



GEOSCIENCE INFORMATION PROJECT: Access to Australian geoscientific information – a tragedy of the commons?

The original plan for this project remains, and is ambitious. Australian geoscience information is made available in a commons as well as a restricted information environment. Access to much of this information is enabled through computerized databases and there was one such database in Australia, AESIS¹, which was maintained by the Australian Mineral Foundation (AMF) until its demise in 2002. The files of AESIS and more recent indexing of geoscience literature of relevance to Australia has since been taken over by AusGeoref² maintained by Geoscience Australia. Access to this database is available via subscription. There is also considerable information available via the Internet.

However it is one thing to locate the relevant references and another to locate the information and data to which they refer. Geoscientific information occurs in many formats. Not only is there the formal published literature of monographs and journals, but there also exists many other collections which include rock specimens, petrographic slides, drill core, maps, photographs, field guide and notebooks, government, research and technical reports. A number of geoscience information research issues arise from these situations and they deserve investigation and include: the status of Australia's geoscientific library collections; Geoscientific data: who generates it? What do they do with it? Is it accessible/locatable? and matters to do with the researchers and the users.

But where to start? "The best laid schemes o' mice an' (wo)men / Gang aft agley." (so wrote Robbie Burns). The original and seemingly logical plan of approach by delving into the issues above has been altered through circumstance. One of my university Masters of Information Management project students was interested in undertaking a study on the role of the information professional in the management of research data. Why not geoscience technical (i.e. research) data? The results of this work appear at: http://libres.curtin.edu.au/libres22n2/VEJohnson_refereed_vol22n2.pdf Now AGIA would like to consider the implications of the use of the GemPet thesaurus – hence this study.

Part of the ferreting around for information revealed a US publication: *Geoscience data and collections: National resources in peril*, the blurb for which includes this comment: "While the nation has assembled a wealth of geoscience data and collections, their utility remains completely untapped....Many resources are in imminent danger of being lost through mismanagement, neglect, or disposal". Where have I heard that before? Australia depends on geoscience and its industries for economic growth and if some of the crucial but often unnoticed support mechanisms are difficult to access or even at risk, then this will impact on the education and training of its professionals. The consequences of a disparate approach to locating, accessing and managing Australia's geoscientific information are costly, frustrating and even dangerous. Information that is not easily located and obtained is forgotten and yet this might be crucial to solving a geoscientific issue of importance to the nation.

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¹ Australian Earth Sciences Information System

² A bibliographic geoscience database drawn from GeoRef that covers Australian literature since 1933 (AGI, 2006).