

**Position**

Tuesday 1/7/2014

Page: 4

Section: General News

Region: National Circulation: 6,500

Type: Magazines Science / Technology

Size: 354.00 sq.cms.

Frequency: Bi monthly

Brief: COUNCIL-S

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## Lake Eyre from above

False colouring of satellite images highlights electromagnetic wavelength information that is normally invisible – and it's creating potentials for several exciting new 21st century genres of art. This Landsat-8 image of flooding along the north shore of Lake Eyre in central Australia was acquired in July 2013 and processed by Geoscience Australia. It highlights water moving through sand dunes into Lake Eyre, with different shades of blue indicating water depth and qualities such as muddiness and salinity. Streaky features in yellow to deep orange and red are sand dunes. Some areas have a green tinge, indicating that surrounding vegetation is responding to moisture.

The image is part of an exhibition currently running at Sydney's Customs House. The exhibition, entitled *Spaceship Earth: Observing Our Planet From Satellites*, is being curated by an Australian founder of the International Society for Digital Earth's (ISDE) digital cities working party, Davina Jackson.

"One of my favourite stills from the Spaceship Earth show is Lake Eyre – showing scattered pools of evaporating water across the central Australian

desert," said Davina. "I saw this view from my aeroplane seat coming back from Europe a couple of weeks ago – and today a friend emailed me news that Australian groundwater has become so extensive, with recent flooding, that we are now one of the world's most effective on-land carbon sinks. This sparks imaginative ideas about the global environmental potentials of Australia's so-called 'barren' desert zones. Hey, perhaps they could become sites for analogue space experiments to pre-test ways people might live on Mars?"

The exhibition takes its title from Buckminster Fuller's 1968 call for 'an operating manual for Spaceship Earth' – which relates Earth to a spaceship flying through space, with only a finite amount of resources that cannot be resupplied.

Aerospatial technologies, including Earth observation satellites, are key to an emerging goal among climate scientists to convert Fuller's 'operating manual' idea (logically a paper document in his day) to a networked computer 'system of systems' that could globally 'auto-pilot' solutions for managing our planet's environmental challenges.



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