



## Mallee Sustainable Farming submission to Parliamentary inquiry: The register of Environmental Organisations

Mallee Sustainable Inc. is a Registered Environmental Organisation. Mallee Sustainable Farming supports the effectiveness of the Register of Environmental Organisations (the Register) in supporting communities to take practical action to improve the environment. We also strongly support the principle purpose of research, education, extension & on-ground works as the means of achieving the goals. Mallee Sustainable Farming believe that maintaining the link between environmental protection and management decisions by private land managers delivers significant environmental protection benefits and should be a very important consideration in the review of the Register of Environmental Organisations.

### *Mallee Sustainable Farming Inc.'s approach to protection and enhancement of the environment*

Mallee Sustainable Farming Inc. (MSF) is a not-for-profit organisation delivering research and extension services in the low rainfall (less than 350mm) Mallee agroecological zone of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. This covers over seven million hectares, extending beyond Balranald (NSW) in the east to Murray Bridge (SA) in the west. Our mission: To provide excellence in research, development and extension initiatives for the dryland Mallee of South Eastern Australia. The focus of Mallee Sustainable Farming is to balance the economics of improved farming systems with the environmental and social outcomes for regional sustainability

MSF formed in 1997 to identify the issues restricting the adoption of technology that would enhance the development of sustainable farming systems to reduce environmental impacts. The Mallee region has particularly sandy soils prone to wind erosion if not managed sustainably. Much of these innovative farming practices are directly or indirectly related to improving soil surface cover and minimising soil disturbance on and off farm.

The primary focus of this work to date has been the protection of the core soil resource through the adoption of stubble retention or other plant matter in paddocks over the non-cropping summer and autumn season. This is the only effective way to reduce the incidence of severe wind erosion that results in intergenerational-scale loss of soil resources: air quality issues of dust storms that can impact across the South Eastern half of the Australian continent and the detrimental impact on neighbouring native vegetation and wildlife corridors.

Mallee Sustainable farming operates to influence positive environmental change through a cooperative, interactive approach across both the agriculture and environment sectors. MSF has had great success in working across these sectors and providing locally-relevant research, identifying practical solutions, and extending this information through the development and promotion of on-farm trials, field days, forums, conferences and publications to farm and community groups. The community response is demonstrated by the significant growth in the adoption of stubble-retained farming systems in the region. The role of Mallee Sustainable Farming continues as there are now new and emerging

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challenges to this biological system that, if not addressed, will force farmers back to the known profitability of cultivation-based farming systems.

Some of the current regionally-based research being conducted and extended to the community by Mallee Sustainable Farming includes;

1. Stubble management to reduce wind erosion and increase soil organic matter
2. Identifying alternatives to chemical weed management that will work in Mallee farming systems
3. Identifying and managing new break crops that can improve the health of Mallee soils

The success of the MSF model was highlighted in achieving the coveted National Landcare People's Choice Award in 2014 which recognised MSF, at a national level, for its innovative approach to assisting farmers to achieve economic, environmental and social sustainability for the future of generations to come. The Award highlights the relevance of MSF's work across the tri-state region and the collaborative projects that it undertakes to demonstrate environmentally sensitive farming practices for low rainfall dryland farmers.

Mallee Sustainable Farming works closely with a range of the key Natural Resource Management agencies in each of the three state it operates in, which allows us to coordinate activities and programs across state boundaries.

Registration as an Environmental Organisation allows MSF to work with private land managers on practical solutions to key environmental issues that would otherwise be not understood and possibly ignored in a traditional production focus farming system.

Mallee Sustainable Farming therefore strongly supports the retention of the principle purpose definition; "the provision of information or education, or the carrying on of research, about the natural environment or a significant aspect of the natural environment."

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