

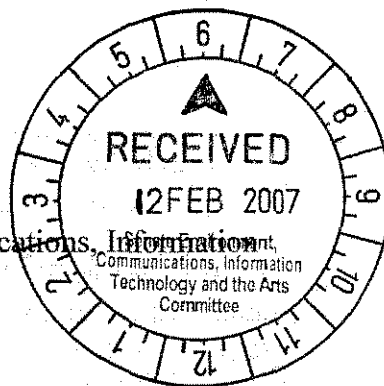
Attachment B

Detailed letter of complaint from Dr Williams

9 February 2007

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Senator Alan Eggleston
Chairman, Standing Committee on the Environment, Communications, Information,
Technology and the Arts
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600, AUSTRALIA



RE: Inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservation reserves and marine protected areas

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your response to my letter, 12 January 2007, regarding my concerns about harassment by Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service upper managers, following my submissions to the Senate Inquiry, 26 February and 30 June 2006. I am grateful to the committee for taking the time to look into this matter.

In your letter, 5 February 2007, you mentioned that the committee requested evidence that relates to the harassment I reported. I have outlined my evidence below, under each of the issues I mentioned in my earlier letter.

1. I was informed that my annual work program needed changing in early October 2006, although it was approved until June 2007.

The EPA has in place a process called a professional performance review (PPR). This is an agreement between all staff and their direct supervisors, agreed for a 12 month period and reviewed at the end of that 12 month period. My supervisor, Mark Connell and I agreed upon my PPR for 12 months on the 4 July 2006. The date of review was July 2007. I had not received any complaint from my supervisor regarding the implementation of my PPR. On the 23 October 2007, I received an email from Mark informing me that his supervisor, Geoff Meadows Manager of Park Services in the Northern Region, "was not happy" with my current PPR and wanted it "tightened up".

I have attached a copy of my PPR signed by Mark Connell and myself, and his email regarding Geoff Meadows insistence for it to be tightened up. I believe it to be one of a number of harassments aimed at annoying me and disrupting my work, because my supervisor had no problem with my work plan and it did not require review until July 2007. Further evidence that this information was sent just to harass me is that Mark did not turn up to the meeting he proposed, 31 October 2006, and did not inform me that our meeting was postponed. Indeed, I have heard nothing more of it.

- 2. 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.**

On the 3 October 2006, I received an email from my supervisor, Mark Connell, stating that "as of now all field trips that last overnight or longer will require my prior approval." This was sent to all of the staff of the technical support unit. However, I have probably undertaken the most number of overnight trips in the past and as mentioned above, my work program, including week-long or longer field trips, had been approved earlier in my annual PPR. Presumably all of the staff of my unit at that time had approved PPRs. There was never any reason given as to why this unusual requirement was sent and I believe it to have been put in place simply to be an annoyance. I have attached the email to this document.

- 3. In early 2006, I was seconded to the Brisbane QPWS office for three months 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.**

In early February 2006, I was contacted by Dr Wendy Drake, the Manager of Systems Support Branch, Parks Division in central office, Brisbane. Dr Drake asked if I would consider applying for three months work with her unit to develop a framework to improve the monitoring and evaluation of vegetation management of the QPWS estate. The implication was that the Executive Director of Parks, Alan Feely, had promised funding (in the order of \$200,000) to be allocated to this issue and a state-wide framework was needed to direct that project and associated funding. I worked with Dr Drake, her unit and all staff involved with vegetation monitoring, over the next three months. Our recommendations were apparently well received in May 2006. However, following my appearance at the Cairns hearing of the Senate inquiry in June 2006, the funding offer disappeared. It is my belief that Dr Drake and her direct supervisor Mike Harris, Director of Systems and Support Branch, Parks Division, remained confident that the promised funding would arrive. To date no funding has appeared, instead yet another review of natural resource management priority issues has been established by the Executive Director.

I have attached as evidence, an email from Mr Harris to the three QPWS Regional Directors, 10 March 2006, where he describes the aims for the project to include "criteria for evaluating funding for future projects." The fact that my three month project to establish a framework for future projects was established in the first place is also clear evidence that there was funding available. This is the harassment issue that is most sad to me, as the rejection of this important project, simply because I was involved, impacts on the whole department and all Queensland National Parks. I believe this to be the most compelling evidence of the vindictiveness of the current Executive Director of QPWS, whose promise of funding was removed following my appearance at the Cairns hearing. It is clear that the Executive Director of Parks read the Cairns transcript, as he subsequently wrote to the committee after reading the Hansard Transcript (submission 175B).

