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"The Spectre at the Feast: The Emergence of Salt in Victoria's Irrigated Districts"

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Howes, Hilary Susan. "The Spectre at the Feast: The Emergence of Salt in Victoria's Irrigated Districts." *Environment and History* 14, no. 2, "Australia Revisited" special issue (May, 2008): 217–39. doi:10.3197/096734008X303746 . Salinity in Victoria's irrigated districts can be understood as the result not only of environmental predisposition and technological inadequacies, but of a prevailing political philosophy which considered irrigation as a social and economic good per se. Victorian authorities (governments and water institutions), anxious to secure the state's economic prosperity and to encourage the establishment of independent family smallholdings, tended to underestimate the actual and potential severity of salinity problems, and to blame their development on the farming practices of individual landholders rather than on systemic failure. Their dismissal of farmers' concerns as 'ignorance' and their tardiness in implementing remedial measures in salt-affected areas were indicative not only of the restrictions imposed by insufficient knowledge, primitive technologies, and limited finances, but also of official resistance to the challenging of 'progress-through-irrigation' narratives. The salinity problems experienced today in many of Victoria's irrigated districts therefore reflect the long-term consequences of a broadly progress-oriented philosophy of natural resource management. All rights reserved. © 2008 The White Horse Press

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