# protected

Magazine of National Parks Association of Queensland

## Shutdown:
## A Break for Nature

PLUS

QPWS Rangers & Fire Management
The Next Fire

ALSO FEATURED

A Message from our Patron
Birthday Wishes from our Members
Rangeland National Parks

NATIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION OF QUEENSLAND INC.
connect and protect

Issue 28
Winter 2020

Connect and Protect

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## Editor

Marika Strand.

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Curtain Fig National Park. Photo: David Clode.

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The National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ) promotes the preservation, expansion, good management and presentation of National Parks, and supports nature conservation in Queensland.

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- Join us – become a member
- Step up – become a National Parks Conservation member or a National Parks Protector
- Donate – support our work
- Volunteer on exciting projects
- Subscribe to *Protected* and *Neck of the Woods* via email
- Connect with us – Facebook, Instagram and Twitter
- Stay in touch – read regular updates on our website
- Share a bush adventure with children – download NPAQ's *Kids in National Parks* guide

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# FROM OUR PATRON

His Excellency the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC
Governor of Queensland

## Message from the Governor of Queensland

Ninety years ago, Queensland's fourteenth Governor, Sir John Goodwin, accepted the invitation from the National Parks Association of Queensland to become its inaugural Patron. As the current Governor, I have been very pleased to continue the tradition of vice-regal patronage of this great Queensland organisation.

Sir John's support was far from token endorsement; he and Lady Goodwin were fully committed to the cardinal principle espoused by the Association, and led by example in having the Government House estate declared a Sanctuary and creating 'Woodland Walks' complete with paths and foot-bridges.

Today, Kaye and I are the proud custodians of this rare remnant of original, inner-city bushland and, in line with that same principle, are committed to ensuring responsible care and sustainable preservation.

As supporters of the Association, we acknowledge the vigilance, advocacy, ideals and persistent effort of Romeo Lahey, Arthur Groom and the many other passionate and dedicated volunteers and donors who have contributed to the impressive list of achievements since 1930.

I congratulate the Association on reaching this milestone year and thank them for the immense contribution their efforts have made to the life of all Queenslanders.

Kaye and I share your disappointment that the planned program of celebrations has not been able to proceed because of COVID-19 restrictions. However, the work of the Association has continued unabated and we, like all Queenslanders, are looking forward to returning to the remarkable places of peace, inspiration and renewal that the Association has helped create and protect for us all.

His Excellency the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC

Governor of Queensland

***Above:*** *His Excellency the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC, Governor of Queensland, Patron of National Parks Association of Queensland.* ***Below:*** *Some of the grounds at Government House.* Photos: Supplied.

# SHUTDOWN:

## A Break for Nature

**Susanne Cooper**
**Councillor, National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ)**

Queenslanders have long enjoyed exploring our many and varied national parks and state forests. Australians from other states typically migrate to Queensland during the winter months and popularity has surged in the last decade. However, many had their trips cut short or cancelled from March in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact of the decision to close national parks and their camping grounds to visitors is significant, with 470 camping areas closed across the state.

Whilst this has had profound effects on park explorers, there have been many positives for national parks. Despite chronic under-resourcing, the pause in visitation gave Queensland park rangers some much needed breathing space to re-assess management priorities. It freed up rangers from focusing mainly on visitor management issues; instead, they had an opportunity to focus efforts on the parks' significant values and resources, which are the key reason for their gazettal. Rangers in some national parks have been able to spend time on critical feral pest and weed management, particularly where there have been devastating fires. With the rains following fire and drought, there has been an explosion of weeds in many regions including South East Queensland and Western Downs. Whilst the national parks in these areas have come alive following the recent wet season and have never looked greener, the parks services will struggle to control weeds as this will require resourcing that is already in short supply. Rangers are also focused on fire hazard reductions with cool burns and assessing Indigenous burning regimes.

The extended drought and devastating fires have also taken a toll on walking tracks which have been blocked with fallen trees and eroded, and in some parks washed away from intense rainfall. The temporary halt in foot traffic along tracks gave the opportunity for regeneration, particularly in areas where people go off-track to take a short-cut. This frequently occurs on tracks that have switch-backs designed to give an easier walking grade.

Areas around campgrounds typically have highly compacted soils. Again, removal of visitor traffic gave a chance for regeneration, especially for native grasses around camp areas which flourish in less compacted conditions. The absence of campers also gave rangers the opportunity to remove dangerous tree-hazards in the vicinity. Camping sites have had the opportunity for natural processes to help compost septic waste. Some day-use areas can be rotated, allowing the more heavily-used sites to be temporarily closed to allow for recovery and regeneration.

Fauna is also affected. The quiet atmosphere around parks coupled with regeneration has resulted in a noticeable increase in sightings by rangers of fauna – from a diverse range of bird species to pademelons and koalas. And the closure of high-use areas has allowed some ecosystems in these iconic sites to recover.

Four-wheel driving on park beaches has also been restricted giving wildlife and tracks a much needed break.

