

**Comparison of the sensitivity of Australasian
and non-Australasian aquatic organisms
to selected metals**

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Dustin Hobbs

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	III
TABLE OF CONTENTS	IV
LIST OF FIGURES.....	VI
LIST OF TABLES	VIII
ABSTRACT.....	X
1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Factors that may cause differences in toxicity data between Australasian and non-Australasian species	1
1.2 Comparisons of the sensitivity of groups of organisms.....	7
1.3 Comparisons of the sensitivity of Australasian and non- Australasian species to toxicants	8
1.4 Metals in aquatic environments	12
1.5 Objectives	13
2 GENERAL METHODS.....	14
2.1 Introduction.....	14
2.2 Database compilation.....	15
2.3 Toxicity data manipulations	20
2.4 Statistical methods.....	21
3 EVALUATION OF CRITERIA USED TO ASSESS THE QUALITY OF AQUATIC TOXICITY DATA	22
3.1 Introduction.....	22
3.2 Methods.....	23
3.3 Results and Discussion	25
3.4 Conclusions	33
4 COMPARISON OF THE SENSITIVITY OF AUSTRALASIAN AND NON- AUSTRALASIAN SPECIES TO METALS USING 95% CONFIDENCE INTERVALS AND THE STUDENT'S T-TEST.....	34
4.1 Introduction.....	34
4.2 Methods	35
4.3 Results.....	39
4.4 Summary of 95% confidence interval and Student t-test results.....	79
4.5 Discussion	80
4.6 Conclusions	94
5 COMPARISON OF THE SENSITIVITY OF AUSTRALASIAN AND NON- AUSTRALASIAN SPECIES TO SELECTED METALS USING SPECIES SENSITIVITY DISTRIBUTIONS.....	95
5.1 Introduction.....	95
5.2 Methods	97

5.3	Results.....	100
5.4	Discussion	107
5.5	Conclusions	111
6	GENERAL DISCUSSION	112
6.1	Further research	123
7	GENERAL CONCLUSIONS	124
8	REFERENCES.....	126

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Appendix 1 - Summary of metal toxicity data for Australasian freshwater biota

Appendix 2 - Summary of metal toxicity data for non-Australasian freshwater biota

Appendix 3 - Summary of metal toxicity data for Australasian marine/estuarine biota

Appendix 4 – Summary of metal toxicity data for non-Australasian marine/estuarine biota

Appendix 5 – Non significant results from Chapter 4

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 Quality score for each respondent assessing the Buhl (1997) study. The AQS is shown as the solid horizontal line and the quality classes indicated by the broken lines.	25
Figure 3.2 Quality score for each respondent assessing the Cheung and Lam (1998) study. The AQS is shown as the solid horizontal line and the quality classes indicated by the broken lines.	26
Figure 3.3 Absolute deviation of individual quality scores from the agreed quality score (AQS) for both studies as a function of the number of years of experience in ecotoxicology of the assessors.	27
Figure 3.4 Absolute deviation of individual quality scores from the original and revised agreed quality scores (AQS) for the Buhl (1997) study.....	32
Figure 3.5 Absolute deviation of individual quality scores from the original and revised agreed quality scores (AQS) for the Cheung and Lam (1998) study.....	32
Figure 4.1 Explanation of the figures used throughout the rest of this chapter.	36
Figure 4.2 Log toxicity of arsenic (V) to non-Australasian and Australasian Uniramia.	44
Figure 4.3 Log toxicity of chromium (VI) to non-Australasian and Australasian Chlorophyta.	45
Figure 4.4 Log toxicity of chromium (VI) to non-Australasian and Australasian Crustacea.....	46
Figure 4.5 Log toxicity of copper to non-Australasian and Australasian Chlorophyta.	47
Figure 4.6 Log toxicity of copper to non-Australasian and Australasian Mollusca.....	48
Figure 4.7 Toxicity of copper to the cladocera <i>D. pulex</i> and <i>C.cf. dubia</i>	49
Figure 4.8 Log toxicity of copper to <i>S. quadricauda</i> and <i>P. subcapitata</i>	50
Figure 4.9 Log toxicity of copper to <i>S. quadricauda</i> and <i>Chlorella</i> sp.	51
Figure 4.10 Log toxicity of copper to <i>P. promelas</i> and <i>M. splendida inornata</i>	52
Figure 4.11 Log toxicity of mercury to non-Australasian and Australasian Chordata. .	53
Figure 4.12 Log toxicity of uranium to non-Australasian and Australasian Chordata. .	54
Figure 4.13 Log toxicity of uranium to non-Australasian and Australasian Crustacea.	55
Figure 4.14 Log toxicity of uranium to <i>D. magna</i> and <i>M. macleayi</i>	56
Figure 4.15 Log toxicity (LC ₅₀) of arsenic (V) to non-Australasian and Australasian Uniramia.....	57
Figure 4.16 Log toxicity (LC ₅₀) of copper to non-Australasian and Australasian Mollusca.....	58
Figure 4.17 Log toxicity (LC ₅₀) of mercury to non-Australasian and Australasian Chordata.	59
Figure 4.18 Log toxicity (LC ₅₀) of uranium to non-Australasian and Australasian Crustacea.....	60
Figure 4.19 Log toxicity (EC ₅₀) of chromium (VI) to non-Australasian and Australasian Chlorophyta.....	61
Figure 4.20 Log toxicity (EC ₅₀) of copper to non-Australasian and Australasian Chlorophyta.....	62
Figure 4.21 Log toxicity (EC ₅₀) of copper to non-Australasian and Australasian Crustacea.....	63
Figure 4.22 Log of the hardness modified toxicity data for copper to non-Australasian and Australasian Crustacea.....	64
Figure 4.23 Log of the hardness modified toxicity data for copper to <i>C. robustus</i> and <i>C. destructor</i>	65

