

Local Government Responsibilities

An examination of the issues on Fraser Island as outlined in the preceding table makes it apparent just how important the island's good governance is influenced by role Local Government. The legislation which the Environmental Protection Agency was proposing fails to implement the Beattie Government's election commitment to bring all of Fraser Island under a single authority. It would allow the administration of the island to be carried out by two mainland based cities and do no more than make them bound by the principles of the Management Plan. That seems wishful thinking especially as the Environmental Protection Agency has been dithering with the revision of the Management Plan for more than two years and has yet to release even the Draft for public comment. The legislation proposed might stop the either local councils deviating from the Management Plan but lacks power to make them pro-active in addressing their responsibilities. MOONBI examines just a few of the current responsibilities.

Revenue

Both Councils have used Fraser Island as a milking cow to gain revenue which they have mostly spent on the mainland. Although this came to light in 1996 in the report of the Local Government Commissioner the Queensland Government seems unwilling to address this abrogation of Local Government responsibility. FIDO constantly refers the EPA to the Report but it hasn't appreciated the implications.

The 1996 Local Government Boundaries Review said (p16) "Hervey Bay City has a net excess revenue of \$122,000" for its portion of Fraser Island. This is "after allowing a pro-rata contribution to general administration" of 10%. In addition the portion of Fraser Island under Hervey Bay "attracts Financial Assistance Grants and Road Entitlement estimated to be some \$160,000 per annum."

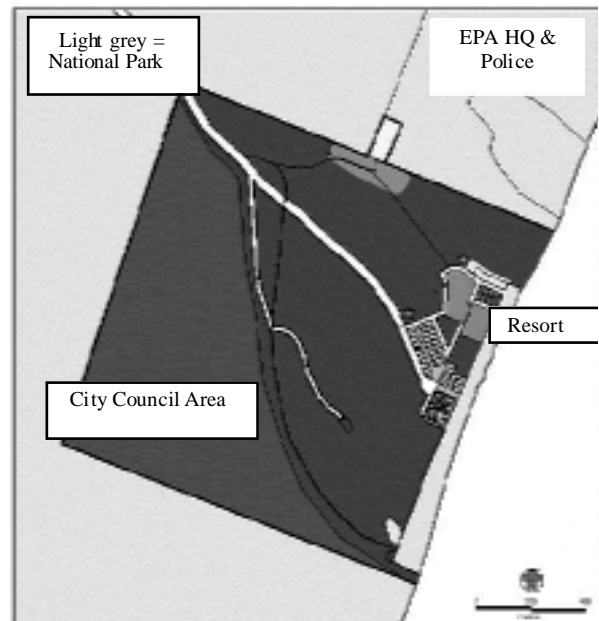
The Hervey Bay council annually collects \$173,746 in rate revenue from Fraser Island (\$755 per property) but admits that it spends annually only some \$34,000 on services to the island. It also receives some other grants for roads and from the grants commission money on the basis of Fraser Island. There was a similar story with Maryborough City Council which collected \$136,109 in rates and spent little more than \$44,000 in providing services.

Both Councils have spent revenue raised from Fraser Island on the mainland for decades. Both cities' mainland areas have benefitted by millions of dollars over the years because their Councils neglected their responsibilities to the island..

Roads

The size of the town reserves is not widely appreciated. For example, the map below shows the township area of Eurong and the extent of the main road. There are more than two kilometres of the Wanggoolba Creek Eurong Road within the Maryborough City Council area but all of the road-works are carried out either by the Eurong Resort or by the QPWS without any compensation. The QPWS has even provided pallets to stop traffic hold-ups on the worst sections of this track. These are now disintegrating but on past performance the Maryborough Council which is a major beneficiary from the economic fillip which Fraser Island presents to the regional economy is unlikely to contribute anything to the cost of replacement. It is a similar story at Happy Valley where the QPWS has tried to maintain the road which is the Hervey Bay Council responsibility from the beach almost to within 500 metres of where the road forks to Lake Garawongera and Yidney Scrub.

It should be noted that the road grants made to the two local authorities are on the basis of the areas of their respective areas. Without Fraser Island both Councils would receive much less revenue in the form of grants but they spend none of the grants on Fraser Island.



