~ Chapter 7 ~

Key barriers to a revitalised visitor
education capacity

Chapter 7

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Where can you start ... Fragmentation and frustration comes to the mind first when trying to describe how we work together as an interpretive team – state-wide, regionally, in districts. Interp has no combined direction within QPWS – lots of people reacting to ridiculous timelines and doing the best they can in their individual way. Interp is seen as a token gesture by most – the lip service given by Ministers at election time never quite reaches ground level. We are totally undervalued, under-resourced and unmotivated much of the time. Innovation and proactive approaches are what we need, but we need to focus state-wide on certain projects/outcomes/messages (just a few choice ones), put everyone's energy into them, put money and time and people into it, make it work and then follow through for some years till it becomes established. Forget trying to do everything at once – we have too many half done things and some disillusioned interpreters as a result. [IN 8, ac]

7.0   Introduction

This chapter examines the key factors identified in chapters 4, 5 and 6 affecting the acceptance and use of visitor education as a park management tool to determine those factors most likely to have contributed to the Queensland Government's declaration that they were going to revitalise the visitor education capacity of the QPWS. This chapter also aims to identify the commonalities and differences of opinion held by interpreters and park managers, and in doing so, provide the basis for the final research objective detailed in the following chapter. Key issues investigated in this chapter are the factors affecting the development and implementation of park/district/regional visitor education strategies and activities state-wide and the affect that organisational structures and relationships have on the ability of interpreters to achieve QPWS visitor education outcomes.

This chapter has two sections. Section 7.1 provides a critique of the key issues identified in Chapters 4 and 5. Chapter 4 established the importance of visitor education in government policy from overarching legislation down through the EPA's Corporate Plan and QPWS's Master Plan to the Interpretation and Community Relation Unit's *I & E Strategy*. It also reviewed the range of supporting documents and resources available to guide interpreters' visitor education practice, and established that most interpreters were 'unaware of or had not used' these documents and

resources. Chapter 5 reviewed interpreters' and park managers' knowledge and use of their organisation's *I & E Strategy*, and established that many interpreters and nearly all park managers were 'unaware of or had not read' this document prior to this study. A lack of communication between interpreters and between interpreters and park managers appeared to be the cause of this lack of awareness. Chapter 5 also established that the structure of the *I & E Strategy* and some key elements lacked specificity, and therefore may have contributed to the reasons why there was limited use of this document among interpreters and park managers.

Section 7.2 reviews the key issues identified in Chapter 6. The opinions of interpreters are further explored to determine the cause and implications of the barriers affecting the ability of interpreters to deliver stated visitor education outcomes. Supervisor and work colleague support are also further examined to determine whether the sense of alienation is real or a result of a misunderstanding of work roles and capabilities. This investigation also aims to resolve the apparent difference of opinion between interpreters and park managers regarding the value non-interpretive park staff place on the use of visitor education as a park management tool.

7.1 Key barriers to a co-ordinated state-wide approach to the development and implementation of park/district/regional visitor education strategies and activities

7.1.1 Key barriers

Data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 suggest that the key barriers to a co-ordinated state-wide approach to the development and implementation of park/district/regional visitor education strategies and activities were:

▪ the lack of knowledge and/or use of the QPWS *I & E Strategy* among interpreters and park managers, and

▪ the inability of *I & E Strategy* to provide an effective framework that links the intentions of Government and the visitor education activities performed by interpreters and other park staff at an operational level (Table 7.1).

Table 7.1: Key barriers affecting a co-ordinated state-wide approach to the development and implementation of park/district/regional visitor education strategies and activities

Issue	Interpreters	Park Managers
Lack of knowledge, use and/or ownership of the QPWS *I & E Strategy*	• Only 22 percent of interpreters said they had an initial or continued involvement in the development of the *I & E Strategy* • 48 percent of interpreters said they were either 'unaware of' or 'aware but had not read' the *I & E Strategy* prior to this study.	• 93 percent of QPWS park managers said they were either unaware of or aware but had not read the *I & E Strategy* prior to this study.
Inability of *I & E Strategy* to link intentions of Government and the activities performed at an operational level	• 26 percent of interpreters said the *I & E Strategy* did not provide adequate direction for visitor education in QPWS. (Note: 21% of interpreters did not answer this question) • Approx 14 percent of interpreters identified problems with the structure of document and the vagueness of some key elements.	• Approx. 20 percent of park managers said they primarily used a range of other park management tools due to a primary focus on natural resource management.

A lack of knowledge and/or use of the *I & E Strategy* among interpreters and park managers means the intentions of Government detailed in policy documents such as the EPA Corporate Plan and the QPWS Master Plan are unlikely to be met. It also means the preferred state-wide direction the *I & E Strategy* espouses for visitor education is unlikely to take place across Queensland protected areas. The likely result being a fragmented approach to the planning and delivery of visitor education activities leading to what the literature describes as an 'ad hoc' and 'scattergun' approach to the organisation and conduct of visitor education activities in many parts of the State (QPWS 2001b).

The inability of *I & E Strategy* to link intentions of Government and the activities performed at an operational level may also cause a fragmented approach to the planning and delivery of visitor education activities across the State. The purpose of the *I & E Strategy* is to link the intentions of government with actions able to be implemented at an operational level. It provides the context and guidelines for the development of regional/district and park visitor education plans and visitor education activities. However, as Chapter 5 suggests, the relevance and/or emphasis placed on some *I & E Strategy* elements is questionable because they are neither indicators of achievement nor a measure of cost-effectiveness. As Nakamura and Smallwood

(1980) suggest, strategy elements need to be relevant in the context of achieving organisational objectives and viable in the context of resourcing.

The following two sections provide evidence to support the assumption that lack of knowledge and poor document structure has resulted in a fragmented approach to the planning and delivery of park/district/regional visitor education strategies and activities across the State, thus giving reason to why the Queensland Government wanted to revitalise the visitor education capacity of the QPWS.

