



**NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION OF
QUEENSLAND**

**TWELFTH
ROMEO W LAHEY MEMORIAL
LECTURE**

to the

**NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF
QUEENSLAND INCORPORATED**

by

John Sinclair

Wednesday 15th April 1998

**"THE LEGACY OF VOLUNTARY
CONSERVATIONISTS"**

President's Address introducing speaker for 12th Romeo Lahey Lecture. By John deHorne

Tonight it is important to remember why we are here. We are here to honor the memory of the Founder of this Association, Romeo Watkins Lahey. Periodically this Association invites a special guest to deliver the Romeo Watkins Lahey Memorial Lecture, an important address on National Parks or Conservation issues.

Romeo Lahey was born into a timber family with sawmilling interests around Canungra. Yet paradoxically he is remembered as a conservationist who strove to preserve the very forests that his pioneering family worked to cut down. Today very little is left of the timber tramway that the Lahey family built from Canungra to Illinbah, the once busy clearing where the logs were loaded and the engines shunted. Today, the tramway route is choked with lantana although you can still find a tunnel and some flattened embankments. One of the locomotives rested for years, quietly rusting, at the back of the Canungra school. That too has gone.

Romeo Lahey wasn't the only man to see the need for areas of preservation, in the face of a rapidly changing environment. But he was an "Action Man", who fought ceaselessly to accomplish his own ideals. He called and addressed public meetings, initiated petitions, badgered the State government and wrote innumerable letters. But he also regularly disappeared alone into the mountain jungles to discover creeks and peaks, lookouts, views and strange rocks, cascades and waterfalls. He loved the trees and the epiphyte gardens high up in the canopy. He was intrigued by the indigenous wildlife, from strange insects to birds and mammals. After a long struggle he succeeded in having Lamington declared a National Park in July 1915. This was HIS VICTORY, but his satisfaction was curtailed by the call to fight for King and Empire in the First World War as a newly qualified Engineer.

On his return from overseas, he continued to battle tirelessly for the preservation of areas of great natural beauty. He established the National Parks Association of Queensland on this day (April 15th) in 1930. He continued in the office of President for over 30 years. Many - indeed most - of Queensland's National Parks have come into being as a result of the efforts of this Association under his direction. Romeo did much of the exploration on the ground of Mossman Gorge and the Daintree and he ranged across and up and down the state in untiring pursuit of his dreams. He noted that cattle moving up steep hillsides traversed sloping ground in a zig zag fashion and calculated that they used a gradient of one in ten - a maximum steepness ratio that he then

John Sinclair was born in Maryborough Queensland in 1939 and has a long history of conservation involvement. He is perhaps best known for his campaign over the past 26 years to protect Fraser Island. For his indefatigable efforts for conservation he was awarded the United Nations Environment Program's Global 500 and the 1993 Goldman Environment Prize.

His work for conservation in Australia extends from regional and State, where he headed the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland for a number of years, to the national scene where he served as a prominent councillor of the Australian Conservation Foundation for 14 years.

John has written a number of books on topics including Fraser Island and Cooloola, and his autobiography, "Fighting for Fraser Island", co-written with Peter Corris.

John has been pioneering ecotourism in Australia since 1968, leading over 400 safaris. For 20 years he only led safaris for the voluntary conservation movement to help environmentalists access places they wanted to protect. During that time he was employed as an organizer of adult education. His involvement in informal education since 1960 helped develop his style for providing excellent commentary and information on the places to be visited. In 1988, he began his own *GO BUSH Safaris* as a full time career. He personally leads all *GO BUSH Safaris* to almost every corner of Australia. This long experience has helped him develop a flexible, relaxed, management style. He is a competent naturalist and a strong advocate for conservation. *GO BUSH Safaris* contributes in cash or kind over \$10,000 to conservation in Australia annually.



adopted when surveying graded tracks within Lamington National Park and in reconnoitering a vehicular route over steep terrain at Cainbable to O'Reilly's guest house in the late 1920s.

My only memory of Romeo Lahey was when I saw him talking animatedly to Arthur Groom at Binna Burra. They were standing together near the old stone machinery shed, and as they talked Romeo would polish the top of his nearly bald head with his hand. That must have been nearly fifty years ago. Even then he was a legend amongst the regular guests at Binna Burra Lodge. There was apparently nothing that Romeo couldn't do - split a log, make shingles for the cabin roofs, build a stone wall or a log cabin, find a waterfall, get the diesel going, survey a track or milk a cow.

Sadly we all pass on from this life. He died in 1968, but he left us a legacy that reminds me of a famous quotation about Sir Christopher Wren "If you seek his monument - look around you". This Association continues to further his life's work. We exist to preserve all the National Parks in Queensland in their natural condition and to secure the reservation of further suitable areas. Our aims include educating the public to the need for and the value of National Parks. We foster appreciation of the beauty to be found in them. We cooperate with other organizations which share our ideals and we forge links with departmental officers and politicians in State and Federal Governments. We support properly supervised scientific research, assist in National Park management planning and the enforcement of protective regulations. Membership is open to all persons who sympathize with the ideals of the Association and who contribute to its very moderate fees.

Mr John Sinclair - champion of Fraser Island - is our celebrity guest speaker tonight. John is not a resident of Queensland these days, and so we are particularly grateful to him for the time involved in travelling from Sydney. Nevertheless he has an intimate knowledge of this State, which he is about to share with us, in presenting the 1998 Romeo Watkins Lahey Memorial Lecture.