And K'gari (Fraser Island), part of Great Sandy National Park, had a break from the 10,000 to 14,000 people who normally visit the island over the Easter period. Interestingly, dingo sightings have decreased markedly along the coastal areas frequented by large numbers of campers and day-visitors prior to the

***Above:*** *Dingo on K'gari (Fraser Island).* Photo: Karlel. ***Banner:*** *Sunset on caravan.* Photo: Rene Rauschenberger.

park closures. Dingoes have moved inland away from these areas; typically they would be closer looking for food and scraps left behind by visitors, but instead have been forced to self-sufficiency.

This breather from visitors allows ecosystems to recover, and rangers to focus on fire hazard, weed, pest management and track maintenance.

Because of this opportunity, when you return to visit a national park, you are likely to notice increased bird life and sightings of native fauna. Many rangers have noted their return to highly used areas, encouraged by the overall quiet and lack of disturbance. NPAQ hopes visitors will take the opportunity to explore and appreciate our diverse national parks as part of a safe, inexpensive holiday, demonstrating how these special, unique areas are valued. This also builds the case for increased resourcing of park management.

***Above:*** *Queenslanders have looked forward to the return of camping.* Photo: Peter Thomas.

In response to the collapse of tourism, the Queensland Government has waived commercial operators' park fees to help with the industry's recovery. Yet, national parks need every dollar they can get. At the time of writing, Queensland national parks will be open from 12th June, including campgrounds, walking trails and swimming holes according to the government's website: https://www.covid19.qld.gov.au/government-actions/roadmap-to-easing-queenslands-restrictions.

When camping re-opens NPAQ requests all campers do the right thing and book campsites (on line https://parks.des.qld.gov.au/experiences/camping/camping_bookings.html or by phone 13 74 68). If you can, spending a little extra cash in the regions can also to help country towns recover faster.

**Are you keen to foster a love of national parks in your kids or grandkids? NPAQ's *Kids in National Parks* brochures are a great place to start www.npaq.org.au/kids-in-national-parks/. And NPAQ is seeking new members – please join www.npaq.org.au/support-us/become-a-member/.**

# FIRE MANAGEMENT A TOP PRIORITY FOR QPWS RANGERS

**Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS)**

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) manages more than 13 million hectares of parks and forests (around 7.5% of Queensland), making it the largest land manager in the state.

Maintaining the diverse natural, cultural, social and economic values of parks and forests stretching the length and breadth of the state requires a year-round effort from QPWS' team of more than 800 rangers.

While the recent restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic saw some national parks across the state closed to visitors, it has provided QPWS rangers with some welcome opportunities to undertake additional maintenance works and planned burns. On Naree Budjong Djara National Park on Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island), QPWS rangers worked with the Quandamooka Fire Team to deliver important hazard mitigation and cultural burns that would normally have proved difficult to conduct during the peak Easter school holiday period.

With the recovery from last year's bushfires still underway, the need to prepare for the upcoming bushfire season is very much top of mind for QPWS' hard-working rangers.

## 2019–20 bushfire season

In preparation for the 2019 bushfire season, QPWS conducted planned burns over more than one million hectares—the largest area covered for the past six years. Severe fire weather, above-average temperatures, strong winds and low humidity on the back of an extended period of drought created challenging conditions throughout the 2019–20 bushfire season.

Between September 2019 and the end of January 2020, more than 8,000 bushfire incidents ravaged Queensland. Approximately 133 bushfires—less than 2% of all bushfires in Queensland—started on QPWS parks and forests. Of those, 76% were contained on QPWS estate despite the severe conditions.

Following the 2019-20 bushfire season, rangers have been undertaking post-fire evaluations across the state including fire severity and extent mapping, and threatened species and ecosystem impact assessments. This work will help prioritise recovery programs and activities, and inform future planning and management.

## A collaborative approach

Fire management requires a collaborative approach and QPWS works throughout the year with local communities, neighbours and other Queensland Government agencies including the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES). QPWS also has strong partnerships with First Nations Peoples, who have used fire for thousands of generations to help manage landscapes, and to connect to and care for Country.

In the jointly managed Rinyirru (Lakefield) National Park in Cape York, QPWS rangers and the Rinyirru Traditional Owners use a combination of contemporary and traditional fire management practices for planned burns. Traditional fire sticks are used to light up small areas of ground and incendiaries dropped from an aircraft to help create a mosaic pattern of burnt and unburnt areas across the 544,000 hectare protected area.

## Fire for conservation and protection

Fire plays an important role in helping

***Above:*** *A QPWS ranger applying fire for a planned burn in Crows Nest National Park.*
Photo: Queensland Government.

to maintain the unique biodiversity found within Queensland's parks and forests. It helps regenerate many plant species, restore and maintain ecosystems and can assist with pest management and control. The flush of nutrients left post-fire, along with sunlight and rain, make a perfect bed for seeds to germinate and perennial grasses to respond, providing food for wildlife. The protection of logs and habitat trees through low intensity planned burns provide shelter and a safe place for wildlife to breed.

The conservation and cultural values of each park and forest is unique, requiring rangers to tailor their fire management and mitigation activities.

The Burrum Coast National Park, south-east of Bundaberg, has a number of Cypress trees which are culturally significant and have been used by First Nations People for their medicinal properties for thousands of generations. To minimise the risk of damage to these and other scar trees from a bushfire event, QPWS rangers and the Butchulla Land and Sea Rangers use traditional burning practices to create a protection zone around the trees. Spot burning starts from the base of the large trees and continues outward in concentric rings. This technique creates a lower intensity burn that helps protect the natural ecosystem by giving insects and other slow moving fauna more opportunity to climb, burrow or move away.

