

REPORT OF THE
TECHNICAL STAFF OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE:

JIM LANE - WOODVALE

RAY FREMLIN - BUSSELTON

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REPORT OF THE
TECHNICAL STAFF OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

The committee was appointed in March 1985 to investigate ways of establishing a system, within the Research and Planning Branch, that offered technical staff reasonable opportunities for promotion.

In the course of the committee's enquiries, many of the questions that were raised concerned the proposal by the Public Service Board to introduce broadbanding and to employ all General Division staff under the Public Service Act. As these proposals concern all the field staff in the Department of Conservation and Land Management, any anomalies apparent in the proposals would be best dealt with by the respective Field Officers Associations. In relation to this submission, there is no reference to broadbanding or to the ramifications of staff being employed under the Public Service Act. The recommendations appearing in this report are relevant, irrespective of the outcome of these proposals.

Each research station was visited by a member of the committee on at least one occasion (one exception was Wanneroo, where contact was by telephone). The committee's brief was explained at a meeting of all technical staff and each station was requested to submit a proposal (attached) that reflected the views of the Technical Staff.

After receiving the submissions from the Research Stations, it was apparent that there are different circumstances affecting the Wildlife Research Station at Woodvale.

The present classification scale of Technical Officers of the W.A. Wildlife Research Centre is considered anomalous and discriminating. Whereas technical staff in other areas of State Government have been able to obtain advancement to gradings of G-II-7 (eg. Agriculture Department) or above (District Foresters), there is no provision for Technical Staff in Wildlife Research to proceed beyond G-II-4 max. This is despite the fact that several technical staff have many years of experience and have become expert in their field.

In order to rectify this anomaly a proposal for extended gradings (attached) together with appropriate promotional criteria has been prepared. This proposal is broadly in line with career opportunities available to technical staff of other State Government scientific institutions.

Considerable thought has been given to the question of appropriate qualifications for promotion to the various grades. Whereas appropriate external technical courses (Diploma, Certificates etc) exist for research technicians in other areas of Government, there are no technical courses available in Western Australia which meet the needs of the W.A. Wildlife Research Centre. In addition, most district staff are required by the nature of their work, to spend prolonged periods away from home. This is highly disruptive to any form of "course" studies. It is therefore proposed that a system of internal examination, similar in structure to that which applies to Forestry technical staff, be instituted. Such a system will enable the disparate technical requirements of the various fields of research activities (eg. rare flora propagation, waterbird population assessment, endangered marsupial ecology) at the Wildlife Research Centre to be met.

In relation to the submissions from the research stations in the Division of Protection and Production, a number of common points emerge:

- i) promotional opportunities should exist for an officer who exhibits a high degree of technical skill without that officer being required to accept administrative responsibility,
- ii) there is wide-spaced support for internal assessment as a means of qualifying for promotion. However, there appears to be dissatisfaction with the present system of examination. Some stations advocate a system of assessment that apportions more emphasis on ability to perform and less on the number of marks achieved in an examination,
- iii) deficiencies in the method of annual appraisal were identified by most stations. There is support for a system of annual appraisal that reflects the worth of an officer to the Department. The opportunity to apply the 'soft' option is not an acceptable form of appraisal,
- iv) the current duty statement is seen as failing to adequately describe the responsibilities and duties of research staff,
- v) there is some support for an option to either accept a tertiary qualification or an internal qualification when promotion of an officer is considered,

RECOMMENDATIONS

- * The Department implement a system of promotion that allows technical staff to progress without having to accept administrative responsibility.

- * That an internal system of assessment be retained to enable technical staff to qualify for promotion. The assessment should place greater emphasis on an officer's capabilities and performance and less on examination results.

- * Duty statements be altered to reflect an accurate statement of an officer's duties and responsibilities.

- * Annual appraisals that rank an officer's performance on a numerical scale should be replaced by a format designed to assess an officer's 'worth' to the Department.

Jim Lane

June 27, 1985


Ray Fremlin

TECHNICAL STAFF SUBMISSION - BUSSELTON RESEARCH

PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.

The present system that requires a hierarchical structure to be in place in order to promote officers is often inappropriate and inequitable in a research organisation. In many instances technical staff have specialised (especially at Woodvale, Como and Dwellingup) and consequently have little professional contact with others in the research organisation. The establishment of a formal administrative hierarchy, whilst effective at some stations where staff have not specialised to a great extent (e.g. Busselton and Manjimup), would be purely to conform with the system in others.

In order to have an equitable system of promotion within the Research Branch, it is recommended that two systems operate in parallel:

- i) where an administrative hierarchy can be established, technical staff (including administration staff) who show aptitude for administration, should have the opportunity for promotion within the research organisation.
- ii) staff who exhibit a high standard of technical skill, or whose capacity to control a research programme has been demonstrated, should be able to progress without accepting administrative responsibility.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR PROMOTION.

