

Dynamics of microbial pollution in aquatic systems

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	vii
List of Tables	xi
Abstract	xiii
Acknowledgements.....	xvii
Preface	xix
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
An Emerging Threat	3
Surrogates for Indicating Pathogen Threats.....	5
Factors Controlling the Fate and Distribution of Enteric Organisms in Surface Waters.....	6
Pathogen Risk Management	8
Role of Numerical Models	8
Aims and Scope of Work.....	9
Chapter 2 Hydrodynamic Modelling.....	11
Overview	13
Hydrodynamic Modelling of Myponga Reservoir	14
Field Monitoring and Data	14
ELCOM Setup.....	18
ELCOM Performance.....	22
Hydrodynamic Modelling of Sugarloaf Reservoir.....	27
Site Description	28
ELCOM Application.....	28
Results and Discussion.....	31
Sampling Program	31
Hydrodynamic Modelling of Lake Burragarang.....	33
Field Monitoring and Data	34
ELCOM Setup.....	35
ELCOM Performance.....	37
Summary.....	39
Chapter 3 A three-dimensional model of <i>Cryptosporidium</i> dynamics in lakes and reservoirs – a new tool for risk management.....	43
Overview	45
Introduction.....	45
Field Experiment	46
Site Description.....	46
Data Collection.....	46
Model Description.....	48
Hydrodynamic Model	48
Particles Model	48
Cryptosporidium Model	51
Results	56
Hydrodynamics	56
Particle Dynamics	56
Cryptosporidium	58
Discussion	62
Hydrodynamics and Particle Behaviour	62
Cryptosporidium	62
Management and Monitoring Implications.....	63
Summary.....	65

Chapter 4	The relative value of surrogate indicators for detecting pathogens in lakes and reservoirs	67
Overview		71
Introduction		71
Methods		72
Description of Myponga Reservoir		72
Sampling Design		72
Tracking the Riverine Intrusion		72
Microbiological Analysis		73
Data Analysis		74
Results		75
Inflow Characteristics		75
The Occurrence and Magnitude of Pathogens and Surrogates in the Intrusion		75
Discussion		81
Pathogen Similarity		81
Turbidity as a Surrogate for Pathogen Transport		82
Implications for Monitoring and Pathogen Risk Assessment		82
Summary		83
Chapter 5	<i>In situ</i> evidence for the association of Total Coliforms and <i>Escherichia coli</i> with suspended inorganic particles In an Australian reservoir	85
Overview		87
Introduction		87
Methodology		88
Site Description		88
Experimental Program		88
Data Analysis		90
Results		92
Hydrodynamics and Inorganic Particle Behaviour		92
Coliform Association with Particles		95
Discussion		96
Hydrodynamics and Inorganic Particle Behaviour		96
Coliform Association with Particles		97
Implications for Monitoring and Management		99
Summary		100
Chapter 6	A generic, process-based model of microbial pollution in aquatic systems	101
Overview		103
Introduction		103
Literature Review and Model Development		104
Growth		105
Natural Mortality		108
Sunlight Inactivation		114
Predation and Grazing		117
Sedimentation and Association With Particles		118
Sediment Survival and Resuspension		120
Model Synthesis and Implementation		120
Model Validation		122
Myponga Reservoir: Riverine Pulse		122
Sugarloaf Reservoir: Pumped Inflow		126
Billings Reservoir: Tropical, Eutrophic System		127
Discussion		130

<u>Chapter 7</u> Decision support tools for managing microbial pollution in lakes and reservoirs	135
Introduction.....	137
Identifying the Problem.....	137
Decision Support Tools	138
Targeted Monitoring	141
<u>Chapter 8</u> Synthesis and Conclusions	143
<u>Appendix A1</u> On the importance of atmospheric stability effects when modelling the surface thermodynamics of lakes and reservoirs.....	149
Overview	151
Introduction.....	151
Study Site and Data Collection	152
Hydrodynamic Model.....	152
Background.....	152
Surface Thermodynamics	154
Computational Aspects	157
Results and Discussion	157
Surface Heat Fluxes.....	157
Hydrodynamics	159
Bibliography.....	163

