

Supplement to December 1987 NPA NEWS

Ninth Romeo W. Lahey Memorial Lecture

18 June 1987



Secretary Forestry W. Wilkes, Conservator A.R. Trist,
Premier of Queensland Hon. G.F.R. Nicklin, Romeo W. Lahey

NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION
OF QUEENSLAND

The Romeo Watkins Lahey Memorial Lectures are sponsored by the National Parks Association of Queensland Incorporated to honour the memory of its first President, 1930 to 1961. After his retirement as President he was elected Life Councillor of National Parks Association of Queensland. From 1911 to 1915 he undertook intensive field trips, much correspondence and a door knock throughout the Albert electorate, and convinced the Queensland Government to gazette Lamington National Park firstly at 47,000 acres and finally in excess of 50,000 acres (his original concept). He served as an engineer in the first AIF in World War I and in the Australian Army in World War II. He died on 26 October 1968.

Under his guidance, the NPAQ was successful in many submissions to the Queensland Government for National Parks in widely spread parts of Queensland. In his 70's, he completed field work on the Association's proposal for a large National Park based on Windsor Tableland and the eastern escarpment including Daintree catchment and Mossman Gorge. Most of his plan for this large National Park in North Queensland was accepted by the Government.



(FOUNDED 1930)

AIMS AND OBJECTS

- (1) To preserve intact in their natural condition the existing National Parks of Queensland; and to secure the reservation of all suitable areas.
- (2) To educate public opinion to a fuller appreciation of the necessity and value of National Parks.
- (3) To form a link between the public and the administration dealing with the National Parks.
- (4) To co-operate with other organisations having the same or similar objects.
- (5) To assist in the enforcement of protective regulations concerning National Parks.

Membership is available to any person who is in accord with the above aims and objects.

National Parks Association of Queensland welcomes additional members.
Enquiries to P.O. Box 1040, Milton Centre. Q. 4064.

NINTH ROMEO LAHEY MEMORIAL LECTURE

**'The conservation movement and the Queensland
National Parks and Wildlife Service'**

by

Dr Graham Saunders, Dr Ross Hynes

and Mr Don Marshall

Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service

18 June 1987

presented by Dr Ross Hynes

**National Parks Association of Queensland
Incorporated**

P.O. Box 1040, Milton Centre, Q. 4064.

'The conservation movement and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service.'

Early in 1860 in the first session of the first Queensland Parliament the Unoccupied Crown Lands Occupation Act was passed. This was the infant state's first Land Act. It reflected competition for land use and led to leasehold tenures of not less than 25 sq miles and not more than 100 sq miles.

In the 1870s the Legislative Assembly passed the Native Birds Protection Act, and also another Act that allowed the destruction of certain marsupials and by doing so extended effective protection to other marsupial species. About the same time, provisions were made for certain lands to be set aside for Reserves for Public Purposes. Fortunately in retrospect, Noosa and Burleigh Head were two such reserves.

Such actions indicate early Queensland Government involvement in the basics of nature conservation - an involvement that persists today regarding land use and the protection of native species.

From those times until 1975 is history so far as the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service is concerned. The National Parks and Wildlife Act took effect from 5 June of that year. The legislation provided for a Director having powers, authorities, functions and duties for the management specifically of national parks and related matters, and also practically as Conservator as prescribed in the Fauna Conservation Act passed in 1974.

Staff of the fauna conservation branch of the Department of Primary Industries were brought together with the national parks staff of the Department of Forestry along with park overseers and workmen.

With responsibilities in part under the Land Act and the Native Plants Protection Act also allocated, for the first time the Queensland Government had a single authority responsible for nature conservation in this State. About 150 people were involved directly as salaried or wages staff. After 67 years of national parks in Queensland, a Minister of the Crown, the Honourable Ken Tomkins, had 'national parks' in his portfolio title along with 'lands' and 'forestry'.

In 1975, this lusty infant of the Queensland Government also inherited the 'conservation movement'.

Now, after 12 years, this is an appropriate occasion to consider the conservation movement and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service, the topic of this Romeo Lahey Memorial Lecture.

The Service has grown immensely, in many ways not considered at its inception. The national park estate has more than trebled. So has the total staff. The annual budget has risen from \$2.3 million to \$28 million, a substantial increase even disregarding changed dollar values. Marine parks have become integrated within the Service's mandate. The Service's structure has been altered markedly -- by regional control for greatest effect at local levels, and by program

management to reflect precisely the sectors in which the Service efforts are being directed and managed. The Service is a leader in this field of development. Its stature today, effectively a department if not in name, is even more surprising given the constraints in government in spending and staff ceilings in the past decade.