Planned burning to reduce fuel loads is one method rangers use to mitigate against the risk of damaging bushfires in parks and forests later in the year. They are generally completed during the cooler months when conditions tend to be milder, but

***Above left:*** *QPWS rangers monitoring the Noosa National Park planned burn*. ***Above right:*** *Aerial vision of Burrum National Park planned burn*. Photos: Queensland Government. ***Banner:*** *Aerial vision of Noosa National Park.* Photo: Surfshots Noosa Photography.

can be undertaken any time of year, depending on the purpose of the burn and provided the conditions are right.

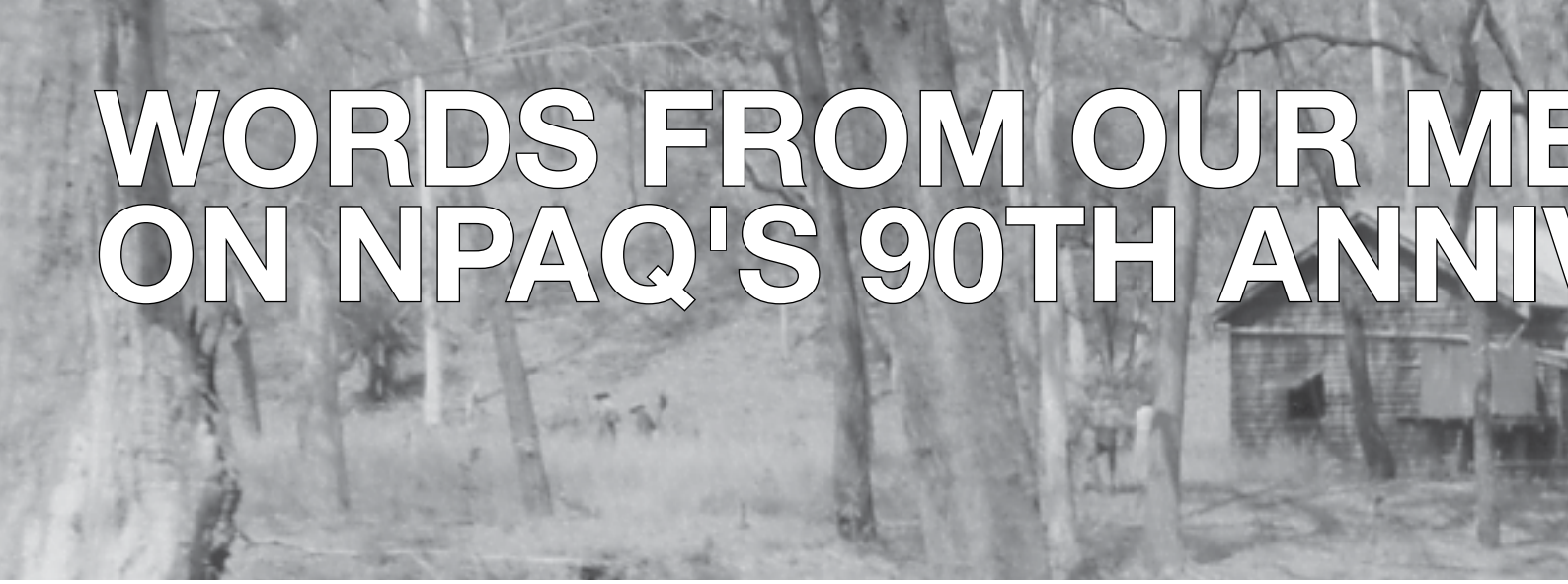
In most cases, it can take many months (and in some instances, years) of planning and coordination between QPWS and other agencies before a planned burn can be implemented, especially where residential areas adjoin national parks and forests.

Prior to the 2019–20 bushfire season, rangers teamed up with QFES to conduct a joint agency planned burn in the busy Noosa Junction area which adjoins the Noosa National Park on the Sunshine Coast. Every planned burn is different, so while this burn area was small at only 53 hectares, often it is the smaller burns that tend to be the most complex, both in planning and execution due to their proximity to neighbouring communities.

In highly urbanised areas like Noosa Junction, rangers are always mindful of the impacts of smoke on the surrounding area and key community assets such as nearby schools, sporting grounds, aged care facilities and shopping precincts. In this instance, rangers aim for weather conditions that will assist with dissipating the smoke and use a variety of tactics and lighting techniques to carefully manage the burn to reduce disruption and smoke effects for the local community.

## Looking ahead

Ahead of the upcoming 2020 bushfire season, QPWS' planned burn program commenced in north Queensland in January and has continued to expand state-wide. The planned burn season generally extends through Autumn into Winter and during this time, QPWS' efforts align with risk mitigation activities undertaken by QFES as part of their annual Operation Cool Burn. At the end of April, rangers had already completed more than 130 burns—double the burns undertaken for the same period last year—showing just how valuable their skills and expertise are in reducing fuel loads to protect people, property and the environment from the potentially devastating impacts of bushfires.



