

5 COUNCILS AND CONFLICT

An interesting aspect of early park management was the advice from Tom Ryan to stay away from local councils. Tom's attitude, from experience, was to tell them what we had done, not what we intended to do.

Gympie City Council had little input into the day-to-day management of Cooloola NP, although behind the scenes it exerted considerable influence. Before I arrived, this Council had somehow extracted a promise from our Director, Dr Saunders, to build a headquarters in the city area. (This is why I was appointed to Gympie, although the regional headquarters was located in Maryborough.) Fortunately for QNPWS, this Council always objected to the concept of a major road through Cooloola NP along the Cooloola Way on the grounds that it would take business away from Gympie!

The northern section of Cooloola NP was located within Widgee Shire, and this Council was quite another matter. It was a farmer-dominated council, concerned primarily with rates and roads. The Councillors resented providing services for State government property from which they could not collect rates, and frequently complained about damage to roads. They had an exploitative attitude to the coastal area of the Shire, which had been managed as a State Forest since 1925. They were hostile to the creation of Cooloola National Park, having done all they could to block it.

Soon after my arrival in Gympie, Chief Management Officer Chuck Wilder asked me, 'Do you know how many local authorities there are in Queensland?' I didn't. 'Well, there are about 133,' he said. Tom Ryan then asked, 'How do you think the Widgee Shire rates in our popularity stakes?' I didn't even care to guess, but was told, 'Last. They are just awful to deal with!'

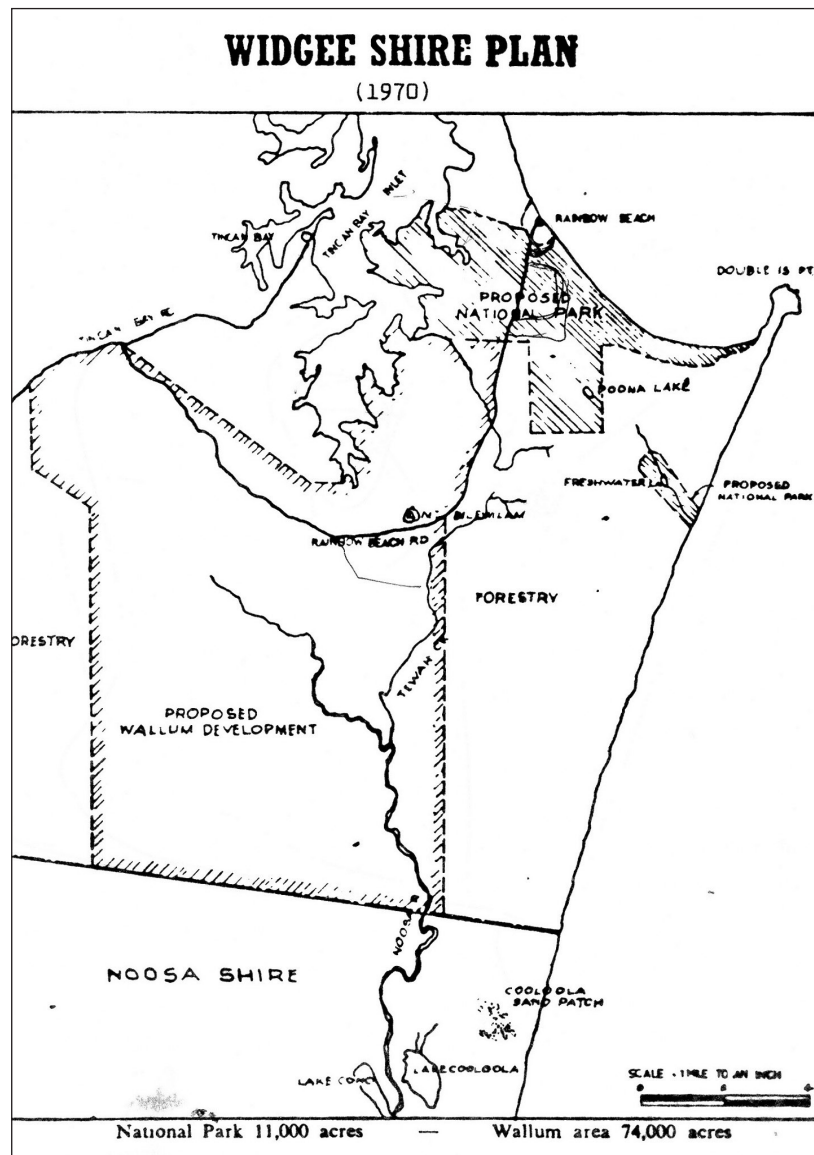
While Noosa NP was the most heavily visited national park in the State for day visitors, Cooloola was the busiest in terms of campers. But Director Saunders responded to our pleas for better financial assistance for Cooloola with the response, 'Why should I allocate scarce money to Widgee Shire, when I have co-operative councils across Queensland crying out for assistance?'

This negative attitude towards Cooloola NP was, I believe, mostly attributable to two people: Shire Engineer Don Clarkson, and Cr A. B. (Ned) Kelly, the coastal representative. As the main QNPWS officer on the spot in the early years of Cooloola, I observed that Cr Kelly's influence restrained the early development of the park. He was once described by another Councillor as an 'environmental Neanderthal'.

My first visit to the Shire Chambers in upper Mary Street was memorable. I was confronted by a large council logo emblazoned on a wall containing the council's motto. The words 'Develop and Prosper' shouted loudly at me, and I was left wondering if there was any empathy with the environment.

According to Noosa Parks Association Secretary Dr Arthur Harrold, Widgee Shire Council was in favour of mining the high dunes of Cooloolo, logging the rainforest, clearing the Noosa plains for pastoral purposes and extracting water to support the developing townships at Tin Can Bay and Rainbow Beach. Ironically, they also promoted tourism, with the object of turning the area into a tourist mecca. Their proposals would degrade the values for which the area was to be protected as a national park. In 1976, Dr Harrold wrote, 'After having done its best to ruin Cooloolo, [the Council] is now expressing a wish to be consulted in the management of the national park'.^[1]

As far back as 1970, Council had recognised the concept of national parks, and had proposed – as a 'balanced development' of the Cooloolo area – two national parks in the Cooloolo sand-mass, totalling 4,453 hectares. One of these covered Lake Freshwater, while the other extended from Tin Can Inlet to Lake Poona and north to the coloured sands. The Council also advocated a wallum development^[2] across 29,960 hectares of the swampy Noosa plains, south to the Noosa Shire boundary. It is clear from their later actions that accepting the concept of national parks and understanding it were two different matters.



Widgee Shire's 1970 Cooloolo land use plan.



Lake Freshwater (photo B. Thomas).

Engineer Clarkson headed a three man deputation to meet several government back-benchers in Brisbane. *The Courier Mail* of 25 September 1970, reported his saying ‘... the mining companies ... would build free, a \$250,000 road from Rainbow Beach eight miles to Double Island Point and this would open the area for tourism’. Describing Double Island Point as ‘... bad as the Sahara Desert ...’, he stated that a big Sydney development company ‘was waiting to spend \$5 million developing Double Island Point as a tourist resort’.

In 1972, a ‘Question On Notice’ was asked of the Premier of Queensland in the Legislative Assembly. His response confirmed that a survey from Rainbow Beach to Double Island Point had been done by the Widgee Shire Council for Queensland Titanium Mines three years earlier, without the authority of the Department of Forestry. This action suggests that Council regarded the Forestry Department with some contempt and was prepared to ignore the legitimate managers of the area.

Prior to gazettal of Cooloola NP, Widgee Shire Council promoted a scheme for a five-stage road system in Cooloola. One of the roads that engineer Clarkson recommended was a north-south highway, east of the Noosa River, to link Rainbow Beach and Tewantin. This stalled due to opposition from the Department of Primary Industries, who had set aside the Cooloola Fauna Reserve (R1093) between the ocean and the Noosa River in 1963. (This area was not included in the original Cooloola NP because the DPI argued that it held important scientific values and should remain as wilderness.)

In 1973, Widgee Shire Council negotiated with the Lands Department for 360 hectares of State Forest 451 to build a ‘Carlo sub-division’, on the high dunes above the coloured sands. As part of this development, Council proposed to ‘restore’ the Carlo Sand blow. Another proposal was to ‘restore’ the large sand blow at the northern end of the Double Island Point isthmus after mining, enabling the construction of a resort. A supporting township was to be built nearby.

