

FAUNA PROTECTION IN AUSTRALIA.

In the "Sydney Morning Herald" of Saturday, March 26, 1960, attention was drawn by a staff correspondent to the perilous position of fauna protection enforcement in Australia. Commenting on an announcement that the field staff of the Fauna Protection Panel of New South Wales was to be increased by 100% (that is, to two officers instead of one) the correspondent said -

"Naturalists, and all who want to protect native birds and animals from commercial exploitation, regard this announcement as a rather poor joke. They had hoped that after years of urging and pleading the Government and the Public Service Board would have authorised a much bigger increase in the Panel's staff. However, the solitary new appointment is a small step in the right direction".

The appointment of a fourth member to the staff in New South Wales has brought it to parity with that of the fauna section of this Department, which, it might be remembered, was recently increased by the transfer of Inspector N. E. McLaughlan to the position of Fauna Warden.

The Sydney correspondent criticised the understaffing of fauna protection agencies in Australia. He pointed out that they were quite unable to prevent breaches of the conservation laws, to look after fauna reserves and to carry out their many other administrative duties, including education of the public.

Actually, we in Western Australia believe that the all important task of conservation agencies everywhere is to ensure that adequate areas are reserved and maintained. Sufficient habitat must be set aside and kept in its natural condition to ensure that representative portions of our fauna, particularly of primitive species and those which have evolved a high degree of adaptation, continue to exist. Unfortunately, all these agencies find themselves under pressure to expend a disproportionate amount of their effort on protection, which is really a negative approach to conservation. This pressure is brought about by what Dr. W.D.L. Ride, Director of the W.A. Museum, has aptly termed as "sentimental conservatism". He describes this as "an attitude which visualises with horror the death of a little furry body and does nothing to hinder the certain extinction of the entire species to which this same little body belongs".

It is to be regretted that the Herald's correspondent fell into this train of emotional thought. He saw inordinate value in the Commonwealth Government's ban on the export of koalas and concluded by referring to the past commercial exploitation of koalas which, in fact, ceased over thirty years ago. We need more positive thinking than this if we are to do the job of conservation properly. Unless sensibly and thoughtfully controlled, agricultural and industrial development will cause, far more quickly and far more completely than the mere keeping of fauna by pet-lovers ever could, the annihilation of entire sections of our remarkable natural heritage.