The Service has attempted to match facilities with increased visitation while managing the national park estate for its permanent preservation in its natural state as required by law. Equally, wildlife has been given attention and study as never before. At the bottom line, taxpayers' money has been used effectively and efficiently by their servants.

Unlike the Service, the conservation movement seems to be a very fragmentary entity -- 'seems' because I am not aware of any formal study which identifies what exactly it is we are talking about!

With current changes, the conclusions of any such study would be outdated by time of publication.

In the Service's view, the conservation movement is an evolving philosophy which seeks by diverse means ways to preserve nature in its many forms on this earth.

Its supporters are formalized into groups, large and small in the community, working individually or collectively towards a broad goal.

In Queensland, I am sure most people forget about the organization most prominent in the conservation movement -- the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service. Too many take for granted the efforts of 460 salary and wages staff in nature conservation. They do not know we have many staff who work more than their required hours in a week without extra pay, who go out and work at weekends and holidays of their own account, clerks who beg to do extra work on parks to see the more practical effect of what they do on paper in offices, and who do not get the salaries they might in similar positions in commerce and industry.

We must not lose sight also of the parallel efforts of conservation professions of related organizations -- the Queensland Museum, Premier's Department, Fisheries, Department of Primary Industries, Lands, Forestry, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, and the national parks and wildlife authorities interstate.

In contrast, the organizations you may recognise as being 'the conservation movement' have relatively few professionals but of course untold numbers of well-meaning, hard-working supporters. A check recently indicated the number of organizations now concerned directly with nature conservation in Queensland has reached 30.

These range from bodies like the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and World Wildlife Fund, through the Australian Conservation Foundation, the Wilderness Society, Australian Littoral Society and similar federal bodies, through State grouping like the Queensland Conservation Council and the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland to the individual organizations like the National Parks Association of Queensland.

To the community, their membership or even an indication of it is unknown.

The ACF Green Pages directory lists more than 1000 non-government environmental groups, and estimates another 300 exist.

Membership of listed groups which are ACF members exceeds 250 000. Total membership of listed groups is said to exceed 500 000. But how many people say under the ACF umbrella pay dues to two, three or more affiliated organizations?

One hundred thousand -- or just 0.6 per cent of the population -- might be a more realistic figure of people in Australia in the formal conservation movement.

In Queensland, one could question an estimated total of 20 000 including the levels of WPSQ branches, Fraser Island Defenders Organization, the Cooloola Committee, the Rainforest Protection Society, your own organization, Field Naturalists, bushwalking clubs and so on. The Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland with 1400 members and the National Parks Association of Queensland with 1300 are the largest. Do such numbers really compare with hobby or professional associations, industry groups, trade unions, political parties or churches and with the influence and power these seem to wield in the community?

Strictly speaking, the formal conservation movement must also include organizations with fringe interests in nature conservation.

These include the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Four Wheel Drive Clubs Association, Queensland Ornithological Society, Animal Liberation, Greenpeace and Fund for Animals.

Professional organizations deserve a place in the conservation movement -- the Royal Society, the Royal Australian Ornithological Union, the Australian Veterinary Association, International Zoo Educators, and relevant departments of universities and institutes to name a few.

An examination of the formal organizations reveals one common factor apart from the general aim of conserving one or more aspects of nature to various degrees.

That is almost without exception, they are urban based and organised groups, and one can presume their members live in the cities, suburbs and towns. While members may be most sincere and practice conservation close to their homes, in general they seek to influence government to control the use of land in rural areas, mostly within 200 km of the coast.

Of greatest importance has been the apparent growth of the conservation movement in an informal way in the Queensland, Australian, and much of the world community in the last 20 years.

This is embodied intrinsically with a growing concern for the environment in the short and long term. The Australian Statistics Bureau found last year 5 million people over age 15 or 47 per cent of the population in this country were concerned about environmental problems.

A survey showed nature conservation was second on the list of prime concerns -- pollution, nuclear issues, planning and development issues, and tree deforestation.



Wallaroos, Great Basalt Wall National Park,
gazetted in March, 1987

People in Queensland registered the conservation of flora and fauna as their greatest concern about the environment. In the community generally, the age group 25 to 44 showed significantly greater concern.

Political strategists have been quick to discount the influence of concern about the environment in the community as a prime factor in voting in elections.

But when an official survey results in such clear findings, attitudes of the past demand review. One may ask what the Prime Minister sought from an electioneering visit to Daintree National Park yesterday?

