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RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES; OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS IN THE HUNTER REGION, NSW

A. J. JAKEMAN, P. K. PARKER, J. FORMBY, D. DAY
Canberra: Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies,
Australian National University (CRES Monograph No. 17). 1987.
Pp. xviii, 369.

The period during the late 1970s and early 1980s saw considerable development of resource-extractive industries in Australia. While the resultant "resources boom" did include developments in a number of areas involving a number of resources, it focused mainly on energy resources—principally coal but, also natural gas in the giant Northwest Shelf project.

The boom derived from the state of world energy markets in the aftermath of the Iranian revolution in 1979, and it never fully lived up to expectations, with energy prices relaxing as a result of OPEC losing its power to manipulate oil prices. During this period, Australia became the world's largest coal exporter (surpassing the United States in 1984), as massive deposits in Queensland and New South Wales were developed. The Hunter region alone accounted for over one-third of the production, exporting more coal than countries like Canada or the USSR. In addition, there was a related boom in the aluminum industry as Japanese smelting capacity based on oil-fired generating capacity was closed down, and Australian black and brown coal (in the La Trobe Valley, in Victoria), together with vast bauxite deposits in Queensland, Western Australia, and the Northern Territory, became increasingly attractive.

The Hunter Valley in northern New South Wales became an important node for resource development thanks to this alignment of circumstances. It saw massive development of open-cut coal mines for both export and power generation for domestic consumption, and aluminum smelting for export. The siting of numerous mines, power stations, and aluminum smelters in the valley raised a number of questions about the impact of these massive developments on both the local environment and the local population. In 1981, the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies committed itself to a major study of the environmental and social impacts of these developments on the Hunter Valley. The result is this monograph.

Many papers from the study have appeared along the way, but this volume provides a useful summary which draws these together and makes them more accessible. The work is important, and has established the reputations of its authors: Day (on water resources) and Parker (on infrastructure), in particular are among the leaders in their fields, and Formby

and Jakeman are also well-established. The volume is therefore particularly valuable for those seeking an insight into these issues in Australia. Furthermore, it appeals as a "one-off" study of the impacts of massive resource developments.

The book's weakness lies in its uniqueness. The volume is put together in the style of a report to government, with a summary, an overview as an opening chapter (and no concluding chapter), and a number of policy recommendations (and "policy points") to conclude each chapter. These policy issues and the advice that the CRES team provides are of undoubted importance for the New South Wales government and the Hunter Valley region, although one often wonders whether most of the damage is already done. The real lesson, however, lies in the lack of adequate prior consideration of social and environmental impacts on a regional basis. This overall format detracts from the appeal of the reader who is not especially interested in "what should be done in New South Wales," but more interested in general points relating to social and environmental impacts of large-scale resource development, or in simply gaining an insight into such developments in Australia. A separate report to government and monograph would have overcome this weakness.

That aside, this is a valuable volume. It contains papers on: the ability of institutions to cope; the coal industry; infrastructure; water use; air quality; and manpower requirements. Its great strength is its comprehensiveness, and it is well worth reading for this alone.

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