

WILDLIFE OFFICERS ACCUSED of THREE MURDERS

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Allegations of murder and corruption in the New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service will be investigated by police in New South Wales and Queensland. They will look into claims that wildlife employees were involved in the murders of three people in the two states.

Allegations that senior wildlife service officers were corruptly involved in the kangaroo industry and bird-smuggling rackets have also been referred to the NSW Independent Commission against Corruption.

The Federal Minister for Justice, Senator Tate, may establish a national inquiry into the allegations, which centre on documents tabled in the Senate last week by the deputy leader of the Australian Democrats, Senator Meg Lees. Senator Lees said yesterday that the allegations were of a "very serious nature" and could not be ignored. But Bill Goolooly, dismissed them as bizarre and preposterous. One of the tabled documents is a transcript of a conversation last March between a one-time identity on the kangaroo industry, Mr Steve Gordon, who is the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission's western New South Wales commissioner, and Mr Raymond Hoser, a Sydney naturalist and author.

Mr Gordon alleged in the transcript that wildlife service staff were involved in the murders of three men: two brothers, Eric and Harry Judd, who disappeared in 1980 in a western NSW town, and Andrew Komarnicki; a kangaroo processing-plant operator, who vanished in the same year in the outback Queensland town.

The bones of the Judd brothers were found in 1982 in their vehicle in a dam on their farm.

Police told an inquest that they apparently drove into the dam after they had been drinking.

Mr Komarnicki's body has not been found, but an inquest concluded that he had been murdered.

Police told the inquiry he had been involved in a "bitter kangaroo meat and skins war".

Referring to the Judd brothers, Mr Gordon said wildlife officers "knocked them off and put them in the dam" as they were returning from a hotel. He said that to cover the crime, the car was loaded with grog.

Referring to Mr Komarnicki, Mr Gordon said officers had put him through the pet-food mincer. He said he saw them mixing the body with other meat.

"I didn't see the blood, but parts were human I got real sick, you know, I stopped dead in my tracks and I just walked off," he said.

NSW Police said yesterday that the homicide squad had begun investigating the claims about the Judd brothers.

Superintendent Merton Butler, of the Queensland Police, said the allegations about Mr Komarnicki would be investigated.

Mr Gordon said in the transcript that the wildlife service was "very corrupt", and people wanting to get into the kangaroo industry had to give its director money.

He said a former officer in the wildlife service "was running the kangaroo industry" while still in the service.

Mr Gordon said people in the industry were "buying him (the officer) off and offering him 20

grand he would do anything, give him a few thousand".

Mr Gordon said another former wildlife service officer had been involved in buying and exporting birds that Mr Gordon was trapping. But Mr Gordon made no connection between the two officers and the murders, which happened before they held senior positions.

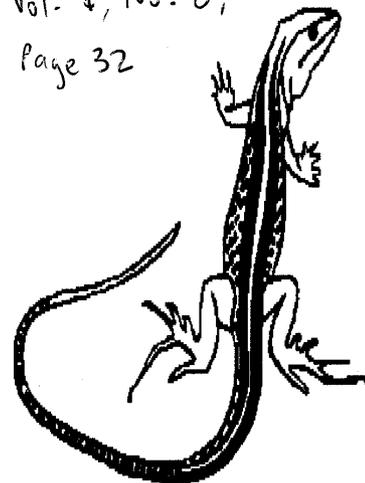
One of the former dismissed Mr Gordon's allegations as incredible. He said there was "no way at all" he had been involved in bird-smuggling, and was not aware of corruption in the service.

Mr Goolooly said in a brief statement that he completely rejected the allegations but, despite their "preposterous nature", he had referred them to the ICAC.

