

6.15 Plan assumptions

This plan is built on a number of assumptions. The transparency of these assumptions is critical to the future review of the plan and the adaptive management approach outlined in the previous section. There are a number of high level fundamental assumptions that underpin this plan including:

- *That the area of existing irrigation is not negotiable and will continue to be justified based on economic and social grounds.* This assumption means it is the role of the plan to ensure that the salinity impacts of irrigation are minimised wherever socially, economically and environmentally feasible rather than recommending a reduction in the area of irrigation. However, it is also the role of the plan to ensure that new irrigation is only sanctioned if salinity impacts are minimised and acceptable.
- *That the economic, environmental and social value of the assets affected by salinity is as stated in Section 4.* The management action priorities are based on this valuation of assets which is a subjective assessment. This subjective assessment needs continual review and the priorities of the management actions changed accordingly. For instance, there is a strong emphasis in this plan on remediating land salinity with a lesser focus on surface water salinity based on the results of the asset valuation process. However, this may change over time depending on stakeholders' evolving values and opinions.
- *That both long-term recharge control and short-term options such as groundwater pumping are required to address the salinity issue.* The Groundwater Pumping Program has been very successful in the MID for lowering the watertable and decreasing the effect and severity of land salinity. However, it is recognised that this is only a short-term solution and that long-term recharge control through more efficient irrigation practices and revegetation is also required to address the salinity problem on a more regional scale. In the MID, addressing the cause of salinity through recharge control alone would have been socially and economically unacceptable due to the timeframes involved. Further, if all flood irrigation enterprises converted to spray irrigation in the MID, there would still be a salinity problem (SKM, 2004b). Therefore it is essential that a combination of management options be implemented to address both the causes and the symptoms of salinity.
- *That the management actions to address irrigation salinity, dryland salinity and ocean-induced salinity are not prioritised against each other.* The Steering Committee decided at the plan's inception that dryland and irrigation salinity were to be treated as separate management action programs and would not be prioritised against each other. As the plan developed, a third category of ocean induced salinity was added which was also treated separately.
- *That the salinisation of groundwater aquifers other than the watertable will be addressed in the appropriate Groundwater Management Plans.* For example, the potential to draw saline water from the Gippsland Lakes into the underlying Boisdale Aquifer is not addressed in this plan.
- *That related natural resource management issues are the subject of other action plans and choices of on-ground actions will be made based on the priorities and trade offs of all action plans.* Although this plan highlights important conflicts and multi-benefits with other natural resource management programs, it is focussed on how best to remediate salinity. There is a need for an additional planning process to bring together the priorities of action plans addressing single issues over the same geographic area.

There are also a large number of more specific assumptions that underpin the choice of management action as detailed in Sections 5, 6 and Appendix D. The assumptions for the expected changes in resource condition resulting from the implementation of the management

actions are given in Table 21, Table 38 and Table 54 for irrigation induced salinity, dryland salinity and surface water salinity respectively.