List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Schematic overview of allochthonous microbial sources and receiving aquatic environments from the catchment to the ocean.....	4
Figure 1.2: Conceptual breakdown of routes of exposure of microbial pollutants.	4
Figure 2.1: Myponga Reservoir bathymetry (contour units in metres below Full Service Level).	14
Figure 2.2: Meteorological data measured 2 m above the water surface for the May 2001 storm event.	16
Figure 2.3: Inflow and outflow data for the May 2001 storm event. Evaporation rates are plotted as 0.8x the pan evaporation rate.	17
Figure 2.4: Myponga thermistor chain data for the May 2001 storm event.....	18
Figure 2.5: Meteorological data measured 2 m above the water surface for September 2001.	19
Figure 2.6: Inflow and outflow data for the September 2001 storm event.	20
Figure 2.7: Myponga thermistor chain data for the September 2001 storm event (top:Met1, bottom:Met2).	21
Figure 2.8: Comparison between the storage-height curves for the ELCOM grid and that based on field data.	21
Figure 2.9: Plan view of ELCOM grid used for Myponga Reservoir, showing the bathymetry the two surface forcing regions, inflow and outflow locations, and the location of the meteorological stations and thermistor chains.	22
Figure 2.10a: Comparison of thermistor chain data and ELCOM simulation at station Met2 ('long-arm') for May 2001 flood event. The bottom panel shows the error with 0.5°C contour resolution.	24
Figure 2.10b: Comparison of thermistor chain data and ELCOM simulation at station Met1 ('main basin') for May 2001 flood event. The bottom panel shows the error with 0.5°C contour resolution.	24
Figure 2.11: Scatter plots comparing thermistor chain data with equivalent ELCOM data for the May 2001 Myponga simulations. The colour scale reflects the time of measurement: blue at the beginning of the period (Day 136) through to red at the end (Day 151).	25
Figure 2.12a: Comparison of thermistor chain data and ELCOM simulation at station Met2 ('long-arm') for Sept 2001 flood event. The bottom panel shows the error with 0.5°C contour resolution.	26
Figure 2.12b: Comparison of thermistor chain data and ELCOM simulation at station Met1 ('main basin') for Sept 2001 flood event. The bottom panel shows the error with 0.5°C contour resolution.	26
Figure 2.13: Scatter plots comparing thermistor chain data with equivalent ELCOM data for the September 2001 Myponga Reservoir simulations. The colour scale reflects the time of measurement: blue at the beginning of the period (Day 244) through to red at the end of the period (Day 265).	27
Figure 2.14: Plot of Sugarloaf Reservoir bathymetry (m below FSL), indicating the inflow, outflow and proposed sample locations.	28
Figure 2.16: Meteorological conditions measured above Sugarloaf Reservoir during the simulation period, Days 182 – 230 in 2003.	29
Figure 2.15: Inflow temperature and inflow/outflow volume fluxes for Sugarloaf Reservoir during the simulation period, Days 182 – 230 in 2003.....	30
Figure 2.17: Discretized 60×60 m Sugarloaf Reservoir grid used for ELCOM. Colour scale is in units of metres above Australian Height Datum.	30
Figure 2.18: Storage-height curve for the ELCOM and raw data bathymetries (indistinguishable because of overlap). The circle is the actual volume estimate at FSL.	31
Figure 2.19: Comparison of thermistor chain data (bottom, °C) and ELCOM temperature prediction (middle). The top panel shows the inflow (periodic) and outflow (constant) volume fluxes for the simulation period.	32
Figure 2.20: Proposed sampling strategy for Sugarloaf Reservoir field experiment. The dashed lines indicate the locations where detailed profiling will be conducted using the CTD and LISST profilers. The crosses indicate the locations where microbiological samples will be collected (black = 2 per day; grey = 1 per day).	33
Figure 2.21: Lake Burragorang bathymetry (colour scale indicates depth from deepest point; Full Service Level, FSL = 116.72 mAHD). Also shown are the four sampling locations: DWA02, DWA09, DWA12 and DWA27.....	34
Figure 2.22: Meteorological and inflow/outflow data for Lake Burragorang during the June-July 1997 flood event.	36

