

Submission on poor treatment as a Queensland Public Sector Worker in 2012.

My name is Kimberley Kennedy and I worked for various iterations of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and Department of Environment for almost 8 years.

I entered the QLD public service in 2004 as an AO3 level Administration Officer. I was a recent graduate with a degree in Bachelor of Social Science (Environmental Studies) and had 2 years of varied private sector experience in Cape York Peninsula and Cairns.

I joined the public sector because I wanted to work for the greater good and to serve the people of QLD.

I entered as an Administration Officer as I had struggled to secure a ranger or project officer position with my limited post university experience and thought as long as I worked hard and applied myself I could better my position and build a career no matter how I entered.

I work tirelessly in this position for 2 years learning the workings, policies, legislation and personalities that made the QLD Parks and Wildlife (QPWS) in the Northern Region tick over.

After two years I saw a PO (Professional Officer) entry level position advertised within the Kuku-Yalanji ILUA (Indigenous Land Use Agreement) Implementation team.

After my private sector experience and learning the jobs available within QPWS I decided this was an area I would like to pursue and somewhere I could make a tangible difference.

This position would set the path for how my career would develop - I liked and enjoyed projects which offered no job security, but were cutting edge, public service positions that aimed to increase awareness and understanding between the QLD government and the public.

Similarly the way in which I was recruited would set a theme for my career as well. This position was fully externally advertised and I won the position through an open merit process. Meaning I completed against anyone who

wished to apply.

The position was only a two year contract but I served in this position for the full 2 years learning many valuable lessons along the way - and growing as a professional officer.

With a month to go on my contract and no sign of an extension I looked around for more work.

I still had my administration officer position as my permanent position having secured it through an open merit process when I was originally hired. However I felt I had outgrown this position and as was common practice while people were away on project positions my position had been backfilled for 2 years.

I was interviewed, again in an open merit externally advertised process, for an AO5 position in the newly formed and funded Reef Protection Unit with the then Department of Natural Resources and Mines. Thus moving out of QPWS.

As was common practice when a permanent public servant moved across departments and up a level there was no "approval" required and I moved departments with no hesitation.

Meanwhile a massive restructure of the public service was undertaken and DNRM was combined with the Environmental Protection Agency to form Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM). QPWS became its own department. This will become relevant later.

This position was again a fantastic experience for me and involved large amounts of personal interaction and education of cane growers in North Queensland region explaining new, world leading legislation on the monitoring and control of diffuse point agricultural legislation. This team was awarded a Premier's excellence award for its efforts. In this role I recruited and trained all new Reef Protection Officers in the Cairns region.

Through movements of staff in the broader team I was able to apply for an AO6 position within this team after 18 months. Again this was an externally advertised, open merit process and I was successful in gaining this promotion - again on a contract basis.

By this stage I had been promoted to Team Leader level but still held my permanent AO3 position. At no stage was I approached regarding my absence or was my career path questioned.

After two years in this team I was offered a 6 month acting opportunity as an AO7 manager and policy advisor working directly for the North Region Regional Director. The youngest of only 3 women operating at this level in North Region.

During the interchange period between these positions I became aware that the Reef Protection project would likely be terminated if there was a change of government in the upcoming state election and began to look for a new position. I saw a PO4 position in the Regional Planning and Co-ordination unit and again through an open merit, externally advertised process I was the successful applicant.

This position was for 1 year with a potential finally of maybe becoming permanent - after 4.5 years of temporary project work this was a welcome relief.

Also this position was not a project based position - it was an everyday departmental function and therefore carried more inherent stability.

I moved to my temporary AO7 opportunity for 6 months with the intention of moving to my PO4 upon completion.

However during my time in this job QLDs government changed and the LNP had a landslide victory and rapidly went about changes.

One of the first actions they undertook was to de-amalgamate the super departments created by the previous government with little or no consultation. This meant the Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM) again became two departments. While QPWS was another and third department.

QPWS implemented a policy of moving all staff back to their substantive position irrespective of merit or job requirement. In my case this meant I had to now seek approval for the PO4 position I had formally accepted 6 months before as there was a new rule that secondments across agencies were no

longer supported. Permission and approval also had to be sought any temporary opportunities regardless of they were higher duties.

So I was forced after 4.5-5 years out of my administration position to return to QPWS to ask for permission to act in a position a had formally accepted months before with more pay, more opportunities and was a meaningful use of my skills.

