

**Attachment A**

**Initial letter of complaint from Dr Williams**

**12 January 2007**



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Committee Secretary  
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts  
Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

**RE: Harassment of a witness at the Senate Committee Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas.**

I am writing in response to Senator Ronaldson's advice at the Cairns Senate Inquiry hearing, 30 June 2006, that if there were any ramifications of my appearance at the hearing, I should inform the committee.

It is clear that QPWS managers read the transcript of Mr Dave Green and my discussion with the Senate in the hearing at Cairns. In the QPWS Executive Director's subsequent submission 175B, he stated that "QPWS had reviewed the Hansard transcript" and that "additional information is tendered in response to factually incorrect comments made by witnesses" during the Cairns hearing. I note that the Executive Director did not challenge any of my statements, such as the issue of limited staff time available for on-ground work, including de-staffing remote parks, and the fact that there are very few weed plans for Queensland parks, despite his assurance at the Brisbane hearing that they existed. Although QPWS managers were aware of the concerns raised at the Cairns hearing, there has been no attempt to discuss or resolve these problems in the last six months. In fact, two of the four remote parks I raised concern about at the Cairns hearing have subsequently been de-staffed (Moorrinya and Blackbraes National Parks), without any plan produced for how they will be managed. There are no longer any QPWS staff based at Mt Isa.

My treatment by QPWS managers since my contribution to the Senate Inquiry has been one of harassment. I am not particularly surprised by this, but believe it is in the interests of the agency and national park management in general that I make you aware of the situation. There have been many minor incidents that when taken by themselves could be ignored as unfortunate events, but collectively demonstrate to me the vindictive nature of a few managers. Examples of these minor issues include being told that my annual work program needed changing in early October 2006, although it was approved until June 2007; and being told that I now require prior approval before I undertake any overnight work, including projects previously approved and clearly requiring a week or more in the field at the time of project approval. I was seconded to the Brisbane office for three months in early 2006 to help develop a framework for the establishment of a project to improve vegetation monitoring and evaluation on parks across Queensland. Although the framework was well received, the vegetation monitoring project was not continued following the Senate hearing in Cairns, and was not given the funding apparently promised. Sadly this last issue affects park management across the state.

There have been several management decisions that have not gone my way. These include the fact I was unsuccessful in being promoted to my recent supervisor's position and not being allowed to undertake outside employment in my own time, despite the department's policy that it observes a person's right to do so. Those decisions may happen to anyone at anytime.

Examples of what I believe is obvious harassment include the stalling of a decision for over a year, regarding my application for approval to undertake outside contract employment for the Nature Refuge Land Holders Association of Queensland (NaRLA) in my own time. Despite repeated requests to my Regional Director for an answer, I did not receive the decision, that I was not allowed to undertake this work, until December 2006, 15 months after my initial notification in September 2005. In fact the letter to me, dated 5 December 2006, stated "I must request you divest yourself of any interest with the NaRLA organization". I am an associate member of NaLRA, which represents people who have entered into a Nature Refuge agreement with QPWS. I consider it harassment to be required to give up membership with any organization, especially one that QPWS supports.

During my recent unsuccessful interview for a promotion, one of the questions I was asked was "where there is a conflict between the environment and this agency, where does your loyalty lie?" When I asked for clarification I was told that I was there to answer questions not ask them. I believe this question is a clear reference to my input into the Senate Inquiry, which the managers consider disloyalty.

The new Queensland Minister for the Environment and Multiculturalism, the Honourable Lindy Nelson-Carr, visited my local office to talk to staff in September 2006. When the Minister came over to talk to me, I discussed with her examples of successful management on local parks and examples where we need to improve our management (e.g. weeds and fire issues). I provided the Minister photos of these issues – seven showing problems that required addressing and six photos showing examples of good and successful management. My Regional Director joined in the end of the discussion and the following day rang me angrily claiming he was sick of me "always doing this". Given it was the first time I had spoken to the Minister, who appeared to be happy to discuss the issues, I can only conclude that by "always doing this" he was referring to my submission to the Senate Inquiry. In fact, he subsequently wrote a letter to me about this discussion with the Minister, dated 6 October 2006, where he stated "I also take the opportunity to remind you of your obligations under Principle 1 ... in avoiding publicly criticizing Agency procedures or colleagues". He has declined to discuss why he thought an internal department meeting with the Minister was considered public criticism of the department and I conclude he was referring to, and criticizing me for, my submission to the Senate Inquiry.

The Monday following my participation at the Cairns hearing of the Senate Inquiry, I was asked by the chair of an interview panel why I had resigned from that panel. I had not resigned and was unaware that I had been removed from the interview panel, which was clearly not at the instigation, wish nor knowledge of the chair of the panel. I asked the District Manager why this had occurred and that I wished to be returned to the panel. He denied all knowledge of it and said it must have been a regional decision. The person who replaced me on the panel told me that the District Manager telephoned him and begged him to be on the panel as the manager said there was no

one else available. This conversation occurred several days after my discussing with the District Manager that I wished to be returned to the panel and I believe is an example of trying to remove my influence on decisions.

A few months after the Cairns hearing I was telephoned and asked by a person in the EPA's media unit to do an ABC radio interview about fires that were burning in the Mt Isa area. She said that the QPWS' central office fire management unit staff had recommended to her that I would be the most appropriate person for the interview. I agreed to do the interview and asked her to gain my Regional Director's approval, which she felt would be a given. She soon emailed me to say that the Regional Director had said he approved my doing the interview, but that he preferred the District Manager to do it, even though the District manager has no experience with fire in the Mt Isa area and he was unavailable at the time the ABC wished to do the interview, which had to be postponed.

My treatment by QPWS upper management has been in stark contrast to that of the field staff across the state. In the weeks surrounding the Cairns hearing I was contacted by more than 50 staff (about one tenth of all Queensland rangers) who thanked and supported me, via emails, telephone conversations and in person. I have not had a single non-management QPWS staff member who has said they do not agree with my comments and many have supplied their own concerns and examples. I was also congratulated for my "public spiritedness" in appearing at the Senate Inquiry by Professor Valentine of the Wet Tropics Board.

I bring these concerns to you in the hope that the vindictive nature of QPWS managers can be removed. I am hopeful that issues raised by the various people participating in the Senate Inquiry can be addressed to ensure the most appropriate management of Australia's national parks is achieved. I leave you with the following questions:

1. Why have the QPWS managers not wished to discuss the national park management issues that Dave Green, I and others raised at the Senate Inquiry?
2. Why have the QPWS managers not actively attempted to rectify these issues, such as the absence of weed plans for parks and limited ranger time available to implement fire, weed and feral animal control work and subsequent ecological evaluation of park management actions?
3. Why have two of the very parks I discussed at the Senate hearing been subsequently de-staffed without any plan for how they will be managed?
4. Why do many of the field staff of QPWS and at least one of the Wet Tropics Management Board agree that these issues require addressing and needed to be raised at the Senate Inquiry, yet the QPWS managers do not?
5. Why have I been harassed by QPWS managers for raising concerns at the Senate Inquiry, even though I clearly only did this out of loyalty to QPWS and because I would like to help improve national park management?

Yours Sincerely,

Dr Paul Williams  
Townsville