Will you please welcome - Mr. John Sinclair.

TWELFTH ROMEO LAHEY MEMORIAL LECTURE by John Sinclair

THE LEGACY OF VOLUNTEER CONSERVATIONISTS

I recently canoed down the Kimberley's Fitzroy River in what turned out to be the most exciting adventure of my life. The other 14 in the contingent included Aborigines, some media representatives and the distinguished conservationist, Dr. Bob Brown. Bob has developed a philosophy that all our actions should be predicated by a simple question which needs to be answered in the affirmative: "*Will future generations thank us for doing this?*"

This is the basic philosophy which motivates the voluntary conservationists. We, more than most, are aware of the legacy we leave for future generations. Since few people are paid to be conservationists, the only motive for the honorary "greenies" is a sense of the public interest, philanthropy and our obligation to future generations.

In 635 days we will be confronting not just a new year but a new decade, a new century and a new millennium as well, some of the greatest challenges in human history. Most of the greatest challenges will be environmentally based.

Romeo Lahey was a pioneer of voluntary conservation in Queensland. Many accolades have been accorded to him by distinguished deliverers of this prestigious lecture in the past. I don't propose to reiterate all of the outstanding merits and his achievements again. I just want to focus on the enduring legacy he left, which ours and future generations will continue to thank him for. I would also hope that his efforts, as one of the outstanding leaders of the voluntary conservation movement, serve to inspire more than to attempt to emulate his efforts.

Most people in the conservation movement usually play relatively narrow and specific roles. These are complemented by the work of others. Romeo Lahey played numerous roles. He was for decades the leader of the National Parks Association of Queensland, an advocate, an activist and a strategist. Over half a million Australians annually enjoy his legacy of Lamington. He was never paid for his services with cash. He took up conservation when few people had foreseen that nature and natural areas in Australia could become so scarce in less than 50 years. He pursued his environmental causes until the day he died. He was the epitome of a voluntary conservationist, a breed which is becoming rarer in Australia in the 1990s.

Reductions in Voluntary Conservationists' Numbers

Voluntary conservationists are now rarer than they were even a decade ago. While not yet extinct, there are many reasons why voluntary conservationists are a threatened species in Australia's current political climate and in Queensland in particular. The question needs to be asked - will there be any legacy to leave in the future?

(a) **Professionalism** is usurping the role of volunteers. Conservation was a cause which until recently was only practised by volunteers and unpaid advocates. That was certainly the case when Romeo Lahey began his career. These days there is an increasing number of professionals working for the conservation movement. This has reduced the role of volunteers. The role of volunteers has been reduced in almost every field where professionals are also employed. In too many instances we see professionals usurping the role of volunteers and forcing volunteers out. I will discuss this aspect in more detail later. Unfortunately, professionals don't seem to complement volunteers. They only replace them.

(b) **Economic rationalism** is also killing voluntarism. The economy can only "grow" if the work can be measured in terms of cash payments. The adage seems to be "*If people aren't being paid, they are not part of the economy which we want to keep growing indefinitely*". Economic rationalists want to eliminate voluntary work. Unpaid child care or working bees or advocacy don't make the economy grow in any measurable way. Thus government grants go mainly to organizations which employ professionals. There is no incentive to groups which rely only on the large unpaid effort of dedicated volunteers.

(c) **Many politicians** are generally hostile to the environmental movement because they see it in conflict with the economic models they support. As such they are actively trying to discourage community support for conservation. This is based on a number of false perceptions politicians have of the environmental movement:

Politicians see the environment as an impediment to other decisions they want to make. Conservation is therefore a heresy; conservationists are heretics. In past ages politicians would seek to have us burnt at the stake. In some countries such as Nigeria and Brazil, conservationists are killed for presenting a threat to "the establishment". But even in Australia, many politicians, perhaps even a majority, shun and attempt to isolate conservationists.

Because more Australians belong to conservation organizations than to political parties, Australian politicians have reason to feel very threatened. Unfortunately though, when it comes to elections we have little choice other than to vote for politicians.

Politicians are prepared to accept that the community holds some values such as our religion and culture (including our sport) to be so precious that they exempt them from the rules of economic rationalism. Governments in Australia sponsor and support sport, the arts, and church schools. However, they are still very reluctant to give unequivocal support to the environment. When politicians recognize the environment as a "sacred cow" in the same category as religion, the arts and sports, conservationists will be a much less endangered species.

(d) **A diminishing pool:** A healthy voluntary conservation movement requires a pool of people with available time and personal resources to give. As the proportion of the population in the work force increases, so does the pool of potential volunteers diminish. When I say "work force", I mean all those who aspire to be engaged in paid employment. The unemployed, while having available time, are normally not available to significantly assist our voluntary efforts. In the past so much voluntary work in the community was undertaken by women who were not in the permanent work force. This pool is continually shrinking while job insecurity and economic pressures demand more people work longer hours reducing their availability to physically assist.

(e) **Government environment departments:** The establishment of government environment departments has deceived some supporters who assume that the government will do the right thing for the environment. This has disarmed the voluntary conservation movement to some extent and robbed us of some of our former support. Because some people think that government agencies are protecting the environment, they no longer see the necessity to contribute the same voluntary effort. The truth is that governments will do only as much as they are pushed to do.