7.1.2   The lack of knowledge, use and/or ownership of the QPWS I & E Strategy *among interpreters and park managers*

Despite the relative importance of the *I & E Strategy* to provide a framework for QPWS visitor education outcomes, 48 percent of interpreters (31% of regional/district interpreters, 43% of field/centre-based interpreters and all BFP interpreters) and nearly all park managers said they were either 'unaware of the document' or 'aware of the document, but had not read it' (prior to this study). The notion that field/centre-based interpreters were less likely than their regional/district counterparts to use the *I & E Strategy* as a means to co-ordinate the visitor education activities they plan and deliver on a state-wide basis means that a revitalised visitor education capacity was unlikely to occur. This lack of knowledge and/or use of the QPWS *I & E Strategy* among interpreters and park managers appeared to be the result of:

▪ Poor *I & E Strategy* communication and awareness; and a

▪ Lack of *I & E Strategy* ownership and use.

Case for poor *I & E Strategy* communication and awareness

Section 4.5.3 detailed that the Interpretation and Community Relations team had experienced high staff turnover in recent years, with several key positions lost or held vacant and that this situation had affected visitor education outcomes. Data presented in section 5.2.2 drew attention to the fact that nearly all BFP interpreters, 32 percent of field/centre-based interpreters and 6 percent of regional/district interpreters stated that they were unaware of the *I & E Strategy* (refer Figure 5.3), while section 5.5.2 detailed that 61 percent of rangers-in-charge, 48 percent of senior rangers and 56 percent of district managers also said they were unaware of this strategy (refer Figure 5.9). Nonetheless, sections 5.2.1 and 5.5.1 detailed that interpreters and park managers

predominantly found out about policy and policy changes through email and other electronic media with workshops, word of mouth and personal enquiries being the second most common way.

The efficiency of electronic communication and the informal networks and means that interpreters and park managers use to pass and share information implies that they should have been aware of the *I & E Strategy*. While interpretive staff turn-over may account for the reduced level of awareness and use of the *I & E Strategy* among this group of people, there appears to be a breakdown in the communication of the strategy to some interpreters and nearly all park managers. Sixteen of the nineteen requests I received[18] for a copy of the *I & E Strategy* came from field/centre-based interpreters and BFP interpreters. (Three requests were received from park managers). Comments made by field/centre-based interpreters, on the questionnaire and during telephone conversations, suggested communication and/or dissemination of policy (and resource information) did not always reach interpreters working in the field. For example:

> *Many of the documents listed are kept by Regional Interpretation Officers. Staff doing face-to-face public contact do not have access to these and/or little time available to read and digest them.* [IN 50, ac]

> *It would be useful to have these documents more available to our park.* [IN 43, ac]

Some field/centre-based interpreters also suggested that there was no co-ordinated communication of the *I & E Strategy* and its components, or guidance to its implementation for interpreters supposedly delivering it 'on-the-ground'. For example:

> *… there is no co-ordinated implementation or communication* (of the Strategy) *with the on-the-ground interpreters supposedly delivering the Strategy.* [IN 49, q8]

> *… without relevant guidance, training etc. for the ground force then the Strategy is only words on paper. In other words – it all sounds great in theory, let's hope it can be practised.* [IN 6, q8]

The lack of awareness of the *I & E Strategy* among park managers, however, is likely to be more complex and a result of current QPWS structure that has interpreters and

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18 These requests were received during the survey of interpreters and park managers. Anecdotal evidence suggests other interpreters and park managers obtained a copy of the I & E Strategy through organisational channels.

park managers in separate management units (refer Figure 4.5) than for reasons presented here. It is complicated by the fact that off-park environmental education activities (extension) and on-park visitor education activities (interpretation and education) are separate (P. Harmon-Price, pers comm. 11 January 2002), and that this division has created a false impression that visitor education is separate to park management. For example:

> *…… I think there is a very traditional mindset to interpretation that separates it from management. Almost every management task has a communication/education role integral to the completion (or ongoing) of the task.* [PM 34, ac]

As a consequence, this may have led to a sense of "aloofness" among some park managers about interpreters because interpreters were seen as another level of management. For example:

> *Interp staff should not be seen to be another level of management that can direct park staff to drop all other tasks because of some programme that is being run on the park. Park staff require support not instruction and should be regularly conducting on-park interp activities themselves.* [PM 38, ac]

Nonetheless this study suggests that the communication and promotion of the *I & E Strategy* among interpreters and park managers, especially among new staff and staff filling temporary positions, was necessary if awareness and use of the document was to be achieved.   For example:

> … [The] *interp and education strategy required more promotion to on-field interpreters and to District Managers and other middle management. There should be more collaboration with Public Affairs to ensure on-park initiatives and programmes are promoted to current and potential users.* [IN 40, ac]

Case for a lack of *I & E Strategy* ownership and use

While poor communication of the *I & E Strategy* and its contents among interpreters may have contributed to the lack of awareness of this document among interpreters, data presented in section 5.1 also suggests there was a lack of ownership of this document among some interpreters. For example:

> … *I don't feel that it has been adopted by a lot of people. I don't sense much ownership. Whether people follow it or not is a mystery to be solved.* [IN 57, q8]

While only a quarter of interpreters surveyed claimed some ownership of the *I & E Strategy* through an involvement in helping to develop it, section 5.4.3 detailed that a similar percentage of interpreters held negative feelings towards the strategy. The negative feelings held by this group of interpreters worked against the intent of the document and ultimately the goals of the Interpretation and Community Relations team. For example:

> *It is too narrow. We need to address the communication needs of QPWS state-wide, both on and off park. This document does not address fundamental issues – get the basics right first, then concern yourself with the 'window dressing'.*
>
> *Basics: 1. All QPWS staff adequately skilled in communication and understanding our core business. 2. Basic signage, VIS etc.* [IN 17, q8]
>
> [The 2000–2002 *I & E Strategy*] *is a lot of 'words' written by government appointees to display a political leaning or direction and has little or no relevance or impact on delivery of interpretation at the ground level other than to soak up resources.* [IN 51, q8]

