

NATIONAL PARK RANGERS AND CALM
FIVE YEARS OF PROGRESS

A REPORT BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CALM



DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared to cover progress with park ranger staff issues in CALM between March 1985 and December 1989.

2. BACKGROUND

Since the Department's inception in March 1985, there has been a steady and continuing improvement in terms of the rangers' career opportunities, conditions and financial rewards.

The process of improvement began when the Department convened a major conference of all rangers in April 1985. At this meeting a list of over 50 items were identified for consideration by the Department and a working party of six rangers was formed which subsequently acted as a representative group for consultation between the rangers and the Department.

Almost all of the concerns raised by rangers (most of which had been around for years) were resolved within 12 months. Following this, attention focused on the subject of career structure.

The influences for change around this time were many and various. For their part rangers wanted improved conditions and worthwhile careers. They also wanted to upgrade their role, to make their work more satisfying, and nearly all indicated a preparedness to expand their skills through study.

The Department supported these aspirations. Further, it wished to upgrade the role of the ranger for other reasons. First, it was desirable for the rangers' structure to fit into an overall departmental framework. Secondly, the Department saw the need to upgrade the services provided in the national parks in line with present-day environmental knowledge and increased public interest in environmental issues.

A comprehensive survey was conducted by the Department in 1985, immediately after the amalgamation, to obtain information on national park work and on the rangers themselves (including their current role, skills, aspirations and attitudes). The survey used a comprehensive questionnaire mailed to each park ranger in the Department.

The survey results indicated that rangers were then spending a high proportion of their working hours servicing public facilities and undertaking basic maintenance and construction work. Much less time was being spent with visitors, park protection, planning and wildlife management.

3. WORK VALUE CASE

By 1987, due principally to the Department's efforts, significant changes to the rangers' role had already occurred. CALM officers who previously were Forests Department or Fisheries and Wildlife staff helped to upgrade the situation in parks by bringing a professional approach to planning and new technology. Rangers were encouraged to contribute ideas from their own backgrounds to assist in the management of State forests and nature reserves. In the south-west districts, wages staff were available to assist with various labouring tasks previously undertaken by the rangers themselves, thus freeing the rangers for other work.

From early in 1985, rangers from all over the State began attending in-service training courses in fire management, recreation, safety, dieback and law enforcement.

Such changes, together with other developments, particularly in the training area, prepared the ground for the rangers' work value case of 1987. The success of the case was a major landmark and brought a restructuring of the Award, a new career and classification structure, improved wages and an expanded training programme. The Certificate of National Park Management, developed in association with TAFE, and the Department's Trainee Ranger Scheme were both completed soon after this.

4. ROLE DEVELOPMENT

Because of the unfortunate linkage between land tenure and union constitutional cover which CALM inherited on its formation, it has been necessary to develop role statements for the various staff groups in the Department.

Several changes in the rangers' role were identified in the 1987 case and there has been further development since then.

In broad terms the Department believes the rangers' duties should emphasise public relations, including environmental education and visitor control, construction and maintenance work (where work crews are not available) and routine park patrolling and servicing. Their duties should also include involvement in monitoring programmes and management plans, pest control, recreational planning, fire control and engineering projects.

Examples of changes to the rangers' role over the past few years include:

Increased public interaction - education and park interpretation

This follows an emphasis placed on such work by CALM policy, and the provision of specially-designed courses covering such topics as park interpretation, recreation and landscape planning and natural history. In addition, training in law enforcement and public relations has helped build the rangers' confidence in their dealings with park visitors.

Holiday activity programmes for adults and children are now being organised by rangers and they are participating more in public forums on community education and park management.

Increased responsibilities for parks and environmental matters

Rangers as a whole are now involved in a wider range of park management decisions. They participate in formulating burning prescriptions and carrying out the actual prescribed burns. They assist with jarrah dieback control programmes and participate in flora and fauna surveys. Plant identification combined with the establishment of herbaria by the rangers are further examples of their additional responsibilities.

Planning

Park rangers are now deeply involved in preparing management plans for their parks. Formerly this work was done entirely by senior staff at Crawley.

Safety and occupational health

Safety programmes, including training and certification, have been instituted in all parks. The former National Parks Authority had no official safety and occupational health programme. Many rangers now participate in district safety committees.

Administration

Some park administration work has been delegated to rangers-in-charge. This has resulted in increased levels of responsibility, and administrative training.

Supervision and training of others

When AWU workers are employed in the parks, or contractors engaged for particular tasks, rangers assist in planning the work and may also prepare detailed work prescriptions and supervise work programmes.

