

NPWS June Joint Consultative Committee update: Flex agreement, hunting in Flora Reserves and more

The Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) of National Parks met on Wednesday 9 June to discuss a range of industrial issues affecting PSA members in the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

Proposed changes to DPIE flex agreement

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) is proposing to merge all flex agreements across the agency into one DPIE-wide agreement. Currently the NPWS flex agreement is contained in the Parks award (which is a consent award). Hence it cannot be changed without the agreement of the parties to the award i.e. NPWS and the PSA. Our flex agreement has sections that are specifically designed to support field operations in NPWS (including no coretime and an extended bandwidth, etc). The PSA supports its members in NPWS retaining the current flex entitlements enshrined in the award. However, the PSA will provide comment on any proposed changes to this agreement if required and these proposals will be put to the members before any agreement is reached.

Hunting in Flora Reserves

The PSA raised concerns regarding reports that hunting would soon be allowed in some of the Flora Reserves currently under NPWS management or about to be transferred to NPWS management, namely Belanglo, Comleroy, Jellore and Meryla. The Executive guaranteed that no staff on work duties will enter into any area of state forest that is open to hunting without a safe system in place and appropriate delegation under the relevant legislation (such as the *Game and Feral Animal Control Act*), including access to the Game Licensing Unit's database.

Gender equity

The PSA has requested gender equity be included as a standing item on JCC agendas. While this has not yet occurred, there were several items where equity issues were raised. This included broad discussion on the delivery of the gender awareness module across all branches, and a report from DPIE-HR on the improved messaging in recruitment across all roles, including field roles, to make them more inclusive.

The PSA has also formally requested a conference for staff in administrative roles (primarily women) across the state, similar to what has been delivered in the past few years for Rangers and Field Officers. NPWS has agreed and informed the meeting that Senior Branch Officers in each Park Operations Branch will be organising branch-wide meetings. The PSA considers that these conferences will provide important networking opportunities and a forum in which staff can raise concerns over processes and systems.

WHS matters

The PSA identified it was still receiving reports of untrained staff carrying out compliance and law enforcement activities. A follow-up meeting with Brett Pengilly was promised to address concerns about



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staff dealing with aggressive and threatening behavior and the possibility of regular refresher training to be provided.

The PSA also raised members' reports of issues with CAMMS, including the fact it was slow in some regional offices, clunky and non-intuitive, and appeared to be generating spam. DPIE staff defended the number of emails that CAMMS generates as being evidence of improved transparency. This is one of the few platforms that extends across the whole cluster and it was reported that NPWS Park Programs staff will continue to have it upgraded and improved for NPWS users.

Law enforcement training

To date 113 staff have been trained in level 1 Law Enforcement and an additional 106 have been trained in "dealing with threatening and aggressive behavior". Level 2 law enforcement training is planned to be rolled out in September/October. The PSA will be engaged to provide comment on the training module prior to its roll out. The course will be a five-day residential course.

There are still some vacancies in the Specialist team. The compliance data base is being designed. However only one field operations member has been involved in the process. The PSA has been advocating for additional operational members to be involved in this process.

Save our Species

The PSA enquired as to the status of members working in the Save our Species (SoS) program. The meeting was advised that all staff in the program should've been briefed on their status. A business case to extend the program has been delivered to Government. Extensions to temporary staff have been granted on the basis that these extensions will be funded once the NSW budget is approved. Otherwise the extensions will be funded internally.

Workload stress

It was acknowledged workload stress was widespread and affecting everyone in NPWS. The PSA delegates highlighted that NPWS staff are coming from a low base with drained levels of resilience following natural disasters such as the 2019-20 bushfires and floods, and COVID. It was admitted there are increasing reports of psychological injuries across the agency. While numbers in NPWS are still below the average for the NSW public sector, they have doubled. The PSA advised some members are using their recreation leave to resolve workplace stress issues rather than formally seeking workers' compensation.

Uniforms and PPE

One issue that has been troubling staff is the difficulty in procuring uniforms and PPE for the hundreds of new temporary staff. The executive admitted this was an issue, with 36 orders now delayed beyond 10



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weeks. The meeting was informed a new Uniform Policy would be released before the commencement of the new uniform contract in the next financial year. The PSA was glad to hear that the roll out of the new uniform would avoid a multi-form result through the formal issue of new uniform items to all staff, consistent with the policy, and the recall of all existing items.

NPWS workplaces

The meeting was advised that more NPWS offices are being converted to agile workplaces. For Parramatta-based staff, it is now assumed that at least 40 per cent of staff will be absent on any one day as DPIE has reduced the area covered by the lease by three floors. The PSA raised issues regarding the process for allocating lockers at Parramatta – this is not automatic (nor guaranteed) as part of the on boarding process, and the process to request one is not highlighted to new staff or their managers.

The PSA raised the issue of overcrowding at some depots and offices, citing the example of the limited toilet and car parking facilities at Blowering Depot where staff numbers have doubled over the past 20 years. This appears to be the case in many NPWS work places across NSW.

New reserves

Following another announcement by Minister Kean of substantial acquisitions of land to be managed by NPWS, the PSA requested information on the level of staffing for these new parks. It was admitted that no additional staff resources will be provided and that any management of these parks will require reallocation of existing staff resources. The PSA expressed its strong displeasure at this situation which will just add to members' stress levels across the Service.

Distribution of EOIs

Prior to the meeting, the PSA had expressed concerns regarding the ad hoc nature of the advertising of EOIs and the fact that the current system requires access to CM9. Prompted by these concerns, NPWS has agreed that a new process will be rolled out later this month which will result in all EOIs advertised on Insite and Workplace.

