making the working group too large to be effective. In areas where the deputy system was not used, those who were not elected generally did not remain involved.

A low level of community interest in an issue can lead to a differing set of challenges. The main question is how to stimulate interest and commitment from individuals who might take on the responsibility of working group membership. The most successful approach seems to have been in Sunraysia where an initial shortage of interested persons was transformed into a situation where there was an excess of nominations over positions. A steering group was established to drum up support and interest before the working group was formed. The steering group was formed out of a series of information sessions. One professional person went to a meeting to find out about salinity and ended up on the steering group and then the working group. The steering group succeeded in fostering interest among several people and some members of the steering group missed out on working group positions. Hence the need to develop an effective deputy system.

The existence of strong interest from one quarter of the community should not be mistaken as a sign that further effort need not be put into stimulating interest from other sections of the community, as the Campaspe West experience indicates.

Most working groups were elected at public meetings. Public meetings are notorious for being attended only by unrepresentative people, but any method of selecting representatives has this problem and public meetings are probably no worse than any other method in this
respect. Most methods involve unrepresentative people selecting unrepresentative representatives. In most cases intervention has been motivated by the objective of achieving wider representation on working groups. Community leaders have been active participants in this process.

What is clear from all these examples is the active role which must be played by those who are responsible to government for the formation of a group. Some may view this degree of intervention with cynicism. The cynicism is so far unjustified. However, with declining agency budgets and increasing emphasis upon demonstrated community support in funding applications, there may be an increasing tendency for competing government agencies (within and between states) to make competitive claims to community support for their agency's programs. This competition may have positive outcomes for local communities who can manipulate the process to increase responsiveness of agencies to local community requirements. However, this competition may also be manifest in attempts to influence the structure of community groups or appointment processes to increase the likelihood of the appointment of representatives who share a particular agency view or allegiance. There is also a risk of one agency perceiving community group decisions to be an outcome of agency bias because they threaten to disadvantage that department.

These possible future problems raise the important issues of just who is representative. Is it the person who is willing to commit time to representing his or her community, is it someone appointed by the minister of a particular agency on the agency's recommendation, or is it someone who answers a random sample survey?

Identifying Interest Groups

Representation of all key interest groups is an important goal in the creation of a working group. If those involved in planning are unrepresentative and have unrepresentative objectives, such as in Campaspe West, planning risks local rejection and failure. The solution is to know who will be asked to approve the plan and then ensure all important interest groups in this community are represented on the planning group. Identifying the important interest groups is not necessarily a simple task. The groups may not become obvious until the planning process is underway. Interest groups may be represented directly, indirectly or not at all. Interest groups include both geographic areas with their own representatives and broader interests.

Most working groups used representation based upon geographic areas. The boundaries of areas with separate representation must be acceptable to the community. In both Avon-Richardson and Nangiloc-Colignan the boundaries chosen by departmental officers were modified by the community members who were consulted on this matter.

Most working groups had direct representation from interest groups not based upon limited geographical areas. Campaspe West and Kerang Lakes are the most obvious, but the Salinity Program model appears to be that interest groups are represented overtly and explicitly. Most working groups contained an environmental issues representative. However, the lower the political level and the smaller the geographic area in which working groups operate, the less is the need for representation of interest groups to be explicit. Sub-regional working groups can operate quite well with interest groups only indirectly represented. The Tragowel Plains working group has shown this.

The members of the Tragowel Plains working group were chosen because they would be able to represent the different interest groups in the area, not because they did represent the groups. The composition of the group was chosen so there would be somebody on the group who could articulate the viewpoint of all the relevant interest groups in the area. However,
no-one was on the group specifically to represent their interest group. The interest groups were represented indirectly. Many working group members were involved with more than one interest group. If interests are to be represented indirectly, the representation must be able to cover all points of view. There must be adequate representation for all parts of the community to be satisfied by the representation they are given. This is easier to achieve in a small community than in a larger area.

Representativeness can be viewed from other perspectives. Different types of people may become community representatives on working groups. There might be agri-politicians, statesmen, conservatives or radicals. A balance of types is needed to ensure there are people for all the roles within the group and to ensure all informal interest groups are represented within the working group. A group composed of only one type of person is unlikely to be able to properly represent the whole community. It is particularly important to ensure that a group is not dominated by rural elites. Many of the people in the community who have made the greatest contributions to the Salinity Program had no previous experience in salinity politics. Often fresh talent is as valuable as people experienced in salinity politics who can represent their organisation.

The nature of the region is at least as important as the method of selecting the group members in influencing the nature of the members selected. Factors such as the size of the region, the nature of the salinity problem in the region and the history of salinity action (or inaction) in the region are important. These factors determine who in the community is interested in participating. The selection method becomes more important when there is insufficient interest in salinity in the community and people must be motivated to become interested.

The nature of community representation

The representativeness of working group members is a conundrum. Whatever the representativeness of the working group members initially, it is inevitable that they become unrepresentative through the life of the working group. They learn of the complex trade-offs required and the constraints on spending government money. The rest of the community does not have to grapple with these problems. The community will never achieve the level of knowledge the working group members come to possess. This knowledge gap is unavoidable, community education will never fill it. Working group members become statesmanlike. They come to understand and accept the realities of government. They often become willing to accept a community share of the costs of implementation greater than the rest of the community would tolerate.

The extent to which working group members become statesmen is influenced by the scale of planning with which they are involved. A working group member's constituency is really the people with whom that person consults. Sub-regional working groups consulted with individual farmers in their areas. SPPAC, however, were a step removed from individual farmers, through the farmer and rural organisations which made up the SPPAC members' constituencies. As chairman of SPPAC, John Dainton could call for regulation to ensure implementation because he had adopted the role of a statesman. His constituency would not reject him. The chairman of a sub-regional working group would lose a lot of credibility among his farmer constituency if he tried to force regulation on the community.

Statemanship is, however, a risk to the community representative. The community must have confidence in the working group. The working group members do not earn this confidence simply by being representative at appointment. They earn it by making the decisions the community wants them to make. The only effective way for working group members to ensure the decisions they are making will be acceptable to the community is by asking the community. Working group members must consult members of the community informally.
throughout the life of the group, but especially when there is a difficult decision to be made. Only if they make a real effort to keep in touch with community values can working group members maintain this valuable gatekeeping role.
12

DEVELOPING THE PLAN

Community planning seems to demand more time and effort than participants initially expect. The workload of a community working group is high, much higher than nearly every group member we interviewed had expected. Meetings were frequent, with most groups meeting at least monthly. At one extreme, the Barr Creek plan required only about twenty meetings, but the working group had a consultant's report from which to work. Although the group rejected much of that report, it provided a structure from which to work. At the other extreme, the Kerang Lakes working group had its 86th meeting in January 1992 when the group launched its draft plan. The group had met almost fortnightly since it began in August 1987.

The number and frequency of meetings required to handle the workload of the group depends on several factors. Different working groups took on different workloads for themselves. Sometimes this was because the salinity problem in some areas was more complex than in other areas. Other times it was because some groups decided to investigate more issues more closely. The workload of the Kerang Lakes Working Group was greater than that of the other groups, for both reasons. For each group, the frequency of meetings varied throughout the life of the group. We noticed some similarity in the process of planning followed by the groups whose members we interviewed. This structure was partly a reflection of universal group processes and partly imposed by the planning guidelines which groups were required to follow.

The Planning Process

The first few meetings of all groups achieved little in tangible terms. All the working groups required several meetings before they could function effectively. These meetings were spent in establishing the operating style of the group and, more importantly, allowing the members to get to know each other. Few members of any of the groups knew each other already. Groups such as these cannot function efficiently until the members know each other, their style, their ideas and what they mean when they say things. This cannot be hurried. "Ice-breaking" exercises would not speed this up because they do not tell the members how other members will behave in meetings. The first few meetings might seem frustratingly slow for people looking for quick action from a working group, but they should not be seen as time wasted.

One task completed by most groups in the first few meetings was electing a chairman. All sub-regional working group chairmen were elected by their group. Only the chairman of SPPAC was appointed by government. SPPAC was established according to a different structure, before most of the other working groups began. In most cases the choice of chairman was obvious to the group. There was usually one person who had a long involvement and interest in salinity, had the confidence of the group (and ultimately most of the community), and who was prepared to fill the position. Generally the chairmen were elected unopposed.

With hindsight it appears that after the initial establishment period many groups spent between 3 months and a year either floundering or pursuing isolated issues. There are differing views as to the inevitability and desirability of this period. One view holds that this period can be avoided by not activating a community group until a work program has been planned and the supporting public servants have prepared their reports to deliver to the group. An alternative view is that directing a group's work program in this manner will convince the group members that they are being given little autonomy and trust by the government and public servants. There is no firm answer to this dilemma. The appropriate course of action
may well need to be decided with characteristics of a group in mind. We doubt that in its first year of work the Kerang Lakes group would have accepted a work plan from the government, though it is ironic that now some members regret some of the time wasted early in the life of their group. Other groups have welcomed a structure of work to get on with their task from almost their first meeting.

Whatever initial attitudes, all groups seem to have eventually accepted a work plan which has been provided by the project officer or the planning support group. In some cases groups have realised the work plan was necessary to create a plan which conformed to the government's guidelines. The plan became a vehicle to commit the various departmental officers to provide required support to the group. Most work plans began with an initial period of issue gathering in which both the group members and the various departments put on the table the issues which concerned them. There was little attempt to evaluate or eliminate issues at this stage. This was followed by the presentation of reports from technical experts: hydrogeologists, agronomists, engineers, economists and others. For many group members there was much to absorb in this period. The reports often raised new options or cast options in a new light.

At the end of the reporting period all groups faced the daunting task of integrating the information they had at their disposal into a coherent plan. In all cases the framework for integration was provided by consultants or departmental officers working with the group. This was a demanding time for all working groups. Meetings became more frequent as groups were asked to decide on the major direction and the detailed options of their plans. In most cases the pressure was intensified by the approach of deadlines for the presentation of plans.

Given the complexity of the problems faced by groups, there seemed to be little alternative to the leading role played by consultants or departmental officers in setting the methodology for integration. An obvious question arises - will there be a conflict of interest for the integrator? Clear and accepted planning guidelines are the best means of reducing this risk. Once the ground for negotiation between groups and government is established, the consultant will know what government expects of the integrator and the group will need the integrator to meet these guidelines.

The final phase of report writing was in most cases a greater burden on the departmental officers than the working group members.

Role of Departmental officers

Salinity management plans depend not only on the efforts of community working group members, but also upon the hard work of the departmental officers who support them. There are two different types of departmental officers involved in the planning process. One group is the scientists and technical staff who support the working group through research and investigation. The other group is the project officers who manage the operation of the working group. The Salinity Program has placed great demands on all these staff.

The role of the project officer is complex. Geoff Parr-Smith has noted five areas of skill a project officer or planning team must have:

- a knowledge and understanding of environmental systems and processes, so that inappropriate consequences can be identified from proposed actions, and avoided.
a knowledge and understanding of the planning process, and its distinction from plan content.

- analytical skill, to sift the input information and develop outcomes, in terms of objectives, aims, actions and guidelines.

- interpersonal communications and conflict resolution skills, to handle the whole participatory process and to negotiate decisions between the many competing parties that are involved.

- authorship skills, to write quality plans quickly and easily. Rewriting and editing are frequently the most time consuming and inefficient parts of the plan production process. They come towards the end of the process, when management is often making strong demands for the finished plan document, and where there must be a delay if an extensive re-writing or editing is required. Many planning projects fall apart at this stage.'

This collection of skills sounds superhuman, and it is. The position combines extension skills in working with people and encouraging change, with project management skills. Moreover, the project management is complicated by the need for both community involvement and interdepartmental co-operation. The planning process requires experienced people and it wears them out. The supply of experienced staff is, naturally, limited. It is a major limiting factor to the development of salinity management plans.

There is a role for younger, less experienced staff, but they must be well supervised by experienced officers. The approach being taken in the Mildura and Bendigo areas is effective. Three irrigation salinity management plans are being developed in the Mildura area, and four dryland plans around Bendigo. Each has a project officer with few years of experience, but the project officers are supervised by an experienced officer who has overall responsibility for the project. This approach makes good use of experienced staff, while also offering good staff training opportunities. Meetings between all the project officers provided them with good opportunities to learn from each other's experiences. This is probably better than formal training.