- Figure 2.23: Plan view of the idealized ELCOM grids (200×200 m): semi-straightened (top) and fully-straightened (bottom). Colour scale reflects height in mAHD..... 37
- Figure 2.24: Comparison of three variations of the fully-straightened ELCOM grid (colour indicates ground height in meters AHD) for Lake Burragarang: 200×200 (top), 400×200 (middle) and 800×200 (bottom). The storage-height curve is shown next to each against the actual relationship. 39
- Figure 2.25: ELCOM simulations of the temperature (°C) structure during the 1997 flood event compared against profile data for the four stations: DWA02, DWA09, DWA12 and DWA 27. Crosses on the field data plots indicate points of measurement. The ELCOM results are from the 200×200 m fully-straightened grid..... 40
- Figure 2.26: Comparison between all measured temperatures and the equivalent ELCOM prediction for the 1997 flood event for all four stations. The ELCOM results are from the 200×200 m fully-straightened grid ($\Delta t = 3$ mins). The colour scale reflects the time the sample was taken: blue at the beginning of the period (Day 181) through to red at the end of the period (Day 196). 41
- Figure 3.1: Myponga Reservoir location and catchment. Sub-catchment areas are indicated in order of decreasing significance from 1 – 8. Inset shows Myponga catchment location on the Fleurieu Peninsula in South Australia. 47
- Figure 3.2: Plan view of Myponga Reservoir bathymetry (m below Full Supply Level) showing the location of the two meteorological/thermistor chain stations, Met1 and Met2, the inflow locations for sub-catchments 1 and 2, and the dam wall. 48
- Figure 3.3: Meteorological (relative humidity, solar radiation, net longwave radiation, wind direction and speed) and inflow (flow rate and temperature for sub-catchments 1 and 2) boundary condition data during the experimental period. 49
- Figure 3.4: Cross section along Myponga Reservoir thalweg schematically showing the location of the LISST and CTD profiles (dashed lines) and the *Cryptosporidium* sampling points (crosses). 50
- Figure 3.5: Conceptual outline of the *Cryptosporidium* model. 51
- Figure 3.6: Transects of temperature collected during the inflow experiment (left) and as simulated by ELCOM (right). The field data transects were constructed by contouring around the profile locations (dot-dash line) using a rectangular grid with a sigma-coordinate transformation. 57
- Figure 3.7: Particle size distribution as measured by the LISST profiler in the inflowing water, indicating the three particle groupings identified in this analysis and for the model simulations. 58
- Figure 3.8: Transects of particle concentration (gm^{-3}) for the smallest size class ($\sim 1\text{-}5\mu\text{m}$) collected during the inflow experiment (left) and as simulated by ELCOM-CAEDYM (right). The field data transects were constructed by contouring around the profile locations (dot-dash line) using a rectangular grid with a sigma-coordinate transformation. 59
- Figure 3.9: Time series of measured and simulated *Cryptosporidium* oocyst concentrations (oocysts/10L) for four locations within the reservoir (Inflow, Met2, Met1, and Dam Wall). The field data (three replicates shown: triangle, circle and square) and simulation results (solid line) were taken from approximately 2.5m above the reservoir floor for the stations Met2, Met1 and the Dam Wall. The dotted line in the inflow plot indicates the data that was used as the inflow boundary condition to the model. Bathymetry shown in top left plot indicating comparison locations. 60
- Figure 3.10: Comparison of the observed and simulated *Cryptosporidium* concentrations. Vertical bars indicate the variance seen in the field data. 61
- Figure 3.11: Comparison of model performance, as indicated by $C_{T\text{model}}/C_{T\text{data}}$, for several values of the aggregation rate constant, α_a . If the high replicate at the dam wall location (75 oocysts $(10\text{L})^{-1}$) is treated as an outlier the ratio increases to 0.67 for the no aggregation case. 62
- Figure 3.12: Simulated distributions of inactivated and viable oocysts at OD 181.68 as an example of the variability seen between the distributions of viable and inactivated oocysts. 63
- Figure 3.13: Simulated distributions of viable oocysts 1m above the sediment at various times during the experimental campaign indicating horizontal variability. 64
- Figure 3.14: Depth to 99% inactivation, $z_{99\%}$, based on a typical days sunlight exposure with a peak irradiance of 500 Wm^{-2} , as a function of the UV inactivation coefficient, k_{UV} , for a range of UV extinction coefficients, η (m^{-1}). ... 65
- Figure 4.1: Myponga Reservoir bathymetry (m) showing the inflow location, the dam wall and offtake, and the location of the two meteorological stations including thermistor chains (Met1 and Met2). 73

