iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 13 **Issue:** XII **Month of publication:** December 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2025.76955

International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.538
Volume 13 Issue XII Dec 2025- Available at www.ijraset.com

Brine, Bittern, and Beyond: Unlocking the Secrets of Sea Water for Industrial Innovation

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Abstract: Desalination processes have become crucial in addressing global freshwater scarcity. However, the by-products of these processes, mainly brine and bittern, pose significant environmental challenges. Brine, primarily composed of sodium chloride, and bittern, a concentrated liquid after salt extraction, both contain valuable chemicals and minerals that can be repurposed for industrial applications. This paper explores the chemical composition, industrial uses, and environmental impacts of brine and bittern, specifically in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and energy sectors. Through laboratory analysis, case studies, and data interpretation, this paper aims to highlight the potential of these by-products for sustainable industrial innovation.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the increasing global population and the corresponding rise in water demand, desalination technologies such as reverse osmosis (RO) are becoming critical in supplying fresh water. Desalination processes generate a by-product known as brine, a high-salinity solution that is typically discarded into oceans. A more concentrated form of brine, called bittern, is produced when salt is extracted from seawater. Both brine and bittern are rich in various minerals and chemicals, which present opportunities for industrial utilization rather than disposal.

However, the disposal of these by-products, particularly brine, has raised significant environmental concerns due to their high salinity, which affects marine life and water ecosystems. This paper seeks to explore how brine and bittern can be repurposed for industrial use, focusing on applications in agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and energy production. The study also aims to discuss the environmental implications and propose solutions for minimizing the negative effects of brine and bittern disposal.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Chemical Composition of Brine and Bittern

Brine consists primarily of sodium chloride (NaCl), along with smaller concentrations of other salts such as magnesium chloride ($MgCl_2$), calcium chloride ($CaCl_2$), and potassium chloride (KCl). On the other hand, bittern, the residual liquid after salt extraction, has a much higher concentration of magnesium chloride and other salts, making it more concentrated than brine. Table 1 below outlines the typical chemical compositions of brine and bittern.

Table 1: Chemical Composition of Brine and Bittern

Compound	Brine (mg/L)	Bittern (mg/L)
Sodium Chloride	35,000	25,000
Magnesium Chloride	5,000	10,000
Calcium Chloride	3,500	1,200
Potassium Chloride	200	1,000
Sulphate	4,000	2,500

Brine and bittern’s chemical properties are what make them valuable for several industrial applications, which is discussed in the next section.

B. Industrial Applications of Brine and Bittern

Brine has numerous applications, including:

1) De-icing and Road Maintenance: Due to its high salt content, brine is commonly used as a de-icing agent on roads during winter.
2) Salt Production: Brine is a primary source for producing table salt and industrial salts.
3) Cooling Systems: Brine is often used in industrial cooling systems due to its ability to lower the freezing point of water.

Bittern has several key industrial uses, such as:

- Agriculture: Bittern is applied as a soil conditioner to improve water retention in arid regions and to boost the yield of salt-tolerant crops like barley and wheat.
- Magnesium Production: Bittern is used to extract magnesium chloride, an important raw material in various industrial processes.

C. Environmental Impact of Brine and Bittern

The disposal of brine into the ocean can cause environmental harm by increasing the salinity of the water, which disrupts marine ecosystems and aquatic life. Similarly, improperly disposed bittern can lead to soil salinization, which reduces agricultural productivity and affects soil health.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Sample Collection

Brine and bittern samples were collected from desalination plants located along coastal regions. The desalination plants use reverse osmosis technology, and the samples were obtained directly from the outflow pipes where brine and bittern are released.

B. Chemical Analysis

To analyze the chemical composition, several laboratory techniques were employed:

1) Atomic Absorption Spectroscopy (AAS): This technique was used to determine the concentration of metals in the samples, including calcium, magnesium, and potassium.
2) Inductively Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (ICP-MS): This method was used for a more detailed analysis of trace elements in the brine and bittern samples.
3) pH and Conductivity Measurement: The pH and conductivity of the samples were measured to assess the salinity.