A project officer needs a certain standing in the local community to be accepted and to operate effectively. Achieving such a standing takes time. However, the project nature of salinity management planning means that staff appointments are usually temporary. Staff have a limited time to establish their credentials to the community. Perhaps more importantly, the temporary nature of their positions makes them tempted to take other, permanent positions elsewhere, should positions become available, even before the planning process is finished. Although their experience is available somewhere else, it is lost to the area in which they have been working. The new project officer often must learn from scratch. The destructive instability brought about by this rapid turnover is only partially offset by a greater stability of staff in senior management positions.

Not only has the Salinity Program required a large number of staff, it has placed a heavy workload on those staff. The pressure of government-imposed deadlines, pressure for action from some sections of the community, and the strong commitment displayed by the working group members has encouraged staff to work long hours. As Geoff Parr-Smith noted above, this was most evident during the stage of writing the plans. For people like Stuart Brown and Bill Trewhella, who wrote the Shepparton Irrigation plan between them, and Mike Young, who wrote the Tragowel Plains plan, this meant tremendous pressure and a heavy workload.

The location of staff has changed during the life of the program. The Program Management Team of the Pilot Program was deliberately established independent of the departments involved. This approach had limited success. The PMT was able to act independently of the
departments. However, the departments from which the PMT members had been seconded from still tended to regard “their” PMT member as a part of their department, or at least a resource provided by their department. The sub-regional working groups now established have one particular government agency which leads their planning, and is responsible for providing staff. This approach seems to be working well.

It can be difficult for staff to know where their responsibilities lie. As government employees they have to ensure their working group considers the wider interests of the whole state, as represented by the government. As community development workers, they might feel obliged to support the community in its negotiations with government. Their difficult balancing act is to achieve an acceptable compromise. Most tend to start as government officers and gradually become community workers. By the time the plan is presented, they are often fighting passionately for their plan and their community. This change in allegiance is inevitable.

Government officers attend working group meetings for different reasons. Some attend as part of their support role to the group. These officers usually attend many working group meetings and build up a rapport with the group and its members. Some attend occasional meetings to explain their research. Some attend because the working group wants them to account for something they have done. Whatever the reason, sometimes the working group might want to discuss policy without the presence of government officers. The officers must be sensitive to the wishes of the working group.

The presence of government officers at public meetings can be intimidating. Often more departmental officers attend public meetings of the community than are necessary. Whilst they may be there only out of interest, and with the best of intentions, and deliberately not say anything, their very presence can intimidate members of the community.

A good working relationship between the working group and its support group is critical to the success of the planning process. The different working groups adopted their own particular relationships with their support group and their own decision making strategies. These depended mainly on how much a group trusted the departmental officers and the role a group gave itself. Most working groups operated somewhere between two extreme decision making styles. One extreme style is that the Technical Support Group develops a set of options and the working group then chooses between them. This was the approach taken by the Tragowel Plains working group. Not only must the working group trust the support group, there must be a support group. The SPPAC Dryland sub-committee never had a technical support group and Tragowel Plains did not have one until the working group had been operating for several months.

The other extreme occurs when the working group distrusts the government and its officers and wants to develop the options itself (or at the very least understand the development of the options). This was the style adopted by the Kerang Lakes working group. It is a major reason for the lengthiness of their planning process. The group scrutinised carefully any reports presented to it. The members wanted to achieve a detailed understanding of the contents and were not afraid to ask that sections be re-written. This approach requires that the working group members be technically knowledgeable, which either takes time to achieve or means that the members are unrepresentative right from the beginning.

Power relationships within working groups are influenced by the way interest groups are represented on the groups. Every group had representatives of separate geographic areas. The only possible exception, SPPAC, had separate dryland and irrigation councillors and its members were chosen so they were spread around the region.

A balance of power was present within the groups but rarely evident formally. Most issues in most groups were discussed then agreed by consensus. Formal voting on issues was not
common. No-one doubts there were tensions, but resolving differences through consensus is more satisfactory and less divisive than through voting.

Shortening the process

The enormity of the task and the thoroughness with which working group members examined technical information contributed to a lengthy planning process. For most working groups it seemed to take between thirty and forty meetings, over three to four years, to reach the stage of presenting a draft plan. In earlier chapters we have discussed the possibility of shortening the planning period. There are three reasons for wishing to achieve this aim - minimise the workload on voluntary community members, and minimise both the cost and the time of planning to speed the direction of resources to activity `on the ground'.

There is no doubt the responsibility of working group membership placed great demands upon community members. The workload on working group members consisted of more than just attending meetings. There were reports and background papers to read, sub-committee meetings to attend, meetings of community groups to address. The workload of extra meetings varied between the groups and, within each group, between the group members. The chairman of a working group might have spent the equivalent of two or three days per week on working group matters. However, all members had to read the reports to be able to contribute to the meetings effectively.

In most groups the chairman also had the major public role throughout the sub-region, with perhaps one or two others having some prominence, while most members were rarely in public view. In some groups, such as SPPAC, several of the members played significant public roles, making public statements, addressing meetings, generally being outspoken.

Most working group members had to balance these commitments against other commitments. The meeting load had to fit in with the farming calendar. The groups tended not to meet, or to meet less frequently, during busy periods such as harvest time. For example, the Sunraysia working group had fortnightly meetings, but broke for three to four months over harvest.

Despite these demands, with almost no exceptions, the working group members we interviewed said they thought all the meetings were necessary. They recognised the process took a long time and a lot of meetings, but did not think it could have been done in fewer meetings.

Community representatives were offered some compensation for their time through sitting fees. Historically, the departments had different policies regarding payment of their landholder committees. DA did not pay theirs, while the RWC paid a meeting and travel allowance. Working group members in sub-regions for which RWC was the lead agency were paid sitting fees, while those where DA was lead agency were not. Eventually the issue of payment for working group members became salient. To achieve uniformity, DA began paying sitting fees to the working group members on plans for which it was lead agency.

The level of payment of working group members is an important consideration. It should not be too high. Working group members must be seen by the community as community representatives, not de facto departmental officers. They have enough contact with departmental officers to taint them as government accomplices without being paid like bureaucrats. Most working group members would still have become involved without sitting fees; they were there because they wanted to be, not for the money. Working Groups are sometimes criticised for being dominated by wealthy farmers. However, increasing sitting fees would not by itself lead to better representation from less-wealthy people. Sitting fees set too low might lead working group members to question whether they are being taken
seriously. SPPAC requested sitting fees for this reason. On balance, sitting fees are probably best kept at a nominal level.

Despite the comments of the working group members, there are few possibilities for shortening the period the working groups need to develop management plans, particularly in irrigation areas. In the Boort district a working group was not formed until some of the technical work has been completed. It was hoped this would obviate the problem of the working group finding itself with little to do (and perhaps losing interest or enthusiasm) while waiting for the technical advisers to conduct their investigations and report back to the group. However, working group members take time to learn enough about the technical issues to make judgements about salinity control options. The more technical work done before the group is formed, the less likely is the group to feel comfortable with that work. According to the Institute for Participatory Planning, one of the important features of a good community participation program is that public participation should start early in the decision-making process.

The Salinity Program is under some pressure to justify its long community planning periods. Where salinity control may imply changes in infrastructure and significant imposed costs on the community, there is a political choice to be made between increasing risk of community disquiet and opposition and long planning periods. Where planning does not imply major infrastructure change or imposed costs, there may well be scope for shortening the planning period, or even telescoping it into accelerated implementation. We shall return to this theme in the final chapter. What has become clear to us is the importance of unambiguous guidelines at the commencement of a community planning project. These guidelines set the limits of negotiability and indicate to the community group where there time and effort is best devoted to develop a plan within a reasonable period.
DEALING WITH GOVERNMENT
Guidelines for Planning

Before the Salinity Program was established, large projects like salinity plans were developed by government with little meaningful involvement of the community. The government had its own guidelines for evaluating the merits of projects. Once the power to develop a plan was devolved to the community, guidelines had to be made available to the working groups. As a major financial contributor, the government had a right to set criteria for the spending of public money. For their part, the groups needed to know how their plans would be evaluated by the government.

The guidelines were valuable to the departmental officers who had the task of evaluating the plans. They needed to compare the plans with each other fairly, to ensure some uniformity in the plans. The guidelines were couched mainly in economic terms. They reflected a change in the rules of paying for irrigation infrastructure. Where previously the government paid most of the costs, now the government expected the community to pay a much greater share of the costs. It was a bitter pill for communities to swallow.

Like most aspects of the Salinity Problem, the guidelines took time to develop. They were not available when the first groups began. The architects of the Salinity Program learnt along with the first working groups. This was frustrating for the groups, because they had no clear indication of what constituted an acceptable plan for the government.

The working groups reacted to the guidelines in different ways. Some groups followed them closely. The Tragowel Plains working group was able to win government support for its plan, despite the seemingly hopeless salinity problem in the area, partly because the plan did not make unreasonable demands on government coffers. The Nangiloc-Colignan working group was also careful to follow the guidelines. The working group in Campaspe West thought they were doing the right thing by producing a plan which adhered to the guidelines, but while the working group came to accept the government's requirements, the community had not.

Other groups railed against the guidelines, regarding them as inequitable and open to negotiation. Both SPPAC and the PMT became advocates for the Goulburn-Broken area. Much of SPPAC's planning was concurrent with the development of the guidelines. SPPAC saw a role for itself in assisting to refine the guidelines and was not happy with the final guidelines released by the government. SPPAC argued that the guidelines were released too late for to be incorporated into their plans.

The guidelines, like all components of the Salinity Program, are subject to change and development as the Program matures. They are negotiable. Because they are essential for coordinated planning, there must be some uniformity in the way they treat different areas. Within that restriction, it is appropriate they be flexible enough to accommodate different characteristics of different areas.

Power of the Planning Group

The Salinity Program is unusual for a government program because of the level of power offered to communities. If the working groups consider they are being obstructed by departmental officers, they have the power to deal directly with the relevant government ministers. It was an adventurous, probably unique, level of power for the government to offer communities. Whilst the working groups have this unusual power of access to ministers, it does not mean their requests will be acted upon. They have influence rather than power.
Power implies their decisions will be implemented, whereas influence implies they will be given a favourable hearing.

This power was a valuable tool to ensure departmental co-operation. All working groups used it, to some degree, although often the threat of speaking to the ministers was as useful as actually speaking to them. The groups did not have to use the power to wield it. Working groups were able to demonstrate they weren't puppets. It also gave them a sense of responsibility they may not have had otherwise. The groups were careful not to overuse the power. This type of power is effective only when the ministers are enthusiastic about the Salinity Program and receptive to the working groups' requests. As time progresses and the novelty fades, it will be interesting to see if scepticism begins.

In addition to the formal power the groups were given, they were also able to create informal power for themselves. Each group built up for itself a standing in its local community. Informal power resulted from the prominence of the individual working group members in the community, the type of people they were, the amount of resources provided, and the formal power the groups possessed. This informal power gave the groups influence over their local communities, the local departmental officers and ultimately the government.

Different working groups adopted different levels of power. The Tragowel Plains working group adopted a policy of accepting the government guidelines and making suggestions where they could be changed. This increased the acceptability of their plan in the eyes of government. SPPAC's approach was to continually negotiate with the government over the content of its plans.

Negotiations with Government

The government receives several chances to comment on a salinity management plan. Government officers work with the working group to develop the plan. Clearly they have significant influence with most groups. Government responds formally after both the preliminary draft and final draft plans are presented to it. The final content of the plan is negotiated between the working group and government after the formal consultation period.

Many working group members considered the government should not have so many chances to influence their plan. They thought the planning process dragged on for too long before implementation could begin. Some saw it as a chance for departmental officers whose pet schemes had been rejected to have their ideas reconsidered. It was also thought by some to undermine the authority of the working group.

Extensive formal consultation with government is useful because it gives people in head office and policy development positions a chance to comment. They are likely to have had less influence on the working group than the project officers and technical support group members. They might also be able to provide a view to balance that of the regional officers. So often project officers become advocates for the plan and lobbyists for the working group.

"The government" is not a single entity. It consists of different departments, sections with different viewpoints within those departments, and the ministers responsible for the departments. The process of government requires that all be given an opportunity to influence the plan, particularly as the government provides significant funding for the plans.

Procedures to resolve conflict, and perhaps achieve a compromise, are part of the ongoing consultation process. Essential to negotiation is acceptance of the ground rules, and often there is disagreement about these. The government may decide some issues are not negotiable, and consult only on other issues. The community may not be willing to accept
some of the constraints imposed by the government. There is a limit to the extent to which
the government can impose its will on the community, yet still endow the community with
ownership of the plans.

