

Introduction

Why this book was written

It seems that everywhere you look in Australia right now there is some sort of development going on. Like many countries around the world, cities and towns are ever stretching across once natural landscapes, transport networks are spreading and natural resources are being consumed faster than ever. The high rate of development in Australia is partly fuelled by its thriving resources sector servicing unprecedented overseas demand for minerals (particularly coal and iron ore). New mines are springing up, established mines are expanding and rail and port infrastructure is being built to overcome transport bottlenecks. At the same time, sharp population increases have taken place. A staggering 421 300 people were added to Australia's population in 2009 alone, with the population predicted to possibly almost double to 42.5 million by 2056 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011a). In recent years, Australia has had the fastest-growing population in the developed world, easily outpacing the growth rates of China and India (Smith 2011). More people results in a need for more residential and commercial developments, as well as supporting infrastructure such as powerlines, roads, pipelines and bridges.

Developments are, by and large, encouraged by governments around the world because they bring affluence to a country in the form of jobs and a stronger economy. However, more development places greater pressure on the natural environment. Some developments have a greater impact on the environment than others, depending on their location and size as well as how they are designed and managed. The consequences of poor planning of development may include permanent loss or degradation of important flora and fauna habitat, disruption of dispersal pathways and extinction of species.

In the pursuit of preventing adverse impacts on the environment, there is a push for development to be 'sustainable', in preference to curbing growth or the factors driving it. 'Ecologically sustainable development' is a policy concept that involves undertaking development to meet human needs in such a way as to conserve and/or enhance natural ecosystems (Ecologically Sustainable Development Steering Committee 1992; Hezri and Dovers 2009).

Overall, biodiversity continues to substantially decline in many parts of Australia (Beeton *et al.* 2006). Now, more than ever, it is crucial that we ensure that developments are undertaken in a manner that reduces impacts on the environment and that the phrase 'ecologically sustainable development' is not just used as a trendy catchcry to justify development. In particular, reducing impacts of development on native wildlife (plants and animals) is essential for the maintenance of biodiversity and preservation of functioning ecosystems.

There is reason for hope and optimism because measures to reduce impacts of development on flora and fauna are increasingly being incorporated into developments in Australia and