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Margaret Cook, *A River with a City Problem – A History of the Brisbane Floods*

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Margaret Cook, *A River with a City Problem – A History of the Brisbane Floods* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2023), 265pp. Paperback. A\$32.99. ISBN: 978-0-7022-6606-5.

I am a product of the Brisbane River catchment. I was born on the banks of the Lockyer Creek, the westernmost extremity of the catchment and grew up in that district, dominated by the dual fears of both drought and flood, and experiencing both equally. As an adult, I was a member of the State Emergency Service during the 2011 and 2013 floods, being directly involved with the civil response of these disasters, as well as assisting in the coordination of the aftermath of these floods. With this in mind, Margaret Cook's book, *A River with a City Problem – A History of Brisbane Floods*, is a personal and somewhat reflective opportunity as a reader.

Margaret Cook's book, by the title, would be understood to be a disaster epic, telling the details of damages, of disaster and of death, and the responses to these tragedies. However, it manages to transcend these themes in a way which is both surprising and, frankly, admirable. This is a book that looks at the experience of the Brisbane River back in the early days before European settlement. It looks at the learned Indigenous knowledge of the river, and the blatant disregard shown by Europeans of millennia of learning. The development structures of the city that would become Brisbane are in complete contrast to the Indigenous understanding of the region. Cook's explanation of this shows that, again, white Australia has a lot to learn from the traditional owners of our lands.

The real star of this book is the river itself. Cook illustrates the great beauty and potential of the river before the constant destruction wrought upon it through the European idea of 'progress'. A once pristine and bountiful ecosystem, gradually turned into the much-maligned 'Brown Snake' of today. This is all before she deals with the disaster of the flooding; almost discussing the flooding as if it were revenge by the river on those who have not taken the warnings seriously. In a true mastery, Cook describes the experiences of the floods without going too deeply into detail. The human cost of these disasters is apparent on every page, and the solutions to prevent future occurrences shows the desperation of decision makers to prevent the next 'big one'.

Works like this are vital for all decision makers and residents to read. Too often we forget the impacts of the last time disaster strikes an area. We build where we have been warned not to, evacuate too late, and then lament the disastrous loss of property and life in the aftermath. The floods of 1893, long forgotten by many, are dealt with in depth, while those in more recent memory are more lightly covered. Personally, I feel this is a wise move as it illustrates the cyclical nature of flooding are resolution within the Brisbane River Catchment, highlighting the first major flood to have occurred under European settlement.

A River with a City Problem – A History of Brisbane Floods is a beautifully-written and engaging book that will satisfy so many. It is an important act of memory for the experiences of flooding in South-East Queensland and should be essential reading for anyone living in the region and for those decision makers at every level of government.

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