Publicity about such extensive community support for the environment and conservation does two things - first it reinforces the beliefs of those who show concern and work for conservation, and second it indicates to the rest of the community that the so called 'greenies' have extensive public support for at least their general beliefs.

The influence of media in bringing about what is perceived as widespread support for conservation cannot be over-emphasised.

Put together the Harry Butler and the Leyland Brothers series, the Science Show, the wildlife documentaries, day to day news items and background features, the coffee table books, and even the recent Service involvement with the Bush Beat and Wombat programs for children's TV and you have a very considerable force at work every day of the year, over years steadily and basically encouraging the conservation ethic.

I believe every person is a conservationist at heart. Nothing is more telling than the decision-making in your own backyard -- whether it be to fell a tree, to clear some shrubs, to put concrete where grass and trees grow, or to put a track through a clump of native trees in bloom. Something inside you says: 'Enough is enough. Let nature take its course.' Mankind and the environment can be in harmony. Something deep in many *Homo sapiens* seeks to maintain a forest margin environment.

What has been the relationship between this conservation movement, as broad or as narrow as you perceive from my remarks, and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service?

Many terms might be used -- cordial, cool, co-operative, chaotic, compelling, compromising, concrete, contingent, condescending, confining, chaste, convivial, contradictory, confusing -- really most anything from A to Z depending on circumstances and the subject of communication.

You will note some feeling or apprehension, of reluctance, of reticence in some of those expressions. A director of national parks and wildlife should be a disinterested person and react only as a public servant to a contact by a member of the public or a group.

In practice, a detailed request for a new national park or praise for an action taken from your organization produces a substantially different response than advice received that the Fund for Animals is taking Administrative Appeals Tribunal legal action once again over Queensland's kangaroo management program.

Predominantly, our relationship is indirect -- through politics, legislation, and the media.

The formal conservation movement in Queensland is largely a lobby group, seeking to influence politicians making decisions in favour of their conservation causes. When decisions are made by government, the Service must carry them out, favourable to some, not to others. Too often the Service is blamed for the decision.

The fact that the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service has had five ministers in charge in 12 years had hindered the development of a direct rapport between a minister and representatives of leading conservation bodies. The urban base of the movement's membership has not been conducive to meaningful relations and discussions over land use and wildlife topics when many members of the Queensland Government have been from rural based electorates. A number of misunderstandings involving the Minister, Members, and the Service with conservation organizations could have been averted.

The organizations for their part might have made greater attempts to explain their views more directly and personally with Ministers and Members.

Clear provisions of the National Parks and Wildlife Act allowing exclusion of land for tourist purposes and roads, and stock grazing permits have been criticised, and the Government, Minister and Service blamed for their use irrespective of the legitimacy of their use. Many proposals gazetted as national parks include highly modified areas and in certain instances careful consideration needs to be given to maintaining traditional land uses at low levels of intensity to prevent unmanageable environmental situations occurring.

Provisions of the Fauna Conservation Act permitting the shooting of fauna causing damage to property including crops and livestock have also resulted in criticism of the Minister and the Service when permits have been issued.

Regulations under the National Parks and Wildlife Act coming into effect on 1 July may be criticized by commercial interests who may now be charged for activities on national parks. \$200 a day fee for filming, and \$20 a day for still photography for example.

The place to change legislation and regulations is the Parliament. Voters have the chance to change members each election. Between elections many opportunities arise to lobby for legislative amendments.

While the media may be responsible for helping to promote the nature conservation philosophy, it may also be seen to promote conservation issues for gain.

Many conservation organizations apparently believe by going public, perceived problems will come to a head and be resolved quickly. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Newspapers, radio and TV news editors are experts at promoting the trivial, headlining one reporter's conclusion of conflict, pitting quote against quote, missing the point, and failing to offer and give right of reply in the same item.

These are the ways of 'selling' news, the attention getters, the ratings winners not the calm, reasoned argument. Conservation publications are not immune from this approach which regrettably has come to be seen as standard rather than what it is -- sensational journalism.

Politicians and Service officers are human. They become most irate when they read clippings or hear criticism about subjects which the critics have not raised, nor chosen to raise directly, or where they have decided to tell the public about their 'sour grapes' response to a considered reply.

Media never resolves differences; only the involved parties can and do.

The direct relationship between the movement and the Service is I am pleased to say much more cordial, generally through longstanding relationships with the office bearers and Service staff involved.