Many bureaucrats lack a genuine commitment to protecting the environment. The upper ranks in particular seem to be more interested in their own welfare and furthering their professional careers than protecting the public interest or the environment.

Politicians and bureaucrats are subject to intense lobbying by vested interests to relax enforcement of environmental standards. One does not need to look far in Queensland to find many examples of governments doing little more than

posture on the environment. They provide little more than brochures and rhetoric while actually helping to accelerate the degradation.

Government Departments of Environment are lulling some people into a belief that there is no longer such an important need for volunteer conservationists. Little could be further from the truth. The idea that governments had a role in conservation had hardly entered into political thinking back in the 19th century. Now there seems to be a new move by some conservative politicians to revert back to that state of affairs.

The State of the Environment

There is now a more urgent need than ever for more voluntary conservationists. The history of most voluntary conservation organizations dates back to the 1960s. The NPAQ, however, has one of the longest histories of any Australian conservation body. During the three decades since the voluntary conservation movement really began to have a political impact in Australia, and indeed globally, there have been a few successes.

We have seen an increase in the area of the National Park Estate. There have been celebrated achievements with Tasmania's Franklin River, Fraser Island, the Great Barrier Reef and Antarctica; We have seen more regulations designed to protect the environment. Yet despite all of this, nobody could honestly say now that the State of the Environment in Queensland, in Australia, indeed even globally, has not significantly deteriorated during that period. We have seen our fisheries and forests seriously depleted. We have seen the global biodiversity significantly diminished with thousands more species teetering on the threshold of extinction. We have seen an accumulation of greenhouse gases globally which are already having an adverse impact on the global climates and on the amount of ultra violet radiation. We have seen much of the precious mantle of global soil, one of the most important life support systems either salinated, eroded, paved or built on or else depleted of its precious nutrients. We are watching plagues of people penetrate into more and more places which were previously unmodified, with consequent degradation. We have watched more and more of the earth's finite supply of fresh

water being polluted or diverted to meet the demands of this expanding population.

A recent Queensland Government sponsored study revealed that Fraser Island has continued to suffer accelerated degradation even since it became a World Heritage site in 1992.

The need for a more active and more vocal, indeed a more strident, conservation movement is now greater than it was three decades ago. To achieve this we must mobilize far more of the community to become more active voluntary supporters of conservation. If we fail to do this then the list of losses will only grow and make those few achievements we have managed so far become even paler in significance.

There are several steps we should take to reverse this trend:

- We need the public to realize that while we may seem to win some of the more celebrated conservation battles we are losing the overall war and that we can only win it with more recruits.
- We should recruit more actively. Why don't we have advertisements in the newspapers telling people how than can join and what members and supporters can do to help?
- We need to make volunteers more relevant and meaningful so that people will feel welcome and needed in the movement.
- We need to make it clear that the people can only stop the global environmental decline through people power and that relegating the responsibilities to governments alone will not work.
- We need to change the attitude of politicians and bureaucrats so that they no longer view us as a threat and "the enemy" but as allies in advancing the public interest to protect the environmental heritage of future generations.
- We need to have some political activism if we are aiming to recruit more political activists.
- We need to enforce a motto which I have always advocated: "Conservation must be fun". We must make our organizations socially attractive if people are to be enticed to sacrifice their precious leisure hours in our cause.

Professional versus Voluntary Conservationists

Differences: We need to recognize that there is a difference between professional and voluntary conservationists. Professional conservationists are mostly employed by government and non-government agencies. Almost all who work for non-government agencies are employed by non-profit voluntary groups such as the National Parks Association of Queensland, or the Queensland Conservation Council or the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland Inc. We need to recognize that our professionals all earn much less than they could expect to earn if they worked for a government agency or for a private environmental consultant. This helps to explain why there is a very significant turnover in the staff of voluntary conservation organizations.

Short careers: Few people have long careers working for voluntary agencies. Some of this is due to the pressures of the job. Unfortunately, too frequently, voluntary organizations (be they environment or welfare) are hard task-masters. But ultimately the reason that most professionals leave our service is economically based. Many are poached by the more affluent government and non-government bodies. Most are subsequently lost to conservation movement and indeed some end up actively campaigning against their former employers and the policies which they had previously advocated.

This continual bleeding of the professional conservationists employed by the voluntary conservation movement explains why we need to have volunteers who remain around to provide a sense of continuity and corporate memory. There has to be someone who remains committed to the responsibility of achieving the conservation movement's aims even when the full-time staff leave.

Jealousy: There is a wide divide between volunteer and professional conservationists. Some professional workers feel threatened by people who are prepared to do the same sort of work as they do but for no pay. Sometimes manifested volunteers are excluded by professionals. Professionals may also deny volunteers critical information. Many professionals respond to this perceived threat by attempting to isolate those who would work for nothing. The efforts of volunteers are rarely praised by their professional peers. Many professionals try to deny public exposure to volunteers for fear that their own role might be diminished in the public perception. I have frequently experienced the lack of support from professional conservationists.

Such jealous territoriality by professionals towards the volunteers is not restricted to just the area of conservation. It also occurs in many other areas.

Volunteer tuck shop workers or art gallery and zoo guides frequently find themselves excluded from information or relegated to more demeaning roles than their professional colleagues despite having greater competence and a longer history of involvement.

