

Changes in Australia's River Systems Since European Colonisation

In many areas of Australia, particularly in the south-eastern parts, rivers were once much wider with shallow beds. The rivers systems often had strong bursts of water followed by long and dry periods, creating the disconnected ponds called billabongs.

While there was once a jolly swagman who camped by a billabong, sadly there are much less billies boiling today—in part due to modern lifestyles. Nonetheless, Australia's naturally found water and rivers throughout Australia have undergone a dramatic change since the time of the first European colonists.

Affects of European Settlement

Where the traditional custodians lived off the land, sadly much changed as the land was transformed to suit a modern Western-European style of living. The middle of 1900's brought about significant changes with several grand water-related projects including the huge Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme, the Ord River Irrigation Scheme, and the C.Y. O'Conner's Coolgardie Goldfields Water Scheme, to name a few.

European settlement brought changes not only to the river network, but on the land as well. Looking to Western Australia, approximately 85% of the native vegetation their wheat belt was cleared for agriculture, and this, in turn, affected the flow of water. Rainfall began to move more rapidly across the cleared land, eroding the valuable topsoil, creating erosion gullies, and forming steep-sided river beds. The long-term environmental consequences of this brought profound changes not only in the water supply, as the river beds became steeper and couldn't carry as much water as before, but also in the diversity and quantity of life, particularly for those plants and animals that thrived in these areas.

Building of Major Dams

The building of dams to ensure a more reliable water supply became also another significant ecological factor, which led to the change of approximately 85% of the pre-colonial river length, and to the detriment of ecosystems and about one-third of river species. The quality of water was also affected due to land clearing, irrigation and agricultural processes, and water run-off began carrying valuable topsoil, soil nutrients, and fertilizers, which posed and still poses a significant threat to the highly valuable and very sensitive reefs and coastal ecosystems.

Changing Attitudes Towards Water in Australia

So, many changes have taken place to feed the growing population in the land many from all parts of the world no call home—Australia. These changes have brought about significant changes to the land, many negative, though sadly perhaps necessary and inevitable. The story doesn't need to stop there though, as there is still much to love about the land that can still be protected.

Many Australians realise we can help protect our rivers and land. As evidenced in an Australian Bureau of Statistics [Water Use and Conservation report](#), approximately 50 percent of Australians who installed rainwater tanks did so primarily to help protect our natural water sources.

Should you be interested to get a rainwater tank that will help to protect Australia's riverways, [Clark Tanks](#) are a known and trusted manufacturer of water tanks in the country. We would be happy to provide you with a high-quality tank at a competitive price.

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