Some working groups were unhappy about the way the final plan is negotiated between
the group and the government. The process of government officers evaluating the plans and their
recommendations passing through different cabinet committees was slow. The working
group members criticised this delay. To maintain credibility in their local communities they
had to sustain momentum. Not all the community is concerned about salinity, but those who
are want action, not planning. Planning is clearly necessary, but perhaps some
implementation of uncontroversial components of the plan can begin before the final plan is
agreed between the working group and the government.

The government could resolve some of the working group members' concerns by responding
to the working groups' "preferred plans" more quickly. However, it is important to realise
that plans are never final. They can be altered according to changed circumstances. With
such a long term planning horizon such change is inevitable.

13

IN INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY

The Victorian Salinity Program is predicated on community involvement as a crucial
contribution to government decision-making. It would be naive to believe that community
involvement begins and ends with the invitation to a small group of landholders and other
community members to join a working group and develop a salinity plan. Only a few
members of the regional community are able to be closely involved through their membership
of a working group. The members of a working group are a small component of a much
larger community and all have realised they have needed to consult with this larger
community at several levels: with local landholders, downstream landholders, the wider
community as represented both by peak interest groups and by the government itself. In this
chapter we review how working groups consulted with each of these sectors of the
community during the development of the plan and after the plan was completed.

Gatekeeping

Despite the prominent public presence of the formal consultation period at the end of the plan
development process, formal consultation is not what ensures the plan will be acceptable to
the community. The most significant consultation, and the most important for the success of
the plan, is done quietly and often individually while the plan is being developed. This
informal consultation happens when the community representatives on the working groups
work to ensure they are still representing the community. They do this by talking to people
who are not involved with the working group, telling them of the actions the group is
considering and asking them whether this approach is acceptable.

The critical feature of this process is that it is informal. It is not structured as "the working
group consults the community". Rather, it is an individual ensuring that the decisions made
are aligned with community values. The development of unrepresentativeness of community
working group members is inevitable, but this process of informal consultation can do more
than anything else to minimise its impact. If the decisions made by the working group are not
aligned with community standards a formal consultation, no matter how well organised,
cannot make an unacceptable plan acceptable.

We call this process of continual informal consultation gatekeeping. Advocates of action
research may view gatekeeping as the most important aspect of 'critical critique'. It is
impossible for all members of the community to participate in ensuring the plan will be acceptable to them while it is being developed, so they elect representatives to do it for them. The representatives cannot reinforce their legitimacy by saying the community elected them to act on the community's behalf. They have to go further, ensuring they really are acting in the community's behalf at all times. In doing this, they are not controlling public opinion but reflecting it. In doing their job properly, working group members ensure that only those options which the community will accept pass “through the gate” into the plan.

*Gatekeeping* is not a comprehensive consultation with the whole community. It involves the circle of acquaintances and friends of the working group members. This limitation of *gatekeeping* is a powerful argument for ensuring the working group membership is composed of as wide a range of local interest groups as possible. However, even this precaution will not ensure that the *gatekeeping* function will effectively influence the developing plan. *Gatekeeping* implies that working group members must carry information in two directions. Not only must they tell the community what the working group is considering, they must bring the community's response back to the working group. There is a large difference between these two tasks. It is easier to keep the community informed than it is to argue on behalf of the community in the forum of the working group. Because of the difficulty of the *gatekeeping* role, few people can perform it successfully. A working group full of such people is fortunate; most working groups have perhaps two or three. This is not a problem, as long as the *gatekeepers* on the group represent or have access to the key strands of opinion in the community. However, it is difficult to know, when forming the group, how well an individual will perform this role.

Informal consultation makes it easier for a working group to canvass options with the community. Presenting a set of options to the community formally can be taken as a sign of indecisiveness. But if the options are presented informally to individual community members by individual working group members, community opinion can be incorporated into the plan without the working group appearing indecisive. This approach helps to maintain the working group's credibility.

The *gatekeeping* role becomes progressively harder to play effectively with the increasing size of the community for which one is attempting to *gatekeep*. In the current popular rhetoric supporting community participation in Integrated (or Total) Catchment Management, little attention has been devoted to the question of the representativeness of large catchment groups. It is commonplace to claim these days that Integrated Catchment Management and Landcare are compatible planning tools.\(^8^1\) However, there is concern in some quarters at the potential lack of representativeness of large catchment-wide groups and possible domination by unrepresentative elites.\(^8^2\)

Willingness and ability to devote personal resources to catchment-wide work ensures that membership of large catchment groups will be restricted to a small minority with uncommon enthusiasm or uncommon personal resources. They are likely to be members of local rural elites. Unrepresentativeness is likely to increase as they become more involved in catchment-wide issues and compromises. Such people may have a major contribution to make to government policy development in catchment management, particularly with regard to basin-wide coordination matters.\(^8^3\) There is a danger, however, that their advice will have little relevance to one of the greatest challenges of catchment management: changing farm management practice.

In a sense, the concepts of Landcare (or Communities of Common Concern\(^8^4\)) and Integrated Catchment Management are in fundamental conflict. As the size of the areas being planned increases, it becomes progressively harder for any representative group to undertake an effective *gatekeeping* function. Representatives are more likely to become remote from the practicalities of farm management unless special provisions are made to maintain contact. The Landcare movement is built upon small groups sharing common land management
problems and the need to develop practical local solutions to these problems. Landcare depends upon the real involvement of those who are to undertake changes to management on their own farms. Landcare groups with over 100 landholders are considered by many to be too large to maintain a common community concern about land degradation problems. The role difference between catchment coordination and local implementation was recognised by the Avon-Richardson group, ARCIS, working in a small catchment. The group attempted to overcome it by the development of its cell structure. Similar issues are causing some confusion in Shepparton as planners and the community representatives try to reconcile the roles and responsibilities of the catchment group SPAC and the local implementation groups, SPIGs.

The conflict between the two principles becomes obvious in the Salinity Program's expectation that working groups are able to make agreements with the State government which include commitments that the local landholders will undertake their share of salinity control works. It is clear that catchment landholders do not believe they have authorised their working groups to make commitments about their farm management to government on their behalf, yet this is apparently the case from a face-value reading of the plans. In reality, working groups have been forced by cost sharing guidelines to make guesses about the level of adoption of salinity control measures and dress these up as commitments. The roles of large and small catchment groups need to be clarified and stripped of inappropriate rhetoric.

Community education

To help overcome the problem of communication with a large catchment constituency, the Salinity Program is well resourced with community education officers. It is one of the best resourced and most comprehensive community education programs undertaken by the State government. Most areas, both in irrigation and dryland regions, have a community education officer. The Pilot Program had a community education officer attached solely to the PMT, but most community education officers are responsible for the community education activities of several working groups. This is sensible rationalisation of resources.

Community education as a tool of consultation is designed to both motivate the members of the local community to contribute to the ideas in the plan, and to ensure they are sufficiently informed to be able to comment effectively on the plan.

All of the sub-regional working groups adopted a similar community education strategy of directing their efforts at the average farmers in the area. These were the people who would be most intensively consulted about the plan. In some cases community education officers also worked with members of the urban community. The community education activities of most officers were directed primarily to informing the community about salinity, giving the working group and salinity generally a public profile, and encouraging the community to both comment on the management plan being developed and involve themselves in implementation.

The Goulburn-Broken Pilot Program followed a different strategy. Because of the size of the Pilot Region and the strategy nature of the plan, only a small proportion of the population could be consulted. These people were leaders in the community: leaders of community groups and industry bodies, local business leaders and influential people in the community. They received a special type of community education. For example, seminars for local bankers were organised, explaining how the regional economy in Shepparton depended on a productive agriculture and how salinity threatened to reduce that productivity. The rest of the region, the average farmers and urban dwellers, were the targets of community education of the nature used in the sub-regions.
All the working groups used the conventional community education channels. Pamphlets, newsletters, field days, bus trips, newspaper supplements and public meetings have been used in extension programs for many years with success. This is not surprising, because community education is really a kind of extension, particularly when the target audience consists mainly of farmers. The boundary between community education and extension is not well defined, nor should it be.

Where the target is the urban community, other methods need to be attempted. Some groups adopted electronic education methods. The Nangiloc-Colignan group produced a video introducing the problem and the working group to the community and made it available for free borrowing in the local general stores. Most families borrowed it. In Sunraysia, television advertisements were produced telling urban dwellers when to water their lawns. These advertisements introduced salinity and watertable concepts to the urban community in an understandable and accessible manner.

Consultation is a two way communication process, but community education sometimes appears to be predominantly uni-directional and unsuitable as a substitute for effective gatekeeping. Community educators face a problem particularly where they must work with an uninterested or apathetic section of the community. In some districts most of the community is disinterested in salinity. This includes most urban populations, where the problems of local farmers usually do not impinge on the urban consciousness. Two groups (Kerang Lakes and Shepparton) tried to determine urban community opinions on planning matters by conducting opinion surveys.86 While this step is probably the most accurate means of determining urban opinions, it is, paradoxically, the least likely to pass the test of credibility with interest groups who wish to comment on the plan. The most opinionated sections of the community do not have an automatic right of access to the working group through random sample selection.

This problem of unidirectional information flow can also occur in farming areas where salinity is not perceived as a major problem. Salt may, in fact, not be an immediate major problem.87 Low commodity prices, high interest rates and rising costs are more likely to put farmers out of business in the short term than salinity. Farmers must be able to survive in the short term before they are able to plan for the long term.

The problem for community education is who decides whether salinity is a problem: the farmers or the government, through the Salinity program? Are the farmers who do not consider salinity a problem worth acting upon ignorant of the real danger or have they made a rational decision?

From this perspective, community education can appear as a paternalistic, though well-intentioned activity. This perception is an inevitable result where it is the government which has decided that a salinity management plan is needed. The government has exercised a mandate to take the strategic, long-term view, but this may fit uneasily with rhetoric that it is acting in areas for which there is community support for salinity action and where the community ‘owns the problem’. Perhaps community education officers would be better titled Community Consultation Officers, to reinforce the involvement, rather than the preaching, aspect of the job.

Formal consultation with the local community

In all cases the local community was consulted formally after the draft plan was released. This was usually a high profile activity, attempting to involve as many in the community as possible. If the working group has done its gatekeeping job properly there would be little in the plan which is not acceptable to the community. Formal consultation might produce some
minor changes in the plan, but nothing major. The working group's job is to prepare a plan on behalf of the community. If the informal consultation has been poor or the plan is ill-conceived, the community might not accept the plan. If the plan really is unacceptable to the community no formal consultation process can save the plan. The community will reject it. "Consultation engineering" does not work. This is why informal consultation throughout the plan development process is so important. It lessens the likelihood of rejection of the plan.

Formal consultation is a step to legitimise the more informal continuing consultation which precedes it. It demonstrates to the community that the plan development process is fitting and proper. It is done so that it is seen to be done. The working group must convince not only its local community but also the state government that proper consultation was undertaken. Formal local consultation, with the exception of Campaspe West, resulted in only slight changes to plans to better align them with community needs.

Several different community consultation strategies were used by the working groups, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Local Action and Advisory Groups (LAAGs) were used successfully in Barr Creek and the Tragowel Plains. They involved local groups of farmers gathering to discuss the plan. LAAGs have probably a wider reach into the community than any other consultation method. People find it easier to attend and present their opinion at a small group meeting with neighbours than a large public meeting. The LAAG process was chosen by some working groups because they believed this would give their consultation results high credibility with government.

Whilst LAAGs are effective in some areas, they are not necessarily the best method for all areas. LAAGs have some disadvantages. One danger with LAAGs is that they can encourage aggregation of information and loss of dissenting views. Usually only the overall opinion of a LAAG is presented to the working group. This is often unintentional, but information flow in any organisation tends to discourage the presentation of dissenting views. Farmers who disagree with the rest of their LAAG on a particular point must be given the opportunity to present their opinion to the working group independently of the rest of the LAAG. Another problem is the difficulty in understanding a plan and formulating questions about it at one meeting. LAAGs should meet at least twice, to give people a chance to learn about the plan they are being asked to approve. This means LAAGs are very time-consuming and resource-hungry for organisers. Where a large community must be consulted, LAAGs are impractical.