# WORDS FROM OUR ME
# ON NPAQ'S 90TH ANNI

## National Parks and the Pursuit of a Dream

Peter Stanton, NPAQ member since 1964

My childhood was full with the freedom and delights of the wild and beautiful places of south-east Queensland. Approaching 80 years later those memories can still fill my heart with joy, but also the poignancy of sadness for the loss of so much beauty as the infrastructure of development sullies so much of the earth of this beautiful part of Queensland.

When I remember childhood paradise now it returns to only one theme, Lamington National Park and the excitement of many school holidays at Binna Burra and O'Reillys Guest House. It was there, in 1948, at the age of eight that I first met those inspiring National Park advocates of Bernard O'Reilly, Arthur Groom, and Romeo Lahey, and first became aware of the National Parks Association and its work.

In 1964, when, based in Mackay, I was working for the Forestry Department, with management responsibilities for some of the largest and finest National Parks in Queensland I decided that I would join the National Parks Association. Although far removed from its activities I was inspired by its philosophies and the writings of some of those most prominent within it.

My interest in National Parks came to the attention of the Secretary of the Department, Bill Wilkes, and the officer-in-charge of the fledgling National Parks Section of that Department, Syd Curtis. In September 1967 I began work with that section in Brisbane as its second professional officer appointment. For over 30 years from that point I avoided any active involvement with the organisation until my days with the Forestry Department, and later the National Parks and Wildlife Service, were finished, as often being called upon to investigate proposals that came to Government from the Association, I wished to avoid any perception of conflict of interest.

Since leaving Government I have not ceased to work in the Conservation area. I have, among other things, for the last 17 years, been working for the Australian Wildlife Conservancy. Having lived in Cairns for 41 years I have been no more able to have active involvement with the Association than I ever was. I remain a member, however, and continue to share its goals and philosophies. I wish it well, in this, its 90th year.

## Reflections on Membership of National Parks Association of Queensland

Lorna Williams, NPAQ member since 1965

The decision was made; I would nominate to attend a weekend camp. My nomination being accepted, I was in it 'boots and all'. Having been a member of the National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ) since mid-1965, approximately twelve months, I knew commitment meant being fully engaged. Never having known the trials and tribulations of camping my apprehensiveness about the forthcoming experience was rather high. Of course, there was the purchase of necessary equipment to be undertaken beforehand.

A visit to Paddy Palin's store in Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley

***Above left:*** *'Lonely rangers hut' taken by a 12-year-old Stanton in 1952 on a box brownie camera in Lamington National Park.* ***Above right:*** *Stanton on his honeymoon in 1967 at Binna Burra Lodge.* Photos: Peter Stanton. ***Banner:*** *Carnarvon.* Photo: NPAQ Archives.

# EMBERS, VERSARY

saw me come out with a light wallet and cumbersome, heavy packages. Needless to say, everything but the proverbial kitchen sink was fitted into my small sedan for that first foray into the unknown world of camping.

Many years later, when assisting with the archiving of the Ruth Reid Historical Collection I was amused to read some of the exploits of Douglas Jolly. One Friday afternoon on his way home from work in the city, Doug met a fellow NPAQ member weighted with camping gear. If my memory serves me correctly, travel to camp was by train then truck. On learning that the member was attending an NPAQ weekend camp Doug raced to the nearby chemist, purchased tooth brush and paste, went to another store, purchased food, and away he went in company of the member to enjoy the weekend. So much for all the trappings thought necessary for my first foray.

Prior to that first camping experience I was contacted by Merle Wagner advising me that she was to be my buddy. Merle invited me, along with some of her NPAQ friends one of whom was Barbara Williams, to dinner one evening. It was a very happy occasion where I was introduced into the rudiments of bush camping, an adjunct to the booklet received when my application for membership was accepted. I'll never forget Merle's kindness. True to her word, Merle kept an unobtrusive 'eye' on me. My enthusiasm for NPAQ and camping grew out of the experiences gained on that occasion. Unfortunately, the buddy system for new members waned. For me, it was a profound help in becoming acquainted with the values of the Association and with bush camping.

NPAQ was very active with monthly meetings, well attended monthly weekend camps, social weekends, and extended outings within Australia and overseas. Educational seminars were held occasionally; for example, I attended one on how to navigate by compass. Seminars established to review the aims, purpose and objectives of the Association were well attended. The Bardon Education Centre was a popular choice of venue. Many members devoted their holidays to lead extended outings. Preparations for the outings took up an enormous amount of time, organisation and collaboration; later, leaders wrote extensive reports of the events.

The purpose of NPAQ is to promote the preservation, expansion, good management and presentation of National Parks, and supports nature conservation in Queensland. Opportunities are provided for the membership to experience the natural environment. What better way could be found for gathering support than to familiarise the membership with the natural landscapes and ecosystems. Many National Parks in Queensland have been Gazetted as a result of pressure from NPAQ through submissions and support from members.

Following environmental catastrophes such as cyclones and floods, members assisted in clearing bush tracks and camp sites thus enabling the public to visit once again and appreciate the Australian landscape. Members continue to assist in the maintenance of tracks and the reduction of weeds in various national parks in Queensland.

