

Land & Water Australia
Senate Estimates Statement, May 25, 2009

On behalf of the Board of Land & Water Australia, I would like to take the opportunity to read this prepared statement.

Australia's Rural Research and Development Corporations are an internationally recognised example of how to overcome market failure in the highly fragmented primary industries sector. Land & Water Australia has been investing in research and development to improve the management of Australia's land, water and vegetation resources for 19 years.

Our mission is "*Informed decisions by land and water managers to support sustainable and productive landscapes, through investment in knowledge generation and management.*"

By operating at arms length from government, we have been able to form close collaborative partnerships with industry and community groups. This has been essential for us to deliver science on the ground and ensure adoption of knowledge that enhances the sustainability and productivity of rural and regional Australia. We have been recognised as leaders in our field through the way we have addressed natural resource management issues across all scales from paddock to farm business to catchment and region; through our research into the social and economic factors that influence adoption of new practices, and through the way we have managed our research portfolio and its legacy from knowledge discovery to practice change.

Independent and conservative estimates show that each dollar invested by Land & Water Australia has returned \$4.60 in productivity gains for rural industries, this does not include the social and environmental benefits. Put simply, investing through Land & Water Australia has made good sense, economically, environmentally and socially.

We are deeply disappointed at the Government's decision to abolish Land & Water Australia and reduce Government's investment in research and development. Our disappointment is at three levels.

Firstly, the decision to so rapidly abolish the organisation has a direct and personal impact on 41 passionate and professional staff, many of whom face unemployment, and the many researchers, PhD students, technicians and research staff who will have their contracts terminated over the coming weeks.

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation
Committee
Budget estimates 2009-2010
DAFF

Tabled document no: 4

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Date: 25 May 2009

Secondly, we are deeply disappointed that 2009-10, the final year of our five-year Strategic Research and Development Plan, will see the termination of many projects funded under that Plan that were in their final stages, potentially wasting significant investments to date.

Most importantly, we are concerned for the future long-term social, environmental and economic sustainability of our primary industries and our rural and regional communities. We believe the challenges of climate change, water availability, global food security and declining productivity growth make Land & Water Australia's role more important than ever. As a nation it is vital to improve our understanding of our land and water resources to manage them for long-term sustainability and productivity growth. In the face of global recession we must be smarter and more efficient in the way we collaborate and coordinate our research, development and extension and this requires partnerships and alliances that cannot be managed from within government. We believe Land & Water Australia was ideally placed to address these challenges through an integrated portfolio of investments balancing productivity growth with sustainable land and water management. This decision will leave a significant void in Australia's agricultural research and innovation system, which we believe will need to be addressed, sooner rather than later.

The Board of Land & Water Australia accepts the government's decision to abolish the Corporation and is committed to manage the wind up of the organisation as professionally as possible. We will be working hard to ensure our staff and our research providers are treated with the greatest respect and understanding.

Land & Water Australia will also be working hard to maximise every last ounce of value we can from our investments in the coming months and ensuring that wherever possible, other bodies take up the challenge we were so diligently addressing.

Finally, the Board would like to thank the extended family of Land & Water Australia, Directors, staff, partners and researchers, who over the years have contributed to the organisation's success, and we'd like to acknowledge the hundreds of messages of support we have received over recent weeks.

Thank you.