

Abstract

In 1998, the Queensland Labor Party replaced the sitting Coalition (Liberal/National) Government in a landslide victory. The newly appointed Labor-led Queensland Government also signalled a new beginning for environmental protection in this State through the amalgamation of all government departments involved in environmental protection into one core government agency – the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In the process, the Queensland Department of National Parks and Wildlife became a division of the EPA called the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS).

The Queensland Government, in the EPA's inaugural Corporate Plan, announced that they were going to revitalise the visitor education capacity of the QPWS. No reason was provided for this policy initiative, nor direction on how the revitalisation would occur or be measured to gauge when the revitalisation had been achieved. For the Queensland Government to publicly state as a policy intent that they were going to revitalise the visitor education capacity of the QPWS raised many questions about the visitor education policies in place and the ability of the QPWS to deliver on these policies at the time. Visitor education is the principal means by which protected area agencies around the world educate people about an area's natural and cultural features, minimise recreational impacts, enhance visitor safety, and publicise the role of the agency in managing the natural and/or cultural resource. It is an effective tool on its own and in combination with other park management techniques such as site-hardening strategies to rationalise resource use and regulation.

This thesis examines the period leading up to and during the life of the Queensland Government's 1999–2001 Corporate Plan for the Environmental Protection Agency to determine the management framework and priority placed on visitor education to achieve particular nature conservation outcomes. It evaluates the organisational policies and structures underpinning the planning and delivery of visitor education services and activities, and the opinions of interpreters and park managers to determine the role, value, use and acceptance of visitor education as a park management tool during this period.

Institutional problems such as a lack of resourcing, high work loads and a negative organisational culture are identified as the main reasons why visitor education was failing to be an integral part of protected area management in Queensland. However,

poor communication among interpreters and between interpreters and park managers, and the failure of the existing departmental interpretation and education strategy to clearly link the intentions of government and the actions required at an operational level to achieve the Queensland Government's nature conservation agenda are also identified as significant barriers. The identification of these institutional problems and barriers supports assumptions as to why the Queensland Government stated as policy that they wanted to revitalise the visitor education capacity of the QPWS.

This thesis also identifies the actions and preferred strategies required to enhance the acceptance and use of visitor education as a park management tool in protected area agencies such as QPWS. These include better promotion of visitor education as a park management tool, improvement of internal communication, the development of achievable visitor education policy, and the securing of adequate funding and resources. The adoption of these actions and strategies by agencies such as the QPWS will ensure visitor education remains a critical aspect of park management worldwide and assist protected areas achieve the goal for which they are established: the conservation of biological diversity.

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Finally, and most importantly, I thank my family, Deb, Morgen and Matthew whose love and understanding made this work possible. They have endured the pre-occupations that a project of this nature entails - to them the greatest reward is that now we can spend more time as a family.

Statement of originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.



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Danny Robert Parkin

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Acronyms and terms used in the thesis

ANZECC – Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council

Bonn Convention - An international treaty for the conservation of migratory species of wild animals.

CAMBA – Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the People’s Republic of China for the Protection of Migratory Birds and Birds in Danger of Extinction and their Environment, signed at Canberra on 20 October 1986.

Ecologically sustainable – Is –

- (a) in relation to wildlife – the taking or use of the wildlife; or
- (b) in relation to protected areas – the use of the areas; within their capacity to sustain natural processes while –
- (c) maintaining the life support systems of nature; and
- (d) ensuring that the benefit of the use to present generations does not diminish the potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations (NCAct 1992, s11, pp22-23).

EPA – Environmental Protection Agency

I & E Strategy - Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service Interpretation and Education Strategy 2000–2002

JAMBA – Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of Japan for the Protection of Migratory Birds and Birds in Danger of Extinction and their Environment, signed at Tokyo on 6 February 1974.

Nature-based – In relation to the use of a protected area, includes scientific, educational, spiritual, intellectual, cultural and recreational (NCAct 1992, s7, p17)

NCAct 1992 – (Queensland) *Nature Conservation Act 1992*

Protected area(s) - are those land and sea areas that are protected in part or fully by statutory legislation or by agreement for purposes of conserving an area's biological, ecological, intrinsic or cultural values. The term is accepted internationally and is used by many United Nations environmental agencies (e.g. IUCN, WWF). It is used throughout the *Nature Conservation Act 1992 (Qld)* in relation to a number of classes of protected area (s14).

QNPWS – Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service

QPWS – Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

Ramsar Convention – An international treaty to conserve remaining wetlands worldwide. Legislative obligations for managing declared Ramsar

wetlands are defined in the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Visitor education – The term used in this thesis to describe the range of educational methods used to explain natural phenomena, inform visitors of management issues, provide advice about natural hazards and the safety precautions one can take, and promote the adoption of a minimal impact ethic. It includes interpretation and education, conservation education, minimal impact, community outreach, and extension