salinity tax from which revenues for alternative futures for dryland salinity areas can be further substantially developed. More broadly, the neo-liberal policy framework actively pursued by all Australian governments since the early 1980s has impacted on approaches to regional development. As Tonts and Jones (1997:182) have argued: ‘These policies, which included a laissez-faire approach to regional development, resulted in a concentration of investment in regions and localities which were conducive to capital accumulation.’ Other regions experienced disinvestment and peripheralisation. In other words, government would have to overturn its continued predisposition to neo-liberal policies before depressed dryland farming regions are likely to receive substantial assistance.

In sum, salinity has become an intractable policy problem substantially because political considerations have dictated the limited approaches adopted by government which has resulted in a paucity of research going back many decades. The crucial ingredient, as is so often the case with difficult policy issues, is the need for political leadership. As The West Australian newspaper once editorialised on salinity, governments have tended to be ‘cowered by the enormity of the problem’ (The West Australian, 22 November 1995). Having actively overseen and directed the decades of land clearing now at the root cause of the salinity crisis, governments must rise to the challenge and develop far-sighted approaches to actively save as much of the landscape as it is practically feasible. The costs of not doing so cannot be measured in strictly economic terms: the steadily encroaching salt scalds across Australia’s dryland farming landscapes will be a permanent reminder of the folly of separating economics from nature.

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