While it is agreed that some form of internal assessment is desirable in order to qualify for promotion, it is recommended that a more flexible system be adopted. Assessment of junior staff should reflect their ability to formulate a coherent argument (in the form of a report or assignment), in addition to a test of knowledge. Promotion to senior positions should be based on tangible evidence of an officer's ability.

Increasingly, technical positions are being filled by people with tertiary qualifications. It is recommended that, in future, receipt of a relevant tertiary qualification (Diploma or Degree) will exempt that officer from sitting the LF 4 and LF 5/6 examination. Above this level, all staff should be subject to the same assessment. It is argued that to gain a degree a person must have demonstrated an ability to prepare a coherent report.

DUTY STATEMENTS.

It is suggested that duty statements reflect the true responsibilities and duties of each officer. They should be updated in conjunction with the annual appraisal and could be used when staff are being assessed for promotion.

ANNUAL APPRAISAL.

The present system that assigns performance to a numerical scale is unacceptable. Consideration should be given to replacing it with a form, similar to the proposed Position Data Form, that allows officers to be assessed on their worth to the Department.

TECHNICAL STAFF SUBMISSION - COMO RESEARCH

- 1.1 Internal assessment should be retained.
- 1.2 The assessment should be by way of a project relevant to the Technical Assistant's work tasks.
- 1.3 The lower limit of each level should have a required minimum tertiary qualification.
- 1.4 Staff with the required tertiary qualification need not attempt the internal assessment.
- 1.5 Promotional evaluation should place greater emphasis on the scientific knowledge of a Technical Assistant, rather than just administrative responsibilities.
This point leads to 1.7
- 1.6 Consideration should be given to a separate classification for Technical Assistants. It is considered invalid to correlate between Clerical and Technical (LF) classifications.
- 1.7 A separate allowance should be included to compensate for each subordinate that a Technical Assistant is required to supervise. This would avoid the situation of a supervisor and subordinate both being on the same salary at the top of a level.
- 1.8 The proposed draft POSITION DATA FORM is, gramatically, poorly constructed and as a result the requirements are often difficult to determine.

The POSITION DATA FORM to contain multiple choice questions wherever possible, thus avoiding misinterpretation of a directive.

Yearly or promotional assessment be based on the POSITION DATA FORM. The current Performance Appraisal Form has an unsatisfactory Assessment Rating method, more emphasis needs to be placed on an employee's worth to the Department, rather than their performance ranking (on a 1-6 scale). This would entail a merger of the POSITION DATA FORM and a more relevant Appraisal and Personal Development Plan.

TECHNICAL STAFF SUBMISSION - DWELLINGUP RESEARCH

1.0 PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

Appraisal should continue to be in two forms; annual appraisal, and assessment to pass bars to automatic annual promotion.

1.1 ANNUAL APPRAISAL

This technique needs to be more effective in distinguishing between substandard, satisfactory and very good work performance. It is easy to overlook the deficiencies of an individual in the interests of comfortable personal relationships between supervisors and their staff. There needs to be more honesty. The soft option approach damages the morale of those field staff who work to capacity.

There must be parity between assessment of individuals with different supervisors.

The results of annual appraisals should be included in the process of selecting staff for promotion to vacant positions.

1.2 ASSESSMENT TO PASS BARS TO AUTOMATIC PROMOTION

Two options exist:

- the status quo with examinations and assignments.
- abolition of examinations in favour of a project/report assessment.

At Dwellingup Research Branch, support can be found for both options.

1.2.1 Arguments in favour of the present examination system are:

- a) in the past, the lack of an examination system has made it difficult for supervisors to impartially assess their technical staff. Personal relations have played too great a part in selection for promotion.
- b) The training given to people when sitting for examinations must broaden their field of knowledge. This is particularly so in Research, where people tend to work in specialised areas.
- c) The present examinations add to the qualifications of those people in Research who may wish to apply for operational positions.

1.2.2 Arguments in favour of project based assessment are:

- a) There is no parity between Departmental examinations and tertiary qualifications. Some tertiary graduates resent having another series of examinations imposed upon them to satisfy the requirements of an operations orientated assessment procedure.
- b) The exams are frequently artificial and irrelevant to the research work place, because exam papers must be prepared for a wide range of Departmental staff.
- c) Preparation for exams consumes significant amounts of time which could be more fruitfully spent at work.

