

Spatial variability in surface water- groundwater fluxes using hydraulic methods

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This thesis is submitted as requirement in
full for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Feb 2014

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without knowledge any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any other university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "S.L. Noorduijn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom. To the right of the signature is a small, light gray rectangular stamp.

Saskia L. Noorduijn

Co-Authorship

Saskia L. Noorduij is the primary author on all manuscripts in this thesis. On all submitted papers, the co-authors provided intellectual supervision and editorial content.

Acknowledgments

I wish to acknowledge the funding from the Australian Research Council and the National Water Commission via the National Centre for Groundwater Research and Training. Without this support, the research presented here would not have been possible. I would also like to acknowledge the Goyder Institute for Water Research of South Australia for contributing funding to site infrastructure and providing me with a scholarship top-up.

I am most grateful for the support and guidance of my supervisors Prof. Peter Cook and Dr Glenn Harrington. I have learnt a great deal over the past 3.5 years, most of it a result of their scientific guidance. Thanks to Glenn for his insight into the hydrogeology of the south east of South Australia, and for all the assistance in the field (good times!). I am indebted to Peter for his clear thinking and logical approach to research, which helped guide me through this project. I also wish to thank all the admin staff (particularly Anna Bonnes) in the NCGRT and the School of the Environment for their assistance over the years.

On a more personal note, I want to thank all the members of Program 3 for their continued enthusiasm, field assistance and friendship. My time at Flinders would not have been the same without my 224 office mates; James McCallum, Dylan Irvine, and (by *proxi*) Cameron Wood. Thanks for all the awesome homebrew, lunches, and Thursday beers.

I also want to thank my mum and dad for all the late night/early morning phone calls. Your support has been invaluable. I also want to mention all those outside of uni which have made my time in Adelaide all the more interesting and rewarding; Michelle and Matthew Sorell, Nic Rawlence, Jess Wadley, the Adelaide Bellringer, and last but not least Graham Gower.

Summary

Quantifying the spatial variability of surface water-groundwater fluxes remains a challenge. The ability to either upscale point measurements or down scale reach/catchment scale measurement invariably introduces error into the estimation processes. This thesis addresses two methods that have been used to estimate surface water – groundwater flux, and investigates an approach to determining stream-aquifer connection state. The aims of this Doctoral thesis are to: 1) determine the representative scale at which standard hydraulic methods can be applied in this field of research, 2) quantify the variability in surface water – groundwater fluxes in ephemeral environments, and 3) develop methods of measuring hydraulic heads beneath and adjacent to streams.

In the first part of this research, the spatial scale of Darcy's law was investigated in the context of surface water – groundwater interaction. The primary supposition being that when applying Darcy's law to estimate groundwater discharge to a stream, the estimated discharge determined using a well at a distance of 50 m will encapsulate discharge over a greater proportion of the stream than a well at a distance of 10 m. This was investigated using numerical methods and stochastic K -fields to determine the influence of aquifer properties i.e., variance and correlation length of the K -fields on this question of scale. An estimate of the integrated hydraulic conductivity between the well and stream was determined by simulating a change in stream stage. The findings of this body of work suggest that an approximate 1:1 relationship exists between the distance of the observation well and the length of stream represented by the Darcian groundwater discharge estimate. In addition to this, the correlation length within the aquifer will strongly influence the variability in the discharge estimates. A similar approach was applied to a highly instrumented field site. The results of the field study concur with those of the numerical simulations i.e., variability in discharge estimates decreases as the distance of the well from the stream increases.

The second part focussed on determining the spatial variability in seepage flux beneath

an ephemeral channel. The use of flood front movement along a channel has emerged as a technique to determine the hydraulic conductivity of streambed sediments and thereby quantify the seepage flux for a given flow event. This approach was applied to a controlled flow event along a 1387 m reach of an artificial stream channel. We investigated the usefulness including surface water and groundwater data to assist in the calibration processes. The results of this study identified areas of high seepage fluxes in the upstream reaches and low seepage fluxes in the downstream reaches. A Latin Hypercube Monte Carlo analysis of the model indicated that specific yield had the strongest influence on the calibration.

The final part of this research investigated a well completion design which would enable the direct monitoring of the connection state of a stream, by enabling placement of wells beneath streams and floodplains. This approach required the well to be sealed so that surface water would be unable to enter, and the total pressure (from a non-vented pressure transducer) within the well could be monitored. A controlled laboratory experiment was used to compare the total pressure response in an open and sealed well to various water levels. The results indicated that the total pressure within the open and sealed wells were equal. Therefore, the groundwater response in the aquifer can be obtained using the total pressure data obtained from within a sealed well. The advantage of this approach is that it negates the need for tall standpipes and additional infrastructure, which would otherwise be damaged during high flow events.