I don't want to dwell on the negative aspects of the relationships between professionals and volunteers. Rather I would like to emphasize the enduring legacy of conservation volunteers, because this is the area where Romeo Lahey established a precedent which I hope that many more will attempt to emulate.

I don't advocate we eliminate professionals from the conservation movement. Rather we must all change our policies and attitudes to the other category of "greenies" if our relationship is to be more productive. If we share a mutual desire to protect the environment, we cannot afford to divert or waste our energies in class rivalry.

- Professional staff of the voluntary organizations need to have a demonstrated commitment to the objectives of the organization. We don't want any more leaving our employment to work for sandmining companies or other opponents.
- Selection of new professional staff also needs to include as a criteria the ability of the new professional to work well with and encourage volunteers.
- Professional staff should demonstrate that they will equitably share responsibility and kudos with volunteers.
- Voluntary organizations need to become more understanding employers and strive to improve relationships with professional staff. We shouldn't have an expectation that paid staff should put in more hours working for us than they would for any other employer.
- The professional staff needs to work to develop a more clearly defined understanding of the role of volunteers and knowledge of what each can offer to advance the cause. They must also have a strong desire to make the fullest use of the respective talents in our voluntary pool.

Types of Volunteer Conservationists

Conservationists represent a diverse group of people although it must be recognized that most conservationists are drawn from ranks of the upper middle classes of society. It should be noted however that almost every significant public interest movement, from consumer and civil rights to the women's movement, draws heavily on this same sector of society for leadership, momentum and most of its human and financial resources. However, there are many niches and roles for people to play within the voluntary conservation movement. I would like to examine those various roles where volunteers are especially needed.

Some people may have roles in more than one niche. If we are to encourage people to support us we must clearly understand the types of roles. Not everyone wants to be a Romeo Lahey or a Bob Brown or a Myles or Milo Dunphy but they do want to help.

The four major roles for conservation volunteers I have identified are:

- * conservation advocates;
- * conservation administrative supporters;
- * conservation watchdogs; and
- * conservation field workers

(a) Conservation advocates

Conservation advocates fill the most important leadership roles.

If we are to address the problems of global environmental decline which I referred to earlier we must do two things: Firstly, we must make the public extremely aware that we are continuing to lose the overall war and that they need to express more active support if we are to stop the deterioration before there is a wholly irreversible catastrophe. Secondly, we must use this tidal wave of public opinion which we must generate to change the political agenda to ensure that the environment gets the precedence in decision making which it deserves. The latter will only be an outcome if we are successful in the first.

All of that requires conservation advocates.

The advocates are the people who make the speeches, write the articles, the letters and main submissions.

They lobby any people of influence (including politicians and bureaucrats).
They discover the obstacles to achieving the desired outcome and devise campaigns to remove or overcome these blockages.
They are the people who develop the campaigns and strategies;
They are the leaders who rally the supporters.
They bring the issues to the attention of the public.

It was in his role as an advocate that Romeo Lahey is probably best known and best identified. Lamington National Park remains the enduring legacy of his advocacy.

(b) Conservation administrative support

Another role for volunteers is in administration. No advocates can achieve much without a lot of people backing up. Any good campaign needs a legion of supporters. These are the unsung heroes and heroines of any campaign. Rarely are they given much public recognition.

They write or type the submissions, produce the newsletters, proof read and help to improve the presentation and refine the concepts.

They answer the phone or ring around, and extend the vital networks which are our strongest weapons in changing public opinion.

They help raise the necessary campaign funds that any campaign needs (the more the better) and do the running around.

They often have to attend numerous less than exciting meetings.

They proffer advice and counsel.

They help devise and improve strategies. Many come up with very helpful creative ideas which enhance campaigns.

They follow up with the finer details for many aspects of the campaigns for which the leaders and advocates have insufficient time to pursue.

Without the efforts of these supporters, few campaigns could succeed. I know this more than most. During the long campaign to protect Fraser Island, I was

known as a "one man band". Little did people realize that it was a very large orchestra although only one soloist was visible.

Some politicians and others had made the Fraser Island campaign very confrontational. FIDO supporters were threatened with reprisals. Because the stakes we were playing for were very high, it was a deliberate (and mutual) choice to make other players less conspicuous. This prevented so many people being exposed to victimization. While our supporters were generous with money and personal effort they shouldn't have their home, and the family personal security placed at risk because they support protecting Fraser Island.

That is why I assumed the position of sitting duck in a shooting gallery. Behind me there were countless supporters who offered advice, addressed the envelopes, turned the duplicator handle, collated and folded our MOONBI newsletters, and attended to those indispensable (but less public) tasks which every organization needs performed if it is to achieve anything worthwhile.

The trend that the law courts are now used by wealthy companies to deter individuals working to protect the environment in an entirely honorary capacity is still alive and well, particularly in Queensland although there are well known examples in every state. A significant number of ruthless exploiters are willing to pursue all kinds of punitive actions to intimidate any conservation opposition they encounter. Some are prepared to use the high cost of litigation as deterrent to any opposition. Despite the measures taken to minimize risks to members of voluntary organizations, the threat of being bankrupted by legal costs stops many from taking a more active role.

I have recently seen a conservationist fighting to remain on the staff of James Cook University because of the stand he took on Hinchinbrook Island. Yet had he been working on a consultancy for some environmental exploiter there is little doubt that he would have had the full support of the upper echelons of the same university administration.