Issues could be created. Do we even speak the same language? Often on these occasions we say we are preaching to the converted. But are we? Is your 'ecological balance, outdoor recreational opportunities and low-key development' the same as our views of what these terms mean? Or the next organization's? Do we even agree on differences between 'preservation' and 'conservation'?

In our normal business dealings, we have few such problems. We receive your letters -- 49 from conservation organizations to Head Office so far this year, including 13 from IUCN, four from WWF, and two from National Parks Associations.

We seek to respond to your requests and comments along with the many thousands of other letter writers and callers as best as we can with the resources and time available, and in circumstances not always appreciated.

The Service must work in co-operation -- firstly with our Minister, then with other government departments with their Ministers, with other levels of government, and with the views of many other organizations, local authorities and MLAs often on record.

I can understand, and I hope you can, that replies -- written and verbal -- may not always be satisfactory to you.

We do say 'no', and for good reason as we see it. For example, acquisition intentions are not revealed. Premature disclosure can raise land prices to unreal levels or create local resistance, thus ending or postponing a valid national park proposal, possibly yours into which you have put effort over years. But be assured your views, proposals, suggestions, opinions, objections, criticism and praise go on file for action and review each time decisions are to be made.

An authority like the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service would not function without such informed public input to its planning and management. The more vigorous, the more rational the information we receive the better the contribution it can make to sound conservation decisions and planning.

On numerous occasions, the Service and conservation organizations individually and grouped have worked together very successfully for the common good.

I think of many joint projects recently -- clean-ups, painting, track work, wildlife surveys and revegetation projects, where the assistance of conservation organization members has been outstanding. That effort is being spread statewide, I hope, with our Service volunteer scheme.

People with a keen interest in our state, its national parks, and wildlife are giving their time regularly to help staff centres like Burleigh Head Information Centre, and very soon Fleay's Fauna Centre, West Burleigh, and Reef Wonderland, Townsville.

Our natural history associations have been another form of co-operation where the zeal of many people for conservation has been combined in useful, on-going projects.

Service staff and participants are well aware of the often very practical and valuable help provided to and received from conservation organizations, exchanges which might not take place were it not for our good relationship and respect for the task the other is undertaking.

Of course the Service has an excellent relationship also with a number of the quiet, unassuming unaffiliated conservationists out there -- the likes of Mr Edward Corbould -- who have given land for parks, or sold at well below market rates.

What is to be the relationship between the conservation movement and the Service in the future?

Briefly the directions the Service is taking is to cope with increasing visitation pressures on parks while managing them for conservation, and at the same time encourage habitat retention for wildlife.

Returns from camping permits for the year to next Tuesday seem certain to top 600 000 camper-nights (about 170 000 people). While no day visit figures are taken, ranger estimates continue to rise.

Twenty-six percent of camper groups come from Brisbane, 6 percent from overseas, 26 percent from interstate, and 40 percent from Queensland centres outside of Brisbane.

While the Service is developing five-year plans, resources are allocated yearly. Priorities must be set.

Venturers involving commercial organizations may take some pressures off financial constraints. Yet within those limits, we will continue to seek broader biological representation in the reserve system.

The conservation philosophy in the community is here to stay. Environmental education is now formally associated with the Queensland state schools curriculum.

Teachers are encouraged to undertake an effective program which includes introducing pupils to local natural and cultural environments -- and helping them realise they are part of these environments. They are asked to help pupils understand the need for sound management of the environment, to develop an understanding of how people are using and misusing resources, and providing an

opportunity for pupils to develop field skills through environmental problem solving.

Most importantly, teachers are asked to help pupils develop a realization that the solution to environmental problems often lies in group or political action, and they should foster an ability and commitment to participate in environmental debate and decision making as informed citizens.

The pupils of today are our citizens of tomorrow. Maybe the conservation movement we have seen is but a beginning.

The conservation movement will not remain static but will move in certain directions all affecting the relationship with the Service.

It could go negative. Organizations may step up criticism, confront government, run with the causes of the time, involve clashes of personalities and generally create confusion. The danger exists. The editor of a popular outdoors magazine said recently: 'I have a terrible premonition as time goes on our leading conservation groups will become more radical, more demanding and much more noisier about their requests. In the process they will lose popular support, and hence their ability to influence government for many of their policies as they subjugate themselves to the whims of the radical minority.'

The equation that determines the quality of conservation outcomes in any one issue is an ambiguous one between the nature of the environmental resource and the negotiated social purpose. It is never simple.

