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‘David Topp, Brisbane Breached: The Story of a Drought Defaulted Floodplain’

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David Topp, *Brisbane Breached: The Story of a Drought Defaulted Floodplain* (Connor Court Publishing Pty Ltd, 2024), 228pp. Paperback. A\$39.95. ISBN 978-1-9228-1578-1

The spectre of climate change and the disorder which it promises hangs over humanity, becoming ever more prescient every day. Recent (at the time of writing) extreme flooding in Germany, Valencia, and Barcelona, and hurricane activity across the southern United States of America, including the devastating floods in North Carolina, illustrate vividly the challenge facing humanity every day. What is not focused on, however, is the eventual legal challenges that are inevitable in our modern world, as people seek answers and redress for their suffering.

David Topp's book, *Brisbane Breached: The Story of a Drought Defaulted Floodplain*, explores the climatic extremities of the Brisbane River catchment. It is an excellent companion to Margaret Cook's *A river with a City Problem*, as it looks at the other natural cyclical weather pattern of the Brisbane River catchment – drought. The way that he examines this is interesting; instead of being concerned with the wider experiences, he uses his own family history as a backdrop for the experiences of drought in the region. He also looks at the implications of drought on water storage and population in the area, as it directly effects the decision-making processes of government during the 2011 and 2022 Brisbane River Floods. He makes good use of primary source material, particularly media reports from the period to paint a picture of the effect of the climate on the area. He also has a good array of photos, which helps to reinforce the severity of the flood event. The depth of local analysis of the disaster is exemplary: from the flooding of Kedron Brook (a Brisbane River tributary) to the destruction of Brisbane's oldest 'modern shopping centre' at Toombul, Topp manages to provide the reader with both a wider understanding of the floodplain as well as an intimate portrait of individual spaces.

However, the real interest and importance lies with the analysis of the legal cases brought against the dam operators, which as a Barrister, is his forte. I lived in the Lockyer during the 2011 flood event and worked as a responder as part of the local SES unit. It has always been, therefore, of interest to look at the wider causes of the flooding to prevent future recurrences. Topp manages to paint a vivid picture of the decision-making processes and concerns of SunWater engineers and executives as well as the Queensland government during what were unprecedented weather conditions. His analysis is insightful and thorough and provides an interesting opportunity to understand the limitations and challenges posed by negligence in such an event. He also provides a commentary as to the changes in management of the Wivenhoe Dam in the 2022 flooding event, showing the lessons learned by decision makers over the interregnum. He provides some strong recommendations for future management, which would be well advised to be heeded.

David Topp has created an excellent account of the impact of flooding and drought in the Brisbane River catchment and a thorough and informative commentary about the legal issues surrounding these events. It should be required reading for all of those who work within the disaster management and recovery space, as well as for those who live in the shadow of flood. Ultimately, understanding both the environmental and legal consequences of floods will save lives and livelihoods.

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