I feel most sorry for Dr Drake and Mr Harris, who for no fault of their own, have suffered the loss of their project, which they know is an essential step forward for QPWS. I have the highest respect for Dr Drake and Mr Harris for their professionalism.

- 4. Despite repeated requests to my Regional Director for an answer, I did not receive the decision, that I was not allowed to undertake outside employment, until December 2006, 15 months after my initial notification in September 2005.**

As required by the EPA's Code of Conduct, I notified my direct supervisor, and as he was acting temporarily in the position, additional management staff, that I was responding to an expression of interest to the Nature Refuge Landholders Association of Queensland. I was offering to provide consulting services to them in my own time. The initial response, from my Acting supervisor, Bruce Lawson via the telephone, was that it seemed fine but that he would run it through upper managers. I was sent a reply from my Regional Director Clive Cook, 31 January 2006 asking for further information, which I replied to immediately. Subsequent to this, I made my initial submission to the Senate Inquiry, 26 February 2006. I was then subject to ongoing delay tactics until December 2006, when I was told I was not allowed to take up this private work in my own time. I have attached my initial notification on 18 September 2005 and my last request, 14 November 2006, for a decision to be made. I can send all correspondence if you wish. I believe that 15 months is far too long for a response to this issue and that there was clearly a delaying policy implemented by some upper managers in order to punish me for making submissions to the Senate Inquiry.

I mentioned in my initial letter to your committee that I was told to divest myself "of any interest with the NaRLA organization". Being an associate member of NaRLA, I asked for a further evaluation, and as I mentioned in my subsequent email to your committee, that issue has been resolved, in that I may remain a member, however not undertake even voluntary work for this not-for-profit organization.

- 5. During my recent unsuccessful interview for a promotion to replace my previous long-serving supervisor of the technical support unit, 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.**

This interview occurred at the Cairns QPWS office, 15 December 2006. The interview panel consisted of Geoff Meadows, chair of the panel and as Manager Park Services, is the direct supervisor of the position to which I was applying. Also on the panel were Mark Peacock, District Manager Cape York/Dry Tropics and Rhondda Leggett, Team Leader in Park Services. The third question asked of me in the interview was "where there is a conflict between the environment and this agency, where does your loyalty lie?" This question seemed completely inappropriate to me

and I asked for the question to be repeated. After the question had been repeated, I asked how there could possibly be a conflict between the environment and our department, the Environmental Protection Agency, and asked for clarification and an example. I was told abruptly by Geoff Meadows that I was there to "answer questions not ask them, so answer the question". Although I asked for a copy of the questions during the interview, Geoff Meadows would not allow me to have a copy, contrary to normal procedure.

I believe this question regarding loyalty is a clear reference to my submission to the Senate Inquiry and that in their opinion I did not show loyalty to the department by providing evidence that we required more resources to achieve our objectives. There is no other explanation for this incident.

6. In a letter to me, dated 6 October 2006, the QPWS Northern Regional Director, Clive Cook stated "I also take the opportunity to remind you of your obligations under Principle 1 ... in avoiding publicly criticizing Agency procedures or colleagues".

The new Queensland Minister for the Environment and Multiculturalism, the Honourable Lindy Nelson-Carr, visited my local office to talk to staff on the 28 September 2006. A morning tea had been organized for this event and an email had been sent to local staff inviting us to attend. The Minister came over to where I and three other EPA/QPWS staff were standing and introduced herself. We each told her what our roles were. The Minister seemed genuinely interested in our work, so I then asked if I could give her some photographs of park management issues. The Minister agreed and we began discussing the 15 photos, eight of which showed problems such as the decline in a local rainforest patch due to the invasion of a large grass weed fuelling repeated fire incursions, and overgrazing of stock on a western park. Seven of the photos showed good results of weed control and fire management that has been achieved: repeated burning killing lantana and rubbervine and delayed burning and de-stocking reducing grader grass weed abundance. The Minister remained interested so I told her that in my opinion it was not just funding that was an issue but just as importantly it was staff availability to implement fire, weed and feral animal work. The Minister seemed surprised that the rangers did not have enough time to implement fire and weed work, so I told her that staff get chained to campground work and building infrastructure and are frustrated that they have not time to implement land management, which they aspire to do. At the end of this conversation, the QPWS Regional Director, Mr Clive Cook, who had been hovering nearby, joined our conversation and politely argued. The Minister soon left, but took away with her the photographs and appeared to have been interested in what was said.