In 1976, Council again supported sand mining in the Cooloola sandmass, even though the area had been declared a national park. The Chairman and Engineer asked Dr Harrold to withdraw

opposition to sand mining between Freshwater and Double Island Point. Rich deposits of mineral, said to be worth \$50 million, had been discovered there. On 6 October 1976, *The Courier Mail* reported, 'Widgee Shire Council has continued its practice of attempting to destroy Cooloola in any way it can.'

In November 1976, the Commonwealth Government cancelled most export licences for mineral sands on Fraser Island. This coincided with a slump in the market outlet for the minerals. The mill at Rainbow Beach was mothballed and the company depot near the railway station in Gympie was closed. Minerals on Fraser Island were stockpiled and buried. Beach sand mining in Cooloola ceased in January 1977, although the leases remained active.

When I arrived in 1978, Widgee Shire Councillors made no secret of their belief that they knew how to manage the area better than QNPWS did. They had certainly ridden rough-shod over the foresters who had previously controlled the area, and they were undoubtedly upset at the closure of sand mining. Council demanded six developments to assist those who had been thrown out of work:

- a road from Rainbow Beach to Double Island Point
- a road from Rainbow Beach to Noosa
- a ferry connection from Tin Can Bay to Seary's Creek
- a connecting road from Seary's Creek to Rainbow Beach
- construction of a central office at Rainbow Beach
- acceleration of slash pine plantings in the area.



Council wanted a road around the cliff tops and a resort on the Double Island Point headland (photo B. Thomas).

Early in 1978, QNPWS staff were astounded to read in *The Courier Mail* that our Minister, Tom Newbery, had visited Rainbow Beach and approved hang gliding on the Carlo Sand Blow. Cr Ned Kelly had invited him to visit and obtained this concession without any input from QNPWS.

Subsequently, the Minister's announcement was taken as 'free licence' for hang gliders to operate in any national park across the State. I was directed to control the situation by issuing Permits to Traverse to authorise prospective hang gliders to operate in the national park.

In 1979, the foreshore in Widgee Shire adjacent to the national park was placed under the Shire's control without any reference to QNPWS. Council's attitude was inflexible: 'The beach is a road which is remade by the tide twice a day for free.' (Beach access had led to a difference of opinion when QNPWS had suggested closing some beaches in its 1978 Draft Management Plan.)

In December 1979, *The Gympie Times* reported that the Shire needed to establish 'control of a beach buffer zone'. This was to be an esplanade between the high water mark and the timber line, in effect resuming a strip of the national park. This did not proceed.

Council was not so forth-coming when it came to removing the many piles of junk on the beach. [3] Some had started life as vehicles, then had been converted into unregistered beach buggies. When these broke down or were wrecked, their drivers walked away and left them on the beach or in the dunes. In 1979, Council demanded that QNPWS remove these eyesores from Teewah Beach. We pointed out that they were outside the park boundary and we had neither the equipment nor the legal right to interfere with them. More mobile units made it back to the Noosa River, where they were abandoned on the North Shore, or, as conservationist Kathleen McArthur^[4] quipped, they 'died while waiting for the ferry'.

There were two huts on a small area of State Forest 451 behind Teewah Beach at Little Freshwater. The mining companies stated they did not own them. In July 1978, Council, who had assumed control of the area as Recreation Reserve 1101 in 1964, asked QNPWS for the names of the owners so steps could be taken to remove the huts. A stalemate ensued when Council neither removed the huts nor signed the area to show it was under Council control.

At Rainbow Beach, a tussle developed between QPNWS and Cr Ned Kelly over land for a national park headquarters, a workshop area and housing. Gympie District Forester Peter Cranny and Toolara Forester John Tadman inspected my proposal to excise State Forest land. With their encouragement, I surveyed an area larger than necessary, which included a high point for a radio tower and an interpretative walking track leading up the gully to the old Telegraph Track.

Shortly afterwards, Cr Kelly leapt over the top of our new area with proposals for a golf course. He argued that a golf course was needed to make a fire break for the township. Council had initially sought land on the opposite side of the main access road, but, since this would 'not be a first class course', they now favoured higher country, which would have views across Tin Can Inlet to the ocean and would blend in with the environment.

Following a 1981 inspection of the national park, Minister Tony Elliott was said to support the new golf course. A golf club had been formed in the week of his inspection, and the proposal was for a club house on the land I had previously requested for QNPWS headquarters. Fortunately, in 1980, a photo of Minister Ivan Gibbs had been published in *The Gympie Times*, announcing my proposal as the site for headquarters and staff housing, and action had been taken to allocate the land to QNPWS.

In an interview with journalist Leigh Hemmings in March 1982, Cr Kelly made the following observations:

- Cooloola NP has limited access and no walking tracks. Something similar to the Hermitage Resort at Mt Cook in New Zealand should be built at Double Island Point.

- The Noosa River should be accessible from the northern end for 2WD vehicles via the Western Firebreak.
- He doesn't see that increased numbers of people are doing great damage to the park.
- Sand mining provides jobs; in many cases mined areas have been brought back to a condition better than they were in the first place.
- In relation to the Cooloola Way, there is nothing wrong with having a road through a national park; the public should be allowed access.
- Cooloola is under-financed and under-resourced; camp fees should be charged.
- A road linking Tin Can Bay and Rainbow Beach along the powerline would be as long as that between Tewantin and Noosa Heads.

In 1982, Widgee Shire Council re-affirmed its earlier demands for a road to link Rainbow Beach with Double Island Point. The same year, I was surprised to learn of Council's desire to have an international airport established over recently developed pine plantations between Mt. Elliott and the Rainbow Beach-Gympie Road. Newly released Shire planning maps confirmed that this concept had been advanced officially.

In January 1983, Widgee Shire Council approached Noosa Shire Council, seeking support for a sealed road to traverse the Cooloola Way from Rainbow Beach Road to Loch's Pinch, around *Tarangau*, along Galloways Lane, across Kin Kin Creek and on to Tewantin. This route, referred to as 'the missing link', became and remains a controversial issue.

Dr Harrold, who was not given to making exaggerated comments, wrote in a letter to Minister Elliott, 'The Widgee Shire Council has a deplorable track record in relation to Cooloola National Park.'

In 1979, engineer Clarkson retired and Adrian McClintock was elected Widgee Shire Chairman. The strident demands of Council gradually eased, and an era of co-operation began.

Endnotes

¹ President's Report May 1975 – August 1976: 'The Cooloola Conflict' by the Noosa Parks Association and Cooloola Committee, 1981.

² Wallum is a term describing low-lying coastal areas comprising mixed heaths, banksias and stunted eucalypts. Wallum soils are known to be nutrient deficient. After clearing, tropical legumes and fertilisers were spread for pasture development. The Department of Primary Industries and CSIRO had been trialling the concept, but it was far from a proven technique. Local Forestry officers referred to the proponents of such Crown Land development as 'grass pirates', or 'wallum beef barons'.

³ In 1969 District Forester Doggrell drew Council's attention to the dumping of car bodies on State Forest at Rainbow Beach pointing out such action was contrary to the Forestry Act. Engineer Clarkson responded – 10 weeks later – saying '... these were removed from the foreshore prior to Christmas to tidy up that area until their owners could be traced. If no one claims same during the next month, or the owners of these derelict vehicles cannot be found, they will be removed from that area ...'

⁴ Kathleen McArthur; 'A Living River – The Noosa', 1974. In later years, 160 car bodies were buried there in a 'graveyard'.

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THE ROADS TO FRESHWATER

After 1865, a network of routes for extracting timber was established across northern Cooloola. Bullock teams were used to haul kauri and hoop pine logs from the dense Woolaan scrubs around Lake Poona to rafting grounds on Tin Can Inlet, from where they were rafted to Maryborough sawmills. By 1923, some tracks, bridges and culverts along these routes were described as 'old' or 'very old'.

South of Woolaan, Freshwater Creek drained a deep valley through Lake Freshwater and onto the beach. After the valuable softwood resource was exhausted, hardwoods were extracted from the Woolaan and Freshwater valleys, with many years between harvesting cycles.

In 1956, contractor Alan Backhouse bulldozed a track to Freshwater for logging trucks. He described the former bullock wagon track as a 'goat track'. Recognising Lake Freshwater's scenic value, Forestry set aside an 80 hectare Beauty Spot around the lake and creek. Once the Rainbow Beach Road was opened for sand miners in the 1960s, Forestry managers consciously referred to the bulldozed route as the Freshwater Track. Previously, most vehicular access to Freshwater had been along Teewah Beach from Tewantin.

In 1972, Widgee Shire Engineer Don Clarkson led a three-man deputation to the Premier and obtained special funding of \$42,000 to improve the Freshwater Track 'for tourism'.