- Figure 4.2: Flow rate and temperature of Myponga Creek and the Sub-catchment 2 tributary monitored during the inflow event in June 2003, days 178-182. The average reservoir temperature was calculated from thermistors suspended vertically at 20 depths: on day 178 the reservoir was fully mixed.75
- Figure 4.3: Temperatures ($^{\circ}\text{C}$) measured during the five transects as indicated by the day of year, preceeded by year (yyyyddd). Transects were constructed by contouring around the profile locations (indicated by the dot-dash lines) using a rectangular grid with a sigma coordinate transformation.76
- Figure 4.4a: Confirmed *Cryptosporidium spp.* counts (oocysts/10 L) for the three sampling periods (T1, T3, T4). The evolution of the underflow is indicated by the dashed line. The value in brackets ([]) is too large to represent the measured value.79
- Figure 4.4b: *E. coli* counts (*E. coli*/100 mL $\times 10^3$) for the five sampling periods (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5). The evolution of the underflow is indicated by the dashed line. The evolution of the underflow is indicated by the dashed line.80
- Figure 4.5: Spearman rank correlation of microorganisms with particle size as measured by the LISST profiler.84
- Figure 5.1: a) Sugarloaf Reservoir bathymetry (scale indicates m below Full Service Level) showing inflow/outflow locations and sampling locations S1-S5; b) Schematic transect through Sugarloaf Reservoir indicating the CTD/LISST profile locations (vertical dashed lines) and the microbiological sampling locations (black crosses were sampled 5 times through the experimental period and grey crosses were sampled 2 times during the experimental period.89
- Figure 5.2: Vertical profiles of temperature ($^{\circ}\text{C}$, ●) and TVC ($\mu\text{m}^3 \text{m}^{-3}$, ×) as measured by the LISST profiler during transects 1, 3, 5 at stations S2 and S4.93
- Figure 5.3: Particle volume concentrations and standard error (P_i , columns), and total surface area, (A_i , line) for the average background reservoir concentration (top) and during the peak of the inflow (middle). The ratio P_i^{INF}/P_i^{BG} is presented (bottom) highlighting the significant contribution the inflow has on the smaller particle concentrations. Note the logarithmic distribution of the size classes.94
- Figure 5.4: Estimation of the net sedimentation rate, k_{SET} (day^{-1}), as estimated by applying Equation 4 between S1 and S3 for each of the dominant particle size classes, i95
- Figure 5.5: Relationship between the magnitude of the settling losses, k_{SET} (day^{-1}), and the significance of that particle size in the inflow particle signature (P_i^{INF}/P_i^{BG}).97
- Figure 5.6: Correlation between Total Coliform and *E. coli* concentrations and salinity (left), turbidity (middle) and TVC (right).98
- Figure 5.7: Spearman rank correlations, R_s^2 , between the raw and inactivation corrected concentrations of TC and EC and particle size.99
- Figure 6.1: Schematic representation of processes simulated by the model.105
- Figure 6.2: Coliform growth response as a function of temperature showing data from various species presented in Camper *et al.* (1991) and the present model (Eq. 6.2) using parameters from Ross *et al.* (2003) and optimum parameters (Table 1) to fit the Camper *et al.* data.107
- Figure 6.3: Variation of published natural mortality ('dark death') rates as a function of temperature for 6 different organism classes. For these plots, only investigations from waters with salinity $<3\text{‰}$ and pH values between 6 – 8 were included. Data points collected from studies in a relatively nutrient rich medium are shown in grey and points collected from studies conducted within a nutrient poor medium are coloured black. The solid line indicates the optimum fit to the data for Eq. 6.5 based on a least squares regression with all data. Model parameters k_{d20} and \mathcal{G}_M are shown for each group and listed in Table 6.1.110
- Figure 6.4: Variation of published natural mortality ('dark death') rates as a function of temperature for 6 different organism classes. For these plots, only investigations from waters with salinity $>30\text{‰}$ and pH values between 6 – 8 were included. Data points collected from studies in a relatively nutrient rich medium are shown in grey and points collected from studies conducted within a nutrient poor medium are coloured black. The solid line indicates the optimum fit to the data for Eq. 6.5 based on a least squares regression with all data. Model parameters k_{d20} and \mathcal{G}_M are shown for each group and listed in Table 6.1.111
- Figure 6.5: Variation of published natural mortality ('dark death') rates as a function of salinity for 6 different organism classes. For these plots, only investigations from waters with a temperature of 20°C and pH values between 6 – 8 were included To increase the number of samples included in the analysis, measurements made between 15 and 25°C were included but the measured mortality values were scaled to their 20°C value using the value of \mathcal{G}_M listed in Table 6.1. Data points collected from studies in a relatively

