

Committee Secretary
Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References
Committee Department of the Senate Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600 Australia.

23 February 2006

The Chairperson,

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

I would like to thank this senate committee for the opportunity to express my views in relation to the management and funding of national parks within Queensland.

I commenced employment with EPA-Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS) on 10th August 1978 and my current position description is Ranger-in-charge Girringun National Park. The park is approximately 230,000 hectares in area and encompasses 2 bio-geographical regions: Einsleigh Upland & Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The park takes in three local government areas: Cardwell, Hinchinbrook and Herberton.

Over the last 20 years I have been actively involved in seeking sufficient operational funding and staffing levels for on-ground management of national park within Queensland. I have through the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and the Queensland Ranger Association Inc (QRA) attended meetings with past Queensland's Minister for the Environment and departmental executive officers seeking a commitment by the Queensland government and QPWS to direct appropriate funding to on-park level management operations. To date have achieved limited success.

Below is a range of issues which is compromising the protection, presentation, client services and management of national parks in Queensland:

Sufficient resources (operating budget & staffing levels) to meet objectives and management requirements of national parks:

As the QPWS funding budget increases I know as an on-ground park manager that the lion share goes to increased administration costs for regional and district offices. One only has to look at the increase in number of management officers and administrators employed in regional and district offices who are engaged to support field staff. Field staff numbers have remained low and stable despite the fact that the national park estate has increased in size over the last few years. Public expectation of services has also increased dramatically. Salaries and wages is a very big expenditure component of our budget.

QPWS has developed a very clever way of increasing operational funding by not filling vacant ranger positions and reallocating their wages to meet park management costs. This has had a very big impact on staff morale and productivity. Puts a lot of stress on rangers

to meet the parks client services needs and natural resource workload. Also impacts on the quality of social life of ranger's family. The department maintains a 12-15% vacancy rate for this tactic. Some districts have had up to 20% vacancy rates. De-manning remote parks of field staff and managing the national park with flying gangs on an ad hoc basis from a distant district base.

On Thursday 2nd February 2006 I attended a meeting at Princes Hill section of Girringun NP with the Executive Director QPWS, Regional Director Northern and District Manager Savanna to discuss the proposal to remove 2 staff from this park and base them at a centre 4-5 hours away. I was requested to draft a report outlining the conservation outcomes achieved to date (park was gazetted in 1993) to justify future commitment of operational funding for this park. The same scenario applies to two other parks in the Savanna

District: Blackbraese national park and Moorinya national park. I have been informed that other remote parks in Queensland have been short listed may suffer the same fate.

At this meeting I was told by the Executive Director QPWS he was flush with operational funding that he would be directing to "enhanced on-ground management of national parks." Also he praised the efforts of the AWU and QRA for lobbying the Queensland government for granting additional operational funding for national parks to address "fires, ferals, weeds and client services." If only we could get a reasonable share of this money.

It would appear the conservation values of remote parks and their declaration under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 is of little interest to management. The past and current achievements we have gained in relation to fires, weeds, feral animal control, fauna and flora diversity and client and neighbour relations will be severely undermined if we remove staff from these parks.

The values and objectives of Australia's national parks, other conservation reserves and marine protected areas.

Speaking only of my experience in Queensland's national parks, I believe QPWS have not truly addressed this issue because they have not developed management plans for national parks within Queensland. If management plan are developed for a park it set in train the blue print for funding and managing that area. This plan would identify the conservation values of this area and the threats to this area. Current management are only guessing at what issues they should resolve as they do not have a long term vision for management of national parks within Queensland. Sadly a lot of decisions and directions made are political and personality driven by executive managers. I call it "compass management" because they change direction each year..

In late 1998-1999 I was a delegate at a forum in Brisbane for re-viewing and drafting of a "Master Plan for national parks in Queensland." The master plan initiative was to set guidelines for the management of protected areas for the next 20 years. The process included many stakeholders, drawing from local, interstate and international experts. A

master plan that covered all aspects for managing national parks: policy, best practices, client services, scientific monitoring and state wide resource allocation to achieve objectives.

In my experience and observations over the last 27 years of employment with QPWS I have never seen a 5 year park management strategy completed mainly because of shifting in senior management priorities, crises management, staff changes and lack of funding.

Queensland Ranger Association Inc.

The QRA was established as a professional association to represent employees of EPA-QPWS to promote communications with employees within department, career paths, support members and family and provide a conduit for discussions with the department.

In March 2000 on behalf of QRA as serving Secretary, I attended a public hearing convened in Cairns by the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) an inquiry (in part) to review the management of national parks in Queensland and to identify models to achieve improved management of national parks. My role at this public hearing was to clarify points of QRA submission to the LGAQ. Also to participate in public debate as required to give a rangers perspective on current management issues of national parks.

Some of the issues raised in the LGAQ inquiry have been addressed by QPWS but the majority of systemic concerns raised in this process are still outstanding and relevant in 2006. Please refer to attached executive summary LGAQ.

Other inquiries and reports.

In 1995 QPWS initiated an internal report into the performance of the department's management of Queensland's Cape York national parks. This internal report was conducted by Bruce Gall, National Parks & Wildlife Service director.

In 2000-2001 as part of the Queensland government state budget process, the Cabinet Budget Review Committee commissioned a review of the management requirements of Queensland protected areas and marine parks. The review is referred to as the "Fenwick Review."

Copies of above 2 reports will be held by QPWS in Brisbane.

From my recollection the above 2 reports clearly state that there was insufficient operational funding, inappropriate field staffing levels and no long term management directions for national parks in Queensland.

I would like this submission to remain private and confidential. Please advise if it is to be made available to public viewing.

If required by your committee I am willing to assist in any practical way and will provide further information if required.

David Green

Attachment 1: Executive Summary of Local government Association of Queensland.
