

National Parks and Wildlife Service Joint Consultative Committee meeting: March 2021

On Wednesday 10 March the PSA and its delegates met with Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE)/National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Atticus Fleming, Naomi Stephens, Andrew Nicholls and Robert Quirk were in attendance for NPWS to discuss a range of issues.

Establishment review; vacant positions and the stimulus package

Atticus Fleming advised the meeting that in 2017 there were 1500 full-time equivalent (FTE) and as at January 2021 there were 1880 FTE. Additional funding from the Commonwealth for a range of projects will increase the National Parks' FTE. However, it was acknowledged that many of the new roles were temporary. He also advised that whilst funding to the agency has increased, so too has the workload.

The PSA advised the meeting that some branches had only recruited field staff with no additional staff to support the 85 additional field staff recruited. Hence current staff bore the burden of training; mentoring and ordering additional uniform, vehicles, firefighting PPE and other administrative duties, as well as managing projects these staff work on.

It was also acknowledged there is a significant attrition rate among poorly paid staff. Hence it was counterintuitive to recruit such staff on a temporary basis to see them leave after being equipped and trained simply because they weren't being paid a living wage. Mr Fleming also indicated additional funding should be forthcoming with projects dealing with bushfire recovery, koala habitat, ROLEM and flora reserve transfers. He indicated he would meet with the PSA to discuss roles to be recruited to support these projects.

Women's issues to be standing item on JCC agenda

The PSA advised the meeting that a conversation was required on gender equality (consistent with NSW Government policy) and that specific issues pertaining to female members: as identified in the PSA *What Women Want* survey report in October 2020. Issues such as flexible work; pay equity; mental health; bullying and harassment; career progression and superannuation should be discussed and progressed.

The PSA noted the specific work environment of the NPWS and the need to engage on gender equity discussions at Joint Consultative Committees (JCC). In spite of robust discussion on the matter, the Department indicated it was not the appropriate forum to discuss such issues. It was disappointing to see this position. Clearly this is not the PSA's position and we will raise these issues every meeting regardless of the Department's unwillingness to discuss them.

Work Health and Safety

The meeting was advised that DPIE would continue to monitor its COVID response consistent with any changes to the public health order (as staff return to their workplaces). A Health and Wellbeing Strategy for the cluster is being prepared for roll out soon.

The PSA asked questions in relation to the number of and recording of incidents and injuries of staff and visitors, aggressive behaviour and fatalities attended by staff and subsequent mental health issues of staff. The PSA was advised that CAAMs is the primary system for recording such matters. However, the Department was advised that this system is not without its faults and hence does not encourage members to report such incidents. Further to this, there is no paper based back up system if the on line system fails.



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In relation to mental health of staff the meeting was advised that additional 'mental health support staff' have been visiting Branches to discuss any issues that members may have with workplace incidents. However, reporting of many incidents and the seeking of assistance of such support staff is said to be one in 10 staff. Further to this the EAP's assistance line appears not to operate 24/7 (however the meeting was advised that the contract with the delivering company indicates it must operate 24/7).

If you are having problems with the reporting of incidents, or the resolution of Workplace Health and Safety matters, please contact the PSA Member Support Centre for advice and assistance on 1300 772 679.

Law enforcement

The PSA advised the meeting that members require more legal and Special Investigator support. The meeting was advised a 'Duty Solicitor' has not been in place for a number of years and that additional support would be provided over Easter from Special Investigators. After Easter the Department will look at better access to Special Investigators. Further to this the Department indicated that the Duty Solicitor was removed due to a 'reprioritising of work'. It was felt by the PSA that this may have been due to the volume of work being provided by NPWS members.

The Department has committed to forming a Law Enforcement working group to review a range of issues including training, compliance database, policies and procedures around law enforcement.

The PSA again reminded the Department of the need to ensure that all staff doing compliance have completed the mandatory level 1 law enforcement training and also of the need to roll out level 2 law enforcement training.

Housing policy

The PSA acknowledged the movement towards the implementation of the policy. However, it was made clear that consultation on the policy was cut short with the unions so that much of the final policy was not agreed to by the PSA. Others issues raised was the entitlement of staff to be accommodated by way of Expressions of Interest (EoI); the number of cottages being rented and status of disused buildings not being made available to rent by EoI.

Uniform allowance

The PSA requested clarification on the classifications that were entitled to be paid the allowance. The Department indicated it would look at data to determine who was entitled to the allowance. A separate meeting between the PSA and the Department will be held to progress this issue.

Uniform Reference Group (URG)

The PSA raised the concern of members that the development of the new NPWS uniform was being expedited as funding was required to be spent by the end of this financial year. On that basis, the URG was being circumvented on decisions in relation to items of fire PPE; colour; texture and fabric and trial of such items. The PSA asked that the URG be engaged on such decisions.