Some working groups used local meetings of groups somewhat larger than LAAGs. Nangiloc-Colignan organised separate meetings for the members of each group drainage area. The cells in Avon-Richardson fulfil a similar function. Like LAAGs, the boundaries of these areas must be chosen carefully, often with members of the community being involved in finalising the boundaries. The members of each group must be comfortable with each other. If groups are chosen randomly the community might become suspicious of the motive, as in Campaspe West. Whilst LAAGs tend to be ephemeral, these larger groups are more permanent. If they exist already it is sensible to use them for consultation.

Large public meetings can have a role in consultation by providing information to many people at once, while giving the public an opportunity for questions throughout the planning period. While more efficient for organisers, public meetings are not effective for receiving feedback from the community, because of the ease with which they can be dominated by a small group of activists. In urban areas of sub-regions, where there is little interest in a salinity management plan, public meetings are probably the most appropriate method. They allow the minority who want to participate to attend while placing no demands on those who are uninterested.

A formal ballot to assess the degree of support of the whole community for the plan is the ultimate in democracy. Everybody has an equal say. However, if a ballot seems the fairest
approach, the plan is probably doomed. If the community has been properly informed and involved a ballot would probably not be required. The need for formal methods indicates tension within the community, or between the community and the working group.

With all community consultation strategies, it must be remembered that local community structures can differ markedly in size and interest. They are composed of many different people, with different problems, different perceptions of their problems, and different attitudes to salinity and to participation in community activities. No consultation method, no matter how well designed, can involve them all. The role of consultation is to give people reasonable encouragement and opportunity to participate.

Consultation with interest groups

Working groups had to deal with various interest groups in their area and from outside. Interest groups vary from state-wide peak organisations, such as the Victorian Farmers' Federation and the conservation groups, through local organisations such as drainage lobby groups, to communities of interest in a geographic area keen to protect their livelihood. While all working groups were landholder-dominated, some peak organisations were usually given the opportunity of formal representation on the working groups. Most groups had a VFF representative and a conservation representative.

In Kerang Lakes, interest groups were involved specifically. People were elected to represent particular issues in the community, such as tourism, business and social issues. The competing interests were so salient in the Kerang Lakes area that it was inevitable that people were involved specifically to represent particular issues. The Kerang Lakes area is large and diverse, with numerous competing interests.

Most groups had no representation from downstream catchment interests. Campaspe West was the exception. This working group included representatives who did not live in the sub-region, but represented the interests of those who would be directly affected by drainage decisions of the working group. Whilst downstream drainage interests need to be protected, and direct representation on the working group ensures this, it is difficult to see how members representing these interests could participate fully in working group discussion. It could be argued that downstream interests in Campaspe West did not have a working group to negotiate for them, so they needed representation on the working group to protect their interest. In contrast, the downstream drainage interests in the Tragowel Plains, for example, had no formal role on the Tragowel Plains working group. The Tragowel Plains drainage aspirations had to be resolved with the Kerang Lakes working group.

As the Salinity Program developed, the chairmen of working groups were brought together in Chairman's Forums and Regional Salinity Forums where issues of inter-regional equity could be discussed. Government took the final role of arbiter between regions by the imposition of guidelines for such matters as salt disposal.

Downstream interest groups, as well as peak interest groups and other community groups had an opportunity to comment on plans as they were released. Most comments on plans from outside were generally supportive. Perhaps the most analytically critical comments came from the conservation groups Australian Conservation Foundation and Conservation Council of Victoria who argued the plans concentrated on farmer-based engineering solutions rather than on solutions which might limit the freedom of farmers.
Planning guidelines for the wider community

The Salinity Program is unusual for a government program because of the level of access offered by government. If the working groups considered they were being obstructed by departmental officers, they had the power to deal directly with the relevant government ministers.

This promise of access was a valuable tool to ensure departmental co-operation. All working groups used it, to some degree, although often the threat of speaking to the ministers was as useful as actually speaking to them. The groups did not have to use this power to wield it. Working groups were able to demonstrate they weren't puppets. It also gave them a sense of responsibility they may not have had otherwise. The groups were careful not to overuse the power.

Whilst the working groups had this unusual promise of access, this did not mean their requests would necessarily be acted upon. The power to plan was not without limits. The limits of power were defined in the planning guidelines set by government. As a major financial contributor, the government had a right to set criteria for the spending of public money. Governments are responsible to the community as a whole, to all tax-payers. The guidelines were couched predominantly in economic terms. The government was not going to bear the costs of major capital works. Beneficiaries were expected to bear the costs instead.

Like most aspects of the Salinity Problem, the guidelines took time to develop. They were not available when the first groups began. The architects of the Salinity Program learnt along with the first working groups. This was frustrating for the groups, because they had no clear indication of what constituted an acceptable plan for the government. With the completion of the guidelines the rules of the planning process were clear. Community groups knew how their plans would be evaluated by government. Government advisers knew how they must evaluate the plans proposed by the community groups.

The working groups reacted to the guidelines in different ways. Some groups followed them closely. The Tragowel Plains working group was able to win government support for its plan, despite the seemingly hopeless salinity problem in the area, partly because the plan did not make unreasonable demands on government. The Nangiloc-Colignan working group was also careful to follow the guidelines. The working group in Campaspe West thought it was doing the right thing by producing a plan which adhered to the guidelines, but while the working group had accepted the government's requirements, the local community had not.

Other groups railed against the guidelines, regarding them as inequitable and open to negotiation. Both SPPAC and the PMT became advocates for the Goulburn-Broken area. Much of SPPAC's planning was concurrent with the development of the guidelines. SPPAC saw a role for itself in assisting to refine the guidelines and was not happy with the final guidelines released by the government. SPPAC argued that the guidelines were released too late to be incorporated into its plans. In reality, SPPAC had little option but to accept the ground rules. The government essentially decided which issues were negotiable.

There is an unavoidable dilemma for salinity planners. The government must represent all citizens, not just those with salinity on their land, yet it asks for local community support for a plan before giving its own approval. Yet the community is unwilling to accept the guidelines imposed by government. In this cases there may be a direct compromise between the extent to which a plan follows guidelines and the chances of the planning achieving community support.
Government response to the plans

Government involvement with planning did not end with the development of guidelines. Essentially the planning process was one of continual negotiation between government and working groups. The most common voice of government was the advice of departmental officers supporting the working groups. These officers were often called upon to give indications of what might and might not be acceptable to government. The advice which was given in response was mostly supportive to help community members avoid dead ends and wasted efforts. The departmental officers were in a very good position to provide this information, as their own comments often formed the basis of later formal departmental comments on plans.

The government received several more chances to comment formally on the salinity management plans. Government responded formally after both the preliminary draft and final draft plans were presented to it. The final content of the plans was negotiated between the working group and government after the formal consultation period.

Some working groups were unhappy about the process of comment and negotiation with government. The process of government officers evaluating the plans and their recommendations passing through different cabinet committees was slow. The working group members criticised this delay. To maintain credibility in their local communities they had to sustain momentum. Not all the community is concerned about salinity, but those who are want action, not planning. Planning is clearly necessary, but perhaps some implementation of uncontroversial components of a plan can begin before the final plan is agreed between the working group and the government.

Some working group members considered the government should not have so many chances to influence their plan. They thought the planning process dragged on for too long before implementation could begin. Some saw it as a chance for departmental officers whose pet schemes had been rejected to have their ideas reconsidered. It was also thought by some to undermine the authority of the working group.

The government could resolve some of the working group members' concerns by responding to the working groups' "preferred plans" more quickly. However, community members must realise there is a limit to the speed with which government can respond. "The government" is not a single entity. It consists of different departments, sections with different viewpoints within those departments, and the ministers responsible for the departments. The process of government requires that all be given an opportunity to influence the plans, particularly as the government provides significant funding for the plans.

Extensive formal consultation with government is useful because it gives people in head office and policy development positions a chance to comment. They are likely to have had less influence on the working group than the project officers and technical support group members. They might also be able to provide a view to balance that of the regional officers. So often project officers become advocates for the plan and lobbyists for the working group.
CONCLUSIONS

Early in this report we discussed a list of characteristics of effective community planning derived from the work of the Institute for Participatory Planning. We can now consider how the Victorian Salinity Program has measured up against each of these. We make no claim that our conclusions are definitive, only that they seem reasonable from our perspective at the conclusion of our project.

Principles of effective planning

The process of public participation should be agreed upon between the agency and participants. Most participants had no significant role in determining the basic structure for community planning, although once they were involved, there were opportunities to influence the evolution of the system. Despite this, by far the majority of participants have accepted the present structure as far preferable to previous methodologies. We have two important and critical observations to make. First, the planning guidelines were drawn up too late. Planning guidelines should have been available at the commencement of the process. Secondly, too little formal emphasis was placed upon the importance of the gatekeeping role played by community working group members. Formal recognition of this role would have given it greater legitimacy in the eyes of both the members of working groups and the departmental officers supporting the working groups. Greater emphasis on this important role may have changed the direction of the Campaspe West plan. Planning guidelines should give formal emphasis to the importance of gatekeeping.

Public participation should start early in the decision-making process. The early Barr Creek and Mineral Reserves Basin planning experiences failed because of failure to begin public participation early in the planning process. The same mistake seems to have been avoided in the Salinity Program plans we have studied.

The objectives of the public participation need to be clearly stated and people need to be aware of the level of power being offered. The key question here is where consultation ends and decision-making begins. This was unclear initially due to the late release of the planning guidelines. The Shepparton group initially questioned the guidelines, but other groups seem to have accepted them. The members of the community working groups we interviewed displayed a very sophisticated understanding of their relationship with government. They quite clearly perceived and accepted their advisory role and the degree of its influence on government decisions. Most working group members were satisfied with the degree of power and influence they exerted on government decisions in their program. This perception is supported by other unrelated research.
Efforts should be made by the agency to identify all interested parties. Many different methods were used to identify and appoint representatives to working groups. Local interest groups were well identified in most cases. With a static future budget for the Salinity Program, this principle needs to be maintained as a high priority. **Strenuous efforts must be made to ensure appointments to community advisory groups represent as many differing interests as possible, and further, these groups should not be seen as the sole source of community feedback.** In Campaspe West crucial interest group representatives withdrew from the process, leading to the ultimate downfall of the plan. This withdrawal arose partly from the unanticipated direction in which the plan developed. Community members often are overcommitted and can only maintain committed representation when it is clear that the planning process has significant and salient implications for them and their constituency. These implications may become clear only as the planning process develops. **Group membership should be more flexible, encouraging the appointment of new group members as the plan develops and new interest groups emerge.** The problem of developing unrepresentativeness is harder to deal with. It is important to see a gradual turnover of membership in working groups, though the transfer between planning and implementation may be the first opportunity to effectively implement this.

Information should be available to all participants. We consider that generally information was available to all participants. It is less clear whether the information was always presented in a comprehensible form, and whether there was time to absorb and consider the information. This is particularly so with the LAAG group process. **For LAAG groups to operate effectively there needs to be at least two meetings of each LAAG group.** This recommendation has significant resource implications. The decision to run LAAG groups needs to be considered seriously and rejected if insufficient resources are available or community interest is low. Formal consultation may be best achieved through a number of concurrent processes.

Participants should know how their submissions will be processed. The salinity planning experiences we have recounted all occurred during the early days of the Salinity Program. Processes were being developed on the run. It is clear that some working group members were unclear how their draft plans would be processed within government and were dissatisfied with the delays in this processing. **Working groups should be given clear indications of how government develops a response to their salinity plan and what the timetable for this response will be.** Speedy response would be aided by the maintenance of an on-going dialogue between district officers supporting their working groups and centrally located policy officers responsible for co-ordinating government response to plans.

Adequate resources should be made available for the required tasks and meetings. Most working groups were well resourced to undertake their task. Initial inconsistencies with sitting fees were eventually ironed out. One major criticism is that there were problems in appointing and maintaining project officers to manage the development of plans. Several plans floundered for a period until the late appointment of a project officer. **Plans should not be undertaken without the early appointment of a project officer.** Some working groups were frustrated by a continual turnover in staff supporting the planning task. Staff filling base level temporary positions found it hard to refuse the possibility of a promotion or transfer to a permanent position elsewhere in the state. **Project officers in charge of planning should not be appointed at base level.**

Commitment to the process of planning should not take over from the commitment to the task of salinity control. Whilst it is easy to dismiss as simplistic calls for more ‘more works on the ground’ from populist orators at public meetings, this issue has arisen a number of times in our discussion of case studies as we questioned whether the planning process had been too long and detailed. We have been unable to determine a true dollar cost of planning for a number of reasons, the
principal reason being the difficulty of differentiating between planning, extension and implementation activity in each of the planning areas. Budget aggregations have proved remarkably flexible over the life of the program. However, one rough estimate of the cost of planning undertaken internally within the Department of Agriculture suggested that, for one plan, the cost of planning was of a similar order to the estimated benefits of the plan. These figures were only rough preliminary estimates, but they indicate a need to seriously consider the degree of planning intensity prior to commencing a catchment plan.

