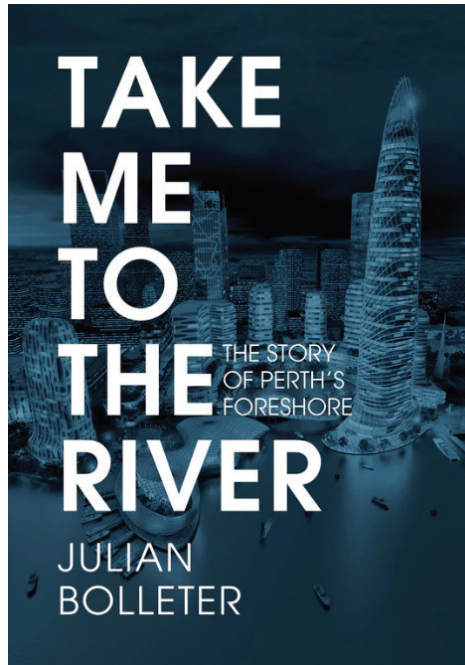


AUDRC Research Note

Take me to the River: The Story of Perth's Foreshore



What do schemes for the Perth foreshore say about us?

Background

- The Swan River has flowed the same course for sixty million years, carving the Perth Canyon – a gorge about the size of the Grand Canyon – into the edge of the continental shelf. This book is concerned with the relationship of European Australian culture to this ancient river system. This historical narrative is viewed through the lens of schemes proposed for Perth's foreshore, the city's symbolic front garden.

- The foreshore has been contentious since the first plan for Perth was drawn up and has subsequently acted as a veritable sinkhole for proposals. Indeed, as a result of collating material for this book, we estimate that more than 200 proposals have been made for the Perth foreshore since the first identified plan in 1833.

- An investigation of this archaeological stratum of foreshore drawings offers a lens through which we can examine and analyse changing notions of what Perth was, what it could have been, and, indeed, what it can be. As Kim Dovey explains: 'The waterfront is a face or mask of the city that constructs urban character and identity.' This book examines the various masks as representations of how European Australia relates and has related to an ancient riverine landscape and, by extension, indigenous culture. These proposals are 'symbolic pointers' to what is taking place in Perth's collective psyche.

- Chapters in this book relate to particular historical periods which reveal

aspects of this psyche. 'Hesperia' concerns Admiral James Stirling's enduring depiction of the landscape of the upper reaches of the Swan River as an Arcadia. At the same time, 'Reclamation' traces how requirements for recreational space and aspirations to become a world-class capital city led to the infilling of vast areas of unsanitary, marshy foreshore areas. 'Naturalisation' focuses on late-twentieth-century efforts to reconcile the resulting generic greenbelt with Perth's endemic landscape and symbolically with indigenous culture, while 'Urbanity' reveals an early-twenty-first-century society stepping onto the global stage via an iconic urban waterfront project. Finally, 'Looking up river, looking down river' reflects on those twin forces – sea level rise and population growth – that will shape Perth Water and the adjacent city in the twenty-first century.

Links to publications

- Bolleter, J. (2015). Take me to the river: The story of Perth's foreshore. Perth: UWA Publishing. <https://uwap.uwa.edu.au/products/take-me-to-the-river-the-story-of-perths-foreshore>
- Bolleter, J. (2014). Charting a changing waterfront: a review of key schemes for Perth's foreshore. *Journal of Urban Design*, 19(5), 569-592. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2014.943703>

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