



## Media Release

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dd December 2000

Ref 00/nnn

### **NATIONAL IDENTITY 'AT RISK' AS LANDSCAPE DEGRADES**

Australia's national sense of identity and culture is threatened by landscape degradation.

Landscape images have always been part of the collective Australian psyche, says Jason Alexandra, of the Ecosystem Services Project.

"Our connection to the land through landscape images dates back to the rock galleries of tens of thousands of years ago," says Mr. Alexandra, "and through the wetlands, yellow box and red gums of the nineteenth century impressionists to the images at the 2000 Olympic games ceremonies."

The Goulburn Broken Catchment in northern Victoria, is a living example of some of Australia's most highly valued landscape. It contributes to our sense of place, identity and life fulfillment, he says.

"These defining Australian landscapes are not a given, they are a product of both natural ecosystems and the way humans have shaped them," says Alexandra

"They have changed over time, and will continue to change. However, unchecked environmental damage will turn these images into museum pieces."

Ecosystems deliver life-fulfilling services, says Mr. Alexandra, so it is a first principle that these services should be recognised by planners and land managers.

"Nature providing a life fulfilling function depends on an ecosystem working in a normal healthy manner", says Alexandra. "In the Goulburn Broken Catchment loss of wide spaced paddock trees, loss of roadside and stream side vegetation, and poor planning will continue to threaten this service".

A life-fulfilling service is critical to many industries in the catchment, and in fact due to the high aesthetic values much rural property is purchased for lifestyle reasons says Mr. Alexandra. People want to live there because they like the landscape, the place and the sense of satisfaction they get from the location.

"If rivers and lakes are filled with algal bloom and the plains are covered in the carcasses of dead and dying trees then the sense of place changes" he added.

Alexandra says that policy makers need to make the qualitative values of landscape quite explicit, and use the full range of policy instruments to protect the foundations of these services.

“There are some very real ways that we can introduce the protection of ecosystems, for life fulfilling reasons, into our public policy processes”, Alexandra says.

CSIRO’s Dr Steve Cork, leader of the Ecosystem Services Project, says that detailed assessments from case studies around Australia, one of which is the Goulburn Broken Catchment, will focus on which services natural ecosystems provide.

"Who benefits from these services? What are current land management practices doing to these services? These are the sorts of question we will be asking," says Dr Cork.

"And most importantly, we need to ask what will happen to the delivery of the most important of these services under future land-use scenarios?" he says.

These services, and the processes that underpin them, provide such things as clean and pure water, protection from extreme weather, life fulfilling experiences, liveable climates, and edible goods.

CSIRO is working with The Myer Foundation, Land and Water Australia, the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority and the Rainforest Cooperative Research Centre on the Ecosystem Services Project, which aims to describe and value Australia’s ecosystem services.

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