Outcomes of the planning process

The community planning process we have explored has produced a range of outcomes. Some of them were unexpected. With a little simplification, the range of outcomes can be classified into four general categories:

- **Consensus and community interest**: Some successful plans have emerged with widespread community support and strong government support. The most obvious example is the Tragowel Plains plan. Consensus and interest resulted from this plan which attempted to answer problems salient to this local community.

- **Incidental involvement**: Some plans were developed in response to government initiatives, rather than community pressure. The incidental involvement of the community resulted from their view of the plan as a subsidy source, rather than a solution. The problem was not salient to landholders. There was no community attachment to the issue addressed in the plan. This was the case in the Sunraysia where solutions to salinity on farms were found by a previous generation of farmers and researchers.

- **No action as a deliberate decision**: In some cases the most technically feasible options for salinity control were shown to be uneconomic. In other cases, agreement could not be reached on a suitable course of action. A deliberate decision was made to take no action for the time being. No plan was characterised by this option, although this strategy was followed for many areas within plans.

- **Adverse community reaction**: One plan, Campaspe West, was rejected by the local community, an outcome little different to that of the controversial proposal for the Mineral Reserves evaporation basin which led to the creation of the Salinity Program. An adverse community reaction to a plan resulted when the plan proposed imposing unwanted compulsory costs on the community. Regrouping and rebuilding was required.

Indicators of probable outcomes

We consider there are two indicators of the likely outcome of a community-developed plan. The first indicator is the nature of the likely solutions to the salinity problem in the area. The likely solutions may be either voluntary solutions (farmers may decide independently of other farmers whether or not they wish to adopt the components of the plan) or compulsory (one-in-all in) options such as community drainage schemes. While no plan fits entirely into either category, some plans, particularly those based around irrigation infrastructure, are dominated by solutions which require complete mandatory adoption by a group of landholders to be successful. Campaspe West and Shepparton are good examples of plans which proposed these solutions: sub-surface drainage and recycling of saline water in an irrigation supply. The Avon-Richardson and Tragowel Plains plans proposed solutions based mainly upon voluntary adoption.
The other important determinant is the nature of the salinity threat. Is salinity seen as a salient personal management problem? For most landholders this only occurs when there is a current loss in production caused by salinity which is perceived as a management problem and is perceived as preventable. Perceptions of possible future loss are unlikely to be seen as a salient management problem. This feature is most obviously manifest in the difference between those plans initiated in response to local community pressure and those plans initiated by government. Government initiation is more likely to be associated with plans aiming to address downstream degradation of future losses or productivity. The Sunraysia plan is a clear example of government playing the leading role in establishing a working group to develop a plan.

Local initiation is more likely to come from communities where some landholders are suffering significant current hardship because of salinity and a minority of the local community is prepared to lobby government for action. Of our case studies, Tragowel Plains and Campaspe West are the most obvious examples.

Clearly neither of these criteria are useful alone as predictors of the likely outcome of a planning process. But in combination they can provide a useful insight into the likely outcomes of planning. There are four possible combinations of these two factors. The result is four different planning scenarios (see figure 14.1).

- **Voluntary solutions, salient personal problem perceived**: This is a 'Dream Run' plan. Little community opposition is likely and community planning will be constructive.

- **Compulsory solutions, salient personal problem perceived**: This is usually associated with a previous 'Grand Plan' which the community has desired for years. In irrigation areas this is often a desire for drainage schemes.

- **Compulsory solutions, problem not salient**: This is the 'Danger Plan'. In this case community support for any significant costs in plan implementation is unlikely. There is a great risk of planning going 'off the rails' and damage minimisation may be required. It is worth asking if a community plan is really needed in this case. If action is required, there may be a greater role for regulation or market-based solutions. It is probably a forlorn and misleading position to argue that significant community support for real change will emerge from any consultation process within such a planning scenario.

- **Voluntary solutions, problem not salient**: This is "Someone Else's Plan". Most people are not interested. They are unlikely to participate in planning or implementation unless a large incentive is offered.
Like any categorisation or model, the categories are not exclusive. Some plans may contain components in different categories. Also, there may be substantial groups in the one community who fit into different categories.

Different types of plans have different groups of possible outcomes. The likelihood of achieving a particular outcome depends on the nature of the plan. Each of the four different planning scenarios has a different chance of reaching one of the four possible outcomes observed in the Victorian Salinity Program (see figure 14.2).
The Dream Run

This is the best possible antecedent state for achieving successful implementation of any planning proposal. This type of plan occurs when a lobbying minority is able to convince the majority to become involved in a plan which is unlikely to impose significant compulsory costs upon the majority and possibly confer some benefits. The working group needs to convince the majority their district has a problem (and preferably their own farm, a much harder task) and that the plan solves the district's problem. The Tragowel Plains planners worked within this scenario.

Competent planning should lead to a consensus solution. Planning needs to be seen by the community to be well done, to prevent the plan collapsing, but beyond that, extensive formal consultation is an expensive luxury.

Consultation in a 'Dream Run' is easy and constructive. However, there is little point spending too much time and money on consultation during planning; the money would be better saved for implementation. In the Victorian Salinity Program, formal community consultation seems to be used mainly to demonstrate to the government that people have been consulted to increase the prospects for government acceptance.

Community education plays a minor role in keeping people informed of what is happening during the planning phase. It can explain a problem people see but don't understand (e.g. what's this yellow patch?). It can also point out a path to a possible solution (i.e. the management plan being developed).
The Grand Plan

In the salinity control arena, grand plans are usually compulsory, not voluntary. There is often an existing popular proposal for a solution. This may be realistic or very much a pipe dream. In the Kerang Lakes area the pipe dream was literally that, a proposal to pipe salty groundwater 1000 kilometres to the sea in a polythene pipe. This did not pass the hurdle of basic economics. Grand dreams do not need to be so ambitious. The Tragowel Plains, Shepparton and Nangiloc-Colignan all had elements of the grand dream, a desire to complete their partial drainage systems.

A `Grand Plan' requires special care because it can result in three quite different outcomes. Resolution depends to a great extent on the cost of the plan imposed on the less-concerned majority. There is likely to be consensus if the plan is cheap, no action if the plan is more expensive, and the possibility of adverse reaction if the community perceives an imposition of unrealised aspects of the plan or feels unwarranted blame is being placed upon it. Consensus can be reached from a `Grand Plan', but it is more difficult to achieve than with a `Dream Run'. The community can become enthused because there is a commonly-recognised current problem. If the interests of all groups cannot be reconciled, a decision to do nothing is often prudent, but the working group must justify such a decision to the community.

Community-based planning is crucial to work through the solution. The most important role of the members of these committees is to informally consult their constituencies as they make decisions. They need to know whether their decisions will be acceptable to the rest of the community. This gatekeeping role is crucial if consensus is to be achieved.

It is well for both the planners and the working group members to be aware of the limitations of community-based planning. It is inevitable that the members of community working groups are unrepresentative of their community. They are interested in participating initially. Also, they learn more than the rest of the community while they are so deeply involved in planning. The community begins to associate them with bureaucrats. Because of the requirement of acceptability to the community, it is unrealistic to expect working groups to make the hard decisions economists might like them to make.

Consultation is easy enough as long as the `Grand Plan' dream is the most technically feasible solution and enough people have the problem. If the dream is not a solution acceptable to the wider community, represented by government, consultation is needed to ensure a solution is reached which enough people trust and which explains the lack of action on the `Grand Dream'.

Community education is vital to encourage all potentially affected interests to get involved in planning early, to prevent an adverse reaction or, if the plan is likely to be stopped, to stop it early. The community education dream is to turn a `Grand Plan' into a consensus solution, but such a `water into wine' transformation requires effective gatekeeping and comprehensive consultation, as well as strategic community education.

The Danger Plan

A `Danger Plan' is the worst possible scenario for any planner. It often results in the imposition of unwelcome compulsory costs on a majority of the members of the community, who do not see a current problem. Such a plan is a response to a concern held by a minority in the community, or a government perception of a problem. Independent government perception of a problem is likely to occur in two situations. One is when technical experts predict the impending development of a land degradation problem which requires preventative works or changes in farming systems. The other is when government wishes to
control off-site effects. In this latter situation there is a risk of irreconcilable differences developing between the local community and government when there is a community perception of an unfair allocation of blame. A community is unlikely to accept a compulsory plan if it requires the members of that community to bear what its members perceive to be significant costs to solve a problem faced by only a minority within the community or by others outside the community. The Campaspe West plan was a 'Danger Plan' which went sour.

In a 'Danger Plan', the community working group has to justify doing anything at all. If this type of plan is managed carefully it leads to a decision to take no action or a government decision to impose regulatory solutions. A decision to take no action is a better result than continuing with planning and having an adverse reaction. A 'Danger Plan' can be stopped with little damage only if enough people who don't perceive a problem get involved or are made involved early enough to stop the plan. This was clearly a problem in the development of the Campaspe West plan.

In Campaspe West planning continued for two years with the silent majority taking little notice of the planning activity, assuming it would not affect them because the planning would produce voluntary solutions. The crucial gatekeeping role was not effectively performed by the community working group because its members had few social links with the disinterested majority. Salinity was geographically concentrated and only farmers from affected areas were interested in going on the working group. Early attempts to convince farmers from other parts of the planning district to take part in the planning process had failed. The members of the working group had few social links with the rest of the district. They continued planning because they received little negative feedback until the compulsory nature of their groundwater pumping proposal became apparent, when the community reacted with fury. The government asked a group of objectors to develop an alternate plan, but this could only occur slowly as trust was rebuilt.

When a 'Danger Plan' goes awry, rebuilding may involve either the plan being shelved while the proponents wait until the community accepts that some plan is required (i.e. no action for the present), or consensus as to a more appropriate course of action (which is likely to be a watered down, voluntary plan which answers only those problems perceived by the majority as real).

The role of formal community consultation is not to ensure there is a plan, but to stop the planners going down a dead end. Formal consultation cannot save a doomed plan, no matter how well thought out the consultation program is. There is likewise little role for community education to convince people they have a problem, because they can't be convinced. The only useful role for community education is to impress upon members of the community the need for them to be involved to ensure the plan does not impose unacceptably upon them. The aim is to prevent an adverse reaction by ensuring an unacceptable plan is stopped as early as possible. Community education is unlikely to convince people they have a problem if they don't think they have one. It is even less likely to convince people they will have a problem in the future. One role of education is to alert the majority to the potential impacts of the plan upon them. This is a politically difficult task, which few people would have the courage to undertake effectively.

Someone Else's Plan

A voluntary plan for something that is not seen as a salient problem by the majority is seen as "Someone Else's Plan" for someone else's problem. A plan in these areas is the result of the government perceiving a need for a plan. Community perception of a problem is likely to be selective. In some areas public attitudes about salinity are filtered by a strong social stigma.
over the admission of salinity damage on one's farm. In other districts education about salinity can have a deceptive effect. A typical response to education in districts identified as needing a dryland salinity plan is a belief by landholders that salinity is a problem in the district, but not on their own farms.

If the community sees the problem in these latter terms, it does not see a salient problem. Any implementation will be driven by a government subsidy. Few landholders will bear significant voluntary costs. Because the community's motivation is based on receiving a subsidy, rather than being based on solving a perceived problem, the extent of community uptake will depend on the extent of the subsidy.

Successful implementation of the plan is dependent on continued government funding of the subsidy. As government is paying for the subsidy and the majority of the community is not interested in the issue, there is little need for government to also pay for consultation with people who don't want to be consulted. Low key consultation only is required, and that should focus on a negotiation over the extent of subsidy.

There is a major role for extension to explain how to take advantage of the subsidy offered. The role for community planning and consultation lies in determining what the community sees as a reasonable subsidy level. As with the adoption of any technology, the subsidy will not be taken up by everybody.

