

NATIONAL REPORT BY AUSTRALIA ON MEASURES TAKEN TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

Summary

Australia's domestic initiatives in addressing the global problem of combating desertification are well established. The continent's erosion prone soils and climatic extremes have necessitated a coordinated and strategic approach to sustainable natural resource management. This approach focuses on collaborative approaches between all levels of government, industry and community in developing solutions.

Australian landscapes are ancient and not well suited to many of the land use and management practices imported from other continents over the last 200 years. The fact that agricultural and pastoral activity are critical components of our national economy has catalysed governments, research institutions, industry and communities to find soundly based and ecologically sustainable approaches to land management. As a result, Australia has amassed considerable experience and expertise in managing and, where feasible, reversing the decline in our natural resource base.

Australia has been proactive in assisting other affected countries with a range of financial, technology transfer and capacity building support measures.

Australian expertise in the management of arid and semi-arid landscapes has gained an international reputation for excellence. In southern Africa, internationally renowned Australian research on the El Nino/Southern Oscillation complex has been cooperatively applied by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology to develop drought forecasting systems. Through the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and other research institutions, Australia has had a long-term advisory role in desertification-related work in several Middle East countries, including Jordan, Iran and Libya. Australian expertise is also being engaged in cooperative research partnerships to address severe land degradation problems in a number of Asian countries. The National Land and Water Resources Audit is a member of the Working Group advising the World Bank led partnership across Conventions in designing the Millennium Assessment initiative.

Australia has developed a range of policy initiatives to encourage and build capacity in communities to address land degradation. The Australian "Landcare" model of community based action has been so successful it is being internationalised through the International Secretariat for Landcare (based in Hamilton, Victoria). It has been adapted in establishing 'Landcare South Africa' and interest in the movement from many other countries is growing.

Australia has, for many years, been working with developing countries affected by land degradation and desertification, including neighbours in our own Asia-Pacific region and Africa. Recognising that prevention of environmental degradation is essential to alleviating poverty and fostering sustainable development, the Government's Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) is currently supporting a range of programs to combat desertification in developing countries worth approximately \$43.9 million. Additionally, the Australian Government provides contributions to a range of multilateral organisations, which either directly or indirectly combat desertification.

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) also participates in desertification and land degradation mitigation by developing innovative technologies and land use methods with an international perspective. ACIAR, which is a component of the Australian Government's overseas aid program, has funded a range of projects related to desertification. These projects, which are located primarily in southern Africa, China and India, run over the decade 1992-2002 and have a combined value of \$11.5million.