Map Showing Eurong Municipal Area

Note: The Environmental Protection Agency Police and administration is located just north of the town area which runs 1.6 kilometres along the beach and 1.6 kilometre inland. The white represents the gazetted road. The top fine line represents main access road to the Eurong Resort passing its industrial site. The road junction (top left) is still well within the town boundary.

Planning Controls

It is a matter of history that the Queensland Government developed two Development Control Plans for the two Councils on Fraser Island, which the Councils refused to adopt. The most adamant opposition came from Hervey Bay whose refusal to cooperate has resulted in an outrageous and inappropriate development of Orchid Beach. At the end of the 20th Century and on a World Heritage island the Hervey Bay council allowed the a total shambles to occur at Orchid Beach.

The Hervey Bay council's administration of Orchid Beach has been deplorable allowing an urban landscape to evolve which is the subject of almost universal criticism by everyone who has seen this planning hotchpotch where most principles of good planning and supervision have been ignored. In addition the Hervey Bay council has a very avaricious approach to tapping Fraser Island water to meet its growing population. Hervey Bay wants the capacity for Happy Valley and Eurong to expand to more than four times the current area they cover. The administration of the Happy Valley and the fact that it has allowed the public toilet there to spill down the road and across the beach for years does not inspire us with confidence that it would manage Fraser Island as well as it deserves.

Weeds

There is now no doubt that the townships have been the main source of weed infestation which most seriously threatens the integrity of Fraser Island. The list of garden escapees is growing at an alarming rate and both Councils have sat on their hands and have been less than pro-active at bringing the weeds under control. While both Councils are now beginning to address the weed problem on Fraser Island, the current effort and lack of urgency means they are falling further and further behind.

Just making Councils responsible for only making decisions which are compatible with the Management Plan is not good enough. This would only enable them to be active when they are called upon to make decisions or to take some action. Unless the Councils demonstrate that they are truly responsible by bringing the weeds within their jurisdiction and with stopping any further weed infestations then the Councils don't deserve to be left with such a treasure as Fraser Island in their hands.

Waste management

Again with the issue of waste management the Councils have abrogated their responsibility and passed the buck and the costs to the EPA. When the EPA tried to pass on the full cost of removing the rubbish collected from the two council areas (\$700,00 over four years) both councils dug their heels in and refused to pay. (See MOONBIs 103 p5 and 105 p11) Eventually they collectively agreed to pay \$244,000. This leaves the EPA having to bear 65% of the actual cost of collecting rubbish from the municipal areas. While the Maryborough Council claimed that it was a saving of \$839 for each ratepayer there were no rate reductions in Eurong and still no commitment to spend all the revenue it raises through Fraser Island on the island.

However there has been a postscript to this debacle, A property owner from Happy Valley (part of the Hervey Bay local

authority area) recently dumped some asbestos cement in one of the EPA's bulk bins without their knowledge. (The driver hadn't inspect the rubbish he collected) This was then picked up by the regular rubbish collection and taken to the mainland for disposal. As it happened the rubbish was taken to the Hervey Bay tip and the Hervey Bay Council then charged the Environmental Protection Agency a \$500 penalty in addition to the ordinary dumping charges it makes. Currently the EPA pays the Hervey Bay City Council between \$500 and \$600 to dump a compacted load of garbage and in fact the Council collects more fees from the EPA for garbage than it contributes. Luckily the driver noticed the asbestos in another load so that it wasn't penalized a second time for placing rubbish which the Council should have picked up itself into a local tip.



For too long the two local authorities have done more than neglect Fraser Island. They have betrayed it by condoning inappropriate development. They have failed to accept their responsibilities for the waste management, roads and weeds. Worst of all while they have benefitted from the extra prosperity that Fraser Island has brought to their communities they have robbed the island of its fair and equitable share of revenue raised.

The Cost of Fraser Waste Management

With a pitiful budget of little more than \$5 million to manage Fraser Island the EPA is struggling to make ends meet. A large slice of the budget goes on waste management. Just imagine that in addition to providing and operating the bins and two large trucks which are expensive to operate on the Fraser Island terrain the EPA has to pay between \$250 and \$280 per truck for each round trip in the Wanggoolba Creek ferry.