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Recent Reptile Thefts,

Corrupt and

Overzealous (1993)

Wildlife Officers

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By Raymond T. Hoser

The book 'Smuggled' was due to be released in June 1992, but for various reasons the release has been delayed until February 1993. The book covers wildlife smuggling from an Australian perspective, with chapters relating to similar matters in the UK, USA and elsewhere. The book details corruption in State wildlife departments in Australia, and shows that corrupt wildlife officials appear to dominate operations smuggling wildlife from Australia. 'Smuggled' shows how wildlife is routinely stolen from keepers, often when it is legally held, and then makes its way to buyers in the USA and Europe.

'Smuggled' also details overzealous wildlife officers who literally entrap keepers into breaking wildlife laws and often 'bust' keepers for the most trivial of alleged offences. Some recent cases that fit the above pattern and are not mentioned in 'Smuggled' are worth mentioning here.

On 20.02.89 a Northern Territory person, Errol Woods, was taken to court, convicted and fined for feeding live bats and birds to three pet Olive Pythons *Liasis olivaceous*. This case followed the unsuccessful trial of West Australian herpetologist Paul Orange for feeding four common lizards to his snakes. In the Orange case, the magistrate found that Orange had been 'entrapped' by officials into giving them his feeding records. The four separate charges, one for each lizard, were dismissed and Orange was awarded maximum costs. An earlier case launched by West Australian fauna officials against reptile man Peter Tight was similarly unsuccessful.

The New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) are well-known as having had numerous corrupt officials over the last 20 years, and the involvement of these officials with reptile-smuggling and other rackets are well-documented in 'Smuggled'. In spite of this there has been no respite in incidents relating to officials in that department and new allegations against them over the last 12 months.

For example, although 'Smuggled' details corrupt activities of the former director of Sydney's Taronga Zoo, Sir Edward Hallstrom, and others at that institution in relation to NPWS and wildlife trafficking, more recently released material from the Customs department (some of the operation donought (wildlife trafficking) file, written by Jim McShane further corroborates the allegations against Hallstrom and NPWS.

'It became apparent through follow-up investigations that certain persons in responsible positions in private enterprise - and certain government bodies had access to information of vital concern in connection with investigations and other matters.'

'Pressure allegedly brought to bear by Sir Edward (Hallstrom) through a member of the NSW State Parliament (named) probably forced the removal of a key (non-corrupt) officer of the National Parks and Wildlife Service who had provided assistance to investigators.'

'It was established that the (name of MP) was the right-hand man of the late Sir Edward Hallstrom

and between them were responsible for the main illegal export and illegal import of the rarer type fauna.'

The NPWS have allegedly been 'reviewing' legislation for over five years now. This 'review' has resulted in NPWS not acting on current legislation and having a self-imposed ban on issuing all forms of keeping permits. All applications are responded to with a formal letter by licensing clerk Gary Ellis, stating the name. However NPWS have seen fit to selectively invoke other sections of the same legislation (also under 'review') to raid licence applicants and seize reptiles.

Sydney reptile enthusiast Shannon Wharton made innumerable licence applications to NPWS, only to be refused and given the standard dorm letter. In the first week of April 1992, he was raided by NPWS officials who declared that they wanted to take all his reptiles. Wharton's parents refused to allow the NPWS officials to take the reptiles and told them to come back with a court issued warrant to take the reptiles if they wanted them.

Wharton's father then sent NPWS a four-page letter explaining the hypocrisy of the NPWS's actions in 'entrapping' his son and the NPWS should immediately licence the reptiles. Followed up by a number of phone calls which among other things mentioned the Weinholt case (see below), Wildlife enforcement officer Leyton Llewellyn allowed Wharton to keep all his reptiles, excluding two Land Mellet Lizards *Egernia major*, which he was to arrange collection of. In a letter dated 11th June, Llewellyn falsely implied that NPWS wanted these lizards because they were endangered. Far from being endangered, these lizards are widespread and common in NSW and Queensland, and are on no endangered lists anywhere! Wharton asserted that Llewellyn probably wanted the lizards 'for a deal'.

Llewellyn allowed his own son, Richard to trap and keep reptiles for some years while he was in the enforcement section of NPWS and 'raiding' similarly unlicensed people and seizing reptiles.