Before sand-mining commenced in 1973, Cudgen RZ exerted considerable pressure to use the Freshwater Track. The mining company wanted to use 20 tonne trucks to move 450 tonnes of mineral sand each week for 40 weeks to the Gympie rail depot. Such consistent use was far in excess of the occasional logging traffic along the track.

Reg Doggrell, the Gympie District Forester, strongly resisted these demands and also the company's desire to camp on old cattle yards at Freshwater and establish a treatment plant on the foreshore. He recommended rejection of the request and suggested the use of the old Telegraph Track with an extension to Teewah Beach, but this was rejected by Cudgen RZ.

In 1973, District Forester O'Brien reported that, despite over \$70,000 being spent on the Freshwater Track, it was still far from perfect for conventional vehicles. Gravelling of the track had in places caused erosion, and maintenance grading by Council had resulted in loose material blocking Forestry's hand-cleared culverts. Forestry imposed a speed, weight and height limit on the heavy trucks that were damaging the track. To keep the public out during wet weather, appropriately worded signs and legally enforceable Permits to Traverse were introduced.

During Easter 1973, despite a lack of toilet facilities, about 400 people camped at Freshwater. Forestry built two toilet blocks and barbecues, and developed two modest camping areas in time for Christmas 1974.

After the ship *Cherry Venture* became stranded on Teewah Beach in July 1973, visitation to

Freshwater increased. Forestry then received many complaints about the poor state of the Freshwater Track and the damage Council had caused to the forest canopy. Other complaints related to litter, pollution, illegal camping, the removal of coloured sand and misuse of dune buggies and motorcycles.

Conservationists complained about a six hectare clearing by Forestry at the western end of Lake Freshwater, which was the first stage of a 400 hectare blackbutt enrichment program. Enrichment planting involved clearing an area along rainforest margins where transitional forest species dominated, and replanting with a pure stand of a commercially desirable species, in this case blackbutt (*Eucalyptus pilularis*). Some foresters argued that, if one eucalypt were present, the area was not rainforest, but this was contestable.

Other complaints related to the mining company's Permissive Occupancy special lease, which allowed a treatment plant on the beach front at Freshwater. Heavily laden mining trucks were driving on the intertidal zone and destroying eugarie beds, instead of using the zone above high water mark, as had been approved.

In 1974, Cudgen RZ pointed out that fuel was being transported along the Freshwater Track to salvage the *Cherry Venture*, and unsuccessfully applied to use the track for the passage of 90,000 litres of fuel per month in 15 to 16 tonne loads.

Politically, this was a highly contentious time, and, knowing that a national park was likely to be declared, Forestry managers adopted a 'wait and see' attitude. They must have breathed a sigh of relief in December 1975, when Cooloola National Park was gazetted and managerial responsibility passed from them to the newly created QNPWS.

In 1977, Widgee Shire Council offered to improve the Freshwater Track, construct concrete causeways, and grade it three times annually. Ideally, it would be sealed and become a one-way system. This never eventuated.

In 1978, Forester Paul Ryan described the Freshwater Track as 'in a hopeless condition and a series of lakes in the wet season'. He and Tom Ryan of QNPWS inspected an alternative, 13 km logging route past Camp Milo, which was almost entirely on State Forest and was required for logging activities. The extensive widening, expensive drainage works, massive gravelling and new bridge required ruled this route out.

When Cooloola NP was gazetted, it contained a small amount of what Forestry termed a 'wasp waist' of rainforest along the Freshwater valley. In our desire to protect this narrow strip of forest, an inter-departmental inspection was held in May 1978, involving head office and Forestry personnel, regional and local staff. Included in the QNPWS team was the Rev. Stuart James, a soil scientist from Kingaroy, who pointed out that the road had, in places, broken into the water table.

The smallish puddles I had noted on my first visit in 1975 were now large and deep, damage caused by vehicles pushing water and sand in front of them as they drove through. QNPWS saw that the cost of maintenance would be like pouring money into a bottomless pit, and decided to close the road in favour of an alternative.



Old Freshwater Road, 1978
(photo Queensland Government).

The first alternative, the road past Camp Milo (now the Pettigrew Road) had already been rejected by Forestry, who did not support QNPWS's opening it for tourist use. Peter Male, the local Forester, was very anti-tourist, arguing that tourists 'light fires and leave rubbish'.

A second alternative was the old Telegraph Track, which led directly from Rainbow Beach to Double Island Point. However, the advancing front of the Carlo Sand Blow was threatening to close this track within a few years, and since there was no possibility of a detour around the encroaching dune, that route was ruled out.

The only other alternative was a circuitous route from the Freshwater Track to the old Telegraph Track, rejoining the Freshwater Track near the lake. This route traversed both State Forest and national park, but, with the tacit acceptance of QNPWS (the new kid on the block), log trucks were already using it. Forestry allowed QPNWS to use the Eastern Firebreak Track, and this route was adopted.

The decision to close the Freshwater Track was taken on environmental grounds, but the closure led to protests from tourism operators and 4WD clubs. Widgee Shire Council complained that our action inhibited any renewal of sand mining on leases that were still current, and argued for a sealed or gravel road to Freshwater.

In August 1978, I was instructed to make the new Freshwater Track suitable for 2WD vehicles by Christmas. My reaction was incredulity, and 'not this Christmas, surely'. This directive would encourage further visitation to Freshwater, where we already could not cope. But planning proceeded rapidly. In addition to local staff, we brought men from Mapleton, Noosa, Kinaba and Woodgate to assist with construction. The Marsden matting used on airstrips during the Second World War would have been ideal on this sandy track, but it was no longer available.

To achieve the 600 mm width required, timber was the only possibility, and large numbers of three metre long, 300 mm × 50 mm planks, were ordered. Trucks brought the planks to the edge of the rainforest. My eldest son Wayne and I worked of an evening and into the night, moving planks along the track for use on following days.

Early in November I used my trade skills to make a jig to ensure that holes drilled through two 300 mm boards would match at both ends. Jim Walsh of South Side Spring Repairs allowed me to use his machinery at low cost to fabricate bolts, 650 mm long and threaded on one end, to hold the pairs of boards together.

The district's supply of timber of this size was soon exhausted, and we were forced to take narrower boards. This meant drilling through and matching three sets of boards to give the finished 600 mm width. We were then obliged



Alternative road to Freshwater, 1978 (photo B. Thomas).

to accept brush box. Much of this timber, being cut green, rapidly warped, and we then had to turn sections of the boarded road over. As the timber warped the other way, we turned it again. Altogether, we used 1100 planks.

At Christmas, the initial project was complete and the money stopped. No funding was forthcoming for maintenance or passing lanes for safety. I brought utility loads of sawdust from a sawmill in Gympie to stabilise trial sections of the old Telegraph Track.

The task of making the Freshwater Track created aggravation from staff, and I was in the firing line. The weather was often hot. Splashes of the creosote painted on the planks to deter termites burnt the skin. The freshly cut, three-metre boards were heavy, and drilling through their 300 mm width was hard physical work. Antipathy developed among employees drawn from different areas, who resented having to leave home and travel to this job, neglecting other essential work. The conservation issue of closing the old Freshwater Track was lost on them.

Then came the public complaints, firstly from visitors who had recently discovered Cooloola and bought 4WD vehicles to access the area, and now found it was 'full of cars'. Next, it was from drivers who could not keep their vehicle on the boards, or, too impatient to wait, left the boards to pass another vehicle. Many drivers were not experienced in sand driving, and we often saw them stuck, searching among control levers to engage four wheel drive. As the sand dried out, the track became a nightmare. Head office had not taken into account the huge increase in traffic, but Director Saunders's undertaking had been fulfilled.

There were on-going inspections and discussions with interest groups, and Cr Kelly continued his agitation. The next few years carried a degree of uncertainty for management. Would we, could we, hold the conservation line in the face of political hostility? The seemingly illogical decisions of Director Saunders to open the track to Freshwater for 2WD vehicles and establish an office in Gympie indicated the influence of government on his public service position. I liked him, but his too easy acceptance of political demands disturbed me.

Before my arrival, Widgee Shire Council had sought an on-site meeting with QNPWS minister, Tom Newbery, and the local member, Max Hodges, who was Minister for Tourism. Mr Newbery had suggested that Widgee Shire might like to have the old Freshwater Track gazetted so they could do it up themselves. Fortunately, when Ivan Gibbs became Minister for Culture, National Parks and Recreation, he decreed that no action would be taken pending assessment of public opinion of the soon to be released Management Plan. In September 1979, Council proposed to upgrade the alternative track from Camp Milo to Freshwater, but Forestry and QNPWS, having previously rejected this route, rejected it again.