- d) People should be tested in the work environment, whether they are administrative, specialist (eg. statistician, computer programmer) or research orientated. Each bar should represent a demand for higher levels of skill. To cross a bar into an available vacancy, a person should demonstrate in the work place that he/she can perform satisfactorily above that bar. A suggested method of assessment is:
- A person should be assigned a project in his/her particular area (administrative, specialist or research).
 - The project should be planned in advance with the supervisor.
 - The project should be a part of the Department's research effort: not artificially created tasks.
 - Complexity of the project should be set according to the bar being tackled.
 - The project should conclude with a report. This report should be part of the candidate's assessment.
 - The report's content, presentation and level of distribution for assessment should be in keeping with the skills required above the bar e.g. internal report, or publication in an internal journal.
 - There should not be an early August (or similar) deadlines: artificial deadlines demand artificial projects. The timetable for the project should be according to the requirements of the assigned task.
 - Parity between individuals with different supervisors is essential. Reports should be assessed by the candidate's supervisor and other professionals.
 - Tertiary qualifications should not be a prerequisite to attempting to cross any bar. However, skills acquired during a post secondary education would be valuable in attempting a project.
- e) The project based assessment would test people's abilities in realistic, complex work situations. It would provide valuable experience and training for the more demanding positions further up the hierarchy.
- f) Experience shows that field staff who have a personal stake in their work apply themselves enthusiastically and the Department benefits from this. It is recognised that not all those who attempt projects will be promoted, as promotion will be into available vacancies. However, people working on projects will help develop a positive and dynamic work environment within a research group.

1.3 CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

The career aspirations of Research Branch staff may be in pure research, administration, or in specialist roles such as mathematician, statistician, or computer programming and modelling. Opportunity for advancement should be approximately equal in all areas.

The present system places strong emphasis on promotion being conditional upon increasing administrative work load. This reflects the Operations orientation of the present assessment and promotion process.

In the Research Branch there is a need for a wider range of senior technical staff. These senior staff members would be specialised as, for example:

- senior research technicians occupying semi-professional roles.
- administrators of research stations, perhaps with technical skills.
- computer programmers.
- mathematical modellers
- statisticians.

This situation would encourage technical staff to develop specialist skills which are at present in short supply in the Research Branch.

TECHNICAL STAFF SUBMISSION - MANJIMUP RESEARCH

PROMOTIONS:

There is general dissatisfaction on promotional prospects. Technical Staff are generally well qualified either having a Forestry Certificate or Diploma (Australia or overseas), Technical, or Tertiary qualifications, and many years experience.

With the usual division into small specialised sections, Research appears to be disadvantaged under a system which sees responsibility only as the number of people under one's direct supervision.

Promotional prospects should be improved. Research should at least be on a par with Divisional and other Specialist sections, and the ratios of senior field staff should be similar in all localities.

Qualifications for promotion should include a pass, an internal examination or other qualification for the position applied for, and promotion given to the applicant being suited to that position. Some system of increasing annually the promotion allowance should be instigated, to bring those who have passed exams to the minimum level (or just below) of the next grade.

DUTY STATEMENTS:

It is generally agreed that the present form of Duty Statement is inappropriate. Statements should accurately reflect and define the required duties and responsibilities of that position. A set form is no good for Research conditions. A Duty Statement is required for each position and anyone holding that position must be paid the appropriate rate - either by promotion to it, or being paid a higher duty allowance.

EXAMINATIONS:

Examinations should be pre-requisite to promotion. However, examinations should be standardised, not the annual chopping and changing experienced over the past 15 years. Examinations should also reflect the knowledge and ability of the examinee, rather than be a memory test. There is much dissatisfaction with anomalies in marking, both setting and marking of examinations should be standardised.

As an alternative to annual examinations, there is some support for a system of internal correspondence courses. This would enable staff to study at their own rate, and take the courses to certain levels depending on the promotional stage aimed for. Such a scheme was put forward some years ago, but nothing more has been heard of it.

ADMINISTRATION:

Administration staff should be given the opportunity to take examinations, and gain promotion, to a higher level than is at present the case. Efficient administration is very important and an integral part of any Research Station, and administration personnel play a large role in both field and office work of many Research projects.

RESEARCH CO-ORDINATION:

There could be more liaison between Research officers at the field staff level. Exchange visits, seminars etc. would help to disseminate information, complement each others work, and avoid duplication.

TECHNICAL STAFF SUBMISSION
WILDLIFE RESEARCH CENTRE, WOODVALE

These proposals are the suggested criteria for the restructuring of the technical division within this research branch. They will provide career opportunities and expectations which are currently enjoyed by technical officers within other departments.