Figure 4.24 Log of the hardness modified toxicity data for copper to <i>D. pulex</i> and <i>C. cf. dubia</i> .	66
Figure 4.25 Log of the hardness modified toxicity data for copper to <i>M. rosenbergi</i> and <i>P. australiensis</i> .	67
Figure 4.26 Log of the hardness modified log toxicity data for copper to <i>P. promelas</i> and <i>M. splendida inornata</i> .	68
Figure 4.27 Log of the hardness modified toxicity data for zinc to non-Australasian and Australasian Chordata.	69
Figure 4.28 Log toxicity of cadmium to non-Australasian and Australasian Crustacea.	70
Figure 4.29 Log toxicity of copper to non-Australasian and Australasian Chordata.	71
Figure 4.30 Log toxicity of copper to non-Australasian and Australasian Echinodermata.	72
Figure 4.31 Log toxicity of copper to <i>P. japonicus</i> and <i>P. merguensis</i> .	73
Figure 4.32 Log toxicity of zinc to non-Australasian and Australasian Crustacea.	74
Figure 4.33 Log toxicity of cadmium to non-Australasian and Australasian Crustacea.	75
Figure 4.34 Log toxicity of copper to non-Australasian and Australasian Chordata.	76
Figure 4.35 Log toxicity of nickel to non-Australasian and Australasian Crustacea.	77
Figure 4.36 Log toxicity of zinc to non-Australasian and Australasian Crustacea.	78
Figure 5.1 Species sensitivity distributions for Australasian and non-Australasian species acutely exposed to Cd in freshwater.	100
Figure 5.2 Species sensitivity distributions for Australasian and non-Australasian species acutely exposed to Cd in marine/estuarine water.	101
Figure 5.3 Species sensitivity distributions for Australasian and non-Australasian species acutely exposed to Cu in freshwater.	102
Figure 5.4 Species sensitivity distributions for Australasian and non-Australasian species acutely exposed to Cu in marine/estuarine water.	103
Figure 5.5 Species sensitivity distributions for Australasian and non-Australasian species acutely exposed to Zn in freshwater.	104
Figure 5.6 Species sensitivity distributions for Australasian and non-Australasian species acutely exposed to Zn in marine/estuarine water.	105
Figure 6.1 Cumulative frequencies of the ratio of toxicity of non-Australasian to Australasian species exposed to metals in freshwater.	116
Figure 6.2 Cumulative frequencies of the ratio of toxicity of non-Australasian to Australasian species exposed to metals in marine/estuarine water.	116
Figure 6.3 Cumulative frequencies of the ratio of toxicity of non-Australasian to Australasian species exposed to metals in freshwater for chemicals with ratios greater than one.	117
Figure 6.4 Cumulative frequencies of the ratio of toxicity of non-Australasian to Australasian species exposed to metals in marine/estuarine water for chemicals with ratios greater than one.	117

