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# **A High Resolution Point Rainfall Model Calibrated to Short Pluviograph or Daily Rainfall Data**

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# ABSTRACT

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The design of hydraulic systems that have to cope with natural flows of flood magnitude is risk-based. The estimation of flood risk relies on joint probability theory where the combination of stochastic inputs such as rainfall and a description of the hydrological/hydraulic runoff process determine the probability distribution of flooding events. To date both the design storm approach presented in Australian Rainfall and Runoff (Institution of Engineers Australia, 1987) and continuous simulation through a Monte Carlo approach have provided workable methods for deriving empirical flood probability distributions as an estimate of this flood risk. While the continuous simulation approach has long been viewed as the best way to evaluate the probabilistic behavior of surface water systems, the design storm approach has remained the preferred choice due to its simplicity and ease of use. However with the onset of powerful personal computers providing the ability for increasingly complex analysis within the required timeframes, the tendency towards using a continuous simulation approach will continue to grow.

The idea behind the Monte Carlo continuous simulation approach is that a long model simulation will eventually sample all possible joint probability interactions (i.e. all combinations of rainfall input and runoff model conditions etc) within a system. If this is the case, the derived flood distribution from these simulations can be viewed as an accurate inference of the true flood distribution and therefore can be used for engineering analysis and evaluation of flood risk. A drawback of the Monte Carlo approach is the required input of a long rainfall record. In the absence of a significant historical record, rainfall models can be used to provide the required data but are in turn reliant on adequate historical data for calibration. Accurate calibration of rainfall models is particularly important in Australia where the variability of rainfall at short and long term time scales is large.

Australia does have an extensive network of rainfall recording stations. These sites record rainfall data in various forms ranging from a daily time step down to six-minute resolution. While the size of historical daily records is often large, there are very few six-minute (Pluviograph) records available of significant length. Indeed,

analysis of Australia's pluviograph records indicates that the average length of the more than 900 pluviograph data sets available from the Bureau of Meteorology is approximately 15 years. Only a small number of sites have a record length exceeding 40 years and of these only 40 or so remain active. Even with the high quality of rainfall data in Australia, periods of missing or corrupt data are often present. Not only does this lack of significant short time scale data provide a major obstacle in the application of a Monte Carlo approach to risk estimation, it also inhibits the application of rainfall simulation models that use this data for direct calibration. This lack of data is particularly important if we consider the tails of the flood probability distribution where it is unlikely that a 15-year historical record can provide accurate estimates of a 100 year flood event. While the advent of numerous stochastic rainfall models provide methods for extending historical rainfall records, without adequate historical rainfall data available for calibration their accuracy is questionable.

This thesis describes the development of a new technique which significantly extends the applicability of stochastic point rainfall models that require historical data for calibration. The technique is demonstrated using a high-resolution point rainfall model based on wet-dry alternating storm events. The original model presented by Heneker *et al.* (2001) uses storm events which are defined by the observed event distributions of dry periods, storm event durations and storm intensity conditioned on storm duration and replicates this event structure during simulation.

Significant improvements to the original model are presented as the first part of this thesis. The parameterisation used to describe the event distributions has been simplified and the number of parameters reduced resulting in a model that is more robust and easier to calibrate. In addition, the Metropolis algorithm (Metropolis *et al.* (1953)) was incorporated into the model providing a description of the posterior distribution of model parameters and as a result enables a description of parameter uncertainty within the model structure. These improvements have produced a model that is well defined and can be vigorously compared against numerous observed statistics in a quantitative manner. Simulation results indicate that the model is able to replicate both calibrated and non-calibrated statistics at various time scales.

The original model required the use of a long pluviograph record at the site of interest to ensure an accurate calibration of model parameters. To circumvent this restriction in the application of the model a new 'master'- 'target' scaling relationship has been developed and incorporated into the model. A model calibration is undertaken at a 'master' site with a long pluviograph record which is then updated and scaled to the 'target' site of interest using the information from either a short pluviograph or daily rainfall record. This structure has removed the need for significant pluviograph data at the 'target' site and enables the rainfall model to be applied at sites with short pluviograph or daily rainfall records.