1. Current Gradings & Reclassification

- 1.1 The senior technical officers of this branch request an immediate review of their current grade for a reclassification. It is our understanding that the Wildlife Officers have already submitted an appeal for reclassification which is at present held in suspense. A number of senior technical officers are performing highly skilled duties and/or are undertaking increased responsibilities over and above those duties presently listed in their current duty statements. It should be noted that there has not been a review of duty statements for some 3 years, they are therefore overdue for re-appraisal.
- 1.2 As the new Industrial Arbitration Act is now operative there can be no further General Division Reviews in the Public Service. This new procedure has disadvantaged all technical staff who will now be required to take their case to the Industrial Arbitration Court. We request management to recognise the urgency in dealing with these matters which would correct the serious anomalies that presently exist.

2. Internal Examination Criteria for Promotion

- 2.1 Examination subject matter should be directly relevant to the duties of the officer. It is suggested a 1500 word essay should form the major component for promotional grade together with a general paper which would cover safety in the workplace, daily vehicle mtce checks, use and/or storage of toxic chemicals etc.... to the max of the G-11-6. In all cases scientific publications and other literature should be available to enable the officer to display skills in researching relevant material for his essays.
- 2.2 Progression to G-11-7/8 will be by a 2500 word assignment and a display of competence in letter writing. Once again published scientific literature should be made available. It is envisaged that officers passing into this grade would be expected to display skills in administration and possess a good knowledge of the organization and structure of the department and its divisions.
- 2.3 The technical staff are not required at the moment to display administrative responsibilities, in fact this item does not appear on duty statement sheets. In view of this, promotion must be on technical merit since there is no other method to display their work skills.
- 2.4 It is recommended that all technical staff should have the right of appeal to the Principal Research Officer and Director of Research and Planning as first arbiters in all matters of promotion which may

be in dispute. All technical staff would reserve their rights to present their case before the Industrial Arbitrator in accordance with the new Industrial Arbitration Act.

3. Recruitment of Personnel with Tertiary Qualifications

- 3.1 A number of technical positions are now being filled by officers recruited with tertiary qualifications. We agree that this is the prerogative of the Department Head and make no further comment to this decision. In cases where the applicant displays an in-depth knowledge and has had previous field experience we see an entry level not exceeding G-11-2 max. as a fair starting point.

4. Technical Assistants

- 4.1 We see a need for technical assistants to be re-employed in this branch. This grade of officer could be at cadet level and would carry out a range of minor duties which are currently the responsibility of the technical officer. This would free the technical officer for more responsible duties and provide valuable assistance on major field research programmes.

5. Promotion on Special Grounds

- 5.1 It has been suggested that the Principal Research Officer should have the prerogative to promote an officer on special grounds. We see this setting a precedent and in consequence do not endorse this proposal. Established promotional procedures and the right to exercise an appeal before the Industrial Arbitrator should be the only recognised and accepted standards for promotion.

6. Amalgamation Anomalies

- 6.1 There are without doubt a number of anomalies arising out of amalgamation. A close check will confirm that technical staff in this branch have responsibilities and undertake their duties to a high level of technical expertise and merit which well equate to their colleagues in more senior grades within the Forest Division. A number of technical staff have tertiary qualifications, some have none but have many years of experience, some have both attributes and others are undertaking tertiary studies in the external mode.

- 6.2 Credit, possibly in the form of bonuses should be given for these higher levels of expertise and to officers supervising staff or volunteers. This would encourage the accomplishment of additional research projects and increase the number of surveys for the preparation of the much needed Management Plans.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1 These proposals are submitted with a view of restoring confidence within this research branch. Career opportunities have been nullified in the past by restrictive PSB procedures. We look to management to recognise that these matters should be dealt with expeditiously. We are not seeking favoured treatment but recognition of our own achievements and technical competence which inject a high degree of support and technical expertise in research programmes.

G-II-1/2 - Technical Officer

Appointment to G-II-1/2 requires possession of a Achievement Certificate together with appropriate knowledge of and interest in natural history and nature conservation.

G-II-3/4 - Technical Officer

Advancement to G-II-3/4 will be obtained on completion of a minimum of 12 months satisfactory service on G-II-2 max, together with satisfactory performance in internal examination

- OR -

Completion of 2 years satisfactory service on G-II-2 max.

G-II-5/6 - Senior Technical Officer

Advancement to G-II-5/6 will be obtained on completion of a minimum of 12 months satisfactory service on G-II-4 max, together with satisfactory performance in internal examination

- OR -

An officer who has not completed the appropriate internal examination will be considered on the basis of substantial experience, viz 13 years, if his competence is clearly demonstrated.

G-II-7/8 - Principal Technical Officer

Advancement to G-II-7/8 will be obtained on completion of a minimum of 12 months satisfactory service on G-II-6 max, together with satisfactory performance in internal examination.