Being a shift worker, I was unable to attend many meetings or participate in activities until retirement. When assisting with the archiving I enjoyed reading the documented highlights of all outings. Never to be forgotten is the commitment of members to the Association. Who could forget Keith Jarrett, Secretary in a voluntary capacity for many, many years. Likewise, presidents, secretaries, treasurers, leaders and organizers of outings, mentioning just a few positions. Submissions to governments are prepared in an honorary capacity. An Honour Board presented by Shirley Simpson acknowledges Past Presidents to the Association and is a permanent reminder of the commitment of many to the pursuit of the aims and purpose of the Association. Volunteers of NPAQ were acknowledged in 2018 through an invitation for two representatives to attend the Clem and Sylvia Jones Thank you Celebration Luncheon that year.

Although workplace commitments and social changes over the past decade have contributed to a reduction in the membership over recent years, National Parks Association Queensland will continue to be a strong force in pressing governments to maintain, preserve and expand national parks in this State.

***Above:*** *Lorna Williams (right) at the Clem Jones Luncheon in 2018.* Photo: NPAQ Archives.

# THE NEXT FIRE

**Phil Ingamells**
**Parks Protection Campaigner, Victorian National Parks Association (VPNA)**

**Can we control fire with fire? Will more fuel reduction burning really save us and the bush we love? It's time for a new approach, not failed remedies, says VNPA's Phil Ingamells.**

We learnt as children that fire is a good friend and a bad master.

And we've managed to tame fire in so many ways in our daily lives. But the relationship between fire, the Australian bush, and the people who live there is increasingly a fraught one.

Fire is undoubtedly master whenever the weather suits it, and the weather will be suiting fire more and more in the years ahead.

For many decades now the prime tool for fire management has been reducing the abundance of understory fuel, our shrubs and grasses, through planned burning and other means. It does seem to make sense – burning or clearing the fuel before a bushfire does – if you can actually do it.

But in most ecosystems there is observed, as well as recorded and published, evidence that while a planned burn can reduce understory fuel for a year or three, in many or most ecosystems the post-fire growth of shrubs produces a significant increase in flammable shrubs over the next decade or more.

Let's be clear about that. Fuel reduction burns can reduce the understory a lot for one year, and a bit for the next few years, but then they can actually increase the shrubby understory for many years. Eventually, over time (and this period varies), those shrubs gradually die off, and the understory becomes relatively low in fuel. Without more fire, it can stay that way for many years.

This 'long-since-fire' low fuel scenario is likely to be the explanation for many of the more open woodlands recorded by early European 'explorers'. Frequently repeated Indigenous burning may well have contributed some of that open country, but not across the broad landscape.

Our understanding of how much this is true in different ecosystems, and under different burn and climate scenarios, would be very strong if fire managers systematically recorded the change in fuel levels in the years following fuel reduction burns. But that simple monitoring program hasn't been happening.

It would be a serious enough omission in monitoring if this was only an issue of public safety, but it's also an issue of protecting something like 100,000 native species. The fuel that threatens us is, at the same time, our invaluable, ancient, natural heritage.

Independent published research, however, such as that performed recently in the Australian Alps National Parks, makes this process clear (see diagram this page).

## How effective has fuel reduction been?

Over the last decade, Victoria's annual Fuel Management reports estimated a possible reduction in risk to life and property of up to 20 per cent maximum. But that would only be if all planned fuel reduction programs could be safely implemented.

That's helpful but not much comfort, particularly when we know that in acute fire weather fuel-reduced areas actually do little to lessen the extent or severity of fire.

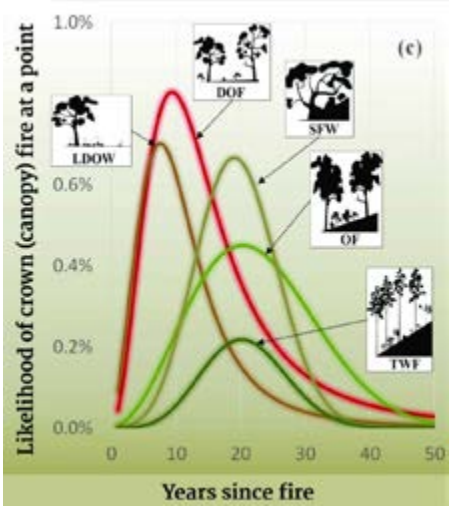
And though we've never managed to reduce fuel to any truly 'safe' level with planned burns, it somehow remains the chief fire management tool in the public's mind, and also in the minds of many fire managers and politicians.

If we step back and look at things afresh, there are far more useful things we can do.

## Protecting life

The over-riding priority for fire management is the protection of human life.

Unfortunately Forest Fire Victoria, in its planning, actually use buildings




*Immediately after a fire, understory flammable shrubs etc are largely gone (year zero here), so any new fire is unlikely to generate enough flame height to reach the canopy. However the shrub layer quickly regenerates after a fire, soon greatly increasing the possibility of a canopy fire developing. In long-unburnt forests, the flammable shrubs die off, reducing the likelihood of a canopy fire.*

***LDOW** = Low, dry open woodland*
***DOF** = Dry open forest*
***SWF** = subalpine forest and woodland*
***OF** = Open forest*
***TWF** = Tall wet forest*

*Source: Zylstra, PJ. Flammability dynamics in the Australian Alps. Austral Ecology 2018.*

as a surrogate for human life. Why anyone would need such a weak proxy for such a critical and clear objective is a mystery; it's possible to save buildings but lose lives, and possible to lose buildings while saving lives.

