

BOOK REVIEW

- Elery Hamilton-Smith

Eberhard, Rolan (ed.) 1997. *Pattern and Process: Towards a Regional Approach to National Estate Assessment of Biodiversity*. Environment Australia, Canberra. [Available from the Community Information Unit, Department of the Environment, P. O. Box 787, Canberra, ACT 260 1. Telephone 1800 803 772; Fax: 02 6274 19701]

Recent years have seen an upsurge in debate about the principles in assessment and protection of the natural heritage. As one element of this debate both the word and concept of *geodiversity* have emerged. This idea has also been embodied in the Australian Natural Heritage Charter (1996), which is in itself another focus of some debate.

The current volume is an extremely important set of papers which discusses both the idea of geodiversity and in particular, its utilization within a regional framework. The discussion is sometimes unduly diverted into arguing the extent to which geodiversity is, or is not, conceptually parallel to the more familiar idea of biodiversity, rather than the extent to which it might be informed by examining the experience of the biodiversity idea.

Just as biodiversity has led us from ideas about single-species protection to eco-system protection, so geo-diversity appears to offer a better basis for moving away from "single-feature" protection to the protection of geologic and geomorphic systems and processes. The major experience in its utilization has been in Tasmania, but it underlies more recent

work in some other parts of Australia, particularly both Western Australia and New South Wales.

Within this volume, Osborne, and a joint paper by Houshold, Sharples, Dixon and Duhig both examine the importance of approaching the tasks of identification and assessment through a regional perspective. Davey reviews concepts of significance, Kiernan examines landscape classification; Pemberton looks at the place of soils in conservation practice. Both Stock and Semenliuk review some of the underlying conceptual issues.

Those responsible for the consideration of karst areas have probably been amongst the first to recognize and work with the idea that regional consideration is essential, and that both the total karst system (rather than just outstanding features) and the processes which have developed and which are continuing within the system, are vital elements of any protection plan. Thus, these papers both owe an intellectual debt to karst studies and at the same time make a significant contribution to further thinking about karst protection.