This negativity extended to the point where at least one interpreter preferred to 'do their own thing'. For example:

> *Didn't want to be involved* [in 1999 Interpretation Workshop where the *I & E Strategy* document was developed]. *…. My achievements have been due to my flexibility, informality, careful approach to volunteers and community and experience … Involved in interp for 21 years – practical not theoretical although I have written a lot …. not into verbosity … seen money wasted on unimportant things …. also training is a waste of limited resources when basics are missing (eg. 8 years an interp officer without a vehicle).* [IN 15, q8]

However, this person did admit that they were:

> *… hindered by lack of understanding from Dept and paper exercises.* [IN 15, q8]

A lack of strategy ownership, a scepticism for policies that had no perceived bearing on what interpreters did and an interpreter preference to 'do their own thing' most likely created a group culture that affected the Interpretation and Community Relations team's ability to achieve their stated goals. One interpreter identified the problem as being the '*lack of cohesive interp team*' [IN 19, ac]. If the goals of the *I & E Strategy* were to be achieved, a collegiate approach to visitor education planning and delivery was required, not a team of individuals. However, this was unlikely as all interpreters were provided with the opportunity to participate in the development of the *I & E*

Strategy (QPWS 1999b), thus creating a group culture which Scott and Harker (2002) view as being dysfunctional.

7.1.3 Inability of I & E Strategy *to provide an effective framework that links the intentions of Government and the visitor education activities performed by interpreters and other park staff at an operational level*

Section 5.4.3 detailed that most interpreters concurred that the *I & E Strategy* provided a framework for the visitor education activities they performed on behalf of the QPWS. However, 26 percent of interpreters (31% of regional/district interpreters and 32% of field/centre-based interpreters) said that the *I & E Strategy* lacked structure and direction, and used generalised statements that were not achievable in light of existing resourcing arrangements. For example:

> *It does provide some direction. But generally it makes large, generalised statements which seem to not provide any new insights into anything. I am also concerned that some of the outcomes may not be realistic or achievable given the current lack of resourcing/commitment to interp by QPWS. We need less large, 'flowery' statements/key outcomes and more specific, innovative strategies, back up by all levels of QPWS and by real resourcing.* [IN 11, q8]

> *It's an umbrella document. Most of the listed strategies are big picture issues. For staff in parks to contribute we need to wait for large programmes to be developed and disseminated. For many strategies, park staff could not implement because they're not relevant.* [IN 60, q8]

However, the purpose of the *I & E Strategy* was to link the intentions of government with actions able to be implemented at an operational level. It should have provided the context and guidelines for transcribing the government's policy initiatives as they related to visitor education (at the time) and provided the context for decision-making, planning and prioritisation of resources, including the setting of priorities, provision of essential benchmarks (DNRE 1999; Parkin 2003a). It should have also described the means for analysing and evaluating the effectiveness of the organisation's visitor education initiatives. Consequently, there was doubt among some interpreters as to the ability of the *I & E Strategy* to provide an effective framework that linked the intentions of Government and the visitor education activities performed by them and other park staff at an operational level. Areas of major concern appeared to be the:

▪ Inability to achieve priority actions and projects

▪ Questionable Annual Targets and Performance Measures; and

- Broad range of key messages for visitor education.

Inability to achieve priority actions and projects

The *I & E Strategy* identified a range of priority actions and projects designed to achieve the key outcomes. However, the extent of the criticisms about the lack of funding and availability of resources to deliver visitor education services meant the successful achievement of these key outcomes was unlikely. (Interpreter and Park Manager opinions on the success of key outcomes also detailed a less than '*very successful'* outcome – refer sections 5.4.1 and 5.5.3 respectively). To be successful, priority actions and projects need to reflect the realities of organisational funding for visitor education. While '*being more innovative with available resources*' and '*doing more with less*' are options, these strategies do not compensate increased workloads and unrealistic targets. For example:

> *… planning* [for] *interp and education outcomes needs to reflect budget constraints and priorities regional focuses and district needs. A framework yes but not direction.* [IN 53, q8]

Questionable Annual Targets and Performance Measures

The setting of annual targets provided a measure by which the effectiveness of Interpretation and Community Relations team visitor education efforts could be appraised. They could also be used to determine the current level of community understanding about parks and wildlife initiatives and community support for nature conservation (QPWS 2000). Annual targets were intrinsically linked to the performance measures detailed in the *I & E Strategy* and were a requirement of the EPA's 'managing for outcomes' budgeting process (Pamela Harmon-Price, pers comm. 27 August 2002). But, as many interpreters pointed out, it was not quantity that counted but quality. This was because visitor education was 'an educational activity that aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information' (Tilden 1977, p8). However, the process of attitude change was so complex and multi-faceted that one interpretive contact, irrespective of the quality, is possibly insignificant, but certainly cumulative and repeated contacts may have the desired effect of changing attitudes (Bill Carter, pers comm. 15 January 2002). The assumption here is that the argument of number versus quality may lean towards quantity.

Quantity as a product means that the more people contacted, the likely greater community effect (Bill Carter pers comm. 15 January 2002). Thus, the effectiveness of an interpretive contact may be determined by mathematical formulae. This is because mathematical formulae can reduce the likelihood of subjectivity often attached to qualitative evaluations. However, while it is generally accepted that numerical standards measure the amount of contact, the issue was – which is better, "brief contact with a lot of people (quantity), or extended contact with a few (quality)?" (Bill Carter pers comm. 15 January 2002). If people are not contacted, no matter how poorly, there can be no effect. This is where other media forms come in. For example: mass media for promoting expectations, signage for orientation, personal services for on-site contact and mementoes for reinforcement (see Carter & Grimwade 1999). But as many interpreters pointed out, quantity should not be a substitute for quality. Annual targets should reflect *I & E Strategy* key outcomes and the vision of the Interpretation and Community Relations team.