Kaj Bulliard, another Sydney reptile keeper, repeatedly applied for

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permits from NPWS on the period 1990-2. Besides getting the standard Ellis formal letter stating that no permits to keep were being issued, another event also happened. Immediately following an application to NPWS for a permit, his facility was broken into and reptiles were stolen. In an interview dated 05/01/93, Bulliard stated that NPWS officials were 'the only suspects' as 'the only other person who knew I had reptiles at the time was with me when it (the break in) occurred'.

Bulliard was victim to another NPWS break-in on 08/01/93, when three officers, Blade, Smith and Smith, were confronted by Bulliard. This break in was filmed by the Sydney media. Bulliard was told by one of the officers, 'if you don't let us in, we'll jump over the back fence'.

In all, seven snakes and one lizard - his entire collection-were taken on that day.

A second reptile-keeper in the same part of Sydney also had reptiles taken from his facility on the same day. He wasn't home when the theft occurred. Three snakes, including a gravid Diamond Python *Morelia spilota* were taken.

Also in late 1992, three separate private zoos in or near Sydney were broken into and had pythons stolen. Symbio Koala gardens had seven pythons stolen on Christmas eve. The Sydney media reported that inquiries pointed to the snakes being sold for well-known strip acts in Sydney's King Cross. The various strippers pay \$500 per snake and need a constant supply as due to the cruel and rough treatment of the snakes, they don't live long. It was alleged that officials of NPWS were corruptly allowing the strippers to illegally buy and use the snakes ('protection') as it would have been effectively impossible for them to operate in the way they did without the knowledge and consent of NPWS officials.

Which brings us back to the Weinholt case. Licensing Clerk, Gary Ellis, the man responsible for enforcing NPWS's self-imposed ban, decided to corruptly issue a licence to the son of his family doctor, Chris Weinholt. Subsequently he corruptly issued a second licence to a close

friend of Weinholt's, again in violation of the 'ban'. Ellis also came under the attention of the Independent Commission against Corruption of NSW (ICAC) for allegedly demanding cash payments with licence applications.

The ICAC have recently been working overtime in NPWS matters. Aboriginal Commissioner Steve Gordon, himself a senior public servant also made a number of startling allegations against NPWS. The allegations are detailed in 'Smuggled'. In summary Gordon alleged that he had been involved in illegally trading wildlife in rackets operated by NPWS directors, Giles, Johnstone and Steele. Gordon alleged that the three men took bribes of up to \$30,000 in relation to Kangaroo permits. Gordon repeatedly asserted that NPWS officials were 'most corrupt' and alleged that NPWS directors were involved with mafia identities, court fixing and murdered people who threatened to expose their rackets.

Gordon was very specific in the information he provided and detailed murders of two brothers, Harry and Eric Judd, whose bodies were found dumped in a car at the bottom of a dam in outback NSW. A third man, Andrew Komanarki had his body put through a pet food mincer.

Gordon also provided information that incriminated Qld fauna officers. ICAC investigators were, at the time of writing, busily interviewing people throughout NSW and interstate on the Gordon allegations and matters raised subsequently. Retired NPWS officer Clive Bennett, further corroborated Gordon's claims in a tape-recorded interview to the ICAC. ('Smuggled' provides more information about Bennett's activities before leaving NPWS).

In Queensland, a wildlife officer, Modesto Melino was found shot dead at point blank range. It was alleged that he too had known to much about official corruption and was therefore eliminated.

A proper inquest into Melino's death was never carried out.

Also in Queensland, the Criminal Justice Commission of Queensland

(CJC) looked at allegations that a fauna park owner was able to illegally kill and stuff protected wildlife, with the 'protection' of corrupt NPWS officials in that state. Other allegations from that state included that reptile exhibitor David Williams had a corrupt contact in the NPWS who had sabotaged a number of serious fauna charges laid against him, by deliberately losing the file. A preliminary report on the matter by the CJC, dated 16th October 1992, stated clearly that 'Mr Williams breached fauna conservation legislation'.