(c) Conservation watchdogs

Another vital role which some voluntary conservationists play is that of a watchdog. The gains we make in the environmental movement are relatively few compared with the losses. We can't afford to let those hard fought for gains slip away through subsequent lack of vigilance.

It need to be said many times over: *"Conservation battles can never be won. They can only be lost."* All we can do is to win a decision that *"at this*

moment in time we will not" ... (sacrifice this part of the environment). It does not mean that at some subsequent time the outcome may not be different. That is why we need to be constantly monitoring and playing a watchdog role. Some people are very good watchdogs, particularly those people who can recall the history when old issues and ideas are revived.

It is interesting that many of the gains which we thought we had achieved in the 1960s with the banning of oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef and the establishment of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, have been lost because there was no on-going watchdog voluntary conservation group specifically monitoring the developments there. As a result we have less than 2% of this outstanding natural wonder of the world protected as a Marine National Park. Most of the reef is not being managed to protect its outstanding natural values which the majority of Australians want fully protected.

Watchdog volunteers need a clear vision for the future which integrates protecting the environment with community needs. This role demands a lot of persistence, a grasp of the whole history of the project and a sense of opportunism.

Romeo Lahey had already seen the Lamington National Park established well before the start of the Great Depression. However with the establishment of Relief Work programs, he saw the opportunity to establish a world class walking track system within his beloved National Park. He personally surveyed the tracks and set the standards for National Park walking trails in Queensland which were the model and envy of other National Parks Services within Australia.

Sadly the official reluctance to provide maintenance for those tracks established by Romeo Lahey at Lamington is causing them to slowly deteriorate. Ironically the only way it seems likely that they can be brought back up to his standard is by using volunteers.

Some Traps for Watchdogs

There are some serious traps for volunteer conservation movements in playing the watchdog role. In recent times there have been several salutary lessons learnt at great cost to the environment and also to the strength of the movement.

Some governments are now keen to lock the voluntary conservation movement into a consultative process which is a subtle way to muffle public criticism. The process can stifle criticism in public forums and exhaust our resources

without delivering any satisfactory gain for the environment. It aims to muzzle watchdogs. To a large extent this ploy has succeeded. Conservationists should not become involved in the consultative process on terms which in any way result in criticisms or advocacy which would normally have occurred being muted.

Another warning concerns exhausting volunteers' resources in the process. Engaging in consultation involves all participants in both financial costs and the most precious resource of all - time.

Volunteers should not be significantly out of pocket for attending meetings for which public servants receive full reimbursement of expenses. It is very unfair and contrary to the principles of natural justice. I have participated on many such consultations especially with the previous Great Sandy Region Community Advisory Committee without any contribution from government to meet my out-of-pocket expenses - not even hundreds of dollars I incurred for fares to attend a meeting which the government unilaterally cancelled at the eleventh hour. If the government wants the views and opinions of voluntary conservationists and they are paying public servants' expenses to consult with us, they should be at least prepared to reimburse us for our out of pocket expenses. We are still foregoing income to attend. Receiving reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses will not turn us into professionals.

The other matter is the question of how much time should we give to the consultative process. In some cases, these committees and consultations are only ruses to divert our energies and efforts away from public campaigns against governments. The insistence that discussions should be treated confidentially is a standard ploy to lock participants into a process which compromises our ability to freely communicate and suppresses public criticism.

After years of being largely ignored during the Bjelke-Petersen era, the Queensland conservation movement was easily seduced when the Goss Government included it in the consultative process. However, as the Goss Government fell short on the delivery of promises on the environment and there was an increasing sense of frustration, most greenie groups failed to criticize it publicly. Had we spent less time in meetings and more time on the media, the Goss Government may have delivered much more.

The conservation movement therefore needs to watch more carefully how it responds to such invitations in the future. If consultations are not delivering desired results, we should carefully consider whether we could spend our time more productively in other ways.

There is a current problem on Fraser Island. We are part of a consultative process where the disproportionate weight is given to anti-conservation interests. This imbalance seriously imperils any chance of a conservation outcome. The consultative process needs serious reconsideration by both governments and the voluntary conservation movement. We must ensure that there are acceptable procedures. We must never compromise our right to continue to raise issues in the public forums.

(d) Conservation field workers

This brings me to the fourth role for conservation volunteers, which is a familiar one to many in this audience, - that is contributing physical work to help the environment.

These are people of action. Many are not affiliated with any voluntary conservation organization. Indeed the contributions of these conservation volunteers are most usually being actively sought by government agencies such as the Department of Environment which have insufficient resources to fulfill their obligations. They assist on working bees, regenerate the bush, pick up litter, eradicate weeds, become involved in landcare projects, keep good records of their observations and do dozens of other things to arrest environmental decline. These are also the people who turn up annually for the "Clean Up Australia" days. There are probably more volunteer conservationists in this category than any other.

Probably the most significant show of strength in the area of volunteers though in Australia is the incredible energy exhibited by the growing band of mainly matrons who are ridding our run down urban bush parks of a plethora of weeds and assorted rubbish. They have succeeded in a spectacular way of bringing back the bush in areas which were previously so over-run by feral plants that they had daunted local authorities for decades.