In December 1979, the distinguished consulting engineer Jack Mulholland was engaged by QNPWS to report on the Freshwater Track. He wrote:

The Cooloola rainforest track is no more or less than the bed of Freshwater Creek ...[to] reopen the old Cooloola track through some 7 kilometres of rainforest for the purpose of building a motor road would be an environmental tragedy ... road maintenance costs would be forever high ...

Widgee Shire Council rejected this report, saying Mr Mulholland's use of emotive language proved bias!

Responding to this report, Council's agitation continued, and Minister Ivan Gibbs was invited to inspect both Freshwater tracks. During the inspection, Council conceded the engineering problems

of the track along the Freshwater valley, and changed their approach in favour of maintaining both old and new tracks as a one-way system.

Engineer Clarkson pressed on me his desire to continue a road southerly past Lake Freshwater, between the coast and the Noosa River, to link with Tewantin. When the Commonwealth Government had stopped export licences for minerals from Fraser Island, the Widgee and Tiaro Shire Councils had shared a large grant of money to off-set resulting unemployment. Both councils had apportioned their money to construct a road from Tin Can Bay to Maryborough, and Widgee Shire Council would soon be left with bulldozers and 6WD graders. These would be available to work in the park, and roads could be built at cost. Clarkson also advocated a spur road to service the establishment of a major tourist complex at Double Island Point.

The Minister's summing up was music to my ears. He told the Council, 'Thank you for your input. I will now consult my departmental staff, and get back to you in due course. I'll come back in two months for a further inspection.' True to his word, he and five of his back bench Parliamentary Committee inspected both tracks in February 1980. As a result, the original Freshwater Track remained closed.

In September 1981, Council invited Tony Elliott, the new Minister for Tourism, National Parks, Sport and the Arts, to inspect the Freshwater Track. Following the inspection, I heard that Minister Elliott was sympathetic to Council's demands. Ominously, in Gympie's *Sundowner* magazine the following month, Cr Kelly was reported as saying that 'the days of conflict between council representatives and officers of national parks were now gone'.

In April 1982, the Noosa Parks Association reported that Minister Elliott had accepted re-opening the Freshwater Track and upgrading the Cooloola Way. He also supported building a new, all-weather road to connect Rainbow Beach and Tin Can Bay, reducing the distance between the townships from 38 to 10 kilometres. This road would follow the powerline and cross Tin Can Inlet by a bridge or a ferry.

To obtain independent advice on the road network in Cooloola, QNPWS approached the Co-ordinator General's Department, and was advised that the cost of a minimal study of the Freshwater access routes was in the order of \$25,000 to \$30,000.

In 1986, consulting engineers Sinclair, Knight and Partners carried out a Freshwater Lake Access Study. The length of the old Telegraph Track route was given as 16.8 kms and the estimated cost for upgrading was \$1.3 million. The length of the Old Freshwater Track was 10.9 kms. It required many deviations and had an estimated cost of \$1.2 million. A further \$200,000 was needed to upgrade the track from Rainbow Beach Road to the edge of the park. Access via Camp Milo was 12.5 kms, and the estimated cost to upgrade it was \$1.4 million. Additionally, they reported of the old Freshwater Track:

Provision of a road in this region would seriously diminish the quality of the area [and cause] pollution ... groundwater contamination and air pollution ... detrimental effects on the aesthetics and noise in the area ... severely restrict the opportunities to create appropriate walking tracks through much of the rainforest.

Neither QNPWS nor the Council had the money required, and the old Freshwater Track remained closed. Management was allowed to prohibit the use of 2WD vehicles on the new Freshwater Track, a sensible decision that eased road maintenance and the over-use of the Freshwater area.

Picnic Areas in the Rainforest

In an attempt to alleviate criticism that nothing was being done in the park, I implemented a plan to create two picnic areas, named Quandong and Blackbutt. At the time of Minister Gibbs's inspection, these were featured prominently and had been connected by a walking track through the rainforest.

For Quandong, an area 500 metres past the present Bymien picnic area, I selected the site of a magnificent, double-trunked, blue quandong tree with large buttress roots. Nearby grew other quandongs, fig trees and picabeen palms, and the largest kauri pine I knew of in Cooloola. For Blackbutt, I chose a stand of blackbutt trees, which Forestry had proposed as a Beauty Spot.

Around the Quandong area, I prepared a 900 metre track named Dundathu (Aboriginal for kauri pine). At the picnic area with Minister Gibbs, I took the opportunity to outline recent developments, including my use of volunteers to make walking tracks. He happily named the Quandong picnic area on the spot.

I flagged a track southerly from Quandong, past the large kauri, and on to join the old Freshwater Track. I did this mainly by myself at weekends, but called on a team of volunteer Honorary Protectors to assist with track construction. A member of the Noosa Parks Association so admired the large kauri that she gave a donation in memory of her mother, who admired trees, and I constructed a raised platform to protect the kauri's root area.

In 1980, I was also developing another picnic area on the edge of the rainforest, which I named Bymien, meaning fig tree.

March 30, 1982 was a red-letter day. To my surprise, Widgee Shire Chairman Adrian McClintock invited me to his office for a cup of tea and a chat. Not long afterwards, I reciprocated, and he called at my office for a cup of tea. From informal discussions with Adrian over the next two years, I knew that Council wanted access for bus traffic to the edge of the rainforest on the Freshwater Track.

My liking for Adrian gave me the confidence to outline a concept I had been turning over in my mind. This involved improving the facilities at Bymien, and seeking Forestry support to upgrade their vehicular track from the Rainbow Beach Road, which was almost entirely on State Forest. I pointed out that this concept was not included in the Draft Cooloola National Park Management Plan, I hadn't sought support from QNPWS or Forestry, and there was no funding. Adrian responded, quite positively, that if approval was given, Council might support it financially.

Clive Price, Deputy Director in head office, was heard to mutter the word 'upstart', saying, 'It's not in the management plan.' When the project was further considered, the Sinclair, Knight and Partners report gave substance to costs. Forestry were assured that the new road would be wide enough for both logging and tourist traffic. The upgrade was approved, and \$200,000 was allocated to Council. This was a good achievement for all parties and the environment.

The Bymien picnic area was extended, and picnic tables and a toilet block were built by District Ranger Mark Johnston. I believe that improving road access to the edge of the rainforest, then using existing tracks for visitors interested in walking, was a happy balance between 'lock the public out' and Council demands for access.

Of greater importance was the easing of tensions between Council and QNPWS. My new-found ability to talk to Chairman McClintock about park issues fostered a constructive relationship. (Also, I had survived my advocacy of a matter **not** in the Draft Management Plan for Cooloola.)

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THE MINISTER AND THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

During February 1980, our Minister, Ivan Gibbs, brought his parliamentary back bench committee for a three day inspection of Cooloola NP. The first management plan for any national park in Queensland had just been released for public comment. The plan and public reaction were now under review.

The Minister's committee comprised Len Stephan (Gympie), Gordon Simpson (Cooroorra), Bill Gunn (Somerset), Angus Innes (Sherwood), and Lin Powell (Isis). Accompanying the group was QNPWS Director Graham Saunders and key staff from the Planning Section, Trevor Vollbon and Bob Spiers, Field Operations Officer Chuck Wilder, Tom Ryan and myself.

Ian Pedley, editor of *The Gympie Times*, accompanied the group and published four comprehensive reports on 19, 20, 21 and 23 February, 1980. His succinct introduction read:

Controversy and Cooloola seem to go hand in hand. Once the battleground for a major war between sandminers and conservationists, Cooloola is now at the centre of skirmishes involving local government, tourists, four-wheel drive enthusiasts, fishermen and timbermen. At issue is the Cooloola Management Plan, the blueprint for the development of Cooloola National Park.

The party's itinerary called for them to inspect the Elanda-Kinaba area, then to travel to Harrys Hut to camp overnight, before traversing beach areas and the two Freshwater tracks next day. They were scheduled to stay at the Rainbow Beach Mikado Motor Inn on the second night. Lunch was to be provided at Teewah Creek in the north central area of the park on the final day.

The Cootharaba Area

Some drama was added to the occasion when our two cabin cruisers battled their way in 30 knot winds across Lake Cootharaba, whipped up by distant Cyclone Ruth. I was the operator of the *Darter*, a half-cabin vessel, and most of my party got wet. Tom Ryan, in the larger boat, kept looking back, and said later, 'At times I couldn't see your boat. Waves were going right over the top. You have the honour of being the first submarine captain on Lake Cootharaba.' We didn't have to be told; some of those waves rolled over the cabin awning and eventually swamped the motor.