If we dump the surrogate, more effective life-saving options come into the picture.

### Compulsory evacuation

While Victoria belatedly came close to compulsory evacuation in this summer's fires, we still lack the necessary legal clout to achieve it. Fire managers should have the authority to evacuate homes, hospitals and even whole towns if necessary, and all regions should have well-developed evacuation strategies in advance of any fire season.

In the USA and Canada, compulsory evacuation is well established. In 2006, the 88,000 citizens of the Canadian town of Fort Murray were evacuated in the face of a several hundred-kilometre fire front. The town was lost, but everyone lived.

### Private bushfire bunkers

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission found that half of the people who relied on private bunkers during the Black Saturday fires survived, but half tragically perished in them. The Commission put out an urgent interim report asking for an approved Australian standard design for private shelters, and that standard was published before the Commission's final report.

However, this critical information has never been communicated to Victorians, and there has been no support for people wanting to install approved shelters. They should, at least, be compulsory for any new building in a high fire-prone area.

These are among a few very employable strategies that can effectively contribute to safety.

But there is one seriously big investment that might radically change fire management in the state.

### Rapid attack capability

Fires ravaged Tasmania in 2016, burning the previously unburnable high tablelands and incinerating Pencil Pines that had been unburnt for a thousand or more years. But the Tasmanian government was poorly equipped to handle fire in these remote areas, and had to rely on aircraft coming across Bass Strait from Victoria. They arrived far too late to avoid disaster.

Around Melbourne however, faced with the prospect of catastrophic loss of life in the Dandenongs, Warrandyte or the Mornington Peninsula, we now have the capacity to get three aircraft to an ignition point within 10–15 minutes of notification of a fire.

Our aerial attack capacity has increased steadily since 2009's Black Saturday fires, but rolling out a truly effective aerial point of ignition capacity across Victoria would be expensive, possibly a billion dollars or more. However Black Saturday cost Victoria over $4 billion, and 173 lives, and this summer's fires have been more expensive.

This is a highly technological solution, but in the face of climate change, it may be the only effective way to seriously reduce the rate of fire in the landscape. We won't stop every fire, but we should set about establishing a far greater level of control than we currently have. There are other ways to help control ignitions, such as burying power lines, a recommendation of the Royal Commission and later rejected by our state government, or encouraging local power generation (which is also good for the climate). And better strategies to control arson could also help.

Investing seriously in ignition control could have many benefits, increasing:

- public safety
- public health
- protection of infrastructure
- protection for agriculture
- protection for tourism
- viability for insurance companies
- reduced carbon emissions
- And … long-term benefits for biodiversity

That has to look like a good return on such a solid investment.

If we reduce the frequency of severe fire, we should be able to decrease impacts on both lives, infrastructure and the environment. And in the long-term, though this might be difficult under climate change, we could potentially decrease the flammability of much of the landscape.

Fuel reduction will always have a place in managing bushfires, especially when it is performed strategically close to assets in need of protection.

But increasing management burns across the landscape won't be the panacea many are claiming, even if it were possible to achieve the task.

# QUEENSLAND'S RANGELAND NATIONAL PARKS

**Paul Sattler, OAM**

On NPAQ's 90th birthday, we celebrate its many successes in securing Queensland's magnificent national parks.

However, the development of a representative national park estate across all bioregions has stalled in recent years. Disturbingly, this is at a time of unprecedented pressure on our natural environment. The semi-arid and arid rangelands west of the Great Dividing Range (excluding the tropical savannahs) suffer in many parts from unsustainable grazing pressure exacerbated by the legacy of degradation over more than a century. This pressure is now magnified by a warming and increasingly variable climate. Equally, these threats represent an unsustainable pressure on biodiversity.

In the halcyon days of park expansion from 1989 to 1994, government policy was to double the national park estate, and there was a deliberate effort to focus on developing a representative park system across the rangelands. At this time there were very few parks west of the Divide, except for the 'scenic lands' like Carnarvon National Park or the 'worthless lands' (from a pastoral viewpoint) such as Munga-Thirri (Simpson Desert) National Park.

The subsequent development towards a representative national park system included new parks in the Mulga Lands (e.g. Welford N.P.), the Channel Country (e.g. Diamantina N.P.), the Darling-Riverine Plain (Culgoa Floodplains N.P.), the Mitchell Grass Downs (e.g. Astrebla Downs N.P.), and the North West Highlands (e.g. extension of Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) N.P.). These are some of the jewels in Queensland's national park system. Over this five year period, approximately $40m was spent acquiring 2,437,892 hectares.

During this time the NPAQ not only supported these acquisitions, but financially supported the publication of *The Conservation Status of Queensland's Bioregional Ecosystems*. This work provided the basis for describing regional ecosystems and securing representativeness across each bioregion, and underpins natural resource management today. After 28 years these ecosystems have now been mapped for the whole state: a monumental task by the Queensland Herbarium. Securing many of these parks was indeed hard-won but by demonstrating that a scientific basis was being used in park selection helped secure rural support.