Trainee park rangers also require supervision and on-the-job training. At the moment there are seven rangers providing supervision for 12 trainees. Shortly there will be another two supervisors. Reports and other information concerning the trainees are collated by these staff and sent to Head Office.

Change in work emphasis

Various methods have helped to reduce the rangers' more menial park duties. At Yanchep there are three park maintenance workers employed to assist with the more routine tasks, also part-time ticket collectors and a pool attendant. In other areas contractors have been employed to mow lawns and clean toilets. Reductions have also been made to the amount of time rangers as a whole spend on some construction tasks, including roads, firebreaks and buildings.

5. TRAINING EMPHASIS

The Department has consistently placed a high priority on ranger training. One example is the range and number of courses provided and the establishment of a training-based career-development programme. CALM also was responsible for setting up the Certificate in Park Management which, for the first time provides rangers in WA with formal training and accreditation. More rangers are now undertaking courses both within CALM and through organisations such as TAFE and WACAE. A small number is pursuing higher qualifications with tertiary institutions in the eastern states, and CALM is assisting them to do so.

The Department expressly encourages the rangers with their training. CALM in-service courses are provided without cost and in work time. Most of these courses will ultimately assist the rangers in their career progression. The Department also provides a study advisory service, participates in accreditation determinations and allows rangers paid study leave to attend outside courses. These are all CALM innovations.

Annual Appraisal

CALM is introducing a system in which every ranger is to undergo an annual appraisal and career development session with their OIC. This is linked to the training programme and a career development model which is being prepared in consultation with rangers. At each appraisal, goals are agreed to and feedback on performance is discussed. No system of this nature existed pre-CALM.

Trainee Ranger Scheme

This scheme, commenced in early 1988, followed the achievements of the previous year. Under the scheme, selected persons wishing to become rangers enter into a two-year traineeship agreement during which time they obtain supervised field training in various parks and undertake the Certificate of National Park Management course. The selection of such trainees is stringent, the criteria reflecting the rangers' changed role and greater academic emphasis.

Five trainees made up the first intake in 1988 followed by a further seven in 1989. All 12 are closely supervised by ranger staff, and their progress is carefully monitored. In total, the training scheme represents a very considerable investment by the Department in the area of national parks.

Rangers

As must be expected, the rangers are not all equally interested in further study. Nevertheless, as indicated by the following list, there is a high attendance at CALM's practical field courses.

Ranger attendance figures for practical field training courses organised by CALM - January to September, 1989

Course	Number Attended
Basic chainsaw maintenance and handling	11
Driver training	12
Law enforcement	9
Work safety	16
First aid	19
Field engineering	11
Dieback control	17
Recreational and visitor facilities (recreation management)	12
Fire protection	14
Search techniques	11
Advanced recreation	10
South Coast Regional Seminar	14
Safety (occupational health, safety, etc)	3
Earth Education Interpretative Activities	5
	164

As these figures show, in the first nine months of this year alone there were already 164 attendances by rangers at CALM courses. This is an average of two courses for each ranger for the period.

6. CURRENT ISSUES

Currently the Department is involved in restructuring the rangers' award and developing efficiencies within the context of the Structural Efficiency Principle, 1988 and 1989 State Wage Decisions. The expected wage increases and other improvements to come from this will add to a series of similar gains achieved since 1987, as follows:

\$10 per week increase	20/03/87
\$ 6 per week increase	05/02/88
4% wage increase	22/07/88
3% wage increase	22/09/88
\$10 per week	22/03/89

To a significant extent the success of the current process will depend upon the completion of the comprehensive career development model that is being produced for rangers and which encompasses -

- . Role specification, areas of competence, skills and tasks and the identification of associated training requirements;
- . Individual appraisal procedures with performance feedback;
- . Training and development programmes designed specifically to meet the individual's requirements.

The first part of the structural efficiency package which has now been completed included a general increase of one wage level to all rangers. This has produced a broadbanded wage scale compatible with the salary scale in the Public Service Salaries Agreement.

Another objective of the current proposal is to assist rangers to become competitive for promotion to wider career paths in the Department or elsewhere in the public sector. The parties concerned have already discussed the question of removing artificial barriers in respect to some positions by way of amendment to selection criteria. Further examination of this kind will follow.

7. CONCLUSION

I am proud of the many achievements gained for rangers since CALM's inception - the Trainee Ranger Scheme, the Certificate of National Park Management, a new career structure and classification system, extensive training and development programmes and significant improvements to the rangers' working conditions achieved through amendments to the Award. These changes represent one of the most rapid and substantial improvements for conservation staff ever achieved by any agency in Australia.

Syd Shea
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

27 November 1989