Conservation organizations could remain positive but take a small step or so backwards so that they distance themselves a little more perceptively or sensitively from the issues. Of course we recognise the National Parks Association of Queensland has been overall very good at this. Perhaps for the sake of gaining representation, conservation groups may consider lowering their standards say of only pristine land, for national parks since such land is now becoming harder to find.

They could leave the task of identification and assessment to scientists and their methods. The allocation of many hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers money for purchases at market values cannot and will not come from recommendations from non-government organizations. Strategic decisions about the use of land in many Queensland coastal areas have been taken. With regard to the big planning issues conservation organizations should turn their attention to inland areas. Whereas open advice on many conservation issues will be sought early in the conservation planning process the policy of not offering land proposals and detailed management plans for public comment will continue. Such opportunities only delay resolution. However, organizations could take major roles in reviews such as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park zoning, and in the development of park plans at a local level.

Of course, organizations should remain as very effective watchdogs of the natural environment, being the conscience of the nature conservation authority in particular. Constructive criticism is the pathway to new knowledge. But criticism would be best restricted to policies away from the heat of individual issues when principles invariably are lost in the crossfire.



*Entrance area Nowranie Cave, Camooweal Caves National Park,
gazetted August, 1987.*

Criticize the Service directly when it is due, but not indirectly. Conservation organizations can work in other positive ways -- in helping educate the public about conservation, volunteering help in park and wildlife projects and generally working collectively and co-operatively with the Service. By following such a course, conservation organizations might achieve greater success in the conservation process.

If conservation groups such as yourselves fail to recognise new horizons then a third course for the movement is that its members and the community generally might lose interest.

Your urban resident in Brisbane might take some convincing that a large block of mulga in the west, or a stretch of Channel Country, part of the Gulf Savanna or even a reference site of the Mitchell grass in the far west is as important for nature conservation as Cooloolo, Moreton Island, Fraser Island, and Lamington. Or that small creatures like kowaris that come out in the desert fringes at night are under more threat of disappearing than swamp wallabies or koalas. The Bushwalk Book of south-east Queensland released this week details 100 walks, many in existing national parks. If even half were undertaken, they could indeed keep alive an appreciation of what is included in such nature reserves for many years.

Your members may consider too that one of your aims and objects -- the reservation of all suitable areas -- has been met and therefore the organization is redundant. To them, rainforest, open forest lands and wallum along the coast may be 'suitable'.

Channel country, mulga, and desert uplands may not be 'suitable' in their view.

Growing numbers of people in picnic and camping grounds may cause some people to be turned off national parks but the feeling is usually temporary.

The lack of younger members concerns many dedicated groups, not only conservation organizations. In conservation, there is no shortage of topics and related activities to keep all ages interested. How this is achieved is up to you.

Thankfully, waning interest does not appear to be a factor likely to affect the conservation movement.

The conservation movement in Queensland has produced many personalities over the years. Some are present here tonight. The most memorable also for some of us in the Service has been Romeo Lahey, born 100 years ago this month. We have many opportunities to see his achievements in conservation today.

Had he been alive, he would have been most pleased with the gazettal last year of the major Johnstone River extension of Palmerston National Park, north Queensland, and also of the 18 900 hectare Herbert River Gorge National Park whose gazettal is imminent as well as the Amphitheatre in the Expedition Range which will be gazetted early in July 1987.

But where is the Romeo Lahey of inland Queensland? There is a challenge for the conservation movement to produce a person or persons or a group -- to go door knocking, to write letters, to lead deputations, to get publicity, and to make major sacrifices for the cause of nature conservation in the areas outlined.

Where are the branches in Charleville, Longreach, Mt Isa and other places? The challenge for conservation in these areas is both demanding and subtle.

For rural people are generally conservation orientated in their own ways and are not necessarily impressed by their city cousin's advice. In fact a real gap has developed in recent generations between rural and city links. However, intelligently planned meetings and seminars that involve key rural people can be held in these places, and local media alerted.

A spark is needed to generate public support which will reinforce Service initiatives.

In future the conservation movement and the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service can walk together hand in hand. Every step taken is one closer to making more secure the conservation of nature in Queensland.

As might be expected, the scale and the direction of the challenge has changed over the last century, and both the logistic and social elements in the process have become far more complex. Notwithstanding this the achievement of conservation groups can be maintained by seeking a mix of approaches that maximize opportunities in a context of social awareness. Here I am sure co-operative ventures in conservation, linked together by committed groups and key people inside and outside the conservation movement, can find a successful and rewarding future.

Copies of previous Romeo Watkins Lahey Memorial Lectures are available plus self-addressed envelope, 230mm x 100mm. Any three for \$2.

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