The following day, 29 September 2006, Mr Cook rang me angrily claiming he was sick of me "always doing this". I asked what he meant by "always doing this" and he claimed I had a history of complaining out of house about QPWS, which is not true and he can only be referring to my submissions to the Senate Inquiry. Mr Cook subsequently wrote a letter to me, dated 6 October 2006, about my discussion with the Minister, which I have attached. On the second page he states "I also take the opportunity to remind you of your obligations under Principle 1 ... in avoiding publicly criticizing Agency procedures or colleagues".

I maintain that the conversation I held with the Minister was courteous and that she was interested and had in fact walked over to me to introduce herself and that she agreed to see the photographs. My discussion of park management issues at an internal EPA meeting with the Queensland Minister for the Environment and Multiculturalism can not be considered "publicly criticizing Agency procedures or colleagues".

I was concerned that Mr Cook had asserted that I had "publicly criticizing Agency procedures or colleagues" and took the matter to the Queensland Public Sector Union, who sent a letter on my behalf asking what policy Mr Cook applied to reach his apparent determination that my actions were in breach of the code of conduct. The union letter also asked why he alleged in his letter that I had made public comments about the department or colleagues, which could not relate to the internal meeting that he was writing about. In his reply, Mr Cook claims no determination was made that the incident was a breach of the code of conduct, but did not answer the question of his assertion of publicly criticizing the department. Mr Cook has never answered this question.

I am a loyal member of QPWS, which is why I decided to provide input into the Senate inquiry in the first place, to help provide desperately needed resources. The only situation that Mr Cook could consider that I have publicly criticized the agency is my submission to the Senate Inquiry, of which he was well aware as he came over to Dave Green and I prior to the Senate hearing in Cairns, telling us to be careful of what we said. I have never written an article criticizing the department, nor criticized the department at a public meeting. I can therefore only conclude that Mr Cook was referring to, and criticizing me for, my submission to the Senate Inquiry.

7. At the time of the Cairns hearing of the Senate Inquiry, I was removed from an interview panel.

I initially stated in my 12 January 2007 letter that it was the Monday after the Senate hearing in Cairns. However, I find this incident happened several days after I had informed my supervisors of my decision to participate at the Cairns Senate hearing. That is, Wednesday 28 June 2006.

The interview panel in question was formed for the selection of the north west Queensland Resource Ranger position, which is responsible for providing assistance in natural resource management issues in the subdistrict. I have worked in north west Queensland parks since 1998. During that time I have published scientific articles on the management issues, have produced vegetation maps and reports for the various parks, undertaken fauna and vegetation monitoring and have worked closely with the rangers, including helping them implement burning operations. I also worked closely with the previous excellent incumbent of the position, who was based in Mt Isa. It was for this reason that I was asked by the north west Senior Ranger to be on the interview panel.

The interview panel chair, Senior Ranger for the north west, rang me on 28 June 2006, asking me why I had withdrawn from the interview panel. I had done no such

thing and was not aware I had been removed from the interview panel, surely an unusual occurrence. I sent an email to the District Manager Savanna and my supervisor Mark Connell. Attached is that email and the only written reply I received, from Mark, stating that "The composition of the panel and location of the ranger are district matters". I asked the Savanna District Manager in person about it and he denied any knowledge that I had been removed from the panel, claiming it must have been a higher regional decision to remove me from the panel, that is the Regional Director Clive Cook. Why the Regional Director would involve himself in subdistrict matters was never explained. I told the District Manager that I wished to be returned to the panel. My subsequent replacement told me on the day of the interviews, that he didn't want to be on the panel, but that the Savanna District Manager had telephoned him, days after I had spoken to the District Manager, begging him to be on the panel because "there was no one else available".

The reason I believe this is blatant harassment regarding my attendance at the Senate Inquiry is that I had difficulty in gaining approval for recreation leave to attend the Senate Inquiry in Cairns (see attached emails). It was only a couple of days after this that I heard I was mysteriously removed from the interview panel. The inference I received from my supervisor was that it was a mistake to attend the Cairns hearing. Incidentally, as evidence that this was not a coincidence, Mr Dave Green, who appeared at the Cairns Senate hearing with me, was also removed at roughly the same time from an interview panel, without his wishes, for a position of which he is supervisor.

8. 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.