nutrient rich medium are shown in grey and points collected from studies conducted within a nutrient poor medium are coloured black. The solid line indicates the optimum fit to the data for Eq. 6.6 based on a least squares regression with all data. Model parameters C_{SM} and κ are shown for each group and listed in Table 6.1.	113
Figure 6.6: Relative variation of coliform mortality rate as a function of pH, showing data from different authors and the model (Eq. 6.8). Model parameters are listed in Table 6.1.	114
Figure 6.7: Bathymetric maps of a) Myponga Reservoir (South Australia), b) Sugarloaf Reservoir (Victoria, Australia) and c) Billings Reservoir (Sao Paulo, Brazil), indicating the sampling locations (★). Note the horizontal scale difference for Billings Reservoir.....	122
Figure 6.8: Comparison of modelled (ELCD) and observed (Field) data from Myponga Reservoir for three organism types. Results are shown at the inflow (dashed-line indicates the interpolated boundary condition used to force the model), and 2.5m above the bottom at Met2, Met1 and dam wall sampling locations, for a) <i>E. coli</i> , b) enterococci and c) somatic coliphages. Error bars on the observed data indicate the observed maximum and minimum of three replicates.	128
Figure 6.9: Comparison of modelled (ELCD) and observed (Field) coliform data for Sugarloaf Reservoir at location S3. Results are shown at surface, mid and bottom depths, for a) Total Coliforms, and b) <i>E. coli</i> . Error bars on the observed data indicate the standard deviation of 5 collected samples.	129
Figure 6.10: Comparison of modelled (ELCD) and observed (Field) faecal coliform data for Billings Reservoir at location BL105. Results are shown at surface and bottom depths.....	130
Figure 6.11: Simulated rates affecting <i>E. coli</i> dynamics in each of the three validation reservoirs, highlighting the large variability in dynamical behaviour seen between systems for the same organism. Rates were calculated in each wet cell within the computational domain and then integrated across the entire domain to give the basin average value. Note the different scales on both x and y axes.	132
Figure 7.1: A conceptual framework for pathogen risk management (adapted after Brookes <i>et al</i> , 2004).....	137
Figure 7.2: ELCOM-CAEDYM <i>Cryptosporidium</i> concentrations (oocysts/10L) presented as a slice through Myponga Reservoir (bottom-right, colour scale reflects oocyst concentration), South Australia (see inset), following a large runoff event, and highlighting <i>Cryptosporidium</i> oocyst concentrations as a function of time for three depths near the offtake (left).....	139
Figure 7.3: Time-series of a) viable inflow oocyst load as estimated from data; b) the viable oocyst concentrations (oocysts/10L) throughout the water column as simulated by DYRESM-CAEDYM; and c) simulated concentrations of viable oocysts at the dam wall for three different depths (adapted from Hipsey <i>et al.</i> , 2004b).....	140
Figure 7.4: Schematic of inflow scenarios that may be observed entering a lake or reservoir, illustrating the surface overflow and underflow.....	141
Figure A1.1: Meteorological and inflow forcing data for the study period. The meteorological parameters are taken from a height of 2.0 m above the water surface.	153
Figure A1.2: Relationship between atmospheric stability (bottom axis – z/L , top axis – Ri_B) and the bulk-transfer coefficients relative to their neutral value (C_X/C_{XN} where X represents D, H or W) for several roughness values. The solid line indicates the momentum coefficient variation (C_D/C_{DN}) and the broken line indicates humidity and temperature coefficient (C_{HW}/C_{HWN}) variation.....	156
Figure A1.3: Variation of the Monin-Obukhov stability parameter (z/L) and the bulk-transfer coefficients (C_D and C_{HW} taken at 2.0 m above the water surface) during the study period. The ELCOM-AS predictions have been calculated using the simulated surface temperature at a location corresponding to station Met1 for the purpose of this plot.....	158
Figure A1.4: Surface layer comparison of ELCOM and ELCOM-AS simulations and the thermistor chain data for station Met1 (a) and Met2 (b). Shading indicates temperature (°C). The contour interval is 0.5°C for the solid contours and 0.25°C for the broken contours. The arrows on the left of the data plots indicated the locations of the thermistors in the field.	160
Figure A1.5: Comparison of all simulated (ELCOM and ELCOM-AS) and observed temperatures for Met1 and Met2. Shading reflects time within the simulation (dark at the beginning and light at the end). Comparison points were taken for each thermistor every hour for the entire simulation period.	162