Performance measures, on the other hand, allow the effectiveness of visitor education materials and activities to be measured against identifiable points of reference, and, as Pamela Harmon-Price (pers comm. 27 August 2002) informed, were a prerequisite part of QPWS business planning processes because performance equalled funding. In most instances there was a direct link between individual *I & E Strategy* outcomes and their corresponding performance measures, however there were some exceptions: *Producing or updating of brochures*, *new topics covered in information media* and *availability of information to answer public enquiries* did not necessarily indicate greater support for nature conservation – they indicated production targets to be met. For example:

> *As much as we need to have targets and measure things quantitatively for funding etc., I feel there needs to be more qualitative measures for best practice (eg. 30,000 public contact hours. Were they quality interp? Did people get the message?)* [IN 57, q4]

> *Depends on the target (eg. Just because we produce more info brochures up to date and on time, does not mean that our outcome has been achieved). (eg. Putting more staff on [Public Contact] does not mean people [visitors] are having a more enjoyable, low impact visit).* [IN 49, q4]

> *These targets are useful indicators of interpretive activity but they do not take into account quality or effectiveness. Really need to survey the community to determine effectiveness.* [IN 8, q4]

One interpreter made the point that visitor education was hard to measure, as outcomes did not fit the business planning requirements of a financial year. In some cases, it may take many years for the effects of a visitor education programme to be realised. These sentiments are also reflected in the literature (Tilden 1977; Mackintosh 1986; Worboys, Lockwood & De Lacy 2001). In addition, visitor education outcomes are often attitudinal or behavioural; for example, developing understanding, providing inspiration, promoting awareness and establishing behavioural norms. Another interpreter questioned the ability of the organisation to measure these aspects of visitor education in terms of monetary or mathematical values. For example:

> *Unfortunately for us, interp and education is one of those things that is very hard to 'measure'. Outcomes are more long term than a financial year. It may be any number of years for the effects to be felt. Outcomes are also attitudinal, related to understanding, inspirational, awareness. How are these measured? Can a dollar value or a mathematical value be placed on that? I think not. …* [IN 11, q4]

Performance measures must be clearly defined and measurable (DNRE 1999). They must also have clear links to organisational goals and targets. They can be broad (such as the increase in visitor satisfaction measured by surveys), or specific (such as the currency of park and wildlife brochures), but they must relate to the outcome being measured. As one respondent noted:

> *Some of the annual targets don't mean anything or their value is over/under estimated. Why that figure? How is it measured? Is it relative or meaningful? Why should we aim for that? (eg. 1% for community participation in nature conservation programmes, seems ridiculous – 1% of what and why so low for an agency such as ours).* [IN 28, q4]

Without clearly defined and linked performance measures the contribution that visitor education was making to the main areas of interest to the organisation remains largely unknown. Determining the cost-effectiveness of particular visitor education activities or programmes was also questionable (DNRE 1999).

Too many 'key messages' to establish consistency in organisational communication
Section 5.3.3 detailed that most interpreters believed that the key messages outlined in the *I & E Strategy* defined the scope of the Interpretation and Community Relations team's core business, and provided a logical, coherent framework for the visitor education activities they performed. They also believed that these key messages should be incorporated into all visitor education activities even though they said the key

messages should reflect a state-wide approach to nature conservation rather than being related to theme areas. A total of 44 interpretation key messages were listed. However, not all key messages were suited to all visitor education activities performed by interpreters. For example, key messages about marine parks would be out of place in a presentation or materials being developed for a park west of the Great Dividing Range in central or far west Queensland.

The purpose of the *I & E Strategy* was to provide a framework for the visitor education activities interpreters performed on behalf of the QPWS. It should have identified target audiences and objectives that related to organisational goals (DNRE 1999). Therefore, five or six well-defined messages (or themes) that reflected state-wide priorities espoused by the *I & E Strategy* would have allowed the range of key messages presented to be used as messages or points to address individual park/district/regional interpretive needs (Table 7.2). Having five or six well-defined subject/organisational priority areas on which the key messages were based would have established consistency in communication of these thematic areas as part of a state-wide direction. Consequently, interpreters may have found that there were actually too many key messages listed in the *I & E Strategy* for them to plan, develop and implement visitor education materials for their park/district/region within a state-wide framework.

Table 7.2: Suggested key message subject areas/themes

- Conservation of nature
- Awareness and appreciation of cultural heritage
- Enjoyable park visits and wildlife encounters
- Minimising people's impact on the environment
- Role of agency in management of protected areas and wildlife.

7.1.4 *Implications of key barriers to a co-ordinated state-wide approach to the development and implementation of park/district/regional visitor education strategies and activities for a revitalised QPWS visitor education capacity*

Despite the efficiency of electronic communication and the ability of interpreters and park managers to network with peers and work colleagues during work time, and at workshops and other training opportunities, the awareness and subsequent use of the *I*

& E Strategy by interpreters and park managers was lacking. As a result, the lack of communication and promotion of the *I & E Strategy* among interpreters and park managers had caused the Strategy to be largely ineffective in its role as a strategic document. Limited awareness and use of the *I & E Strategy* among interpreters and park managers also meant the intentions of Government and the state-wide direction for visitor education the Strategy espouses were largely unmet.

Data interpretation also suggested that the current structure of the *I & E Strategy* did not adequately provide the 'framework' to guide the development and implementation of park/district/regional interpretive strategies and actions. Some actions and priorities were unachievable because of resourcing deficiencies while some annual targets were neither indicators of achievement nor a measure of cost-effectiveness. In addition, some performance measures were considered irrelevant because they did not measure the achievement of particular organisational objectives. The listing of a broad range of key messages, although useful, may have also worked against the need for interpreters to develop key interpretive messages for their park, district or region within a logical, coherent state-wide visitor education framework that supported organisational goals, and as a result has caused the credibility of the *I & E Strategy* among some interpreters to be questioned. The lack of clear directives and measurable criteria meant the *I & E Strategy* was largely ineffective in its ability to establish an effective framework for the conversion of government intentions into organisational outputs.