The approach has been tested at numerous pairs of sites providing evidence of its success in generating accurate synthetic pluviograph data across the country and within various climatic regions. Model results are presented and compared for both the observed pluviograph data (for individual storm and sub-daily statistics) and daily data (for longer aggregated statistics) available at the target sites and compares well to Australian data. The rainfall model presented in this thesis can be used to provide accurate synthetic rainfall data at sites with minimal historical rainfall data providing a powerful tool for application in hydrological risk analysis across Australia.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ABSTRACT	i
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xxiv
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Aims	7
1.3 Research Outline	8
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>11</b>
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Physical Process of Precipitation	12
2.3 Stochastic Rainfall Modelling	13
2.4 Point Rainfall Models	14
2.4.1 Poisson Models	15
2.4.2 Cluster Models	18
2.4.3 Markov Models	26
2.4.4 Alternating Renewal Models	31
2.4.5 Discussion of Point Rainfall Models and the Selection of one for Further Development and Regionalisation	39
2.5 Regionalisation Techniques	43
2.5.1 Identification of Homogeneous Groups (or Clusters)	43
2.5.2 Regional Flood Analysis	50
2.5.3 Rainfall Model Regionalisation	54
2.5.4 Summary of Rainfall Model Regionalisation	60

<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>IMPROVEMENTS TO THE HIGH RESOLUTION</b>	
	<b>POINT RAINFALL MODEL</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>Description of Original Rainfall Model</b>	<b>63</b>
3.2.1	Model Structure	64
3.2.2	Probability Model of Inter-Event Time & Storm Duration	65
3.2.3	Calibration of Inter-Event Time & Storm Duration	66
3.2.4	Method of Maximum Likelihood	67
3.2.5	Probability Model of Average Rainfall Intensity	70
3.2.6	Disaggregation of Rainfall Events	73
3.2.7	Intra-Storm Rainfall	75
3.2.8	Internal Storm Dry Periods	77
3.2.9	Summary	79
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Identifying and Removing Correlated Parameters</b>	<b>82</b>
3.3.1	The Metropolis Algorithm	83
3.3.2	Incorporating the Metropolis Algorithm into the Rainfall Model	88
3.3.3	Dry Spell and Storm Duration Parameter Analysis using the Metropolis Algorithm	89
3.3.4	Improvements to the Calibration of Dry Spell and Storm Durations through a 3-Parameter Model	93
3.3.5	Intensity Parameter Analysis using the Metropolis Algorithm	96
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Improvements to the Calibration of Storm Intensity</b>	<b>98</b>
3.4.1	Investigation into the Intensity-Duration Shape	103
3.4.2	Initial Duration – Intensity Relationship Description using a Continuous Function	107
3.4.3	Verification by Simulation	114
<b>3.5</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	<b>INCLUSION OF PARAMETER UNCERTAINTY IN</b>	
	<b>SIMULATED RAINFALL TIME SERIES</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Review of Existing Models to Capture Uncertainty</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Incorporating Parameter Uncertainty into the Rainfall Model</b>	<b>123</b>