List of Tables

Table 1.1: Summary of common water-borne diseases.	3
Table 2.1: Results of preliminary monitoring of pathogens near the Sugarloaf river inflow.	32
Table 2.2: Comparison of ELCOM simulation results for the various grid configurations, presenting the underflow characteristics, and the results of the regressions against the profile data. Figures in bold indicate the results closest to the observed data.	42
Table 3.1: Parameter values used for the simulations.	61
Table 4.1: Sampling times (Day of year in 2003) for microbiological samples.	74
Table 4.2: Mean microorganism measurements for the 5 transects (T1-T5).	77
Table 4.3: Spearman Rank correlation between microbiological surrogates.	81
Table 5.1: a) Correlation with raw and inactivation corrected TC and EC values with the bulk indicators of salinity, TVC and turbidity; b) Spearman rank correlations, R_s^2 , between total coliforms and <i>E. coli</i> concentrations and particle size data collected with the LISST profiler using raw (C) and inactivation corrected (\tilde{C}) data. The particle size classes that show correlations above 0.800 are highlighted bold.	96
Table 5.2: Details of the sedimentation and attachment calculation for both coliform groups. Results are based on data between S1 and S3.	98
Table 6.1: Summary of parameters required for the model, with typical values presented for 7 organism types. NA = Not Applicable ; NI = No Information available.	123
Table 6.2: Overview of the three validation sites summarising the key physical and chemical parameters.	126
Table A1.1: Comparison of the basin-wide net surface fluxes over the study period with and without the correction for atmospheric stability. All fluxes are positive into the waterbody.	158
Table A1.2: Statistical comparison of modelled and measured temperature data at thermistor chain locations Met1 and Met2 for simulations conducted with and without atmospheric stability correction.	161

Abstract

Microbial pollution of surface waters and coastal zones is one of the foremost challenges facing the water industry and regulatory authorities. Yet despite the concern and increasing pressures on water resources in both developed and developing countries, understanding of microbial pollutants in the aquatic environment is fairly scattered. There is a need for an improved ability to quantify the processes that control the fate and distribution of enteric organisms to support decision-making and risk-management activities. The aim of this thesis has been to advance the understanding of the dynamics of microbial pollution in aquatic systems through review, experimentation and numerical modelling.