Final words on lessons for community planners

We have shown how different outcomes can be produced from different antecedent states. Some outcomes cannot be achieved from some types of plans. We have also explained how different community planning tools are needed for different planning scenarios. Clearly, planning could be improved if the likely planning scenario was known as early as possible. It would lead to more efficient use of government funds. The possibility of community backlash would be reduced. If the initial pressure for a plan comes from the community, are we facing a danger plan, a grand plan or a dream run. In each situation only a minority will be lobbying. Are the majority merely uncomfortable in a lobbying role, or do they not consider there is a problem and disagree with the vocal minority? The challenge for planners is to find out enough about each local community as early as possible to determine the likely nature of the plan. One answer to this question may be by conducting cheap market research.

We conclude our report with a plea for realism in expectations and care with rhetoric. Nearly everybody wants to achieve consensus. Planners must realise there is no magic consultation button which will eliminate conflict. Early Salinity Program rhetoric implied community involvement would lead to community ownership of both the problem and the solutions, and increased adoption of salinity control measures. After five years, experience has shown these early hopes and expectations to be unrealistic. With hindsight, much of the early optimism was naive. This is not to imply that this grand experiment in widespread community planning was a failure. It should not be judged by the unrealistic expectations of earlier years. It should be judged by what is achieved on the ground. To date there is much to be proud of. Yet the final judgement will not be made in this report, but by the historians of following decades.

For those who have read this report for guidance on how to run a community-based planning program, there are many lessons to be learned from the experience of the participants. The most important lesson is that nobody can provide recipes which will ensure successful and effective community participation. 'Consultation engineering' does not work; the community is not easily deceived. Different approaches are needed for different areas. We have
described which methods were used successfully in which areas, and which were unsuccessful. The final decision on which methods are appropriate to maximise the chance of successful community-based planning rests with the people who will be organising the participation and conducting the consultation. They are in a position to understand their local community.
ENDNOTES


5. J.M. Powell, *Watering the Garden State*.


There has already been an evaluation of the Barr Creek Project by an interdepartmental team. *The Barr Creek Salinity Project (1987-1989): Review*, May 1989, Rural Water Commission of Victoria. While that review contained a section on the Project Team, it concentrated on the implementation of the strategy. Some of this chapter is based on the material in that report.


From notes prepared by Roger O'Farrell for Mac McArthur, chairman of the public meeting held on 9th October 1986 to form the Tragowel Plains Sub Regional Working Group.

From Roger O'Farrell's notes for Mac McArthur.


*The Challenge Of The Plains: The Main Features of the Tragowel Plains Salinity Management Plan*


46. The operation and consultation strategy of the Campaspe West Management Committee is documented well in section 2 of the Supporting Technical Works to the Draft Salinity Management Plan, August 1989. The Draft Plan itself also contains useful information about the conduct of the project.


53. The results of the survey are reported in the background papers to the management plan. The survey report, *a survey of landholders with irrigated land in the Campaspe West area, April 1988*, is on pages 7-14 of the background papers.


55. A valuable reference in writing this chapter has been the draft *Final Report: Goulburn Broken Region Salinity Pilot Program*, written by Pilot Program Coordinator Graeme David before he left to take up another position. Although still in draft form, and not widely circulated, this report is the most comprehensive record available of the operation of the Pilot Program.


62. Much of the material in this section of the chapter is drawn from the report by the Ministerial Task Force on Salinity, *Regional Salinity Control Pilot Program*, September 1985.

63. Much of this section comes from the final report of the Pilot Program Establishment Team to the Interdepartmental Salinity Liaison Committee, *The Development of Goulburn Broken Region Salinity Pilot Program*, February 1986. The quotations in this section are drawn from that report.

64. Final report of the Pilot Program Establishment Team.


66. Final report of the Pilot Program Establishment Team.


70. For greater detail on the interactions of the Kerang Lakes and the irrigation supply system readers should refer to 'Communities in Partnership: Kerang Lakes Area Draft Salinity Management Plan', Kerang lakes Area Working Group, March 1992.


73. The inception report of the working group, published as *Salinity in Sunraysia: the community, the environment and horticultural production, A preliminary report*. 

74. The operation and consultation strategy of the Campaspe West Management Committee is documented well in section 2 of the Supporting Technical Works to the Draft Salinity Management Plan, August 1989. The Draft Plan itself also contains useful information about the conduct of the project.


81. The results of the survey are reported in the background papers to the management plan. The survey report, *a survey of landholders with irrigated land in the Campaspe West area, April 1988*, is on pages 7-14 of the background papers.


83. A valuable reference in writing this chapter has been the draft *Final Report: Goulburn Broken Region Salinity Pilot Program*, written by Pilot Program Coordinator Graeme David before he left to take up another position. Although still in draft form, and not widely circulated, this report is the most comprehensive record available of the operation of the Pilot Program.


90. Much of the material in this section of the chapter is drawn from the report by the Ministerial Task Force on Salinity, *Regional Salinity Control Pilot Program*, September 1985.

91. Much of this section comes from the final report of the Pilot Program Establishment Team to the Interdepartmental Salinity Liaison Committee, *The Development of Goulburn Broken Region Salinity Pilot Program*, February 1986. The quotations in this section are drawn from that report.

92. Final report of the Pilot Program Establishment Team.


94. Final report of the Pilot Program Establishment Team.

95. Final report of the Pilot Program Establishment Team.


102. The inception report of the working group, published as *Salinity in Sunraysia: the community, the environment and horticultural production, A preliminary report*. 

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This problem is underlined by the difficulties associated with forming a community advisory structure for the Murray Darling Basin.


78. See the sections on consultation in the chapters on the Tragowel Plains and the Barr Creek working groups for more detailed discussion of LAAGs.


81. Salinity plans are also funded by the Murray Darling Basin Commission’s ‘Communities of Common Concern’ program. In unpublished research by the Murray Darling Basin Commission Community Advisory Council, 74% of leaders of Community of Common Concern projects believed their community group had the majority of control over their project. Sixty seven per cent believed their group exerted a considerable or significant degree of influence over the direction of expenditure.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX 1: LIST OF FOCUSED INTERVIEWS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
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Departmental officers involved in more than one plan: 5
Departmental central policy officers: 10
Representatives of Umbrella community groups: 3
APPENDIX 2: QUESTION FORMAT FOR FOCCUSED INTERVIEWS

A. Working Group Members: Plans Released

1. On Working Group formation and effectiveness.
   a) Why did you become involved?
   b) What other community groups or organisations are you involved with?
   c) What was your public role?
      1) How much time have you committed to the planning process?
   d) What do you feel you achieved?
   e) Did anything limit your involvement in the group?
      1) time?
      2) assertiveness?
      3) structures?
   f) Was the number and frequency of meetings appropriate?
   g) Do you feel that the composition and membership of the Working Group was appropriate?
   h) Was the working group representative of the community?
   i) Was the process of selection of the working group appropriate?
   j) Did the working group have sub-committees?
      1) how well did the sub-committees work?
   k) What formal community groups have been involved in the planning process?
      1) How deeply?
      2) how well were these groups able to work with the salinity working group?
   l) Were you supported adequately by departmental officers and the departments in general?
   m) What do you think should be the role of departmental officers on the working group?
   n) How did you feel about the presence of departmental officers in working group meetings? Did your views on this change?
   o) Were the planning guidelines clear, fair? Did they help the planning process?
   p) How much decision power do you think the planning groups were given? Did your views on this change? Did you feel any of the decisions you were considering had already been made elsewhere?
   q) What do you think of the final plan? Is it practical? Is it fair?

2. On Wider Community Consultation
   a) How much change was made to the management plan after consultation?
   b) How much did consultation add to the acceptability of the plan?
   c) Who ran your consultation?
   d) What did your consultation involve?
   e) Could it have been done better?
      1) How?
   f) What did you hope consultation would achieve?
      1) Did it achieve what you hoped?

B. Working Group Members: Plans Underway

1. On Working Group formation and effectiveness.
   a) Why did you become involved?
   b) What other community groups or organisations are you involved with?
c) What is your public role?
   1) How much time have you committed to the planning process?
d) Are you achieving anything?
e) Is anything limiting your involvement in the group?
   1) time?
   2) assertiveness?
   3) structures?
f) Is the number and frequency of meetings appropriate?
g) Do you feel that the composition and membership of the Working Group is appropriate?
h) Is the working group representative of the community?
i) Was the process of selection of the working group appropriate?
j) Does the working group have sub-committees?
   1) How well do the sub-committees work?
k) What formal community groups have been involved in the planning process?
   1) How deeply?
   2) How well were these groups able to work with the salinity working group?
l) Are you being supported adequately by departmental officers and the departments in general?
m) What do you think should be the role of departmental officers on the working group?

n) How do you feel about the presence of departmental officers in working group meetings? Have your views on this changed?
o) Were the planning guidelines clear, fair? Did they help the planning process?
p) How much decision power do you think the planning groups were given? Did your views on this change? Did you feel any of the decisions you were considering had already been made elsewhere?
q) Do you feel confident your group will be able to produce a plan? Will it be according to the deadlines given?

2. On Wider Community Consultation
   a) What have you learnt from the consultation experiences of other working groups?
   b) How important do you think consultation will be to your sub-region, in terms of achieving an acceptable management plan?
   c) What consultation have you done already?
   d) What plans do you have for further consultation?
   e) What do you hope consultation will achieve?

C. Working Group Members (abridged version)

1. On working group formation and effectiveness.
   a) Why did you become involved?
   b) What other community groups or organisations are you involved with?
   c) What was your public role?
   d) How much time have you spent on salinity planning?
   e) What do you feel you achieved?
   f) The process took a long time. Did the working group need all that time?
      g) Is the working group representative of the community?
      h) Did the working group have the right people on it?
      i) How well did the sub-committee system work?
j) Were you supported adequately by departmental officers and the departments in general?

k) What do you think should be the role of departmental officers on the working group?

l) Were the planning guidelines clear? Were they fair? Did they help the planning process?

m) How much decision power do you think the working group was given? Did your views on this change? Did you feel any of the decisions you were considering had already been made elsewhere? Will the government take much notice of you?

n) What do you think of the final plan? Is it practical? Is it fair?

2. On Wider Community Consultation

a) Did consultation change your plan much?

b) How much did consultation add to the acceptability of the plan?

c) Could your consultation have been done better?

1) How?

d) What did you hope consultation would achieve?

1) Did it achieve what you hoped?

D. Facilitators / departmental officers

1. On Working Group formation and effectiveness.

a) Do you feel that the working group spent its time well?

b) Was the number and frequency of Working Group meetings appropriate?

1) How much time have you committed to the planning process?

c) Do you feel that the composition and membership of the Working Group was appropriate?

d) Is the working group representative of the community?

e) Was the process of selection of the working group appropriate?

f) Does the working group have sub-committees?

1) How well do the sub-committees work?

g) What resourcing and support does a working group need?

1) Was this provided?

2) What experience do the support staff need?

3) When should they be appointed?

h) Were you supported adequately by

1) Head office staff?

2) Working group members?

i) What should be the role of government representatives on working groups?

j) What formal community groups have been involved in the planning process?

1) How deeply?

2) How well were these groups able to work with the salinity Working Group?

k) Were the planning guidelines seen as clear, fair? Did they help the planning process?

l) How much decision power do you think the planning groups were given? Did your views on this change? Did you feel any of the decisions you were considering had already been made elsewhere?

m) What do you think of the final plan? Is it practical? Is it fair?

n) How valuable is the working group approach to management plan development?
2. On Wider Community Consultation
   a) How much change was made to the management plan after consultation?
   b) How much did consultation add to the acceptability of the plan?
   c) Who ran your consultation?
   d) What did your consultation involve?
   e) Could it have been done better? How?
   f) What did you hope it would achieve? Did it achieve what you hoped?
   g) Do you think the success of a consultation program depends on the methods used or the style of the individual running the program?

3. Time and Cost
   a) How much time and money was spent on
      1) the operation of the working group?
      2) the community consultation program?
   b) How much time and money do you think would have been spent on plan development if it had been done solely by departmental officers?

4. General Issues
   a) Where was the community when the planning process began?
      1) Who thought salinity was an issue in the area?
      2) Who was agitating for and against?
      3) Has community opinion moved since planning commenced?
         a> How, why, what evidence?
   b) Do you think there are any lessons for others?
E. Departmental Representatives on Working Groups

1. On Working Group formation and effectiveness.
   a) How did you come to be involved with the working group?
   b) How much time have you committed to the planning process?
   c) What do you feel you achieved?
   d) Was the number and frequency of working group meetings appropriate?
   e) Do you feel that the composition and membership of the Working Group was appropriate?
   f) Is the working group representative of the community?
   g) Was the method of selection of the working group appropriate?
   h) What resourcing and support does a working group need?
      1) Was this provided?
      2) What experience do the support staff need?
      3) When should they be appointed?
   i) Was the working group supported adequately by
      1) Head office staff?
      2) Working group members?
   j) What should be the role of government representatives on working groups?
   k) Were the planning guidelines clear, fair? Did they help the planning process?
   l) How much decision power do you think the planning groups were given? Did your views on this change? Did you feel any of the decisions you were considering had already been made elsewhere?
   m) What do you think of the final plan? Is it practical? Is it fair?
   n) How valuable is the working group approach to management plan development?