The lack of awareness of the *I & E Strategy* among interpreters and park managers and the structural failings of the document were issues that needed to be addressed if the Queensland Government's vision of a revitalised QPWS visitor education capacity was to be achieved. Failure to do so resulted in a continuation of the fragmented 'ad hoc' and 'scattergun' approach to the organisation and conduct of visitor education activities in many parts of the State reported in literature.

7.2 Key barriers affecting interpreters' ability to deliver visitor education outcomes

7.2.1 Key barriers

Data presented in Chapter 6 suggested that the key barriers affecting interpreters' ability to deliver visitor education outcomes were:

- barriers such as lack of funding, limited resourcing, high workloads and short project time frames, and a lack of support provided by their supervisors and/or work colleagues to the visitor education work they performed

- a negative organisational culture that did not accept the role and value of visitor education as a park management tool (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3: Key barriers affecting interpreters' ability to deliver visitor education outcomes

Issue	Interpreters	Park Managers
Barriers to the role and value of visitor education	• *'Poor resourcing and a lack of funding'* was the most significant barrier to the visitor education work interpreters performed. - 86 percent of interpreters agreed that more staff and better resourcing were required to achieve QPWS visitor education outcomes. • In general, interpreters were of the opinion that lack of supervisor and/or work colleague support acted as a barrier to the visitor education work they performed: - 52 percent of interpreters said they should primarily be involved in duties such as interpretation and public contact rather than administration and park maintenance.	• 13 percent of park managers said there was a lack of funding and/or resourcing to deliver worthwhile visitor education activities. – visitor education was an effective management tool, but due to limitations of staff, time and money, this tool was severely underused – priority was given to 'hands-on' work. • 10 percent of park managers believed that interpreters should not be seen as another level of management, they should be involved in park management just as park rangers should be involved in visitor education
A negative organisational culture that did not accept the role and value of visitor education as a park management tool	• 57 percent of interpreters said the culture of the QPWS provided a barrier to the acceptance of visitor education as a park management tool. • 64 percent of interpreters said the culture of QPWS did not recognise the value of interpreters to engage community support for nature conservation.	• 12 percent of QPWS park managers acknowledged that current QPWS culture/management regime did not value visitor education.

Visitor education has many roles in a protected area agency. It is one of the major ways that protected area staff interact with park visitors to promote the agency and its services, enrich a visitor's experience, encourage appropriate behaviour and promote appropriate conservation values (Sharp 1982; Beckmann 1991; Beaumont 1999; Worboys, Lockwood & De Lacy 2001). Most protected area agencies also use visitor education to communicate with its visitors about a variety of management issues, including natural and cultural resource protection (Moscardo 1999). Barriers such as

lack of funding, limited resourcing, high workloads and short project time frames, and a lack of support provided by their supervisors and/or work colleagues affect the role and value of visitor education in an organisation that is mandated to conserve Queensland's native flora and fauna and protect biological diversity.

The belief among interpreters and park managers that a negative organisational culture existed towards the acceptance and use visitor education also affected the role and value of visitor education as a park management tool. As the literature review revealed, organisational culture is both an accomplishment and a constraint. Passfield (1989) and Parker (2000) both note, it is an accomplishment when it shapes the identity the organisation's members and the achievements made, but a constraint when individuals and groups within the organisation display resistance towards established norms and processes.

The following two sections further analyse the key barriers identified in Chapter 6 to provide evidence that specific barriers affected the ability of the Interpretation and Community Relations team's capability to achieve stated visitor education outcomes. Thus also contributing to the reasons why the Queensland Government wanted to revitalise the visitor education capacity of the QPWS.

7.2.2   Barriers to the role and value of visitor education

The QPWS *Interpretation and Community Education Situation Report 1999–2001* detailed that interpreters had achieved worthwhile outcomes during 1999–2001 and had their achievements acknowledged in two major industry reports (2001:1). These were the *ANZECC Best Practice in Park Interpretation and Education Study* (DNRE 1999) that recognised examples of interpretation 'Best Practice' being achieved, and *Innovation in Interpretation* (Qld Tourism 2000) that showcased five QPWS interpretive case studies that contributed to the creation of successful tourism products from a total of 30 case studies taken from across Australia. The *Situation Report* also detailed that the expected revitalisation of interpretation within the QPWS was yet to be realised: financially and institutionally. Inadequate resourcing, high workloads and a negative organisational culture were the main reasons cited why the planned revitalisation had not occurred (QPWS 2001b).

In the two years prior to this study, the Interpretation and Community Relations team experienced high staff turnover and low budgets with many interpreters believing that funding shortfalls had directly resulted in a number of key positions being lost, or remaining vacant (QPWS 2001b), thus reducing their capacity to implement the government's community nature conservation agenda and deliver on stated visitor education outcomes. The lack of support provided by supervisors and/or work colleagues was another issue identified in the data affectively reducing the achievements of interpreters and the work they performed. The barriers that were most commonly cited were the:

- Lack of funding and resourcing for visitor education

- Reduced capacity to deliver QPWS's community nature conservation agenda

- Lack of support provided by supervisors and/or work colleagues

Lack of funding and resourcing for visitor education

Lack of funding and resourcing for visitor education were common criticisms observed in the data. MacIntosh (1986) and Worboys, Lockwood and De Lacy (2001) make similar observations in the literature. While interpreters mostly cited the need for a dedicated budget to achieve visitor education outcomes, park managers largely criticised the lack of funding to resource visitor education in a meaningful and equitable way. For example:

> *Interpretation needs to have a budget at all levels. I have not had a budget for years and even when I did, money was used for other areas of park management. [IN 13, ac]*

> *Attempts are made where possible, but … in our inherent poverty cycle, I & E is usually a wishful daydream. <u>No funding</u>. [PM 93, q6]*

