

**DISCONTINUUM OF THE MAHAWELI RIVER AND ITS IMPACT ON THE
STRUCTURE AND THE FUNCTIONING OF INSTREAM HABITATS: AN OVERVIEW**

by

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Drainage basin of the Mahaweli, river (349 km) with the largest catchment area and annual discharge in Sri Lanka, being subjected to severe utilization since the 18th century. Recently, this river has been dammed onstream to form three major hydro-electric reservoirs in the wet zone highlands and partially diverted to inundate two irrigational "tanks" in the dry zone lowlands. Observations were made along the course of the river gradient from headwaters to the down-stream to identify significant anthropogenic effects on the natural river ecosystem. Changes in both micro and macro habitats are apparent. These changes may be attributed to the habitat alteration resulted from catchment shift, deforestation, and effluent discharge. River ecosystem has also been subjected to dramatic changes at the downstream of the newly built highland reservoirs. Possible trophic changes along the course of the river gradient are discussed by referring to RCC.