

NOTES FOR ADDRESS TO MANAGERS MEETING, OCTOBER 1987

R J Underwood
GENERAL MANAGER

I would like to share three nice things with you:

1. I warmly welcome our new managers (Andrew Burbidge, Don Keene, Ian Kealley, Drew Haswell, Bob Cooper, John Sclater, Hugh Campbell) appointed during the year.
2. I continue to be most appreciative of the support given me by regional and branch managers. There isn't one of you who hasn't performed at a high level of competence and dedication.

I also want you to know about the way your own staff feel about you. I have quite a lot of contact with members of the field staff, technical and specialist officers and rangers. It really pleases me when they speak highly of their managers. I do not seek these comments, they arise spontaneously.

3. At the recent National Fire Workshop at Busselton, two people from the eastern states (one in a national park/wildlife agency and the other in a forestry commission) independently said to me that "CALM is now widely regarded as setting the standards for professional conservation management in Australia".

In addition, a number of people commented to me on the very good morale, high spirits and confidence of staff in CALM.

I was very proud to hear these comments, and I pass them on to managers because you are the people who deserve the credit. I hope you will pass my appreciation on to your staff.

When I spoke to managers last year I felt that we had overcome some of the worst difficulties associated with the formation of CALM and that there were better things ahead.

A year later, looking at the Department and our branches and regions, I think I was right. We have had a few hiccups in terms of organisation and structures and rewards, and our staffing procedures (especially management of the FTE and new appointments) need to be greatly improved. But on the whole I think the Department is now operating smoothly. There will always be many things we can do better. Defining and solving these on-going problems are simply part of the job.

I also consider we have succeeded in establishing good working relationships with many areas in the external environment - eg,

- . industries (timber and mining) on CALM lands
- . most other government departments
- . most shire councils
- . most recreation and tourist groups
- . scientific and research institutions/community

There are five areas which concern me, and I would like to discuss these briefly with you.

1. CALM is not strong politically. As Syd has correctly pointed out, as a department we have no politically influential constituency. By definition we have to try to satisfy almost everyone -- as a result, almost no-one will go in to bat for us. Whenever we benefit one sectional interest, we disbenefit all the others.

If we are to grow (in terms of support, and therefore resources for conservation) we must identify and develop an effective constituency for CALM. I seek ideas from all managers on this requirement.

2. Worse than this, CALM is hated in some rural areas, notably Denmark and to a lesser extent Margaret River. We have a poor image in some suburbs (eg, Subiaco) and we are disliked and mistrusted by some groups, notably the ACF, the AHC, and the Miscellaneous Workers' Union.

This is not the moment to go into reasons, or expand on my favourite subject of perceptions versus realities. Nor do I expect we will ever be universally loved. We will always have to apply some government policies or to employ techniques which are unpopular with some sectors of the community or of our staff.

What I do want to emphasise is the nature of our response.

I know how easy it is to react aggressively or angrily in the face of "unfair criticism", or failure to get credit where it is due, or the territorial demands of other agencies or organisations. I understand the psychology of constant negative feedback and its effects. Nevertheless, I see in myself and in many around me, a growing incapacity to react in a cool and friendly way to these pressures. This is unsatisfactory. As managers we have two important responsibilities:

- (i) To remind ourselves and our staff of the correct response to provocation - ie, stay cool, try to focus on the problem, not the people, keep your sense of humour and proportion, try to be positive, but never attack or try to destroy.

(ii) To support each other. Like "Alcoholics Anonymous", we need "stress anonymous." The message is - help each other. Write notes, make visits or phone calls. This internal support system is a crucial part of our Department.

3. Thirdly, I remind you again that we will never expand our new regions, or build up our key technical branches without a reallocation of resources from the well-endowed. And we will only do this if managers take a wide view. As I have said before to you: it's easy to be possessive and parochial. Each of us thinks ours is the most important part of CALM. It takes courage to give up resources. By giving up you are automatically saddling yourself with the task of instituting change in your own area, or of having to make tough decisions on priorities.

In the last year we have made some tremendous progress - eg,

- 3 new staff in the Kimberley
- 2 in the Pilbara (+ 4 new rangers)
- 1 about to start in each of Kalgoorlie and Geraldton
- 1 commenced in Wheatbelt
- 2 in Recreation and Landscape

This has been achieved in the same year the Department took a 3% cut in staff overall.

I give great credit to the managers who have given up resources to make this possible. I am sure the managers who have been on the receiving end would endorse this.

4. CALM managers represent a magnificent resource of experience, intelligence and energy. I want to be able to tap this resource in the most efficient way possible. If there is one area I intend to focus on in the next 12 months it is using branch and regional managers to identify, rank and help solve important Departmental issues - ie, a continuation of the theme of this conference. You see problems or solutions from quite a different perspective to the Policy Directors or Syd or myself. I have also found you to be a wonderful source of novel ideas. The trick is to be able to capitalise on it. I will be trying to do a lot of listening in the next 12 months.

5. Finally, I want to touch on the question of new initiatives. I alert you to the fact that I do not favour new major projects by CALM for a while. There are far too many things we already have on our plate which we are not doing well enough. From the point of view of functions and responsibilities I regard CALM now as undilutable. This makes me appear "a knocker". However, my theme is the old one of "do what you do, do well" and I intend to promote this in the year ahead.

Need some method to judging priority to enable current ones to be ditched if new ones are better!

To conclude on a positive note. It's nice to think that other people (our peers) regard us as number one in Australia. But we are the best judges of how good we can be, as compared to how good we are. According to my vision for CALM we still have a fair way to go. I hope all you managers will also have a good set of goals in front of you.