> *Nil resources means nil delivery. [PM 106, q6]*

The lack of funding and resources for visitor education meant that many park managers considered visitor education a luxury. Priority was given to more tangible park management outcomes. Consequently, visitor education was only used if funding and resources were available. For example:

> *I & E is a valuable tool but often it is regarded as a luxury and the appropriate amount of funding is not made available to use this tool effectively. [PM 49, ac]*

> *Interp is used as much as practical, subject to the limitations of staff, time and $$. Priority given to getting hands-on done first, but utilising interp opportunities as they arise.* [PM 54, q6]

Some park managers levelled their criticism for the lack of funding and resourcing at the policies of government, inferring that economics and the re-election of politicians were more important than the protection of natural resources. For example:

> *… An allocation of funds should be specified to I & E as base funding. … It is also embarrassing to present the park through I & E when certain facilities are under par.* [PM 143, ac]

> *No funding and no commitment at government level. Government would not want parks better resourced to protect natural resources or provide better I & E to better inform a public of gross neglect. Nature conservation is an antithesis of short-term economics and re-election of politicians.* [PM 93, ac]

> *The lack of/reduction of resourcing for park-based interp is a bloody disgrace. This function was better resourced and more effective 15 years ago! More time is spent talking about this at high levels and nothing is done to get things happening.* [PM 32, ac]

Mackintosh (1986) suggests that visitor education was always vulnerable during budget crunches, because de-emphasis in interpretation and education services did not have the striking effect upon visitors that closing a walking track, lookout or campground had. The realities of government funding and the organisational distribution of those funds means that the funding and resourcing of visitor education will always be issues that are continually raised by interpreters and park managers. A more positive solution may be the promotion of the value of visitor education to assist park management. For example:

> *Instead of complaining about how poorly resourced interp is in* [the] *QPWS, need to promote its valuable role.* [IN 40, ac]

Reduced capacity to deliver QPWS's community nature conservation agenda

Parkin (2003a) suggests that interpreters have the experience and skills to deliver the QPWS's community nature conservation agenda. However, their identification of high workloads and short project time frames as the second most significant barrier to the work they performed suggested the capacity of the Interpretation and Community Relations team to achieve stated outcomes was lacking.

QPWS interpretive staffing when measured against other ANZECC agencies was under-represented as a percentage of total staff (Table 7.4). This may have been due to the fact that QPWS interpretive staffing numbers had changed little since 1995 (QPWS 2001b) (Table 7.5). In addition, the *1999–2001 Interpretation and Community Education Situation Report* (QPWS 2001b) detailed that the Interpretation and Community Relations team had experienced high staff turnover and low budgets in the two years prior to this study and that funding shortfalls had directly resulted in a number of key positions being lost, or remaining vacant. Interpretive staff (including Graphic Artists) numbered 51 (or 46.1 FTEs) plus 8 vacant positions (at the time of the survey). This was approximately 4.8% of the total QPWS workforce[19] (P. Harmon-Price pers comm. 11 January 2002).

Table 7.4: Interpretive staffing in ANZECC agencies
(source: adapted from ANZECC 1999:13)

ANZECC Agency	Total number of staff	Full time IE staff	Part time IE staff	IE staff as % of total staff
NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service	1400	5	115	8.6
New Zealand Depart. of Conservation	1350	80	40	8.9
WA Conservation and Land Management	1300	14	10	1.8
Parks Victoria	900	nr	nr	??
Qld Parks and Wildlife Service	480	36	2	7.9
SA Dept Environment and Heritage	300	nr	nr	??
NT Parks and Wildlife Commission	166	15	2	10.2
ACT Dept Urban Services	93	1	34	37.6
Environment Australia (Kakadu NP only)	68	3	nr	4.4

IE = Interpretation and Education
nr = no response

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19 Total workforce in 2002 was estimated to be 1100 individuals. This included staff gained during the 1999 government restructuring of agencies involved in environmental protection.

Table 7.5: QPWS Interpretive staffing 1995–2001 (FTEs)
(source: adapted from QPWS 2001b, p11)

Location	1995/96	1998/99	2000/01
Southern Region	28.2	27.2	25.3
Central Region	0.5	2.5	3.4
Northern Region	15.0	11.5	15.3
Central Office	2.0	2.0	5.0
Totals	45.7	41.2	49

FTEs = Full Time Equivalents

The Southern Region had the greatest number of staff with interpretive roles (25.3 FTEs). This was to service the needs of Queenslanders living in this region. However, more than half of the Southern Region's 'interpretive' staff worked in the Great Sandy District (QPWS 2001b). Great Sandy National Park had eight public contact ranger positions based at major centres throughout the district, while popular national parks such as Lamington and Springbrook did not have any interpretive staff. The remaining interpreters were based at Brisbane Forest Park (5) and on Moreton Island (1).

Fourteen interpretive staff (including three public enquiries staff) delivered information and education services across the Northern Region. Eight were based in Cairns, three in Townsville and the remaining three at Cardwell, Innisfail and Lake Eacham (QPWS 2001b). The Central Region had the lowest interpretive staffing of any region (5.5 FTEs). While it was also the smallest region, it did have a number of major parks including Blackdown Tableland and Eungella National Parks and a collection of island parks in the Whitsundays area that attracted large numbers of visitors.

Very few interpreters spent all of their time doing interpretation or public contact. Many field/centre-based interpreters were also involved in park management activities such as patrols, permitting, resource management and maintenance while many regional/district interpreters had additional work duties such as administration, budgeting, human resource and project management responsibilities (refer Table 6.1).

Staff turnover and unfilled positions also created a circumstance that affected interpreters' capacity to meet the demands of park staff and district managers for interpretive materials.

To effectively drive the Queensland Government's community nature conservation agenda, interpretive staffing should match park, district and regional demands for interpretive services (Appendix 6). However, a shortfall in interpretive staffing created a circumstance where many interpreters found themselves overworked and/or required to undertake unpaid extra working hours to meet demands, caused projects to have shortened timeframes, or caused interpretive duties to become more reactive (QPWS 2001b). (Refer Section 6.2 for discussion of the factors affecting the delivery of visitor education activities by QPWS interpreters). Consequently, the Interpretation and Community Relations team's vision of greater community engagement and improved interpretation and community education services by the QPWS was largely unachievable.