My acting opportunity was not supported and I was faced with a decision to either relinquish my permanent public service position (AO3) to take up my higher duties opportunity or return to a position I had not worked in for almost 5 years, no longer had the skill set or interest in and which reduced my salary by close to \$35000 a year.

I chose stability and my permanent position in QPWS. My substantive position position has been vacant for well over 12 months and when I returned it was obvious the role was surplus to requirements.

I was systematically ignored and under utilised. Within 3 months I was told my position had been made redundant. I was one of 14,000 Queenslanders who lost their jobs. One of 28 in our regional QPWS area in one day.

This message was delivered by good local managers who it was clear had little or no input into the decisions of who would lose their jobs and who wouldn't. It seemed to me that numbers of jobs to be lost were based on required budget savings. These figures were handed to departmental heads in Brisbane and they determined how many positions this equated to with limited regional input.

In the North Region 26 of the 28 positions lost were women working as administration officers, finance officers, IT officers and HR officers. The approach taken in North Region QPWS means that those staff left behind have very limited administrative support, no finance officers and or HR officers based regionally. This surly can not be sustained long term without affects on productive, staff burn out and stress levels.

In several cases the positions lost were the only administration positions in small local offices (Innisfail, Mossman, Cardwell) leaving these office full of rangers trying to achieve environmental outcomes unsupported.

Rangers were protected through a different set of employment guidelines thus leaving those in QPWS in the non-Ranger stream at more risk. In a department of approx 3000 only 600 were not rangers so the total of 100 job losses was 1 in 6.

Everyone who was told they were being made redundant that day were made aware of the ability to be redeployed. However this alternative was so vague, open ended, was not a guarantee of continuing employment and also meant a substantial reduction in payout figures should the employee not be found a job within 3 months so only 2 people that I am aware of took up this option.

It was clearly stated by all including Government Ministers and Department Heads that this was a redundancy exercise and that it was not a reflection on those made redundant however a number of factors need to be examined.

Why would any employer faced with the difficult decision to downsize his staff not give preference to high achieving staff. Specifically in my case why was I able to perform adequately in an AO7 position then nobody took the trouble to find a position where my talents and experience could be used. Obviously if this had been done over say a twelve months period instead of being rushed that sort of analysis could have been done ensuring that the best staff would be retained rather than lost.

Why was my termination payment calculated on the AO3 position I had not been employed in for 5 years rather than the AO7 position I had last acted in or the AO6 position I occupied in the Reef Department or even the PO4 position that I had been appointed to. The obvious answer is that the intention was to limit the payouts to the smallest amount possible.

While the payment may be considered generous by some it has been diminished further as at the time of this redundancy exercise I discovered that, to my delight, my husband and I were expecting our first baby. Obviously the benefits I will receive under the federally funded maternity leave scheme (which I thankfully still have access too) scheme will be less than I would have received if I had remained employed by the Department. A further financial loss to my husband and I. As well as having no job to return to after the baby is born.

Of those 14,000 employees who lost their jobs through this process no one can draw on loss of income insurance (such as mortgage protecting)

because you *must* be forcibly retrenched

- due to the directive including the term voluntary (Voluntary early retirement), it is considered we *volunteered* to lose our jobs and therefore are not entitled to draw on insurances to protect our loss of incomes.

No one can apply for positions vacant , which QGov are advertising on a weekly basis, without penalty provisions to the poorly termed VER *incentive* payments and yet; these and others on a daily basis continue to be targeted for further job cuts.

There now also appears to be a directive in place that no work is to be offered to those who took redundancy. One may ask why a competent ex employee who was made redundant but has the skills and experience to take on a short term assignment is not the best person for the job?

My conclusion given the way I was demoted then made redundant and now told that I can't be recruited is that the departments criteria for recruiting does not include "Best Person for the job"

I left the public service with such an awareness of a change in attitude - we were useless public servants, we deserved no respect, our rights at work through our Enterprise Bargaining agreements were being eroded, opportunities and career development were truncated.

If this Inquiry is to contribute anything to the debate it may be to emphasis to the people of Queensland that this process was rushed through without thought as to merit or retaining the best staff to ensure future productivity of the Government.

Without doubt this process was rushed, under consulted and will in the short and long term lead to diminished and vanishing services for the people of Queensland.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this presentation