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The Improvers' Legacy: Environmental Studies of the Hawkesbury

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SINCE European settlement began on the Hawkesbury-Nepean River system in New South Wales, two centuries of exploitation has led to various environmental problems. Despite these problems, the Hawkesbury-Nepean River is one of Australia's most scenic waterways. To maintain and restore the river system for future generations requires a combination of an historic perspective with appropriate scientific knowledge.

A conference was held in Richmond, New South Wales in 1994, to mark the bicentenary of European settlement at the Hawkesbury. The theme of the conference was "The consequences of human impact on the Hawkesbury region" which covered both historical and environmental topics. As a result of the conference, *Cross Currents* (1997) was produced. It contains papers that deal with the history of European settlement along the river. This volume, *The Improvers' Legacy: Environmental Studies of the Hawkesbury*, presents papers on the environmental history of the catchment. As a follow-up to *Cross Currents*, *The Improvers' Legacy* is consistent throughout in achieving reference to historic events and maintaining an historic perspective, while providing knowledge of the river system today and predictions for the future.

Topics covered include the impacts of Aborigines, human settlement, boat wash, and extractive industries, on the Hawkesbury River area and its biota; the Fire History of the Blue Mountains; the History and Management of the Hawkesbury National Parks and Reserves, and the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Trust; and the history of human settlement. A striking feature of this latter chapter is the realization of some early settlers of the damage that was being caused to the river — even as early as the 1820s.

A range of authors contributed to the papers providing a diversity of expert background experiences. Despite the individual nature of the papers, the chapters flow well. A list of contributors is supplied with a brief insight into their occupation and interests.

Chapters 1–4 are suited to either the expert or non-expert on environmental issues. These chapters are enjoyable and highly understandable. Chapters 5–8 contain unnecessary detail and complexity. They could be simplified and condensed for the book to be suited to the non-expert as well as the expert, without losing any impact or historical perspective.

Some chapters were revised since the conference in 1994, others have no references beyond this year. Surely in the last four years material has been produced to update these papers.

The standard of presentation of this book is very high. It has an attractive cover with a full colour photograph, and relevant photographs throughout which are appreciable in black and white.

The Improvers' Legacy is good value as a resource book for students, providing a case study of a river system that has suffered massive environmental degradation. For use as a guide for other river systems, it would have only general applicability due to its site specific nature.

An index that contains both subject matter, and people and place names is provided. This is useful, especially if the book is used as an educational resource. A reference list by author is definitely required.

The major fault that I found with this book, is the lack of a summary chapter. The reader would benefit from a final chapter that brought together and summarized all the individual concepts mentioned throughout the book.

Overall, I found *The Improvers' Legacy* to be an enjoyable book to read and a great learning experience.

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