These people are not in the public eye but, by their actions, they are making a positive contribution to the environment. We should never underestimate the value of increasing the proportion of the population who are actively involved in working to protect the environment even in small ways. Their direct effort is positive because they assume a proprietorial interest and continue to have a residual interest in their projects.

Proprietorial interest: Once people have a proprietorial interest in the environment, they become more concerned and protective of it.

Some Namibian friends of mine managed to persuade some tribes of indigenous Namibians that the elephants and the rhino were not the property of the Government but rather their property. While they had the view that all wildlife was owned by the state, they felt justified in poaching it, especially as they had gardens and crops damaged by these animals. Their attitude was similar to that of many Australians who inflate their taxation deductions believing that it is OK to cheat a little on the government. However, once they accepted that the wildlife was their own, they became very possessive and proprietorial. They stopped all the poaching. As a result Namibia is the only country in Africa where there was actually an increase in the number of elephants and rhino during the 1980s.

Making people believe that the environment is ours and not the exclusive property of the governments makes them far more protective of it.

The American Experience

In 1993 and 1997, I studied some of the more heavily used National Parks in the United States including three World Heritage areas: The Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Grand Canyon National Park and Mesa Verde National Park. The Smokies annually draw over 10 million visitors; over 5 million now annually visit the Grand Canyon and over 2 million visit Mesa Verde. However the management of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco with over 20 million visitors is even more of a challenge. None of these parks could operate effectively without volunteers.

The United States Congress has produced legislation which has defined the role of volunteers in ways which have helped to remove the reluctance of professionals in the US Parks Service to utilize this potential resource. Indeed with the recent budget cuts to the Parks Service more and more staff are becoming very enthusiastic about the assistance and contributions which volunteers can make to the successful management of their parks.

The American Congress has long recognized the values of:

- * utilizing the goodwill that so many citizens have towards the park;
- * saving the drain on the public purse by expanding the bureaucracy to be the only source of staffing the parks; and
- * empowering people to take a more active role in protecting one of the most precious assets, their national parks.

In 1970, Congress enacted a law to establish the VIP Program which covered volunteers for "lost liability, work injury compensation and reimbursement for out of pocket expenses."

A congressional guideline says:

"Volunteers can be utilized in any and all parts of the park management system. All levels and types of skills can be utilized and almost any kind of work can be performed as long as it is work that:

- 1 *Would not be otherwise get done during a particular fiscal year because of funding or personnel limitations.*
- 2 *Fees paid to employees to accomplish work that would not otherwise get done during a particular fiscal year because of funding or personnel limitations.*
- 3 *Does not result in the displacement of any paid employees.*

or

A brochure produced by the National Parks Service lists some examples of the roles that VIPs could perform. It suggests the following as samples:

- * work at an information desk, answering visitors' questions and handing out written information
- * present living history demonstrations in period costumes
- * write or design brochures
- * serve as a campground host
- * drive a shuttle bus
- * build fences, paint buildings, and make cabinets
- * maintain a park library
- * take photographs or work in a darkroom
- * answer mail requests
- * give guided nature walks and evening campfire programs
- * assist with the preservation and treatment of museum artifacts
- * maintain trails
- * design computer programs for park use
- * answer telephones
- * conduct oral history interviews
- * give environmental education programs for children
- * patrol trails
- * demonstrate arts and skills
- * organize photograph and slide files
- * prepare and conduct special park events
- * pick up litter along roads, trails, seashores and rivers

- * inventory underwater resources such as shipwrecks on diving expeditions
- * assist resource managers and researchers by making wildlife counts, planting trees, and taking part in other projects

It seems that the only work that volunteers cannot participate in other than a few activities where their safety may be jeopardized is limited only by park managers imagination. In the Great Smokies, I saw part of a brilliant audio visual presentation on the wildflowers of the park which was prepared by a "VIP" (volunteer) who happened to be the outstanding expert and a professor of botany at a university. The same VIP conducted a Wildflower Spring Pilgrimage, a special event which attracted more people to the park but gave them all a far more meaningful experience.

At the same time the Parks Service is helping entirely voluntary conservation organizations called National Parks Associations. These run the shops within the National Parks, raise money which is passed over the Park managers to specifically help that park and they coordinate the effort of volunteers. In 1993 after many years of progressive increase in effort the Golden Gate Superintendent reported that the contribution of volunteers had increased from 64.6 work years the previous year to 66.3 work years that year. The National Park Association elaborated, "Support for the park volunteer program resulted in nearly 4,000 people providing over 100,000 hours of volunteer time (and) contributions resulted in \$1.6 million of support for the National Parks Service."

In Australia we too are now seeing some governments begin to woo volunteers to help preserve the environment albeit with much less enthusiasm.

Australian zoos, museums and art galleries have long had well established mechanisms for recruiting and utilizing volunteers. Most of these institutions would be less well endowed today if they had not harnessed this potential. Being a guide in a gallery or zoo requires training and expertise. This type of work is frequently done better by volunteers than paid staff.

Nature Search 2001: In 1991, the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage established a project called "Nature Search 2001" to coopt volunteers to identify the wildlife resources of South East Queensland. They were overwhelmed. Over 3000 volunteers enlisted and hundreds of thousands of records shed some exciting new light on the wildlife of the region. The current Queensland Government recently dumped this most successful volunteer programs it has yet undertaken.