While the party were at the Kinaba Centre, Senior Planning Officer Trevor Vollbon spoke about Kin Kin Creek and the Noosa River. 'The Noosa River is unique,' he said. 'There's nothing like it from New South Wales till you get up to Cape York Peninsula. We've looked at the river and the park as part of a long term plan, since the vast majority of park users have not yet been born.'



Kin Kin Creek sunset (photo D. Batt).

Leaving Kinaba, the party journeyed along Kin Kin Creek to view the rare and recently re-discovered *Boronia keysii*. At Harrys Hut, canoes were made available for the party, and all enjoyed a quiet paddle on the still waters of the Noosa River while waiting for the evening meal. Dinner in front of an open-hearth fire in the galley of the hut was conducive to conversation, philosophising and yarn swapping.

I found the conversation around the camp fire quite fascinating, particularly when the politicians described the moods and eccentricities of their prominent cabinet colleagues.

Editor Ian Pedley reported that the Management Plan for Cooloola provided for peripheral use of the park, and described the low key camping area at Elanda Point as providing a buffer zone. He noted that 900 people in Elanda, where recreational facilities included bushwalking, yachting, canoeing and history, would mean fewer people camping in the park, acting as a pressure release. Fishing as well as boating would be restricted on the Upper Noosa, and bass fishing would be subject to permits and a bag limit.



Noosa River at Harrys Hut (photo B. Thomas).

This proposal had the full backing of Gordon Simpson, the most experienced bass fisherman among the MPs, and of Noosa Shire councillor Charlie Piggott of Kin Kin, an avid bass fisherman, who turned up to give the Minister a briefing on the sport. Cr Piggott advocated a closed bass season and the cessation of trawling in the breeding areas of Lake Cootharaba.

Ian Pedley, having also enjoyed the Noosa River environs, philosophised:

It's no wonder so many people are getting back to nature, escaping from the pressures of suburban life but in turn putting pressure on the natural environment in places like Cooloola.

North-eastern Cooloola

On the second day, both Freshwater tracks were inspected and discussed at length by members of the party. We pointed out that Freshwater – seen as a major tourist destination by the Widgee Shire Council and local business people – had limited potential for car parking, camping and picnicking. Located in a narrow valley between two sand dunes, with Freshwater Creek flowing along its southern edge, the area available for development was limited. If access for conventional vehicles were maintained, it would not be possible to control the numbers of vehicles.

At Double Island Point, Planning Officer Bob Speirs explained the problems confronting QNPWS. His 1980 review of aerial photos suggested there had been a loss of 10% of the width of the isthmus in the past 20 years. While spinifex grass could hold its own against storm surges, it could not withstand mechanical agents such as motor vehicles. Increasing vehicular use, camping on the northern side and erosion on the southern side could allow storm surges to break through the isthmus.

'The Beach Protection Authority has recommended closing the track across the sand blow,' Bob said. 'If Widgee isn't prepared to close the beach, we wish to use the Leisha track, making it two-way and re-routing the first 100 to 200 metres, so it goes in at right angles to the beach. The camping problem is purely one of numbers. Last Easter at Double Island Point, there were 850 tents, containing probably 2500 campers.'

Ian Pedley reported that the issues of vehicular access across the isthmus and beach closure north of Freshwater were the most controversial aspects of the Management Plan. He noted that the beach itself was once a happy hunting ground for sand mining companies, which gouged several million dollars worth of rutile from the foreshore. However, he asserted that, of all Queensland's national parks, none had quite the same attractions, ranging from Lake Cootharaba in the south to Rainbow Beach in the north. The Cooloola landscape consisted of ocean beaches, high dunes, wet plains of wallum heath, the Noosa River with its lakes and tributaries, and the slopes and plains of the river's western catchment.

Teewah Creek

Minister Gibbs and his party enjoyed lunch beside the old bridge at Teewah Creek. There was a feeling among some of the Minister's party that it would be unfair to eliminate all but bushwalkers from such a delightful place.

Discussing the problems of the proposed closure of the road from the Cooloola Way at Coops Corner to Teewah Creek, Trevor Vollbon explained that the road had to be re-sited in this section of the Noosa Plains because of erosion, which caused washouts a metre deep in places.



Teewah Creek (photo B. Thomas).

‘There are three reasons against roads in the middle of parks,’ he said. ‘First, there is the people control problem, second the problem of the road itself, and third the possibility of spreading root rot fungus. The Service is particularly concerned about *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, which has already been noted in the park. This fungus kills selectively and could move tens of metres overnight given the right conditions. There is evidence that the disease is brought in by vehicles, in particular earth moving vehicles.’

I consider that Ian Pedley was fair and accurate in his reporting, but I thought the bold introduction for this part of his report bordered on the dramatic. His article commenced:

Keep out! Unless you want to walk. You can paddle your own canoe, but won't be able to drive your car in the Primitive Areas of Cooloola National Park. This is one of the loud and clear messages of the management plan for the park. The proposal will affect existing roads and deny future vehicular access to other parts ... The area proposed to be zoned 'primitive' under the plan comprises mainly the top half of the park and includes the upper, and, in some sections, un-navigable reaches of the Noosa River and Teewah Creek.

Observing Teewah Creek for the first time, he said he could

... only recommend that others see it now before it becomes too late, unless they are prepared to hoof it. The Widgee Council must sometimes feel like the National Parks and Wildlife Service's whipping boy. It wants to see the road through the western catchment of the park to provide a fast link between Tewantin and Noosa in the south to Rainbow Beach in the north, as well as to give easier access to the Noosa River system. Council has recently spent money on the road and even named it 'Cooloola Way'. The Service, while in favour of a better road link which would also be likely to divert some through traffic off the beaches, is inclined more to a scenic but longer road further west around the Como Scarp.

Rainbow Beach

The final report in Ian Pedley's series was headed 'Site chosen for National Parks HQ at Rainbow', and it stated that talks were scheduled to begin in Brisbane over the siting of a QNPWS information centre at Rainbow Beach.

A photo of Minister Gibbs showed him planting a stake to mark the proposed site of the information centre. His enthusiasm for this location was, I believe, a political 'balancing' of the Kinaba Centre in the Noosa Shire.

Ian Pedley reported that Mr Gibbs had been immediately impressed with the site picked out by District Ranger Ron Turner, a site on Forestry land on the southern side of the Rainbow Beach Road about a half kilometre from the township. Mr Gibbs said he would have detailed talks with Dr Saunders and the Forestry Department. 'There is an urgent need for an information centre to be built at Rainbow Beach,' he said. 'I will be pushing to have it done as quickly as possible.'

Minister Gibbs also gave his blessing to the new Dundathu Walking Track, a development I had already commenced, in my own time and by using volunteers. He noted that it:-

... leaves the new Freshwater Track beside the Quandong picnic ground, named after the big Quandong tree. Two features of the walk are a kauri pine with a girth of about five metres and a big brush box with climbing fig roots convoluted round it. Mr Turner is working on a system of tracks radiating from Rainbow Beach. These are of various lengths and loop shapes so that there is different scenery all the way round. Ultimately there could be overnight camping spots for walkers wanting to go all the way to Freshwater or beyond.

Ian Pedley made two prescient observations, which illustrate an attitude prevailing during the early days of the national park. I term it the 'Us and Them' syndrome.

His first comment was that 'one Ranger, who must be given a cloak of anonymity', claims that the users of the top end of Cooloola National Park have little in common with those at the southern end. While visitors in the south seem to be generally concerned with nature, many at the north are far more interested in their four wheel drives and stubbies.

His second comment related to an observation by politician Angus Innes, who made the point that 'there seemed to be some rivalry between the two shires that share the park. The people of Noosa and Widgee should see it as a regional thing, which must be managed as a whole, and the whole will prosper'.

Although Ian Pedley was fair in his reporting of the 1980 inspection, I believe that considerable antipathy has emanated from the Gympie district towards the 'undue influence' of residents of Noosa Shire on 'our area'. Gympie people saw Cooloola as 'their' playground, with no restrictions on building huts, beach camping, shooting, collection of coloured sands and beach and rock fishing. While Forestry controlled the area, few visitors had access to the beaches from Gympie, and reliable access came only in 1965, when Council opened the road to Rainbow Beach. On the other hand, unrestricted access along Teewah Beach from Tewantin commenced after the First World War.