2. On Wider Community Consultation
   a) How much change was made to the management plan after consultation?
   b) How much did consultation add to the acceptability of the plan?
   c) Who ran your consultation?
   d) What did your consultation involve?
   e) Could it have been done better?
      1) How?
   f) What did you hope it would achieve?
      1) Did it achieve what you hoped?

3. Time and Cost
   a) Is consultation cost and time effective in your experience?
   b) Is the working group approach cost and time effective in your experience?

4. General Issues
   a) Do you think there are any lessons for others?
F. Central Policy Officers (e.g. Salinity Bureau, Departmental Salinity Sections)

1. What were you expecting as the outcome of successful community involvement and consultation in the program?

2. What do you think should be the role of the community working group?
   a) How do you think it should be formed?
   b) What membership should it have?
   c) How should it interact with the technical support group?
   d) What should be the role of government officers on working groups?

3. What do you think consultation should achieve?
   a) Does it achieve what you hope?

4. Is consultation cost effective in your experience?

5. How much decision power do you think the planning groups were given? Did your views on this change?

6. What is your own evaluation of the plans presented by the groups? Implementable?

7. What lessons have you learned for the future?

G. Local Government and Community Umbrella Groups (CCV, GIRDAC, KIRSAC, etc)

1. Was your organisation satisfied with the opportunities afforded it?

2. Are you satisfied with the way the working groups were set up?

3. Are you satisfied with the composition of the working groups?

4. Are you satisfied with the consultation processes being employed?

5. How did your organisation involve itself in the consultation process?

6. Have you any recommendations for future planning processes?
APPENDIX 3: A SURVEY OF THE TRAGOWEL PLAINS COMMUNITY’S RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION AND COMMUNITY PLANNING

What was the purpose of the survey?

This review has concentrated on the perceptions of those involved in the Victorian Salinity Program. However, the review would be incomplete without considering the perceptions of the farmers who were not members of working groups, but who were supposed to be consulted. The views of those involved in plan development are not necessarily from the same perspective as the views of the farmers who were not involved.

A random sample survey was conducted to measure the extent to which the farming community has participated in the salinity planning process in their area. The area chosen had to be one which has just had a salinity management plan prepared. These areas have gone through their consultation phases. Of these areas, Campaspe West was eliminated because of the widespread community disagreement with the plan. Planners in Shepparton Irrigation and Goulburn Dryland deliberately chose to consult only the leaders in their community. A survey of farmers in those 2 regions would have been a survey of community leaders, and could not have been a random sample survey. Therefore, the Tragowel Plains sub-region was chosen. The Tragowel Plains plan has been promoted on the basis of extensive community consultation. On the other hand, if the Tragowel Plains farming community has not participated much in consultation then consultation is likely to be less effective in other areas. If consultation is effective anywhere, it would be effective in the Tragowel Plains.

How was the survey done?

The survey was conducted by personal interviews on farms in August 1990. The interviewing was conducted by 14 postgraduate and final year undergraduate students of agricultural extension at the University of Melbourne. The University provided four staff members for supervision. This joint approach had several benefits. The School of Agriculture is respected in the farming community for its independent research in agriculture. Because DARA is involved with plan development, using DARA staff as interviewers may have biased the responses. Further, use of students as interviewers enabled more interviews to be conducted than would have been possible if all the interviewing had been done by DARA staff. My involvement managing the interviews in the field ensured the quality of interviewing was maintained.

The Tragowel Plains sub-region was divided into 6 areas. Each of the 6 interviewing groups stayed within their own area. As they drove around, they selected every third or fourth farm and approached requesting an interview. There were few refusals. Where no-one was present they went to the next farm. Interviewees had to be involved with making management decisions on the farm. Beyond that requirement, any person on the farm could be interviewed. Those women approached whose husbands were not home and who were willing to be interviewed, were interviewed. Some women, however, preferred that their husbands be interviewed. Because the questionnaire was short (about 20 minutes) and because of the difficulties in making appointments the interview team thought the sampling method was appropriate. A random geographic distribution of farms was achieved, but perhaps biased in favour of resident landholders.
Results of the survey

There are 446 farms in the Tragowel Plains. Ninety seven farmers were interviewed. This sample is a large proportion of the population for a survey, although the smaller the population to be studied the larger the sample required before meaningful conclusions can be drawn. None of the respondents were working group members, these being deliberately excluded from the sample. Seven were LAAG leaders. In most cases, the results are presented as numbers rather than percentages because of the relatively small sizes of the population and the sample involved.

Awareness of the plan

Nearly everybody interviewed had heard of the plan (figure A1). Of the 8 who hadn't heard, some may not have been the farm decision makers involved in the consultation process for the plan. Every farmer was supposed to be invited to a LAAG meeting. Nevertheless, it is a high awareness rate.

![Figure A1: Awareness of the plan.](image)

Most respondents first heard of the plan from one of two sources, someone involved in planning and the local paper (figure A2). Planners includes working group members, DARA staff and LAAG leaders, all of whom could be seen by the respondents as people involved in the planning. "Planner" and "farmer" refer to personal contact. It is possible that some responses in the category of other farmers could refer to other farmers who were involved in the planning process, but this would not have involved many people.
The local paper in Kerang, the *Northern Times*, published two 4-page inserts publicising the Tragowel Plains salinity management plan and the working group. It also contains "Gunshots", a weekly column written by DARA Kerang extension officer Gyn Jones. Several "Gunshots" articles at the start and end of the planning process were devoted to the Tragowel Plains management plan. Interestingly, some respondents said they had not heard of the plan until the LAAG meetings, which were held at the end of the planning process, after the draft plan had been launched in August 1989. The working group had been operating for three years by then.

The respondents' source of information about the plan differed little from where they first heard of the plan, apart from the high number who got most of their information from the consultation booklet or the working group newsletter (figure A3). The booklet is the most likely source of this information, because it was produced specifically as an information source for the farmers to read before the LAAG meetings. It was a well-produced, informative document which aimed to explain the contents of the plan in a manner which was easy to understand. Clearly it was a success.

Together, figures A2 and A3 show the importance of personal contact between those involved in planning and their farmer "constituents". They also show the value of inserting information in the local paper.
An overwhelming majority of respondents correctly perceived the plan to be a joint effort by both community people and government officers (figure A4). Three respondents mentioned specifically that, although the plan was a joint effort, government had the final say in the content of the plan. Some respondents saw the plan as developed by the community alone, but very few saw it as a government effort only. The effort put into publicly emphasising the co-operation between community and government in developing the plan has resulted in high community awareness of the joint process.

Figure A3: Sources of information about the plan.
Figure A4: Perceptions of who developed the plan.

When asked the name of the person involved in developing the plan they had heard of most, almost half the respondents mentioned a working group member, more than half of these being the chairman of the working group (figure A5). Several people mentioned DARA staff, all of whom were current staff. Just less than one quarter of the respondents had not heard of anyone involved.

Participation in the consultation process
The consultation booklet referred to in the previous section was distributed to all farmers on the Tragowel Plains. The interviewers showed each respondent a copy of it, and asked if they had seen it. The booklet had a very high recognition rate (?). A copy of the latest working group newsletter was also shown to the respondents. Aided recall of this newsletter was also high, but not quite as high as for the booklet. Perhaps this was because the booklet was distinctive, and newsletters often look similar to each other.

Respondents were asked what opportunities they had been given to comment on the plan, and what form their comments took (figure A6). The most commonly reported opportunity to comment was at LAAG meetings. Generally respondents reported having had more opportunities to comment than they had actually used. Only three quarters of those who reported having an opportunity to attend a LAAG meeting said they commented at a LAAG meeting. More than half of this group actually attended their LAAG meeting but said they didn’t comment ( ).
More than twice as many respondents reported having made no comments than those who reported having had no opportunity to comment. The large difference between the number who recalled public meetings and the number who said they spoke at public meetings is perhaps indicative of the lack of enthusiasm most people have for speaking at public meetings. The working group was wise in not emphasising public meetings in its consultation strategy. The only successful public meetings are small ones. Large public meetings are too easily stage managed, either by the organisers or a disgruntled group in the audience. A few respondents had spoken privately to someone involved in developing the plan.

LAAGs were the key consultation strategy employed in the Tragowel Plains. Most respondents (78) had heard of LAAG meetings. However, only about half reported attending their LAAG meeting. A few others spoke to their LAAG leader in private, but this group did not mention LAAGs as an opportunity to comment on the plan (figure A7). These farmers may not have been invited to a LAAG meeting. Working group records state that 69 percent of resident landholders attended a LAAG meeting. However, the LAAG attendance rate measured in this survey was 48 percent. A possible explanation for the discrepancy is that this survey depended on the respondents' recall of their attendance. Also, it is possible that someone on the farm other than the respondent had attended a LAAG meeting.

It is possible that some LAAG leaders spoke to each of their LAAG members individually about the plan, then collated their responses into their LAAG leader's report to the working group. Although a different strategy from that intended by the working group, it is not unacceptable. The purpose of consultation is for each person to have an opportunity for their opinion to be heard. Individual conversations certainly allow this, although they might not canvass the range of issues and opinions covered in a small group meeting such as a LAAG.
Perceptions of the consultation process

An intriguing feature of LAAG attendance was the surprising number of respondents (14) who reported attending the LAAG meeting, having had the opportunity to comment at the LAAG meeting, yet not commenting at the LAAG meeting. Did these people attend but not say anything? Would they have said anything in another forum? It is hard to imagine someone attending a meeting of such a small group and not saying anything. we suspect that they did talk about their reaction to the plan, but did not perceive that talk as a comment on the plan.

"Making a comment on the plan" implies a formal structure where someone listens and acts on the comment. This is what was planned to happen with the LAAGs. Perhaps these farmers felt their LAAG did not have this formal structure. Perhaps they felt that no-one would take any notice of what they said. Certainly a substantial majority of respondents indicated that nothing held back their involvement in their LAAG meeting (figure A8). It is often difficult to ask about concerns like these, and the questionnaire may have missed some respondents' concerns. However, the respondents must have been satisfied with the LAAG process, because holding local meetings was the most common suggestion for improving consultation (figure A10). Also, respondents who said they attended a LAAG meeting but didn't comment were no more likely to report their involvement being held back than other respondents.
Three of the six farmers who said they were held back said the reason was that they didn't have enough time to participate. Often people who say they didn't have time for things really mean they didn't make time. There was some evidence of a "meeting-goer effect", where those who belong to community groups were more likely to attend their LAAG meeting, but it was not significant (Chi-square test, p=0.14).

The respondents were asked whether they thought the working group had taken notice of the comments they made on the plan, and whether they thought the government had taken notice of their comments. There was a clear perception that the working group had taken notice of people's comments (figure A9). However, the respondents were far less sure about the government. Note that in a question like this, a response of "don't know" is likely in some cases to indicate unease rather than a lack of opinion. It is interesting to compare the thoughts on this matter of those mentioned earlier as attending their LAAG meeting but not commenting with the thoughts of all those who commented (table A1). Whilst the group that said they didn't comment was as confident as the rest of the sample that the working group took notice of their comments, they were much less confident of the government taking notice of their comments. It is difficult to see, though, how this relates to their unconventional perception of their participation in LAAGs.

Figure A8: Perceived limits to participation in LAAG meeting.
Did the government take notice of your comments?  

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<th>all respondents who commented (%)</th>
<th>those who attended but did not comment (%)</th>
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Table A1: Did the government take notice of your comments?