The concept of volunteers working on conservation projects in Queensland and Australia is not new or unique. Volunteers' muscles have been used to clean up some parks littered with old car bodies and sundry rubbish in various Australian urban parks. However, various Australian National Parks Services have been slow to harness the potential of voluntary effort

State Formal Campaigns: In states such as Tasmania there is now a concerted effort to harness the efforts of volunteers in a much wider array of tasks. In their brochure they are seeking volunteers to work in many areas not previously addressed. These include enterprise projects, caring for sick or injured animals, adopt a track, visitor education, habitat care, whale rescue, raptor records, threatened species assistance, oil spill response, archival research, data records (computer), historic site conservation and excavation assistance. New South Wales and other states have established foundations to take what funds they can extract from the public. While all state conservation agencies are keen to use volunteers to save their budgets, they are reluctant to give volunteers too significant a role in park management.

Eli Creek: In 1981 the Fraser Island Defenders Organization undertook a most successful voluntary project at Eli Creek. This project shamed a hostile Queensland Government into improving the management of Fraser Island which is now a World Heritage site. The Bjelke-Petersen Government was determinedly trying to establish that tourists were doing more damage than sandmining companies. They did this by refusing any action to stop the rapidly growing volume of tourists unintentionally degrading Fraser Island.

In the face of official opposition, FIDO undertook the then mammoth task of reversing this deliberate, official neglect. FIDO's effort in constructing a board walk and other facilities at Eli Creek involved eighteen weekends of voluntary working bees by between 15 and 30 workers. They built the boardwalk, a picnic shed and toilets. FIDO also closed the area to campers and began rehabilitating the area which had been degraded during a decade of laissez faire use. FIDO financed the project entirely. It almost sent the formerly financially secure organization broke.

FIDO's efforts achieved two essential purposes: It arrested the degradation that had occurred at Eli Creek. It also ultimately shamed the Bjelke-Petersen Government in Queensland into actively managing recreation on Fraser Island. It passed the Fraser Island Recreation Area Act in 1985. The new Board was anxious to obliterate any evidence that FIDO had been involved so it almost immediately demolished and replaced FIDO's Eli Creek boardwalk (which was

in very good state of repair) at a cost more than \$350,000 to the Queensland public. It was a case of volunteers shaming a hostile government.

Legacy for Future Generations

While we urgently need more National Parks to preserve in the most pristine state possible representative habitats and biodiversity, these islands of hope cannot survive for long if we don't address the larger issues confronting us now. We cannot leave future generations to cope with an even bigger problem than we have inherited or created. We must start to address what is happening outside the national parks which seriously threaten the future integrity of what should be the most inviolable havens in the world. As I said we are losing the war to preserve and protect the precious global environment. The four precious pillars of our life support systems on earth are rapidly crumbling. As these continue to suffer so will the risk to the integrity of national parks increase. The soils which are vital to the production of food are a rapidly diminishing commodity which is expected to feed more and the increasing human population cramming onto the Earth. It is also expected to sustain other forms of life.

As more soils erode and more of the Earth is desertified, we have to question whether our National Parks will be immune from the impacts. In some countries poaching and even squatting in national parks is the result of impoverishment of the soils outside the parks.

Biodiversity is another one of the life support systems. Unless we preserve the full biodiversity with which the Earth was endowed what future is there for us?

Biodiversity is being rapidly lost with the accelerating extinction of species, especially in those habitats where it should be richest, - the rainforests, littoral zones, rivers and streams and coral reefs. While we may blame many contributing causes, it is clear that the largest single reason for the loss of biodiversity is the ever increasing human population. As conservationists we must be more active in urgently addressing this most pressing issue - because it is the factor which may take the longest period to correct without a serious calamity.

Air is another of the four vital life support systems yet this is being polluted and degraded so that much is now unsafe to breathe and our atmosphere is full of an excess of greenhouse gases. It is now supposed that the disappearance of frog species is related to the deterioration of the atmosphere and/or the increasing amount of UV radiation reaching the earth. We have been warned

about the consequences of not addressing the atmospheric deterioration on the climate, on human health and on the economy. I want you to consider what will be the impact of the deteriorating atmosphere on National Parks and the life that is in them.

Water though, is the most urgent of the life support systems to be addressed. For example, it seems that almost 60 percent of the potential potable water on the Australian mainland is already being utilized.

It is estimated that there is only enough potential potable water to support a population of 27 million on the mainland at current levels of consumption. If you are wondering about this, then ask yourself where our five largest cities: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide are going to derive water if each expands its population by just 50 percent (say another 6 million between them). In the meantime our natural ecosystems are drying up as the quest for water becomes more intense. Rivers such as the Darling are drying up. The Macquarie Marshes are starved for water. Ban Ban Springs have ceased to flow as nearby farmers tap underground aquifers to irrigate crops.

The wider issues: We must realize that in the past most voluntary conservationists have been identified with specific campaigns such as saving the Franklin River, creating new National Parks, saving whales, or protecting particular ecosystems such as rainforest or the Great Barrier Reef. What we have to now realize is that such campaigns will be rendered futile if we don't now tackle wider issues which pose major threats to erode away those gains we have made. It has been easier to deal with issues like Fraser Island because they have a relatively narrow focus. We are now being challenged to address every factor impacting on Planet Earth's life support systems. These include almost every aspect of human activity. It is a task greater than any Olympic challenge.

