



# Media Release

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## Mediterranean Saltbush Trial Achieves Positive Results

A trial in northern Tasmania has shown the species Mediterranean Saltbush can successfully help manage salinity.

Andrew Bond runs a mixed, irrigated cropping and livestock property "Landwick" near Cressy and received funding from NRM North to establish saltbush on the property.

When he bought the land, some areas were bare salt scalds and were eroding badly. It is estimated that up to six inches of top soil was lost.

The salt scalds are low-lying areas usually covered in water during winter. The areas were fenced off 12 years ago to exclude stock and a range of salt-tolerant species were planted, but many died.

Mr Bond planted Mediterranean Saltbush in one large scald in 2007 and most plants survived and thrived in the wet and salty conditions.

Mr Bond said most of the scald now had plant cover and was no longer eroding.

"The saltbush is very easy to establish and sheep love it. There's no big money in it, but it's a useful bank of summer feed and really helps rehabilitate salt scalds.

"Previous to planting saltbush, I had no production off those sites in 15 years and it also helps the broader landscape by lowering the water table in my nearby cropping paddocks. It improves the health and appearance of the farm and stops the salt from spreading.

"These former salt-scalds are great examples of how farmers can easily manage salinity in a productive way."

Mr Bond said it was important to let the salt-tolerant plants establish first and not to graze them in the first year.

Another large scald was rehabilitated last year. This time desirable salt-tolerant pasture species including fescues and puccinellia were drilled between the saltbush rows.

The pasture was drilled in autumn and saltbush planted in spring. 95% of saltbush plugs are established with pasture growing well in the drier areas.

NRM North's Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator, Adrian James, said it was amazing how the saltbush quickly bounced back from being reduced to sticks by sheep.

"The difference between the saltbush areas and where the scalds haven't been managed is profound. The more recently planted area is going to be even better, rows of saltbush with useful pasture in between." Mr James said.

The cost of planting saltbush was relatively low - 1000 plugs per hectare, inclusive of milk carton guards, stakes, herbicide and mounding are around \$1,300 per hectare.

This cost can vary according to weed cover, whether plugs or seedlings are used and the number of stems per hectare.

Julie Finnigan from Serve-Ag said successful establishment of saltbush in trial sites in salt-affected agricultural regions of Tasmania had so far shown very promising results.

"Growth rates and survival have been very good and their resilience to grazing is outstanding.

"Saltbush utilises saline soils moisture, helping to lower watertables and flush salts from shallow soils while gaining a valuable and nutritional feed source for sheep.

"Saltbush has the ability to provide both environmental and economic benefits to landholders through the productive use and remediation of saline soils." Mrs Finnigan said.

The NRM North funding for this project was through the Federal Government's Caring for Our Country Program.

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