

Lessons from collaborative research programs

(with an emphasis on natural resource management)

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Collaboration in natural resource management research is not new to Australia's rural R&D Corporations:

Some examples:

1991	soil health
1992	adoption of nrm practices
1993	climate variability agroforestry
1994	irrigation pesticides
1995	sustainable grazing
1998	dryland salinity
2000	land water & wool
2003	sustainable mixed farming

Initial observations:

Farmer levy payers also expect collaboration

Collaborations only work when all partners see something in it for themselves . . .

. . . but collaborations need more than that, they need synergistic benefits i.e. $1+1+1=5$

Effective collaborations require effective frameworks, adequate resources and trust

The more you put into a collaboration, the more you get out of it

Case study: National Dryland Salinity Program:

Partners (1998-2003):

Coordination	LWA
Industry	GRDC MLA RIRDC (AWI)
Government	DAFF States of NSW, Vic, Qld, Tas, SA, WA
Science	CSIRO
Other	Westpac Bank

National Dryland Salinity Program:

Investment focus (1998-2003):

Audit & monitoring

Environment

Institutional arrangements

Low recharge farming systems

Sustainable use of saline resources

Regional & catchment salinity processes

Infrastructure

Some collaborative lessons (1993-98)

- “It’s a LWWRDC Program isn’t it?”
 - if you treat it like the coordinating agency’s program, that’s what it will become
- Landcare – national v local ping-pong
- Multi-disciplinary R&D is difficult
- True participatory research is even more difficult
- Doing multi-disciplinary and participatory research simultaneously is potentially lethal, but very effective if you can pull it off. Need to consider:
 - engagement issues
 - ownership issues
 - methodological issues
 - communication issues
 - cultural issues
- Be aware of: “If you give us money, we’ll be your friend”

Some collaborative lessons (1998-2004):

- Communication is everything, but it needs a basis and credible messages!
- Collaboration can be vital, but it's not an end in itself
- Collaboration can involve high transaction costs
- Decentralisation can work, but relies on trust
- Misperception exists that if it's national then it must be government
- Engaging the regions (without a map) is critical
- “Don't touch policy research!” makes people suspicious
- “Don't criticize us” (even constructively)
- “We'll collaborate, but we're into silver bullets”
- Engaging industry and engaging farmers are two different things
- Who manages the contracts?

Case study: Grain & Graze:

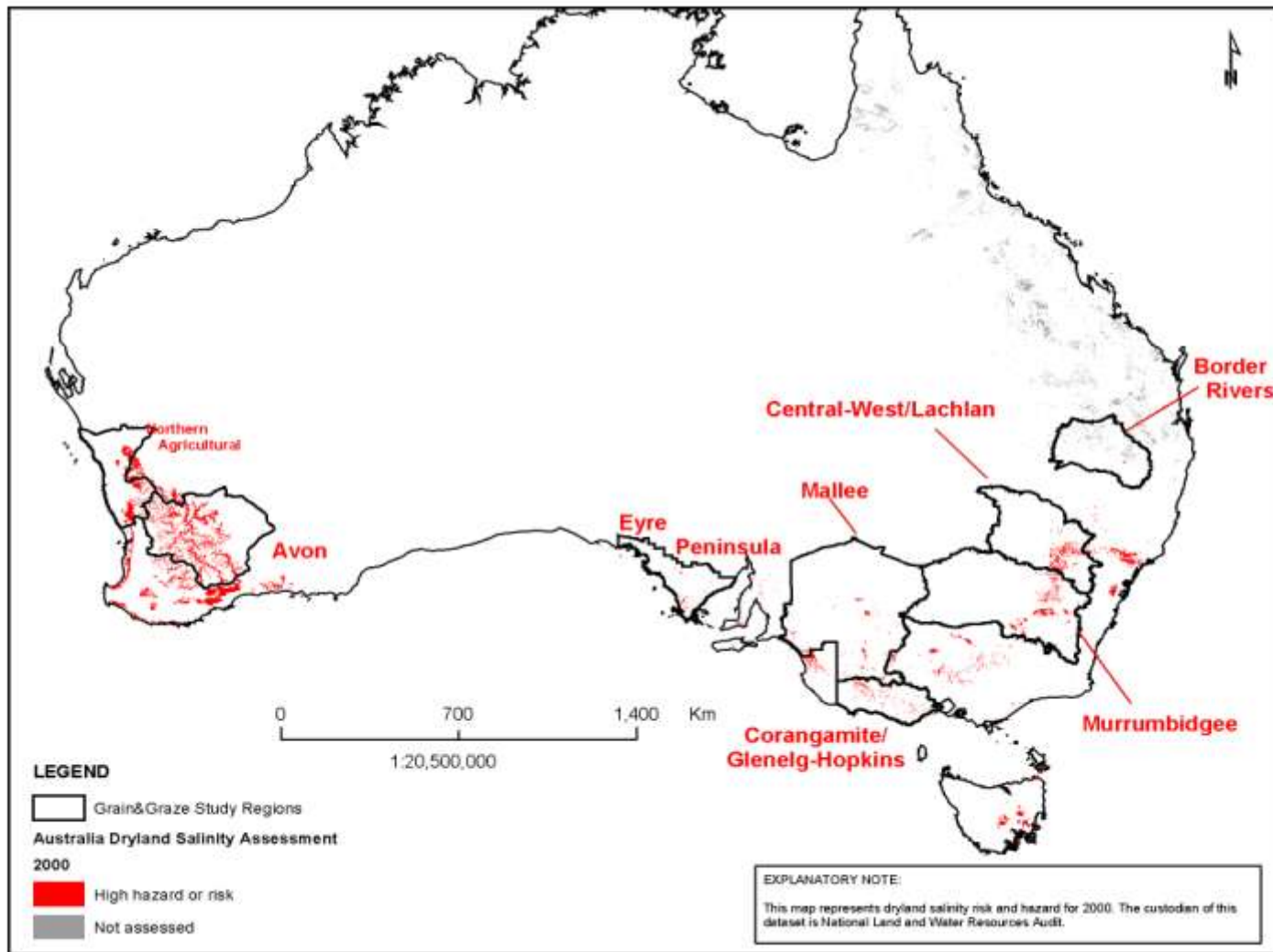
Investors:

Industry

Grains R&D Corporation
Meat & Livestock Australia
Land & Water Australia
Australian Wool Innovations

Catchments groups

Central West CMA
Murrumbidgee CMA
Mallee CMA
Border Rivers CMA
Corangamite CMA
Glenelg Hopkins CMA
Avon Council
Nth Ag Reg. Council



Goals:

1. 10% increase in sustainable production
2. Progress towards meeting catchment targets
3. Increase in pride, confidence and social capital

Some collaborative lessons:

- Collaboration is a producer expectation
- Different partners have different cultures
- The language of targets, outcomes and outputs has many meanings and connotations
- Industry, government and catchment investment cycles are difficult to match
- “It’s great to deal with the industry people, and not the bureaucrats. They have something to offer!”
- Its hard to progress towards meeting targets when the targets are meaningless
- Data – The Government isn’t collecting data at the scale its own programs depend on!

Case study: Managing Climate Variability:

Investors:

Industry

- Grains R&D Corporation
- Meat & Livestock Australia
- Land & Water Australia
- Australian Wool Innovations
- Rural Industries R&D Corp
- Dairy R&D Corporation
- Sugar R&D Corporation
- Fisheries R&D Corporation

Government Dept of Agriculture

Other National Farmers Federation



Some collaborative lessons:

- Supporting generic issues as an entry price to receiving specific benefits
- Pooling funds gives strength to a collaboration
- Financial resources are not enough to make a collaborative partnership work
- The domination of one party in a collaboration requires sensitive handling
- Generic management agreements reduce transaction costs considerably



Thank you

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