Queensland reptile-keeper, and president of the Reptile Keepers Association of Queensland, Euan Edward, had had a long-running battle with the NPWS in that state. On 7th October 1992, he received a notice from NPWS stating that they intended taking his licensed reptiles from him and were cancelling his permits. Edward was given less than 48 hours to reply to the ultimatum given. On 9th October he was 'raided' and had all 58 reptiles taken. Edward was arrested at the time of the raid by police accompanying the fauna officials and charged with keeping reptiles without permit(s). To an impartial observer, such a case is essentially similar to a motorist being pulled over by a policeman and told that their licence was cancelled without their knowledge and for no good reason five minutes ago and therefore they were going to be booked.

A close friend of Edward in New South Wales suffered similarly. Paul Woolf asserted that he was 'done' solely because of his association with Edward, and the determination of wildlife officials to harass Edward.

In mid-1992, Woolf moved from Queensland to New South Wales. His move was delayed due to the excessive time it took to get relevant import and export permits from NPWS's in Queensland and NSW. Eventually after he got all the correct permits, he moved himself and his reptiles to Sydney, where he was commencing a new job. Shortly after he moved, armed officers 'raided' Woolf's house and took all 46 of his reptiles. The 'raid' was on 13th October.

In a subsequent letter to NPWS

(NSW), Woolf's lawyer, Neil Sullivan, summed up the illegality of the actions of NPWS officers Potts, Snook and others when he said 'We wish to point out that at the relevant time our client was the holder of a general licence GL 1206 (NSW-issued) issued 27th May 1992, expiring 31st May 1993. Also at the time our client was the holder of a permit for the movement of the fauna from Queensland number IM 028518, operative from 9th October 1992 to 9th November 1992. Our client also held an import licence number 9635 from your service...your seizure and retention of these reptiles is illegal and actionable as such...'

Perhaps I should mention here that the issue of 'import' and 'export' permits by state fauna authorities has been illegal under section 92 of the Australian constitution, which expressly forbids any impediment to trade between states and this point has been repeatedly tested and proven in wildlife laws. One question worth asking, is why do NPWS's still persist in insisting on issuing these permits at unnecessary time and cost to all concerned.

In November 1992, NPWS

(NSW) executive officer Jeff Hardy and others in NPWS sold a rare black Cockatoo, listed by his own department as 'Endangered'. In State Parliament the NSW opposition said the sale was 'a grab for profits in the sleazy illegal bird trade'.

Perhaps the attitude to wildlife bureaucrats in NSW and Queensland can best be summed up by recent events surrounding another wildlife bureaucracy, the recently founded, 'Wet Tropics Management Agency'. Agency director, Peter Hitchcock, a former deputy director of NPWS (NSW) squandered over a million dollars on consultancies, but failed to release \$30,000 to save a fish on the brink of extinction. The Lake Eacham Rainbowfish now no longer occurs in the wild and only a few specimens remain in captivity.

Meanwhile the agency spent \$600,000 on a draft management plan called "Strategic directions" which government experts said was a waste of money. Likewise for the \$900 per day spent on consultants who gathered material, which was already readily available. In the

federal senate, Senator MacDonald questioned the appointment of Vicki Pattermore to the position of manager within the agency. Pattermore, the wife of Hitchcock, was according to MacDonald given the position in violation of all accepted procedure. MacDonald told the senate, Pattermore was 'in line' for the job long before it was advertised.

Parts of the manuscript of 'Smuggled' were tabled before Federal Parliament on June 18th, 1992. This included Steve Gordon. As a result of this a number of 'official' inquiries into corruption in the NPWS of NSW and Queensland and their roles in smuggling birds and reptiles have been announced. These include inquiries by the ICAC (NSW), CJC (Queensland), Australian Institute of Criminology, Australian federal police, and perhaps most importantly a federal Senate Inquiry.

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