Initially, a new module for simulating the protozoan pathogen, *Cryptosporidium*, was developed and implemented within a three-dimensional (3D) coupled hydrodynamic-water quality model (ELCOM-CAEDYM). The coupled 3D model was validated against a comprehensive dataset collected in Myponga Reservoir (South Australia), and without calibration, performed to a high degree of accuracy. The investigation then sought to examine the experimental dataset in more detail and found a significant difference between protozoan pathogens and the bacterial and viral indicators. To examine the role of bacterial association with particles in more detail, a second experimental campaign was carried out in Sugarloaf Reservoir (Victoria). This campaign was used to gain insights into the association of coliform bacteria with suspended sediment and to quantify their sedimentation dynamics based on *in situ* measurements. Using an inverse technique, particle profile data was used to create a simple Lagrangian model that was applied to back-calculate the sedimentation rates of the coliform bacteria and the fraction that were attached to the particles. The results indicated that 80 – 100% were associated with a small-sized clay fraction. This result was in contrast with the *Cryptosporidium* dynamics in Myponga Reservoir, where it was concluded that oocysts did not settle with the inorganic particles.

These findings indicated the current models for simulating the array of organisms of interest to regulatory authorities are inadequate to resolve the level of detail necessary for useful predictions and risk management. Large differences between the protozoa, bacteria and phages were being observed due to different particle association rates and sedimentation dynamics, order of magnitude differences in natural mortality rates, and different sensitivity to sunlight bandwidths. The original model implemented within CAEDYM was therefore rewritten to be more complete and generic for all microbial pollutants and different types of aquatic systems. The model was built using a generic set of parameterizations that describe the dynamics of most protozoan, bacterial and viral organisms of interest. The parameterizations dynamically account for sensitivities to environmental conditions, including temperature, salinity, pH, dissolved oxygen, sunlight, nutrients and turbidity, on the growth and mortality of enteric organisms.

The new model significantly advances previous studies in several areas. First, inclusion of the growth term allows for simulation of organisms in warm, nutrient rich environments, where typical die-off models tend to over-predict loss rates. Second, the natural mortality term has been extended to independently account for the effects of salinity and pH, in addition to temperature. The salinity-mediated mortality has also been adapted to account for the nutrient status of the medium to simulate the importance of nutrient starvation on the ability of an organism to survive under osmotic stress. Third, a new model for sunlight-mediated mortality is presented that differentially accounts for mortality induced through exposure to visible, UV-A and UV-B bandwidths. The new expression has capacity to simulate the photo-oxidative and photo-biological mechanisms of inactivation through included sensitivities to dissolved oxygen and pH. Fourth, the model allows for organisms to be split between free and attached pools, and sedimented organisms may become resuspended in response to high shear stress events at the water-sediment interface caused by high velocities or wind-wave action. Fifth,

the enteric organism module has been implemented within the bio-geochemical model CAEDYM, thereby giving it access to dynamically calculated concentrations of dissolved oxygen, organic carbon, and suspended solids, in addition to pH, shear stress and light climate information.

Without adjustment of the literature derived parameter values, the new model was validated against a range of microbial data from three reservoirs that differed in their climatic zone, trophic status and operation. The simulations in conjunction with the experimental data highlighted the large spatial and temporal variability in processes that control the fate and distribution of enteric organisms. Additionally, large differences between species originate from variable rates of growth, mortality and sedimentation and it is emphasized that the use of surrogates for quantifying risk is problematic. The model can be used to help design targeted monitoring programs, examine differences between species and the appropriateness of surrogate indicators, and to support management and real-time decision-making. Areas where insufficient data and understanding exist are also discussed.

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Preface

The main body of this thesis is comprised of six chapters (2-7). Chapter 2 is preliminary hydrodynamic modelling work conducted on several reservoirs proposed for use during the research program. Although it may seem somewhat peripheral to the main focus of the thesis, it forms the backbone of many of the predictions presented later on since all the systems simulated depend on the integrity of the 3D hydrodynamic predictions. Additionally, this work was performed prior to the field campaigns, and so these simulations served as virtual environmental laboratories and enabled testing of hypotheses and sampling regimes prior to committing to the field experiments.