4.3.1	Influence of Intensity Parameter Uncertainty on Rainfall Model Simulations	124
4.3.2	Influence of Inter-Event Time and Storm Duration Uncertainty on Rainfall Model Simulations	127
4.4	<b>Influence of Record Length on Posterior Parameter Distributions</b>	<b>131</b>
4.5	<b>Influence of Record Length on Resultant Model Simulations</b>	<b>135</b>
4.6	<b>Summary</b>	<b>141</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 5 IMPROVED MODEL VALIDATION</b>		<b>143</b>
5.1	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>143</b>
5.1.1	Observed Data Records	144
5.2	<b>Calibrated Event Probability Distributions</b>	<b>144</b>
5.3	<b>Intensity-Frequency-Duration</b>	<b>152</b>
5.4	<b>Aggregated Depth Statistics</b>	<b>154</b>
5.5	<b>Annual Rainfall</b>	<b>157</b>
5.6	<b>Record Length</b>	<b>159</b>
5.7	<b>Summary</b>	<b>161</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 6 REGIONALISATION WITH A SHORT PLUVIOGRAPH RECORD</b>		<b>163</b>
6.1	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>163</b>
6.2	<b>Regionalisation Model Structure</b>	<b>164</b>
6.2.1	Preliminary Investigations	166
6.2.2	Treatment of Sampling Variability at the Annual Scale.	171
6.3	<b>Regional Model Application to Inter-Event Times and Storm Duration Parameters</b>	<b>177</b>
6.3.1	Model Development for Inter-Event Times and Storm Durations	178
6.3.2	Simulated Inter-Event Time Results at Selected Target Sites	183
6.3.3	Simulated Storm Duration Results at Selected Target Sites	189
6.3.4	Comparison between Simulated and Observed Daily Dry Probabilities at the Target Site	194
6.4	<b>Regional Model Application for Storm Event Depths and Temporal Pattern Parameters</b>	<b>198</b>
6.4.1	Model Development for Storm Event Depths	198

6.4.2	Incorporating Non-Parametric Kernel Smoothing Density Estimation	204
6.4.3	Storm Event Depths Results - Introduction	206
6.4.4	Simulated Storm Event Depth Distribution Results at Selected Target Sites	207
6.4.5	Monthly and Annual Rainfall Results	210
6.4.6	Model Development for Storm Temporal Pattern	215
6.4.7	Intensity Frequency Duration Curve Results	219
<b>6.5</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>221</b>

## **CHAPTER 7 REGIONALISATION WITH A DAILY RAINFALL RECORD**

		<b>223</b>
<b>7.1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>7.2</b>	<b>Development of the Daily Regionalisation Model Structure</b>	<b>225</b>
7.2.1	Daily Calibration Model Development and Simulated Likelihood Approach	229
7.2.2	Treatment of Sampling Variability between Rainfall Record Time Periods	233
<b>7.3</b>	<b>Model Calibration Using Daily Data Results</b>	<b>235</b>
7.3.1	Introduction	235
7.3.2	Calibrated Daily Statistics	238
7.3.3	Comparison of Observed and Simulated Annual and Monthly Rainfall Distributions	243
7.3.4	Comparison of Observed and Simulated Bulk Storm Event Distributions –Inter-Event Times	247
7.3.5	Comparison of Observed and Simulated Bulk Storm Event Distributions – Storm Duration	250
7.3.6	Comparison of Observed and Simulated Bulk Storm Event Distributions – Storm Depth	254
7.3.7	Comparison of Observed and Simulated Intensity Frequency Duration Curves	256
<b>7.4</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>259</b>



<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	<b>CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>261</b>
8.1	Overview	261
8.2	Stochastic Rainfall Simulation Model	263
8.2.1	Summary	263
8.2.2	Conclusions and Recommendations	264
8.3	Regionalisation with a Short Pluviograph Record	265
8.3.1	Summary	265
8.3.2	Conclusions and Recommendations	266
8.4	Regionalisation with a Daily Record	267
8.4.1	Summary	267
8.4.2	Conclusions and Recommendations	268

<b>CHAPTER 9</b>	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>270</b>
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#### APPENDICES

<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>RAINFALL DATA SITE DETAILS AND RECORDING STATION INFORMATION</b>	<b>A.1 – A.15</b>
<b>APPENDIX B</b>	<b>IMPROVED RAINFALL MODEL VALIDATION (Master Sites)</b>	<b>B.1 – B.55</b>
<b>APPENDIX C</b>	<b>REGIONALISATION WITH A SHORT PLUVIOGRAPH RECORD – RESULTS</b>	<b>C.1 – C.110</b>
<b>APPENDIX D</b>	<b>REGIONALISATION WITH A DAILY RECORD – RESULTS</b>	<b>D.1 – D.141</b>