Rising watertables

By the 1970s high water tables were becoming more widespread, particularly in the Wakool Irrigation District where the groundwater was very salty.

Land clearing, the introduction of irrigation and the major flood of 1956 followed by another major flood in 1974, all contributed to the problem.

By 1981 19,200 hectares of the Wakool District had water tables within 1.5 metres of the surface. High water tables dramatically reduced the productivity of these areas and threatened regional biodiversity. More than 2,000 hectares of farmland was completely barren.

The Government was already taking action, developing the Wakool Tullakool Sub Surface Drainage Scheme. At the same time landholders in the east were lobbying for additional surface drainage to alleviate water logging, but construction of the evaporation basins was given priority.

The scheme was established on a 2,100 hectare site near Wakool and was built in two stages between 1978 and 1988. Under the scheme saline groundwater is pumped through a network of underground pipes into evaporation basins.

The scheme now successfully protects more than 50,000 hectares of land in the Wakool area from high water tables and salinity.

Inland aquaculture

Research is underway into the possible use of saline groundwater, which is similar to sea water, for the commercial production of fish.

Trials are being conducted at the NSW Inland Aquaculture Research Centre which has been established at the Wakool evaporation basins.

In October 2004 Rainbow Trout produced at the research centre (pictured above) were sold at butcher shops throughout the region.

Tiger Prawns from the research centre have also been sold iat the Melbourne and Sydney fish markets.

The evaporation basins are only one of a number of strategies developed to combat rising water tables across the region. Others include improved farm layouts, surface drainage, water reuse and revegetation.

Groundwater is pumped into evaporation basins where salt crystalises once the water has evaporated. Productive farmland can be seen adjacent to the basins.