

St Lucia is the world's oldest protected estuary, and Africa's largest estuarine system. It is also the centerpiece of South Africa's first UNESCO World Heritage Site, the iSimangaliso Wetland Park, and has been a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance since 1986. Knowledge of its biodiversity, geological origins, hydrology, hydrodynamics and the long history of management is unique in the world. However, the impact of global change has culminated in unprecedented challenges for the conservation and management of the St Lucia system, leading to the recent initiation of a project in support of its rehabilitation and long-term sustainability. This timely volume provides a unique source of information on the functioning and management of the estuary for researchers, students and environmental managers. The insights and experiences described build on over 60 years of study and management at the site and will serve as a valuable model for similar estuaries around the world.

Renzo Perissinotto is Professor of Marine Biology and Academic Leader in the School of Life Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. He has published 110 articles in the primary peer-reviewed literature and is the senior author of a book on South African temporarily open/closed estuaries published in 2010.

Derek D. Stretch is Professor of Hydraulics and Environmental Fluid Mechanics, the eThekweni-sponsored Chair in Civil Engineering and the Director of the Centre for Research in Environmental, Coastal & Hydrological Engineering in the School of Engineering, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.

Ricky H. Taylor was until recently the Park Ecologist of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife for the iSimangaliso Wetland Park. He has 37 years of experience at the interface between science and management and has completed a Ph.D. on the St Lucia system through the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, Norway. He is an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Life Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.

Cover illustration: oblique aerial view of St Lucia mouth looking south in April 2007. The St Lucia inlet can be seen in the foreground and the Mfolozi inlet in the background. The inlets were artificially separate, and the St Lucia mouth had recently been breached by heavy swell in the wake of Cyclone Gamede. Photograph by Ricky H. Taylor.