The early hostility of Widgee Shire Council and some Rainbow Beach business people blinded them to peripheral development possibilities at Rainbow Beach. In contrast, the popular leased camp ground at Elanda Point has been beneficial to both the Noosa District and the national park.

8

THE WESTERN CATCHMENT – MY FIRST DAY WITH PREMIER JOH

It started as an ordinary day when the Gympie office phone rang in September 1980. Tom Ryan wanted to know if I had any appointments the following Wednesday. Quickly checking my diary, I said, 'No. Is there something you would like me to attend to?' His next words made me sit up and take notice. 'You are not to tell anyone about this, but you are to meet Joh Bjelke-Petersen at the Gympie airport and take him on an aerial and ground inspection of the Cooloola area, particularly the western catchment.'

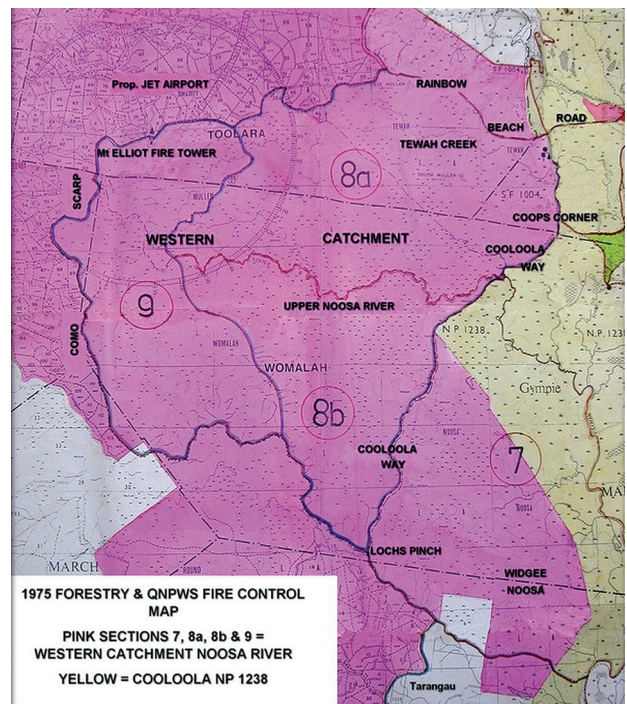
My immediate reaction was 'Why me?'

From my contacts in conservation circles, I knew of well-based scientific arguments to have the western catchment of the upper Noosa River added to the park. This area, known as the Womalah landscape, had a different soil type from the sand mass. Dr Arthur Harrold had conducted a flora survey and listed over 100 different plants that did not occur in the existing park. The Noosa Parks Association and the Cooloola Committee were pressing hard to include this area in the park.

The former Member for Gympie, Max Hodges, had given an undertaking to have a pulp mill built in the district. To guarantee the success of this mill, Forestry stressed the need to increase their exotic pine plantations by an additional 10,000 hectares of land in the Western Catchment. (The existing plantation, spanning Toolara and Tuan districts, covered 40,000 hectares, and was said to be the largest single pine plantation in Australia.)

Against these competing arguments, the Premier wished to inspect the Western Catchment and make up his own mind. I knew the area and I was on the spot – in more ways than one!

I had never been involved in such a senior level inspection and commenced a little homework, particularly what Premier Joh liked and disliked in the way of food and drink. My wife Yvonne purchased and packed the lunch, which included the Schweppes's lime cordial I was informed the Premier liked. I contacted Geoff Brown at Wolvi, who made enquiries about the quantity of land Forestry had recently purchased



The Western Catchment of the Noosa River. Pink = state forest; yellow = national park.

on the eastern side of the Wolvi-Kin Kin Road. Both the information and concept of Forestry using this poor quality, former farm land, was invaluable to me on the day.

I worked out the compass bearing from the Gympie airport to Elanda, at the southern edge of the national park. More importantly, I contacted Tom Graham, the Cooloola Overseer, stating apologetically, 'I know you're very busy, but by Tuesday next you are to install a picnic table, a fireplace and a rubbish bin.' This was to be done at a new picnic area I had commenced clearing.

The day appointed for the inspection arrived, and I made sure I was at the Gympie aerodrome with plenty of time to spare. To my horror, I noticed several Widgee Shire trucks and many workmen standing idly about, and thought I had been sprung. An aircraft approached, and the workmen tried to make themselves less visible behind their vehicles. I overheard one of them say, 'Here comes Big Russ!' Russell Hinze, the so-called 'Minister for Everything', was scheduled to visit that day, to inspect the police station and racecourse and hold discussions with Widgee Shire councillors.

Instead of 'Big Russ', Premier Joh descended from the plane, walked straight to the workmen and started shaking hands. He was advised that the council equipment was there to reseal the tarmac, and his plane, the week old and already controversial 'Joh Jet', was in the way. There was a piercing whistle from him, and a shouted call to the pilot, 'Beryl, can you move the plane from this area?' Then the motors started, and the plane moved backwards out of the way.

I suggested to Joh a change of plan. The calm atmosphere was heavily filled with smoke, but the promise of a later breeze seemed to make a delayed flight a better option. After meeting the Premier's private secretary, Peter McDonald, and his pilot, Beryl Young, I invited the party to accompany me in a vehicle borrowed from Forestry. Approaching the Wolvi area, I outlined the issue, especially the argument that Forestry needed an extra 10,000 hectares of land on which to plant pines. As we descended the ranges and drove along the Wolvi-Kin Kin Road, I pointed out the former grazing lands recently purchased by Forestry for planting pines.

I considered that these and further farm purchases would be a better way to expand the pine plantations. Added to the cost of clearing untouched native forests were the problems of siltation of the river, loss of stream flow and water quality, and potential blocking of the river mouth.

In the upper Noosa catchment, there were large areas of swamps unsuitable for plantations. Forestry managers tried to show their environmental credentials by maintaining strips of native bushland within the plantations, but these residual 'environmental reserves' were either too swampy or too rocky to plant, and were managed as firebreaks between blocks of pines.

As we proceeded towards Harrys Hut at the Noosa River, I was surprised at Premier Joh's enthusiastic response to seeing a swamp wallaby hopping across the road. A little further along, he insisted we back up to look at a carpet python, again with that excited, almost childlike response to seeing the reptile. The Cooloola Way, which traversed part of the land he was to inspect, had not long been opened and was still in reasonable condition. I pointed out the 'chevron' scars made by the rare yellow-bellied



Premier Joh wished to have a better look at the carpet python.

gliders. Arriving at the new picnic area along the Freshwater Track, I saw, with pleasure, that Tom Graham had complied with my wishes.

Peter McDonald used the kindling and firewood I had brought to light the barbeque and cook the meat. Beryl Young unpacked the food and Premier Joh, seated at the table and looking around, told me how he had nearly lost his seat in parliament over the Cooloola controversy. Bags and bags, containing thousands of postcards protesting proposals to mine the coloured dunes, had arrived at his office. He had stared down his colleagues and narrowly won the day, and the area became a national park. He had often flown over Cooloola, and now, here he was, right in the thick of it. He was ecstatic. It was 'Beautiful, just beautiful.'

I told the Premier how volunteers were helping to construct walking tracks in the area. I mentioned the visit by one of his cabinet colleagues, Ivan Gibbs, and how he had named the nearby picnic area 'Quandong'. There were a great many strangler figs near this new site, and I had searched Zachariah Skyring's Kabi vocabulary and found the word 'bymien', meaning fig tree. I hinted that he might like to emulate his colleague, and, in true political style, he rose to his feet, saying, 'I, Joh, in the presence of Beryl, Peter and Ron, do hereby declare this Bymien Picnic Area open.'

After lunch, we walked to Lake Poona, where Joh kicked off his shoes and sat on the sand at the water's edge. His shoulders visibly relaxed as he enjoyed the pristine surroundings, so quiet and still.

On the return journey to the Gympie airport, Premier Joh broached the sensitive issue of the pulp mill, asking whether I thought it was a good project. I expressed my concern for future soil fertility in the Womalah area, but thought I was getting into matters I didn't know well and tried to change the subject. 'No, no', he said, 'I want to know your opinion.' Having lived in New Zealand and passed through the huge exotic pine plantations in both islands, I then noted that the large trade imbalance between Australia and New Zealand might make importing paper a viable alternative.

I switched to a safer topic, referring to a recent report in *The Gympie Times* where a local Water Resources Commission engineer had stated there was insufficient water in Lake Borumba to operate a pulp mill. Describing the tan colour and frothing of paper mill waste water pouring into the western end of the Gippsland Lakes at Rosedale in eastern Victoria, I posed two questions for any local mill: where would the water come from, and where would the effluent go? There appeared to be two choices: pump the effluent into the Mary River or overland to Sandy Strait, creating problems in each area.