Today however, a fully representative national park system across the rangelands remains far from complete. Major gaps exist in the Brigalow Belt, Einasleigh Uplands, Desert Uplands, Mulga Lands, Mitchell Grass Downs and Channel Country. With the increasing severity of threatening processes, it is urgent that our national park estate is expanded across our rangelands to protect and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services.

A range of conservation measures is also required to complement new national parks for the protection of rare and threatened species and ecosystems, refugia, and corridors as part of achieving sustainably managed landscapes. Of particular note is the need for protection of our rangeland wetlands both in parks and on private lands. Many contain rare, endemic species whilst others represent key habitat for wide ranging, migratory species.

Unfortunately, landholder concerns still remain over securing new parks and over park management in pastoral regions. These concerns can be partially overcome by investment in nature-based outback tourism as economic diversification is desperately needed to assist distressed local communities and to build broad societal support for completing a representative rangeland park system. Coordinating park acquisitions with other environmental initiatives across the rangelands also need to be further explored.

**Paul was directly involved in the expansion of Queensland's National Parks over three decades and guided the acquisition of many of our rangeland parks. He also coordinated the development of Queensland's Regional Ecosystem classification. A detailed history of this work is available in: *Five Million Hectares - a conservation memoir 1972-2008* which is available on line (www.npaq.org.au/publications/reading-of-interest/). Paul retains a keen interest in the rangelands: their need for sustainable management and to consolidate the park system.**

***Above:*** *Riversleigh World Heritage Site, Boodjamulla (Lawn Hill) National Park.* Photo: James Fitzgerald. ***Banner:*** *Munga-Thirri (Simpson Desert) National Park.* Photo: Tandrew22.

# THE NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

## Personal reflection on why our parks must be valued

**Colleen Thornton**
**Councillor, National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ)**

A deep breath, a calming moment of peace, the crisp fresh feeling of clean air -

This is the experience that makes me fall in love with parks every time – the connection with peace, the lack of noise and the disappearance of anxiety or stress.

I met with Deb, Yvonne and Graeme in early 2019 with a hope that as the Secretary, Vice President and President, these important people would see a person with a useful skill set in marketing, authenticity and a willingness to join a great cause and give back. I had answers to all their questions rehearsed and ready, then when they asked, "what do National Parks mean to you?", my rehearsed answer went out the door and the honesty came out.

National Parks, nature, the great outdoors, were so incredibly important to my mother and father. Dad, I found out had apprenticed in the Pechey Forestry in high school making the commute from Dalby in the 70s before finally deciding to pursue a career as a police officer. Mum was an avid girl guide in New Zealand who claimed to have learned survival skills from Sir Edmund (still unverified, she also had a "shark bite" that was suspiciously like a knee reconstruction). They met in central Queensland as the resident police officer and nurse albeit one in Birdsville, the other in Bedourie. In the ensuing years, along came their four children and around regional Queensland we moved.

Mum was a louder voice in the community, Dad her rock of support (even if she would lovingly yell "Tree Murderer" any time he so much as trimmed a branch on a tree). She was often advocating for rural health and protesting developments that disturb flora, fauna or the native peoples. The most memorable slogan that comes to mind is, "Keep your cotton-picking hands off Coopers Creek", a unique alliance of scientists, graziers and environmentalists, protesting the large scale irrigation of the Coopers Creek flood plains in the mid 1990s. Mum wasn't a scientist or grazier but she was fiercely protective and she understood that the great outdoors needed protecting from profit. My six-year-old mind kept hold of that slogan and strong conviction, even if I didn't truly understand what irrigation was, I knew the animals and land wouldn't be happy!

We eventually moved to Toowoomba, the garden city, where Mum would always point out when someone in the neighbourhood cut down another tree. Living outside was our routine, from gardening, to bushwalks and camping, boats and the open ocean, even nibbles with the neighbours under the giant poinciana. To walk in to our family home, it was like a bomb had gone off, things everywhere, but boy was the garden always spectacular.

In 2014, they both passed away, a mere 10 days apart. Mum's life in the sun saw her grow melanomas that metastasised to her brain and Dad had Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. To cope with my grief, I would go for early morning walks, weekend walks, I would go outside to my comfort zone and even attempt balcony gardening.

When the grief had passed and my life had settled into a solid career, the time was right to think about giving back and as fate would have it, NPAQ advertised a vacancy for a volunteer council member.

I volunteer as a council member with NPAQ because nature and the great outdoors are something that was important to my parents, it's something that they taught me to see as important, cherish, connect with and seek to protect.

***Above:*** *The author enjoying nature.* Photos: Supplied.

# RANGER SPOTLIGHT

## Insights into the diverse backgrounds and day-to-day activities of Queensland's park rangers

**Don Rowland**
**Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS)**

Don Rowlands, a Ranger In Charge and descendent of the Watti Watti family and the Wangkangurru Yarluyandi elder in Central West Queensland Region, is based in Munga-Thirri National Park, also known as the Simpson Desert. After some time working in the cattle industry, it was time for a change. Don has a passion for looking after country, natural environments and everything that depends on it, and it was this passion in late 1994 that set him on his path to becoming a Park Ranger. Don successfully secured a position with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services (QPWS) in 1994… and the rest is history.