On the 26 September 2006, I was telephoned by Maggie Littlefair, Team Leader Media Office of the Director General, EPA. She asked if I would do a radio interview for the ABC regarding fires burning in the Mt Isa area. Ms Littlefair told me that the QPWS central office fire management unit had recommended me to her as the most appropriate person to do the interview. I have done a radio interview before and agreed to the interview, simply asking Ms Littlefair to confirm approval with my Regional Director Clive Cook. Ms Littlefair told me she assumed that would be no problem.

I subsequently received an email from Ms Littlefair, apparently apologetic and keen to explain that Mr Cook did approve my interview, but that he would prefer the Savanna District Manager to do the interview, even though he was busy and has never attended a fire in north west Queensland, nor evaluated their results. Apparently the interview had to be postponed to allow the District Manager to find time to do the interview, despite Ms Littlefair telling me that the ABC were very keen to interview within an hour. No explanation has ever been provided to me about this. I have never pursued it as it is a minor issue, and only mention it here as yet another example of the many minor annoyances that have magically arisen since my submissions to the Senate inquiry. I attach Ms Littlefair's email here.

9. Continued accusations that I have a history of criticizing the department.

Since sending my letter, 12 January 2007, I have again been subjected to harassment. It occurred on 1 February 2007. I was asked by my supervisor's boss Geoff Meadows to come into the District Manager's office for a chat. I was questioned about a memo I had sent to my supervisor and the Savanna District manager the day before, where I had raised my concern that our natural resource management advice was not being incorporated into management decisions. Ultimately, the only issue I was actually criticized over was that I had cced the memo to the QPWS people involved in an example I used and a person from each of the central and southern regions of QPWS, who share my concern. During this "discussion", Mr Meadows repeatedly accused me of having a history of criticizing the department. I denied this and asked for examples. All he could provide was the issue of my talking to the Minister in September 2006. I denied this was criticising the department and in any case one example does not constitute a "history". I asked Mr Meadows repeatedly to provide examples of this history and he could not. In the end he said that I knew what he was talking about. I said to him that I believed he was criticising me for participating in the Senate Inquiry into national park resourcing. Mr Meadows smirked and said something along the lines of yes of course. I pointed out to the District Manager that he had witnessed this, but he said he had not heard what was said. I told Mr Meadows that it was illegal for him to harass me on the basis of my submission to the Senate Inquiry, to which he simply smirked further.

Last year, 2006, was my eleventh year with Queensland Park and Wildlife Service (or earlier names of the same department). I have never been substituted in radio interviews, demanded my PPR be reviewed mid term, or been told I have a "history of criticizing the department" before I made a submission to the Senate Inquiry in February 2006. I maintain that every word I submitted to the Senate Inquiry was absolutely correct and that I only did so out of concern that if a Senate Inquiry were asking whether we needed more resources, then the committee should be aware that we do need more resources, for the sake of the management of Australia's national parks.

In my letter 12 January 2007, I mentioned that in contrast to the harassment I have received from a few QPWS upper managers, more than 50 QPWS field staff contacted me at the time of the Cairns hearing, to give me their support. This is true and more staff have done so since that time. I remain grateful for their support. Given the vindictiveness of a few QPWS upper managers, I will not reveal the identity of any of them. However, after confirming approval, I provide evidence that a very important and experienced protected area professional supports my actions, and that it has been long recognised that more resources are needed by QPWS. The following is an excerpt from an email from Professor Peter Valentine of the Wet Tropics Board and coordinator of the Protected Area Management Course at James Cook University.

In an email from Professor Peter Valentine to the other Directors of the Wet Tropics Board, 10 July 2006, following the Cairns Senate hearing, Professor Valentine said:

“After our presentation there were a number of other individuals and one of particular interest was Dr Paul Williams from QPWS who made a submission about the grossly inadequate resources for Park Management in Queensland. Paul gave an excellent additional set of comments building on his written submission. It highlighted what has been known for a long time, that there is a severely inadequate allocation of funds for on-ground activity in Queensland and that parks are actually declining seriously as a result. This applies equally within the World Heritage area. Dave Green (a ranger) also gave a heartfelt presentation about the desperate lack of resources in the parks and was strongly critical of some on-ground policies from the point of view of a park ranger. One of the Senators (Ronaldson) drew attention to their bravery in giving such public comment and I for one was pleased to learn about the protection of witnesses in such circumstances. I am inspired by the public spiritedness of these two professional park people.”

I thank you for the opportunity to provide this evidence. I would make the same submissions to the Senate Inquiry again if my time were repeated. I ask that you provide the best possible argument in your report for more resources, both the allocation of on-ground time and funds, to continue to improve the management of Australia's Protected Areas.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Williams', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr Paul Williams
Townsville