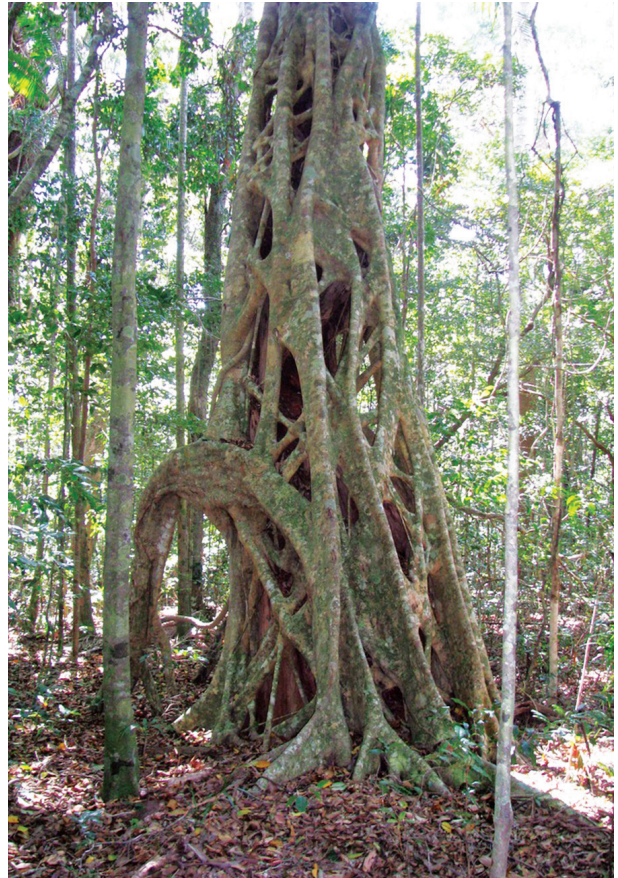


Fig trees were common in the area.



Lake Poona.

At the Gympie airport, I noted that two policemen were guarding the 'Joh Jet'. Russ Hinze had arrived after Joh's party had left, and had flown into one of his well known tantrums. He didn't know what the Premier was doing, nor did the local member, Len Stephan, nor did the Councillors. The workmen would have told them that Premier Joh had left with the local park ranger! Oh dear! 'Big Russ' was not amused! In fact, he was furious because the 'Joh Jet' wasn't under guard! I would have loved to be a fly on the wall in the political scene round Gympie that night.

On board the plane, I asked Beryl to follow my compass course. As we circled the Cootharaba area, I outlined the recent history of Elanda. The Commonwealth Government, who owned the land, was about to hand it back to the State for national park purposes, but I was not in favour of adding Elanda to Cooloola National Park. The area was heavily infested with the noxious weed groundsel, and it would take a long time and a lot of money to revegetate it. I thought that if this area, in addition to the Wolvi lands, was planted to pines, the 10,000 hectares Forestry were seeking would almost be reached. Also, the Australian Paper Manufacturing group had established extensive areas of pine plantation just west of Elanda.

Beryl enquired about the airstrip near Tin Can Bay, which she was aware of but had not seen. We flew north along the Noosa River valley, circled the airstrip, then started to circle slowly over the Western Catchment. The land below was swampy, and I observed to Joh, 'Looks very wet down there.' There was something in his reply, in the way he slowly said 'Yesss', which caused me to rest my case and say no more.

After the 'Joh Jet' bearing the Premier had departed, I was surprised to discover in my vehicle a memorandum written by the Permanent Head of Forestry to his Minister, outlining the Forestry case for a pulp mill. Forestry had become interested in a cattle property at Neerdie, north west of Toolara, which was owned by the Tinana Development Company. This area would satisfy their

requirements should they not be allowed to plant pines in the Western Catchment. The company was willing to sell 10,345 hectares at an average price of \$517 per hectare, and a valuer's report was attached. Forestry were seeking \$1.2 million to purchase this area.

I telephoned the information to QNPWS head office, then mailed the report for their attention, but a question remained in my mind: Was the report left in my vehicle accidentally or deliberately?

I thanked Tom Graham for installing the infrastructure at the new, officially named 'Bymien Picnic Area', explaining that his efforts had supported a successful day. I also told Gerri Kluver, the Overseer in my office, that I had acted on instructions to keep Premier Joh's visit a secret! Within a week, I received the message that the Western Catchment was to be added to the national park. Feeling a great sense of achievement, I passed the news on to Dr Harrold. QNPWS Director Saunders had to underwrite the cost of the proposed Forestry purchase at Neerdie.



Como Scarp; interface between state forest and national park from former Mt Elliott fire tower (photo D. Batt).

In 1983, the Western Catchment was added to Cooloola National Park. It included the Upper Noosa Catchment, the whole of Kinaba Island and a 315 hectare area north of Kin Kin Creek to protect the habitat of the rare Keys Boronia (*Boronia keysii*). Its western boundary was set 200 metres from the edge of the pine forest, just below the crest of the Como Scarp. This gave Forestry a wide strip for fire protection, roading and control of gravel deposits along the ridge line. It meant there was actually a strip of native bushland outside the legal boundary of the national park.

9 THE CHANGING FACE OF QNPWS

Head Office

The 1983 staff magazine, *Newspaws*, reported that a major review of the Department was under way, involving an expansion in head office. The move from a former brothel site in Albert Street to a multi-level Ann Street building signalled significant changes, and the feeling of friendliness within head office vanished.

The Ann Street building was a rabbit warren with many tunnels. Office personnel increased in numbers, and unsmiling strangers filled the rooms. Former smiling faces were despatched to rabbit holes on different floors, where they were difficult to find. 'Bolt holes' gave access to different levels, where staff would go to enjoy cigarettes and a gossip, often at least a 30 minute round trip and more than once a day.

In the reorganisation, the Maryborough Region became a sub-region of a new Southern Region. The northern boundary of this huge region included Fraser Island and all lands west to the Northern Territory border. The new Director of the Southern Region, Noel Dawson, operated from a large office complex at Moggill, a western Brisbane suburb, on land gifted to the department.

Seven years later, another Regional Director, Des Boyland, moved his office to the centre of Brisbane, not far from the Ann Street head office. The Moggill complex continued to be used for all national park operations, wildlife enforcement and researchers, confiscated and injured animals, and the large regional store. Under-utilised, this complex went into a slow decline.

There was a huge increase in Departmental costs for wages and accommodation, but this was not reflected in an increase in field staff, or money for park maintenance and improvements. The tail was now wagging the dog, a dramatic change from the early years, when head office staff were there to support field staff. I recalled – sadly – being invited into Director Saunders's office in 1978 for drinks and a 'Welcome aboard' from the senior staff. Although I didn't get into head office very much, it had now become a place to avoid, and I had cause to reflect on Deputy Director Clive Price's words, 'Welcome aboard, for better or for worse!'

For field staff, it seemed that the head office public servants had to justify their positions by demanding more paper work, a bureaucratic approach to management that was to get much worse. Tom Ryan, forewarned of the changes to come, commiserated with me when he resigned, saying, 'Good luck Ron!'

Economic managerialism had arrived! Operations lurched from crisis to crisis, as money allocated for specific tasks was cut or withdrawn. Sometimes warnings would come that we might have to take vehicle keys away from staff. (I was never told how to cope with rubbish collection or toilet

cleaning if staff could not use their vehicles.) Such talk seemed to be a panic reaction, and it happened too often for staff to develop confidence in senior management.

Staff publications revealed that large amounts of money, staff and equipment were going into providing the regional and sub-regional offices with more expensive vehicles and new computers. The weekend penalty rates many field staff relied on to give them adequate wages were either limited or cut altogether, and their attitude hardened towards knocking off on time and being paid overtime.

There was increased pressure to meet deadlines. The public, left out of the equation, saw even less of park staff.

Maryborough Sub-Region

Following Tom Ryan's resignation, I assumed responsibility for the sub-region for several months and spent almost as much time in the Maryborough office as at Gympie. When Kevin Bade was appointed as Regional Superintendent, he continued to commute from Rockhampton for the next four months.

After a week-long meeting in head office, Kevin was heartily sick of the system. Our vehicle usage and general expenses were once again to be restricted to emergencies. There was no money for postage or petty cash, and little money for fuel or toilet paper. On top of this, we were required to gather statistics for future use, and we received a demand for a 'Forward Alert', a list of proposed events, so strategies could be considered for gaining favourable publicity.