Lack of support provided by supervisors and/or work colleagues
In general, Section 6.1.2 detailed that the level of support that interpreters received from supervisors and non-interpretive work colleagues ranged from *no support; generally left alone to do the best job possible with available resources; sometimes questions value of the work I do*, to *very supportive; provides guidance and resources when required*. While the level of support varied between groups and within groups, it is clear that a percentage of interpreters felt that they, and the work they do, were undervalued. (As a group, only BFP interpreters enjoyed a high level of support from supervisors and non-interpretive work colleagues). This feeling of undervaluing was linked to claims of disillusionment among interpreters (QPWS 2001a; QPWS 2001b). Johnson and Johnson (1994) note that undervaluing and disillusionment negatively affect a person's self-esteem and psychological health causing states of depression, anxiety, anger, tension within work groups and a decrease in work productivity.

One interpreter suggested that they were *not so much 'undervalued', but 'not understood'* [IN 23, q23]. Their reasoning was that non-interpretive staff did not understand the technical processes involved in developing effective visitor education programmes and activities, therefore they did not have an appreciation of the scale of what they were asking interpreters to do. As many visitor education programmes were reactive, proper planning and the delivery of outcomes often missed their full

potential/impact. This may have seemed to both the public and work colleagues as inefficient, which may have caused conflict – *making the job harder, causing further inefficiencies and disheartenment amongst interpretive staff* [IN 58, ac].

In contrast, one interpreter felt that the undervaluing was task dependent – staff were appreciative if the work was for them, and if not, they did not see the results and hence the benefit of the work [IN 54, q23]. Along the same lines, another interpreter suggested they

> *…received great and much valued support from sub-district park staff, [but]*
> *very little to mostly none from supervisors and district office staff. Without*
> *the parks, I would have had a nervous breakdown by now!* [IN 28, q23]

The task-dependent sense of undervaluing was also supported by the interpretation of park manager data. Many park managers supported interpreters and the use of visitor education on its own and in concert with other park management tools to address park management issues. They saw the role of interpreters and the work they perform as an integral component of park management. For example:

> *I & E should be an integral part of the day-to-day management of a*
> *protected area* [PM 24, q6]

> *It is never one or the other. It is essential to provide a mix of management*
> *tools which is appropriate for the*
> *situation/circumstance/messages/objectives* [PM 146, q23]

> *I & E are significant tools but lack effectiveness in isolation. I & E needs to*
> *be used in concert with other tools. Both systems need to mutually support*
> *one another* [PM 100, q23]

However, it is also clear that some park managers questioned the role of interpreters and the narrow focus they had in the management of protected areas. They reasoned that visitor education should be a work duty of all operational staff. For example:

> *… I & E staff are also "off with the fairies" and simply do not understand park*
> *management* [PM 96, q23] *…. until such time as practical people are*
> *employed in I & E it will continue to be left on the shelf. It should be a*
> *valuable tool with staff on every major park delivering a sound programme.*
> [PM 96, ac]

> *It is good to have specialised interpretive staff although these should still do*
> *30% general duties to stay in touch with visitors/management on park. Don't*

> *underestimate the wealth of knowledge and expertise in 'general' rangers.*
> [PM 22, ac]

> *A few exclusive interp people seem to always get updates training (ie.*
> *annual training). There are many other staff in operations and at lower levels*
> *(ie. OO3, OO4) who would like some structured training so that they can be*
> *more involved but it is rarely forthcoming.* [PM 7, ac]

In order to work together effectively interpreters and park managers must establish mutual trust. This can be achieved through working co-operatively with each other (Johnson & Johnson 1994).

7.2.3 Evidence of a negative organisational culture

The *1999–2001 Interpretation and Community Education Situation Report* drew attention to the fact that interpreters achieved worthwhile outcomes under difficult circumstances during 1999–2001, but conceded that the planned revitalisation of interpretation did not happen, partly due to an organisational culture that did not value the role of interpreters in engaging community support for nature conservation (QPWS 2001b, p1). This was in spite of the fact that visitor education services were recognised as core business in the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (EPA 1999).

The literature review established that the mandate of an organisation, the various management units and the characteristics of individuals within an organisation such as the QPWS, interact to produce a dynamic mix of understandings and management actions that underpin its approach to business and the implementation of organisational goals. As a result, policy and the shared decision-making processes of different entities will influence the location of visitor education within the QPWS. Therefore, this circumstance is likely to affect the role and value of visitor education in the QPWS structurally and the acceptance and use of visitor education as a park management tool operationally. The main issue that arises here is the

▪ Reality of a negative organisational culture towards visitor education.

Reality of a negative organisational culture

Sections 6.1.3 and 6.2.5 outlined interpreters' and park managers' claims that a negative organisational culture towards the acceptance and use of visitor education as a park management tool existed. In addition, many 'Interpretation and Community Relations team' internal documents openly criticise the affect that a negative organisational culture was having on interpreters' morale, and their ability to achieve nature conservation outcomes (QPWS 2001a; QPWS 2001b). These documents also stated that a "shift in the corporate culture which makes interpreters feel their hard work is appreciated is desirable" (QPWS 2001b, p4) and that the "Service must embrace a corporate culture which recognises that education is vital to engage community support for nature conservation" (QPWS 2001b, p3).