C. Experimental Procedures

The brine and bittern samples were tested for their industrial applications:

1) Agricultural Experiment: Bittern was mixed with soil at concentrations of 0%, 5%, 10%, and 15% to assess its effect on the growth of salt-tolerant crops such as barley.
2) De-icing Performance: Brine was tested in laboratory conditions at different concentrations (10%, 20%, 30%) to measure its effectiveness in melting ice on road surfaces.
3) Magnesium Extraction: Bittern was processed using solvent extraction methods to isolate magnesium chloride for use in industrial applications.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

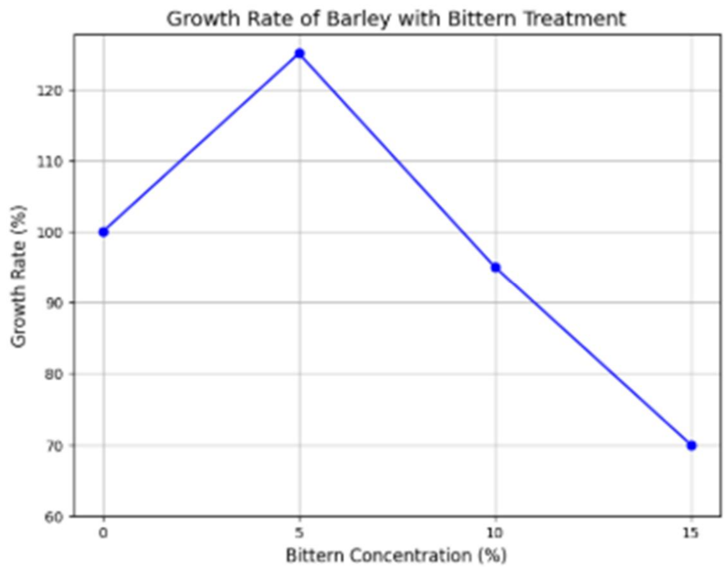
A. Chemical Composition

The chemical analysis revealed that brine was rich in sodium chloride, whereas bittern contained significantly higher concentrations of magnesium chloride and potassium salts. These findings are summarized in Table 1 above.

B. Agricultural Application

In the agricultural experiment, different concentrations of bittern were mixed with soil to study the effects on barley growth. The results are shown in Figure 1 and Table 2 below:

Figure 1: Growth Rate of Barley with Bittern Treatment



Bittern Concentration	Growth Rate (%)
0% (Control)	100
5%	125
10%	95
15%	70

As seen, barley growth was enhanced at a 5% concentration of bittern, showing a 25% increase in growth. However, at higher concentrations (10% and above), the growth rate decreased due to excess salinity.

C. De-icing Performance

Brine was tested for its performance as a de-icing agent at three different concentrations. The results are summarized in Table 2:

Table 2: De-icing Performance of Brine

Brine Concentration	Freezing Point (°C)
10%	-8
20%	-12
30%	-15

Brine at a 20% concentration demonstrated the best performance in terms of lowering the freezing point, making it an effective de-icing agent for colder climates.

D. Magnesium Extraction

The magnesium extraction process was successful, with a purity of 95% for the magnesium chloride produced from bittern. This demonstrates the feasibility of using bittern as a raw material for magnesium production, which has applications in industries like automotive and construction.

V. DISCUSSION

A. Industrial Applications

The findings of this research support the use of brine and bittern as valuable resources in several industrial sectors. Brine's effectiveness as a de-icing agent makes it particularly useful in colder climates. Additionally, bittern's ability to enhance soil fertility presents significant benefits for agriculture, particularly in salt-affected areas. Furthermore, the extraction of magnesium from bittern opens new possibilities for using this by-product in magnesium-intensive industries.

B. Environmental Considerations

While the reuse of brine and bittern for industrial purposes is promising, their environmental impact must still be carefully managed. Brine disposal in marine environments leads to an increase in salinity, harming marine ecosystems. Bittern, when improperly disposed of, can result in soil salinization. However, by repurposing these by-products, we can reduce the need for disposal and mitigate their environmental effects.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the potential of brine and bittern, typically seen as waste products, for industrial applications. Brine can be used effectively in de-icing, while bittern can benefit agriculture and provide valuable magnesium for industrial use. These applications not only offer economic benefits but also contribute to reducing the environmental impact of brine and bittern disposal. Further research should focus on optimizing the extraction processes and exploring new uses for these by-products in the pharmaceutical and energy sectors.

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