The remaining chapters (3-7) are independent papers written for journal publication. Each of these papers contains an introduction that includes a review of the relevant literature. To avoid unnecessary duplication, Chapter 1 does not seek to provide a comprehensive review of the literature pertaining to the entire thesis, but rather to place the individual papers in the context of the overall work. Similarly, Chapter 8 draws together the conclusions from each of the individual papers and serves to synthesize the individual chapters into a single body of work.

Chapter 3 has been published in the *International Journal for River Basin Management* as "A three dimensional model of *Cryptosporidium* dynamics for lakes and reservoirs – a new tool for risk management", by M.R. Hipsey, J.P. Antenucci, J.D. Brookes, M.D. Burch, R.H. Regel and L. Linden, Volume 2(3), pp. 181-197 (2004). Copyright for this paper belongs to the International Association for Hydraulic Research.

Chapter 4 has been published in the journal *Environmental Science and Technology* as "The relative value of surrogate indicators for detecting pathogens in lakes and reservoirs", by J.D. Brookes, M.R. Hipsey, M.D. Burch, R.H. Regel, L. Linden, C.M. Ferguson and J.P. Antenucci, Volume 39(22), pp. 8614-8621 (2005). Copyright for this paper belongs to the American Chemical Society.

Chapter 5 has been published in the *Journal of Water, Air and Soil Pollution* as "In situ evidence for the association of Total Coliforms and *Escherichia coli* with suspended inorganic particles in an Australian reservoir" by M.R. Hipsey, J.D. Brookes, R.H. Regel, J.P. Antenucci and M.D. Burch, Volume 170(1-4), pp. 191-209 (2006). Copyright of this article belongs to Springer Publishers.

Chapter 6 is in preparation for submission to the journal *Water Research* as "A generic, process-based model of microbial pollution in aquatic systems" by M.R. Hipsey, J.P. Antenucci and J.D. Brookes.

Chapter 7 is a brief summary article aimed at lake and reservoir engineers, and outlines the tools and options available for assisting with microbial pollution problems. It appeared in the periodical *LakeLine* as "Decision support tools for managing microbial pollution in lakes and reservoirs", by M.R. Hipsey, J.P. Antenucci, and J.D. Brookes, Volume 24(4), pp. 25-28 (2004).

Various components of the work have also been presented in other papers and at conferences, but have not been included in the thesis directly. These include:

- Antenucci, J.P., Brookes, J.D. and Hipsey, M.R. A simple model for quantifying *Cryptosporidium* transport, dilution and potential risk in reservoirs. *J. AWWA*, 97(1): 86-93 (2005).
- Brookes, J.D., Antenucci, J.P., Hipsey, M.R., Burch, M.D., Ashbolt, N.J. and Ferguson, C.M. Fate and transport of pathogens in lakes and reservoirs, *Environ. Intl.*, 30: 741-759 (2004).

- Brookes, J.D., Davies, C.M., Hipsey, M.R. and Antenucci, J.P. Association of *Cryptosporidium* with bovine faecal particles and implications for risk reduction by settling within water supply reservoirs. *Water and Health*, 4(1): 87-98 (2006).
- Hipsey, M.R., Antenucci, J.P. and Brookes, J.D. Coupling a *Cryptosporidium* fate model to a 3D hydrodynamic model: results from Myponga Reservoir, SA. *Australian Water Association 20th Convention - 2003 OzWater Conf.*, Perth, Western Australia, 2003.
- Hipsey, M.R., Brookes, J.D. Antenucci, J.P. and Burch, M.D. Field and modelling evidence for pathogen behaviour in drinking water reservoirs. *Australian Society for Limnology Annual Conf.*, Warnambool, Victoria, Australia, 2003.
- Hipsey, M.R., Antenucci, J.P., Brookes, J.D., Burch, M.D. and Regel, R.H. Simulation tools for minimizing pathogen risk in drinking water reservoirs. *6th International Conf. on Hydroinformatics*, Singapore, 2004.
- Hipsey, M.R., Antenucci, J.P. and Brookes, J.D. A new process-based model of enteric organism dynamics in natural waters. *7th International Conf. on Hydroscience and Engineering*, Philadelphia, USA, 2006.