Data interpretation also suggested that there was concern among interpreters and park managers that existing corporate structure and management perpetuates the sense of a negative organisational culture through the fragmentation of entities involved in communication, extension and visitor education into separate organisational units. For example:

> *Existing Agency culture does not embrace interp. For this to change will require major cultural and industrial change to QPWS. An interp culture must be implemented from the top down in QPWS. Isolated efforts from individual staff in QPWS are lost in mediocrity.* [PM 71, ac]

> *We need a corporate shake up of communication and client services to provide professional public contact on- and off-park across the agency – not interp by itself.*
>
> *Current problems are not strategic …* [Problems are] *perpetuated by current structure where communication and public contact are fragmented across a number of units which appear* <u>not</u> *to communicate with each other at Central Office level. Time for a new vision. Interp by itself can't solve our entrenched corporate and cultural problems.* [IN 17, ac]

Organisational culture is the result of organisational practices, structurally and socially (Jans & Frazer-Jans 1991). Evidence of a negative organisational culture lies in the understanding of the policies and decision-making processes that influence the location of visitor education within the organisation. It is also necessary to have an understanding of the policies and decision-making processes that guide the delivery of visitor education services at an operational level. While the reality of a negative organisational culture is more likely to be the perceptual construct of a group that identifies with the successes and failures of the group, organisational structure

influences culture through the identification and support of particular management entities within the organisation (Ashforth & Mael 1989). It is clear that the social identity that interpreters and park managers share in relation to the use of visitor education is affected by the structure, policies and resourcing priorities of the organisation.

7.2.4 Implications of key issues affecting interpreters' ability to deliver visitor education outcomes for a revitalised QPWS visitor education capacity

Resourcing, funding and high workloads were factors that affected the ability of interpreters to work efficiently and produce quality outcomes and/or products. However, these issues are resolvable. For example, better resourcing, more funding, an increase in staffing, and the prioritising of work will reduce these factors as barriers to the work that interpreters perform. Not so easily resolvable are the feeling of undervaluing among some interpreters, and identification by interpreters and some park managers of an organisational culture that does not support or accept the role and value of visitor education as a park management tool.

The feeling of undervaluing among interpreters was not widespread, with less than 25 percent of interpreters identifying a sense of undervaluing. However, it appears to be multi-dimensional. Factors such as the lack of funding and resources provided, a lack of awareness among supervisors and non-interpretive work colleagues of what interpreters do and/or the processes involved to plan, develop and deliver visitor education outcomes, excessive workloads, short timeframes and the reactive nature of some visitor education tasks, create situations that may disempower interpreters and affect the value and use of visitor education as a park management tool.

Interpreters and park managers both believed the structure and policy decisions of the QPWS contributed to an organisational culture that negatively affected the acceptance and use of visitor education as a park management tool. Organisational emphasis and appropriate resourcing were central to the opinions of both groups. Without a change in organisational structure and resourcing arrangements for visitor education, interpreters and park managers will continue believing that a negative organisational culture exists.

A well-resourced and supportive work environment is necessary to achieve stated nature conservation outcomes (QPWS 2001b). Interpreters and park managers also

consider the promotion of visitor education within the QPWS a priority to achieve recognition and acceptance. However, any promotion must be done in a manner that does not isolate it further in the minds of those who direct the functions and outcomes of the organisation. This may require interpreters and park managers to work collaboratively together and with others as a means of reinforcing the role and value of visitor education as a park management tool.

Although an organisation's culture is composed of relatively stable characteristics that tend to imply permanence, organisations do change over time (Maund 1999). Change may be a result of external factors such as government policy, economic viability or community expectations, or through internal factors such as the exposure to new thoughts or ideas, or staff succession by those with different values and perspectives. However, the customs and norms of a long-established institution such as the public service change slowly (Corbett 1992), while cultural resistance (to accept and/or implement change) will impede organisational change and the achievement of stated goals (Passfield 1989, Parker 2000). Consequently, a more complete understanding of the culture of the QPWS is required to appreciate the full impact that this factor has on the acceptance of visitor education activities to engage community support for nature conservation and the State's park system. This is because QPWS culture cannot be neatly defined (Ross 2001). It is not homogeneous in nature. The mandate of the organisation, the various groups within QPWS and the characteristics of individuals interact to produce a dynamic mix of understandings and identities that circulate within the QPWS structure.

7.3   Summary

This chapter has provided the critique to support many of the issues raised in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 and assertions made in various internal QPWS documents about the role and value of visitor education in the QPWS. A lack of resourcing, high workloads and a negative organisational culture are the three main factors identified by interpreters as barriers to the work they performed. This chapter has also identified poor internal communication and the failure of the existing *I & E Strategy* to provide a complete framework for the delivery of visitor education services as additional barriers to the achievement of visitor education outcomes. These barriers affected the ability and capacity of interpreters to deliver on the Government's community nature conservation agenda.

Adequate resourcing is crucial to meeting the visitor education needs of the State's national and conservation parks and the Queensland Government's community nature conservation agenda. So is a culture that is supportive of the contribution that visitor education can make on behalf of the QPWS's role in nature conservation and the management of protected areas in this State, while *I & E Strategy* ownership is necessary to promote a state-wide approach to the delivery of visitor education services. Yet, above all, effective internal communication is required between interpreters, and between non-interpreters at senior management and operational levels within QPWS, to achieve acceptance and use of visitor education as a park management tool. Communication is the link that connects the intent of Government with the visitor education activities implemented at an operational level. Well-managed internal communications will enable interpreters to develop responsibility for the implementation of visitor education activities that support the goals of the organisation. This may include more frequent instruction, information sessions, workshops, and better use of direct and indirect communication channels.

This chapter has also outlined that poor awareness of the role and value of visitor education among non-interpreters has probably led to the negative organisational culture view held by interpreters. This view, whether right or wrong, was hindering the ability of interpreters to engage the community and promote nature conservation ideals and practices on behalf of the QPWS as well. Effective communication, and the encouragement of non-interpreters to be involved in visitor education planning and delivery will contribute to the acceptance of visitor education as a park management tool. A process of dialogue and convergence is required. This will provide an enhanced level of ownership and ensure visitor education activities developed at a park/district/regional level support the stated aims of the organisation. Chapter 8 details the strategies that may be employed to enhance the role and value of visitor education as a park management tool, thus contributing to the Queensland Government's determination to revitalise the visitor education capacity of the QPWS.