**How long have you worked in national parks?**

Since the early 1990s.

**What is your most memorable moment?**

My most memorable moment is when I received the Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for my services to my community and the environment. I must give a huge amount of credit to the Department of Environment and Science for their wonderful support over the last 26 years and to the many wonderful mentors who helped me achieve my goals. It was a special part of my working life that I look back on very fondly.

**Can you describe your favourite national parks experience?**

Traveling across Munga-Thirri National Park with an archaeologist, linguist, and anthropologist to record and share my people's traditional stories, stretching back more than 60,000 years.

An expedition that started from Witjira (Dalhousie Springs) on the desert's western side to Wirrari (Birdsville). This journey followed the trails of my ancestors which is now captured in the Dreamtime story, Thurtirla Pula - The Two Boys. A story map of waterholes and fishing holes by which First Nations people have lived sustainably in the desert for tens of thousands of years. Not everyone is aware that First Nations people once successfully lived here long before cars and air-conditioning, but that is my job to tell everyone and share the history, I love that!

**What is the best part about working in a National Park?**

Working on country as a descendent from the Watti Watti family and a Wangkangurru Yarluyandi elder in Munga-Thirri National Park is quite special. Truly the best part of working in a national park is the opportunity to record sites and places retracing my song lines to reconnect to the memory of my ancestors and ensure these stories are available for generations to come now and into the future.

I also love talking to people from all walks of life out here in the wide-open spaces, they can relax and get in touch with the environment and the world around them. As Rangers we look after some of the most spectacular countries on earth, we help when needed, share information and skills and this is for me is an amazing privilege and I would not change a thing, I would do it all over again!

**What is your top tip for visitors to parks for bushwalking?**

*QPWS Ranger Don Rowland in Munga-Thirri National Park.* Photos: Luke Barrowcliffe.

I love sharing my backyard and all its hidden treasure - for those who spend big dollars buying 4WDs, Munga-Thirri National Park is one of the last great 4WD experiences. My tip would be, be well prepared! Do a little reading up about where you're going. Carry a small backpack with water, snacks and a basic first aid kit. When driving stay on marked trails and most of all take time to stop, breathe and 'feel' the environment around you, these spaces are here for everyone to enjoy and experience its wonder.

**What is your top tip for campers?**

Ensure you have a camping permit and be well-equipped to cope with your environment. Always check park alerts when planning and before leaving for your trip www.des.qld.gov.au. Leave your camp site better than you found it, take all your rubbish with you. Respect other campers!

*NPAQ thanks Don for taking time to answer our questions. We appreciate the work all QPWS rangers undertake in protecting Queensland's national parks.*

queenslandnationalparks.com.au | qld.gov.au/camping | facebook.com/qldnationalparks | @QldParks; #QldParks

# FROM THE PRESIDENT

**Graeme Bartrim**
**President, National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ)**

Wishing you good health and safety as our community continues to grapple with the pandemic and its consequences.

There is something about being on the back page which encourages more latitude. Well, here goes:

Although Australia and Queensland have managed the pandemic very well there remains much uncertainty about our medium-term future. Extreme and conflicting views abound, including: the economy is predicted to return to original strength in a matter of months to some years, JobKeeper should end in September, it will need to be extended, a possible vaccine or cure is months to years away, Queensland's tourism industry will be in the doldrums for years, it will recover because of much greater internal tourism.

As has often been stated, Australia and Queensland's success in combatting the virus to date has been largely due to responses based on scientific evidence (and a well-intended community).

Whilst we have been consumed with the pandemic and its social and economic aftermath other underlying issues remain.

The commencement of the Royal Commission into last summer's fires reminded us of two of these.

Initial representations made it clear that we should expect longer fire seasons and more severe fire events as a regular part of our future (Karl Braganza, BOM, Head of Climate Monitoring). The Federal Threatened Species Commissioner, Sally Box, informed the Commission that of 327 threatened species, 49 lost more than 80% of their habitat and 65 lost 50% of theirs during the summer fires. Queensland's biodiversity is of national and international significance.

Broadly some choices are to be made: do we aim to return to where we were pre-virus? Do we continue with this reliance on science? Do we maintain greater bipartisanship? Do we address well understood long term issues?

Since February, we as a community have changed enormously and we now have an opportunity to change in a considered way.

Of course, of interest to us is our National Parks (which have proven to be very popular as travel restrictions have eased). There is sufficient evidence that experiencing nature does support our mental health.

The State's Protected Area Strategy has been in gestation for years whilst there has been a commitment to the State achieving 17% target of its area being protected. Even though the State's finances will be stretched for some time, we believe that it is time for a well-funded Protected Area Strategy. The benefits to our biodiversity, our community and to tourism associated benefits will be great in the long term.

# WHAT'S ON

## NPAQ Activities & Events

Due to the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) situation, most NPAQ events and activities have been cancelled.

These cancellations were done with the interest of safety in mind and to comply with government regulations in this unprecedented and evolving situation.

As restrictions are gradually eased, please visit our website www.npaq.org.au/activities-events for the most up to date information on what activities and events are upcoming.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