This was followed two weeks later with a 'drop dead' panic. We were to immediately provide estimates for 'minimum operations'. All major funding was stopped! There was to be no replacement for Lindsay Pringle at Kondalilla, who had resigned due to ill-health. We were broke, and I was told to cope with one fewer member of staff!

Kevin often said that the paper work was affecting him, and his directions lacked consistency. My health was also affected, with on-going headaches and back and neck problems. Other District Rangers were likewise under pressure, and one told me he was 'having a nervous breakdown'.

Inefficient communication affected normal operations. My contemporaries were receiving instructions from Brisbane two to three weeks ahead of me because of handling delays along the chain from head office to Moggill, to Maryborough, and on to Gympie.

In August 1984, we received a fresh demand for paperwork. This involved a regional assessment of 'musts, wants and should haves' listed by priorities 1, 2 and 3, to be updated annually. Another time, Kevin and I were told to drop everything and provide details of development proposals, in writing, instantly. More and more reports were demanded, always with deadlines, without consideration of what urgent works might be in hand.

My approach to work changed. Instead of driving myself to be always available, I reacted by attending to the required administrative work. My weekend days off became more sacrosanct, although I was still quietly available to assist Honorary Protectors and conservation groups. Kevin or I were then rostered on duty each weekend, but this came with an unexpected benefit, as I was able to complete administrative work without interruptions from other staff or the telephone. Staff then complained that I wasn't available during their working week.

On one occasion, I agreed to lead a Sunday walk to Mt Peregian with the Noosa Parks Association on my normal rostered day off. I then received two weeks' notice to attend an engineering

management course at Yepoon on the Monday after my volunteer outing. I refused to cancel leading the NPA group, and, by leaving very early on Monday, I arrived only a few hours late. Many of the other QNPWS staff present were annoyed at being instructed at short notice to participate in this course, and one man walked out, complaining of the irrelevance of the subject matter for park management. A government initiative stipulated that 2.5% of departmental allocations be used for training, but engineering-level training for Park Rangers was merely going through the motions of complying with legislation. Meanwhile, back in the parks, work piled up because there was often no-one to handle it.

At a District Ranger meeting in Brisbane, other rangers approached me to find out how I was coping so well! This surprised me, but I found that they had been told that the Gympie Region was 'not having any trouble'!

Kevin and I once worked hard to reach a nominated deadline for 'urgent' paper work to be at Moggill. Worried that the report might be a day late in the mail, Kevin telephoned with an explanation, only to find that the Regional Director was in western Queensland!

We were then obliged to prepare flow charts for proposed works, designed to show, in advance, target dates for the different stages, as the works progressed. When we were called on to provide an itinerary of our movements for the next week, then for two weeks, Kevin responded, 'I can't predict where I will be this week let alone two weeks in advance!'

In 1985, management of Cooloola National Park was split into north and south sections, and I was given the smaller Noosa Shire area. If splitting the region was supposed to save manpower and costs, just the opposite resulted. There was an imbalance in workload between the two sections, so I gained heavier responsibilities for wildlife, volunteers, environmental park management, rural nature conservation and an unemployment scheme.

Southern Cooloola National Park and Elanda

Returning from annual leave in January 1985, I was greeted with advice from Kevin that a decision had been made to open the Harrys Hut area as a major tourist interchange. The access road to the river was to be upgraded and the Western Firebreak south from Camp Milo closed. Despite my protests, Kevin wasn't prepared to question the concept or its ramifications. It was a bombshell, a *fait accompli*. Although the Cooloola Management Plan had never been formally adopted, these development concepts were contrary to the plan's thrust to maintain the Noosa River as a low-level recreation and wilderness area.

Within a fortnight of this disturbing news, we heard on the grapevine that the local member, Gordon Simpson, knew of this plan. A new bridge was to be built over Teewah Creek and unwanted staff would be shed by September!

Dave Batt, Stan Powell and I inspected the development potential at other sites along the Noosa River. Fig Tree Point and Eurubbie Road had better potential than Harrys Hut, especially for vehicular access. My report to Kevin was not welcome, as he was expecting my endorsement of the Harry's interchange.

A company operating a tour along Teewah Beach, and down the Western Firebreak to the river at Camp Site 3, objected strongly to the interchange proposal, and nothing more was heard of it. The Western Firebreak, a Forestry road, remained open.

Gordon Wilkinson from the Moggill regional office appeared on the scene in 1985 to assist with land acquisitions. A quiet but confident man, he and I worked well together, sometimes with QNPWS botanist, Dr Wendy Drake, assessing the quality of various lands for conservation purposes. I assisted them with background information, and accompanied them to point out the boundaries of vacant Crown land in Noosa Shire and around Mt. Coolum. We also inspected the Mudlo Gap and the Rossmore Creek chimneys in Kilkivan Shire.

Wendy and Gordon were aware of the threatened swamp stringybark tree (*Eucalyptus conglomerata*), which grew only in a few localities on the Sunshine Coast, including Mooloolah River National Park. This national park comprises 1400 hectares of mainly heath and swamp vegetation. In the north-west corner, there is a hectare of a different soil type, bearing a remnant of tall, dense forest.

The company that was about to construct a new toll road connecting the Bruce Highway to Mooloolaba sought to clear a long, narrow strip along the northern edge of the park, where fewer than twenty swamp stringybark trees remained. We proposed putting the road a little further north, excising a narrow strip of land owned by the Moreton sugar mill, but this was rejected. Instead, many of the swamp stringybark trees along the northern edge of the park were cleared. The company also cleared part of the tall forest for a toll station, which only lasted a few years until a change of government lifted the tolls.

I didn't have frequent contact with the Member for Gympie, Len Stephan, apart from the annual Christmas party he gave for public servants. On more than one occasion, he indicated that QNPWS should charge fees to use the park. Whenever this subject arose with Len, I would express my opposition. It would mean that park staff would spend time on fee collection and administration. If fee for service was the argument, the public could ask where is the service?

Another issue Len would raise related to terminology, and reflected on-going antagonism between the State and federal governments. 'Why is the word 'national' used in conjunction with Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service? The federal government do not support State controlled national parks financially. Why not call them State Parks, to better reflect the source of financial support?'

The creation of the Fraser Island Recreation Area in 1985 meant fees were about to be charged there, and a seminar was held at Moggill to inform staff. In the enthusiasm to gain extra revenue, I knew my point of view would be blowing into the wind. Head office took almost 25% of this new source of revenue for administration, and very soon visitors to Fraser Island started to question what services were being provided for the new fees. Park use fees were later introduced across the State.

After the creation of the enlarged department in 1983, I felt that offering advice based on experience and local knowledge was no longer appreciated. This was confirmed by quiet, personal advice from friends in regional and head offices. Perhaps, at age fifty, I was too old to adopt the sycophantic role senior management expected. Their encouragement for District Rangers to complete a 'life plan', showing where we wished to go within QNPWS and what strategies we should employ to do so was a bit beyond me!

Gympie Office

My return from annual leave in January 1986 brought a welcome surprise with the presence of Bronwyn Gibson in my office. She was pleasant and efficient, coping well with each responsibility

given to her, and she quickly became an asset. However, I wondered, considering our boom and bust operations, where money was being found for her wages.

In March 1986, I was instructed to draw up a budget without delay, but the necessary forms were not available, even in the Moggill office. Our single telephone was ringing incessantly with Easter camp bookings, wildlife enquiries, and park administration. Having trouble reaching me, Kevin telephoned the office of the Health Department and instructed me to get a second line.

In April, I had to prepare a list of achievements covering the past three years. When I was told to compile a Strategy Plan for both Elanda and Noosa, I took the opportunity to insert a list of desirable land acquisitions south of Noosa, which later became part of Noosa National Park.

In May, I prepared a list of 'Non-Recurring Specials', which were developments we would like to do. If extra money became available at short notice, we could proceed, but the problem was that each item needed to be designed by our planning officer, who was fully committed travelling the State, handling the here and now.

Staff came under pressure to do more and more paperwork. In December, I was instructed to complete a new report, showing the percentage of time staff spent on various tasks. Later, there was a new monthly return format, enabling Moggill office to review achievements and select items to present to the Minister and to gain publicity.

I was not surprised when Kevin Bade retired in 1987 due to ill health. He was temporarily replaced in the Maryborough office by Wildlife Ranger Paul Sheehy, who quickly delegated all manner of wildlife work to me.

In February 1987, I was stunned to be told, without any preamble, by Regional Director Noel Dawson, 'You are to be transferred to Moggill as a Wildlife Ranger. How do you react to that?'