The questionnaire sought suggestions for more effective consultation. Only half of those who were asked, offered any suggestions as to how they could be consulted more effectively in the future (figure A10). Most suggestions were to hold local meetings such as LAAGs. Half the respondents had either no suggestions or thought that the current arrangements were satisfactory. Given LAAGs were the main consultation method employed, this appears to be a vote of confidence in LAAGs by the farmers of the Tragowel Plains.
Those involved in the development of salinity management plans are concerned that the most appropriate methods are used to ensure that people participate as fully as possible in plan development. However, it seems from the results of the survey that this concern of departmental officers and working group members about the process used is not shared by the Tragowel Plains farmers. Many people appear to be satisfied not to use the opportunities they are given to participate. This is shown in several ways. Many more respondents reported not commenting on the plan than reported having no opportunity to comment (figure A7). A quarter of the respondents said they had the opportunity to comment at a LAAG meeting, but did not comment. Most of these did in fact attend, but some did not. We noticed that some respondents found the questions about processes difficult, as though they had not considered these matters. The lack of suggested limits to participation in LAAG meetings (figure A8) reflects this lack of concern as much as it reflects a satisfaction with the LAAG process. We suspect some respondents found it difficult to distinguish between having the opportunity to comment on the plan and actually commenting on the plan. While bureaucrats are focused on the processes involved and the conduct employed, the community is apparently more interested in the content and outcomes of the plan. So it should be, because the right process is useless unless it achieves an appropriate outcome. From this point of view, the best process is an invisible process. While the community appears unconcerned by process and conduct in this case, it is likely that community concern would increase if they perceived that the processes used were unacceptable. As long as the processes used give people some opportunity to participate (even if they don't use the opportunity) they appear to be satisfied. The lack of suggestions for improvement and the fact that many said that the current process was satisfactory add weight to this idea.
Appraisal of salinity hazard

Respondents were asked their perception of the salinity hazard to their district and their farm, using a standard question already used in surveys in other areas. The respondents were asked which of the following statements they thought best reflected their situation.

1. Salinity is not a problem, or only a minor problem in the local district.
2. Salinity is, or will be, a problem in the district, but I do not anticipate a problem on my property.
3. Salinity is a problem which is increasing in the area and is likely to affect my farm in the future.
4. Salinity is already affecting my farm.

The percentage of responses in each category is shown in figure A11. Note that the question measures a person's appraisal of salinity hazard, rather than the salinity hazard itself. For comparison, the responses from a sample of Shepparton district irrigators interviewed in August 1989 in a University of Melbourne unpublished research project is also shown. We suspect that the level of concern in the Shepparton district did not increase markedly between August 1989 and August 1990. There was some community education effort in that region in the intervening period, but not as much as there was before the Shepparton survey was conducted.

The salinity hazard perceived by Tragowel Plains farmers is much greater than that perceived by Shepparton district farmers. This is not surprising, because salinity in the Tragowel Plains is more obvious than it is in the Shepparton district. A much greater number of Tragowel Plains farmers than Shepparton farmers said that their farm was already affected by salt. Fewer were in each of the three lower hazard categories. Ten Tragowel Plains farmers expressed concern at the restriction imposed by the categories. They felt that, although salinity was already affecting their farm, they were able to control it. For comparison purposes, these farmers were put into the fourth category.
There were significant differences between localities on the Tragowel Plains in the way their residents perceived the salt hazard. The first three possible responses were grouped together into a category 'salinity is not yet affecting my farm', leaving the other category 'salinity has already affected my farm'. The localities were put in two groups, the area north of the Mitiamo-Boort road (the old Pyramid Hill Irrigation Area) and the area south of that road (the old Dingee-Calivil Irrigation Area), based on the assumption that the northern area is likely to be more saline. Those in the more saline area were significantly more likely to say that salinity was already affecting their farm than those in the less saline area (Chi-square test, p=0.0001).

Clearly, Tragowel Plains farmers are more willing to accept that they have a salt problem than are Shepparton district farmers. If acceptance of a problem is necessary for someone to be motivated to act, then the Tragowel Plains farmers are more likely to participate in salinity planning for their area than are Shepparton district farmers. They are also more likely to participate in consultation activities. Therefore, the participation rates for the Tragowel Plains plan, as measured by this survey, may not be matched in other areas. The Tragowel Plains plan is seen as a success partly because of the high proportion of its population who commented on the plan during consultation.

Apart from a few public meetings, the Shepparton region farmers have not yet had the chance to comment in detail on the salinity management plan for their area. If their appraisal of their salinity hazard is anything to judge them by, they are likely to become even less involved than the Tragowel Plains farmers have been. Unless, of course, something in the Shepparton plan threatens to affect them badly.
Perceptions of the plan

The respondents generally saw the plan favourably (table A2). Most said they thought there were parts of the plan they thought were very good, and almost none said there were no very good parts. Almost half said there were parts of the plan they were unhappy with, but several said there were no parts they were unhappy with. Most of those classified as "don't know" said they were unsure of the details of the plan. The unusually large number who were not sure of the details may be explained partly by the fact that the LAAG meetings (where the respondents obtained most of their information about the plan) were held almost a year before the survey. Perceptions of good and poor parts in the plan were not related to whether or not the respondent had attended a LAAG meeting. If so many people are not sure of the details of the plan, then the plan does not occupy a large part of their thoughts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Good parts of the plan</th>
<th>Poor parts of the plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table A2: Perception of good and poor parts of the plan

When asked what they saw as the very good parts of the plan, more respondents mentioned drainage than any other aspect (table A3). This is not surprising, because the history of irrigation on the Tragowel Plains is, in many ways, a history of irrigation farmers campaigning for drainage. Because of this, anything that promises better drainage is likely to be received favourably in the Tragowel Plains (and probably in most irrigation communities). We suspect that the high acceptance of the plan is, in many cases, because it does something about drainage. Beyond that, it may not matter much to the Tragowel Plains people what is in the plan.
The respondents expressed some concerns about the plan, but each concern was expressed by few people (table A4). None of the concerns were shared by many farmers. This indicates that there is general acceptance of the plan. Recognition of good aspects in the plan was much stronger than concern about poor aspects. There is nothing in the plan which is likely to upset people. The plan leaves people alone if they want to be left alone.

### Table A3: Good parts of the plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Number of mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drainage</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-operation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil salinity survey</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planting trees</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fencing off salty areas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>92</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: more than one response was possible.

### Table A4: Poor aspects of the plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Number of mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government spending too much or unwisely</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government spending too little</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil salinity survey</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying and selling</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: more than one response was possible.
Intentions for implementation: the soil salinity survey

A soil salinity survey is a key component of the Tragowel Plains salinity management plan. For an individual farmer, it is the first thing to be done as part of the implementation of the plan. It is a prerequisite for obtaining assistance for other farm works as part of the plan. It is done at almost no cost to the landholder. We asked the respondents whether they were going to have a soil salinity survey done on their farm and, if so, when they would apply for it. More than a quarter of the respondents said they had already applied (figure A12). A quarter of the respondents did not intend to have a soil salinity survey done. In some cases, this was because they disagreed with some aspect of the survey.

Of the 30 who said they had already applied for a soil salinity survey, only 27 had actually applied at the time of the survey, according to the records of the plan implementation team. The other three had probably confused the soil salinity survey with a survey for the purpose of a whole farm plan or laser grading development. Although this confusion indicates a lack of knowledge of the plan, the number of people involved (three) is too small to make any conclusions valid.

As 27 farmers out of a sample of 97 had actually applied for a soil salinity survey, the application rate measured in the survey was 28 percent. The actual application rate up to the time of the survey, according to the records of the plan implementation team, was 16 percent. This discrepancy is unusually great for a survey with as large a sample as this. This does not necessarily cast doubt on the sampling method used in the survey, since it is not possible to tell from the road whether or not a farmer has applied for a soil salinity survey. However, it does suggest that the answers reported here are not as representative as they should be. Someone who has applied for a soil salinity survey is likely to have greater knowledge of the

![Figure A12: Intentions on applying for soil salinity survey.](image-url)
Respondents' reasons for undertaking a soil salinity survey were varied (table A5). Most reasons were in the spirit of the plan: "to identify salty areas", "to concentrate inputs on better land"; even "to find out how much salt I have", although this does not imply treating different parts of the farm differently. Some are doing it because it is free, or because everyone else is. Some are cynical enough to see that they need to do it to obtain assistance later. Disagreements with the soil salinity survey included concerns about the accuracy of the meter and the nature of the survey. Disagreement with the survey was not asked about specifically; some respondents mentioned it and their comments were written down. It is possible that more respondents disagreed with the survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Number of mentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify salty areas</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify extent of salt</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's free, may as well</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To concentrate inputs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirement for further work</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline data</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Disagree with survey) (8)

Table A5: Reasons for undertaking a soil salinity survey

Conclusions from the survey

A major strength of the Tragowel Plains salinity management plan is the high level of community involvement it attracted. Seventy seven percent of those surveyed reported that they had some opportunity to comment on the plan. Fifty percent said they actually commented on it. The high participation rate reflects the effort the Tragowel Plains working group put into consultation. It also shows how important an issue salinity is seen as, by the Tragowel Plains community.

There is general community acceptance of the Tragowel Plains salinity management plan. In many cases this is because it involves drainage. It is not surprising that Tragowel Plains farmers want drainage; they have been campaigning for it for many years. Beyond that, it may not matter much to the Tragowel Plains people what is in the plan. There is nothing in
the plan which is likely to upset people. The different items of assistance provided are generally uncontroversial. The plan leaves people alone if they want to be left alone.

The bureaucratic preoccupation with processes and conduct is not shared by the community. The community is more interested in the content and outcomes of the plan. From a community point of view, the best process is an invisible process. Where the community appears unconcerned by process and conduct in a plan, it is likely that community concern would increase only if they perceived that the processes used were unacceptable. As long as the processes used give people some opportunity to participate (even if they don't use the opportunity) the community appears to be satisfied.

Tragowel Plains farmers are willing to accept that they have a salt problem, arguably more so than are farmers in other parts of Victoria. If acceptance of a problem is necessary for someone to be motivated to act, then the Tragowel Plains farmers are more likely to participate in salinity planning for their area than are farmers in other districts. They are also more likely to participate in consultation activities. The Tragowel Plains plan is seen as a success partly because of the high proportion of its population who commented on the plan during consultation. Plans in other areas have attracted comment from far fewer people. This may be because of a deliberate policy of the planners, or because the community does not see salinity as a significant issue. The participation rates for the Tragowel Plains plan, as measured by this survey, are highly unlikely to be matched in other areas.
GLOSSARY

ACF: Australian Conservation Foundation

ACIL: Agricultural consultancy firm.

ARCIS: Avon Richardson Catchment Improvement Scheme.

BCIT: Bullock Creek Improvement Trust. Drainage trust active in the Tragowel Plains.

CCV: Conservation Council of Victoria

CFL: see DCE

Community Working Group: Community groups charged with the responsibility to develop salinity plans. Also referred to as `working groups'.

DA: Department of Agriculture. During the period of this review this department was also known as the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the Department of Food and Agriculture. Referred to in the text consistently as the Department of Agriculture (DA).

DARA: see DA

DCE: Department of Conservation and Environment. During the period of this review this department was also known as the Department of Conservation, Forests and lands. For a period the Department of Water Resources was incorporated into this department. In the report this department is consistently referred to as the Department of Conservation and Environment (DCE).

DFA: see DA

DWR: Department of Water Resources. For a period this department was incorporated into the Department of Conservation and Environment. This incorporation had little effect upon this departments contribution to the Salinity Program. In the report this department is consistently referred to as the Department of Water Resources (DWR).

EM meter: Device which uses electromagnetism to measure soil salinity.

FMIT: First Mildura Irrigation Trust.

GIRDAC: Goulburn Irrigation Region Drainage Action Committee. A drainage advocacy group based in the Shepparton area.

KIRSAC: Kerang Irrigation Region Salinity Action Committee. A drainage advocacy group based in the Kerang area.

KLAWG: Kerang Lakes Area Working Group.

LAAG: Local Action and Advisory Group. Small groups used as the basis of community consultation the Barr Creek and Tragowel Plains plans.

PMT: Program Management Team. Administrative support group assisting the development of the Shepparton and Goulburn/Broken salinity management plans.
RWC: Rural Water Commission. During the period this report considers, this statutory body had responsibility for the operation of most of the states of Victoria's major irrigation systems. As this report was nearing completion, a major review has recommended to creation of regional water authorities to take over most of the roles of this body. In the report this authority is consistently referred by the initials RWC.

Salinity Bureau: Administrative Unit charged with the coordination of the Victorian salinity program.


SPPAC: Shepparton Pilot Program Advisory Council.

SRWSC: forerunner to RWC.

Technical Support Group: Group composed of government and other professionals responsible for providing technical support and advice to community working groups. Also referred to as 'planning support groups'.


VFF: Victorian Farmers' Federation