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1 The interspecies assessment factors (AF) for a range of different interspecies extrapolations that should protect 95 and 99% of the species. Taken from Warne (1998).....	3
Table 1.2 Summary of the results of studies, on the relative sensitivities of Australasian and Non-Australasian species.....	11
Table 2.1 The questions used and the marks awarded to assess the quality of toxicity data for aquatic biota. Taken from Markich <i>et al.</i> (2002).....	18
Table 2.2 The hardness-dependent algorithms for freshwater ($\leq 2.5^\circ/\text{oo}$) that were used in the ANZECC and ARMCANZ (2000) water quality guidelines and in this study.....	21
Table 3.1 Percentage (%) of the 55 ecotoxicology assessors who answered questions that differed from the agreed response established by the authors to judge the data quality of two randomly selected ecotoxicity studies used in this paper to evaluate the data quality evaluation process.	28
Table 3.2 Revised scheme for assessing the quality of aquatic toxicity data with the modified questions underlined.	31
Table 4.1 Comparisons that were performed between Australasian and non-Australasian freshwater taxa in this chapter and the type of data that was used.....	37
Table 4.2 Comparisons that were performed between Australasian and non-Australasian marine/estuarine taxa and the type of data used.....	38
Table 4.3 Freshwater results for 95% confidence interval and Student's t-test for all data.....	40
Table 4.4 Freshwater results for 95% confidence interval and Student's t-test for LC ₅₀ data.....	41
Table 4.5 Freshwater results for 95% confidence intervals and Student's t-test for EC ₅₀ data.....	42
Table 4.6 Freshwater results for 95% confidence intervals and Student's t-test for hardness modified data.....	42
Table 4.7 Marine/estuarine results for 95% confidence interval and Student's t-test for all data.....	43
Table 4.8 Marine/estuarine results for 95% confidence intervals and Student's t-test for LC ₅₀ data.....	43
Table 4.9 Marine/estuarine results for 95% confidence intervals and Student's t-test for EC ₅₀ data.....	44
Table 4.10 Summary of the results of the comparisons of the sensitivity of Australasian and non-Australasian taxa in freshwater.....	79
Table 4.11 Summary of the results of the comparisons of the sensitivity of Australasian and non-Australasian taxa in marine/estuarine water.	80
Table 4.12 The results of the most reliable comparisons of the relative sensitivity of Australasian and non-Australasian freshwater taxa for each combination of metal and taxa.....	84
Table 4.13 Ratio of the sensitivity of Non-Australasian and Australasian freshwater organisms for the most reliable comparisons.....	85
Table 4.14 The results of the most reliable comparisons of the relative sensitivity of Australasian and non-Australasian marine/estuarine species for each combination of metal and taxa.	87
Table 4.15 Ratio of sensitivity of Non-Australasian and Australasian marine/estuarine organisms for the most reliable comparisons.....	88
Table 4.16 Summary of the results of other studies comparing the relative	

