

**THE AUSTRALIAN FRESHWATER PROTECTED AREA RESOURCEBOOK:
THE POLICY BACKGROUND, ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF PROTECTED
AREAS FOR AUSTRALIAN INLAND AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS.**

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REVIEW

In September 2000, the Australian Society for Limnology (ASL) established a working group to examine the issue of representative reserves (or protected areas) in inland aquatic environments. This monograph is the product of that investigation, and examines government commitments and programs in the light of information related to the use of the “protected area” concept in inland waters. The paper examines the policy background, history, role and importance of protected areas for the conservation of inland aquatic ecosystems in Australia.

According to the international Convention on Biological Diversity 1992, the conservation of biodiversity, including aquatic biodiversity, involves the protection of representative examples of all major ecosystem types, coupled with the sympathetic management of ecosystems outside these protected areas. Although the Australian government, and all eight Australian States and Territories are committed to this principle, only Victoria, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have funded specific programs aimed at meeting this commitment. Although all jurisdictions have established terrestrial reserves (Ramsar sites, for example) which protect aquatic ecosystems, the degree to which such reserves protect representative ecosystems has not been

systematically assessed in any Australian State.

The purpose of the monograph is to promote discussion of all issues surrounding the development of freshwater protected areas, including their limitations. The importance of representative protected areas provides a focus for the document. Its expected audience is primarily natural resource managers at various levels, policy makers, scientists and tertiary students. It is structured to allow the reader to find specific information on a particular issue quickly, without having to peruse the entire paper. The degree of detailed technical information provided establishes the paper as a resource book as well as a discussion paper.

The book comprises 10 core chapters (including a summary) making up roughly 110 pages, with a further 14 technical appendices adding another 150 pages. A separate bibliography is provided through an internet link. In electronic form, the book is available (free of cost) through www.onlyoneplanet.com.au. Hard copies are only available for libraries (no private sales) at a cost of \$36 including postage.

The term ‘reserve’ is used in the book to encompass the first four of the IUCN’s protected area categories. The bulk of the book’s core text is devoted to chapters discussing:

- the historical development of protected areas in terrestrial and marine environments;
- threats to the freshwater environment, and the role of freshwater protected areas;
- the development of national, State and regional inventories of freshwater ecosystems to underpin the identification and selection of protected areas;
- national and State programs for the protection of aquatic environments;
- a hypothetical framework for protecting rivers of high conservation value, including a discussion of Canada's Heritage Rivers;
- difficulties faced by aquatic reserves which are not faced by terrestrial reserves; and
- conclusions and recommendations.

The book makes recommendations relating to the development of comprehensive inventories of inland aquatic ecosystems in all Australian jurisdictions, and also recommends the development of a national framework for the establishment of inland aquatic protected areas. Increased protection of high conservation value rivers is also recommended.

Appendices examine national and State freshwater conservation programs in more detail, as well as providing technical information on matters relating to international agreements, establishing site value, classification methods, the Canadian Heritage Rivers System, and extracts from key documents.

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