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CSIRO Publishing

PO Box 1139 (150 Oxford St)

Collingwood, Vic. 3066, Australia



CSIRO
PUBLISHING

Telephone: +61 3 9662 7628

Fax: +61 3 9662 7611

Email: publishing.sr@csiro.au

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Preface: Sodicity issues in agricultural industries—current research and future directions

Australia is recognised as containing the world's largest area of sodic soils, with approximately 33% of the continent being affected.

The first National Conference and Workshop on Sodic Soils in Australia was held in Adelaide (9–13 November 1992), to bring together information and experience on sodic soils available at that time. The papers from that conference were published as a special issue of the *Australian Journal of Soil Research* (Volume 31, 1993). The 1992 conference covered a wide range of topics, including distribution, classification, mineralogy, fertility, environmental consequences, irrigation, and management of sodic soils. Importantly, it identified priority areas for research in each of these topics.

The 3-day International Sodicity Conference held at Tatura, Victoria, from 28 February–1 March 2000 sought to:

- provide a forum for presenting sodicity research in agricultural industries since 1992, and
- set specific directions for future sodicity research across different agricultural industries.

The theme of this conference was 'Sodicity Issues in Agricultural Industries—Current Research and Future Directions'. The application of sodicity theory to practical problems experienced by primary producers and other land managers was the main focus of presentations.

The conference targeted dairy, rice, cropping, cotton, sugarcane, and viticulture industries and provided a top-notch forum among soil scientists, agronomists, engineers, industry representatives, and some farmers. Keynote papers targeted two audiences: (i) main stream research soil scientists, and (ii) applied agricultural scientists involved in implementation, consultants, farmers, and policy makers. The theme of the conference generated considerable interest and as a result 40 oral papers and 12 poster papers were presented. Over 140 participants from Australia and overseas attended the conference. The main emphasis of a mid-conference field tour was on irrigated pastures. The conference concluded with a facilitated workshop to capture issues that need research to further improve knowledge of sodicity in agricultural industries.

In recognition of the importance of soil sodicity research to Australia, the *Australian Journal of Soil Research* (AJSR) and *Australian Journal of Experimental Agriculture* (AJEA) agreed to publish peer-reviewed papers from the conference.

Eight papers from the conference and two related papers are published in this volume and 16 papers will be published in AJEA's special issue (volume 42, issue 3, 2002). Research knowledge gaps in agricultural industries, identified in papers and at the workshop, will be presented in the AJEA's special issue. Further, for each industry, an experienced researcher was invited to identify key issues where gaps in research were perceived to exist. These will be also included in AJEA's special issue.

I extend my appreciation to all Program Committee members from the different States and members of the Organising Committee from the Institute of Sustainable Irrigated Agriculture (ISIA) at Tatura. I especially acknowledge the help of Mr David Burrow, Ms Wendy Hopkins, Dr Ken Olsson, Ms Kirstin Coote, Ms Debbie Smith, and Ms Sue Ward.

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Dr Aravind Surapaneni

Institute of Sustainable Irrigated Agriculture (ISIA)

Private Bag 1

Ferguson Road

Tatura

Victoria 3616

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