sensitivities of Australasian and Non-Australasian species.....	91
Table 5.1 Types of taxonomically different organisms and the major subdivisions of organisms these belong to.	97
Table 5.2 Protective Concentrations (PC) for Australasian and non-Australasian species exposed to Cd in freshwater (µg/L).	101
Table 5.3 Protective Concentrations (PC) for Australasian and non-Australasian species exposed to Cd in marine/estuarine water (µg/L).	102
Table 5.4 Protective Concentrations (PC) for Australasian and non-Australasian species exposed to Cu in freshwater (µg/L).	103
Table 5.5 Protective Concentrations (PC) for Australasian and non-Australasian species exposed to Cu in marine/estuarine water (µg/L).	104
Table 5.6 Protective Concentrations (PC) for Australasian and non-Australasian species exposed to Zn in freshwater (µg/L).	105
Table 5.7 Protective Concentrations (PC) for Australasian and non-Australasian species exposed to Zn in marine/estuarine water (µg/L).	106
Table 5.8 Comparison of estimated chronic trigger values (µg/L) from Australasian and non-Australasian aquatic toxicity data for Cd, Cu and Zn in freshwater.	106
Table 5.9 Comparison of estimated chronic trigger values (µg/L) from Australasian and non-Australasian aquatic toxicity data for Cd, Cu and Zn in marine/estuarine water.	107
Table 5.10 Comparison of estimated chronic trigger values derived using Australasian data with the Australian and New Zealand Water Quality Guidelines trigger values for Cd, Cu and Zn in freshwater (µg/L).	110
Table 5.11 Comparison of estimated chronic trigger values derived using Australasian data with the Australian and New Zealand Water Quality Guidelines trigger values for Cd, Cu and Zn in marine/estuarine water (µg/L).	110
Table 6.1. The questions used and the marks awarded to determine the quality score and quality class of the toxicity data. Modified from the USEPA (1994)...	113
Table 6.2. Safety factors that would be needed to protect 95% of Australasian species from varying percentages of chemicals, using non-Australasian toxicity data.	118
Table 6.3. Summary of the results of the comparisons of the sensitivity of Australasian and non-Australasian taxa using estimated chronic trigger values and t-test results.....	120

ABSTRACT

The difference in sensitivity of Australasian species and their non-Australasian counterparts has not been thoroughly examined. Of those studies that have been undertaken, there was no clear pattern evident regarding which group of species was the most sensitive. The current study aimed to determine if there were any significant differences between the sensitivity of organisms from these two regions by collating metal toxicity data and determining if significant differences were evident using Student t-tests and species sensitivity distribution (SSD) methods. Generally, there was more non-Australasian toxicity data available than Australasian data. Therefore, the availability of sufficient toxicity data for Australasian species determined which metals could be investigated. The metals for which there was sufficient data were As(III), As(V), Cd, Cr(VI), Cu, Pb, Hg, U and Zn for freshwater organisms and Cd, Cr(VI), Cu, Pb, Hg, Ni, and Zn for marine/estuarine organisms. Data was assessed using quality assessment criteria that were tested and improved as part of this study. The quality of the toxicity data was assessed in order to ensure that only acceptable quality data were used in the comparisons. Statistical comparisons of the best available freshwater data revealed that 35% of the comparisons had significant differences ($p < 0.05$), with 80% of these, the Australasian species were the more sensitive. For the best available marine/estuarine water data, 47% of the comparisons showed significant differences ($p < 0.05$), with 60% of these, the non-Australasian organisms were more sensitive. Examination of the ratios of the differences between organisms from the two regions indicated that, as a whole, the freshwater Australasian species were significantly more sensitive while there were no significant differences ($p > 0.05$) detected between the marine/estuarine organisms.

SSDs could be derived for Cd, Cu and Zn in both fresh and marine/estuarine waters using acute toxicity data. Australasian freshwater organisms exposed to Cu were found to be significantly ($p < 0.05$) more sensitive than the non-Australasian organisms. The five other comparisons showed no significant differences ($p > 0.05$). Estimated chronic trigger values (ECTVs) were derived using acute to chronic ratios. When comparing these ECTVs the Australasian organisms were found to be significantly more sensitive ($p < 0.05$) to Cu in freshwater, while the non-Australasian organisms were found to be significantly more sensitive ($p < 0.05$) to Cd in freshwater. The four other comparisons did not reveal any significant differences ($p > 0.05$).

Assessment factors were calculated using the ratio of the sensitivity of Australasian and non-Australasian species to the selected metals and then plotting the cumulative frequencies against the ratio. This analysis revealed that an assessment factor of 7.1 would need to be applied to protect 95% of Australasian organisms in freshwater ecosystems from 95% of chemicals studied, while an assessment factor of 2.2 would be needed to ensure that 95% of Australasian marine/estuarine organisms would be adequately protected from 95% of chemicals studied when using non-Australasian toxicity data to derive trigger values. The observed differences in sensitivity of Australasian and non-Australasian organisms to metals indicate that using non-Australasian data could cause either over or under protection of the local species and that this kind of study should be conducted with other chemical groups.