Public Opinion: We were able to show in campaigns like the Franklin, the Great Barrier Reef and Fraser Island that we had overwhelming public opinion on our side. On the polls taken then between 75 and 65 percent were in favour of stopping the exploitation. There is every reason to believe that there is a similar ground swell of support to address other major environmental issues. However, we can only achieve that support if we sell our messages more actively through our networks of volunteer conservationists.

To mount those vital campaigns we are also going to have to convert a lot of that public support into one or more of the four categories of voluntary

conservationists I outlined above: *advocates, administrative supporters, watchdogs and/or field workers.*

We may need to undertake more initiatives to shame governments into better management of the whole environment and convince the public that governments do not have a monopoly on environmental protection and indeed they don't share our priority to be given to the environment. We need to become more focused on our own agenda for protecting the total environment. We shouldn't only react to agendas others have nominated.

Although there are many more people subscribing to conservation groups than to Australian political parties, the voluntary conservation movement during the last decade has lost a lot of vitality and lost its ability to organize campaigns. Not enough has been done to capitalize on this great potential. It is now time to regroup and recruit and tackle the even larger issues confronting us. Many volunteer conservationists have succeeded against daunting odds. It is not a task which is beyond us but we must begin to make a start.

The legacy of the volunteer conservationists will be the benefits which future generations derive. We should not be looking necessarily to the thanks that we receive for our actions now. We have to remember the test which Bob Brown prescribes: "*Will future generations thank us for what we have done?*"

Just as subsequent generations have thanked Romeo Lahey for Lamington and his other outstanding achievements for the environment, we can be sure we will be thanked if we ensure that future generations inherit the benefit of our efforts as voluntary conservationists even if politicians don't want to thank us now.

The president then called for David Drake the grandson of Romeo Lahey to give the vote of thanks to John Sinclair

My grandfather, Romeo Lahey, came from a large family. Representatives of that family present here tonight include Romeo's daughter (Alison Drake) and Romeo's niece (Shirley Lahey).

Before thanking John Sinclair for his address tonight, I would like to congratulate the National Parks Association of Queensland for continuing this worthwhile series of occasional lectures that started back in 1970. Over the years, a remarkable group of people from diverse backgrounds have spoken on various conservation topics.

To date those dedicated and talented speakers have been:-

- 1970 Alan Clelland
- 1971 Alec Chisholm
- 1972 William Wilkes
- 1973 David Lahey (Romeo's son - like some of the other early speakers, Uncle David has since died).
- 1975 Keith Jarrott
- 1978 Professor Ray Specht
- 1980 Keith Jarrott
- 1984 Horwood Cossins
- 1987 Dr Graham Saunders/Dr Ross Hynes/Don Marshall (NPWS)
- 1990 Tony Groom
- 1993 The Honourable Pat Comben MLA

I am aware that some of these earlier speakers are present here tonight. We can now add John Sinclair's name to this list of talented conservation volunteers.

Let's now focus on John Sinclair and his address this evening. There was no complacency in John's talk - rather it was a call to activism. Insightful comments by John included the references to jealous territoriality between volunteers and conservation professionals. I detect twin themes in John's talk:-

- *positive encouragement* and
- *battle hardening* of the troops.

In relation to the former, we had John's concept of conservation as fun, and the success of the park volunteer program in the USA. In relation to 'battle hardening', we had John's alert to the subtle ploy of consultation (which saps the resources, including time, of volunteers), examples of brutal intimidation and the scale of the challenges ahead. Like all good speakers, John provided us with a guide to action: "Will future generations thank us if we do this?"

I asked my dear cousin Shirley over the recent Easter long weekend what she saw as John's principal qualities. She nominated:-

John's perseverance

His enthusiasm

And his being a great educator.

John, like Romeo, is one of those rare men of thought and principle - who is also a man of effective action. Apart from being an advocate for Fraser Island, a celebrated naturalist and an informative guide with Go Bush Safaris, John also writes occasional letters to the editor of Brisbane's "Courier Mail".

Ladies and gentlemen, will you now join me in thanking the author and presenter of tonight's address, John Sinclair?

Mission Statement

The Association will promote the preservation, expansion, good management and presentation of National Parks in Queensland.

Objects

The objects for which the association is established are -

- (1) To preserve intact in their natural condition, to the greatest possible extent, the existing National Parks of Queensland, and endeavour to ensure the reservation and preservation of other areas thought to be suitable as National Parks.
- (2) To educate its members and the public to a fuller appreciation of the necessity for and value of National Parks.
- (3) To promote the development and implementation of appropriate management plans for National Parks, and appropriate management of environmental factors which may affect existing and potential National Parks.
- (4) To promote effective legislation in respect of National Parks and to ensure the enforcement of provisions for the protection of National Parks.
- (5) To promote measures to allow visitors to have access for the purpose of experiencing National Parks in appropriate ways.
- (6) To arrange and conduct field outings to allow members and guests to visit National Parks and areas which may be suitable for reservation as such.
- (7) To keep members and the public informed on matters affecting National Parks.
- (8) To form a link between the public and the administration.
- (9) To co-operate with persons or bodies having the same or similar objects.
- (10) To raise and administer funds for furthering the objects of the Association, and to take all other steps necessary thereto.

The expression "National Parks" shall include other protected areas and related reserves, both terrestrial and marine.



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