With wages maintenance ferry fares a, dump charges it is currently costing the EPA about \$500,000 or 10% of its budget just to remove the waste from the island. Apart from the reluctance of the Councils to pay their full share of the operational costs, the Cooloola Council absolutely forbids the EPA from depositing any garbage collected on Fraser Island in their tips. This is despite the huge economic fillip that Fraser Island provides to that shire. Thus the cost of removing waste from the island is much more expensive than it might otherwise be.

Notes: (1) The EPA pays more than any equivalent client to use the ferries to Fraser Island. (2) While Kingfisher Resort manages its own waste disposal garbage from the Eurong Resort is placed in the general waste picked up by the EPA. Thus Eurong Resort makes a profit from garbage as does the council because the EPA pays it the ferry levy to remove their waste off the island.

It is small wonder that the EPA is engaging an independent outside consultant to consider alternative methods with dealing with the waste generated on Fraser Island.

Fishing Expo Fiasco Continues

The EPA continues to believe that it is best to encourage the Fishing Expo as a means of educating the patrons of this classic "Boys' Own" event which is a very successful advertising gimmick by Toyota. The EPA is blind to some basic facts in their report of the 2003 Fishing Expo. Increasing patronage results in an ever-increasing infrastructure load.

The report notes: "The full complement of 1500 entry tickets were sold out several weeks before the event. Of these competitors 497 had not attended the expo before. In addition there were 300 registered associates, about 100 unregistered associates and 157 staff, guests and sponsors making a total of 2057 people in the Waddy Point area. The concentration of such a large number of people in this relatively small area meant that the potential existed for unacceptable impact on the environment." (The media claimed that the event attracted 3000 people). To demonstrate that the event is causing incrementally greater stress each year the report shows that since 2000 events the number of camps has increased from 251 to 311 (25% increase) and the number of campers increased from 878 to 1113 (27% increase).

The EPA did a Pontius Pilate on the impact of the fishing effort: "The impact of the event on the fish stocks of the ocean surrounding Fraser Island cannot be quantified, but is likely to be considerable. Although the Fraser Island World Heritage area extends 500 metres offshore, this impact is beyond the bounds of this report as the Fraser Island recreation Area ends at the low water mark."

News in Brief

Fraser waders affected by Korean sea-wall: In 1991, the Korean government began building a 33-kilometre sea wall to cut the flow of seawater across the Saemangeum mudflats and “reclaim” them for agricultural use. Against the advice of the government’s own 2001 Expert Review Panel, construction of the sea wall continues. It is now 75% finished. If completed by 2005, the sea wall would be the world’s longest destroying a 208-square-kilometre ecosystem that is Korea’s most important wetland. The Yellow Sea fishery would lose a major spawning ground, and ornithologists believe that a tenth of the visiting bird populations would perish for lack of sustenance. That means that something happening thousands of kilometres away from Fraser Island can be expected to impact significantly on the population of trans-equatorial waders visiting Great Sandy Strait within a decade.

Fire Lighters fined: As Christmas presents two Sydney men were fined and ordered to pay compensation of \$30,000 between them for starting a fire on Fraser Island. The fire burnt for almost three weeks in January and February last year destroying approximately 2000 hectares of the Great Sandy National Park vegetation, threatening property, and killing or injuring wildlife before it was brought under control.

Shaun Vincent Murnane, of Miranda, and Jason Guy Quick, of Panania, were convicted after pleading guilty to charges under the Nature Conservation Act 1992 (s62). Despite warning signs advising there was a fire prohibition in place on the island at the time, Shaun Vincent Murnane, and Jason Guy Quick had lit a campfire.

Each was fined \$3500 (in default six months prison) and ordered each pay \$10,000 compensation and \$1500 costs. The Magistrate said that had they been Queensland residents, he would have ordered maximum community service rather than monetary compensation. He ordered that convictions not be recorded.

Problems with Pandanus: MOONBI has been advised by Andrew Collins of the Tin Can Bay based Cooloola Coast Care:

(This is) to let you know that we are experiencing pandanus dieback throughout the Tin Can Bay inlet, Rainbow Beach and in patches along the beach sections of Cooloola National Park from Noosa to Double Island Point. This dieback is due to *Jamella australiae* (leaf hopper) as has occurred on the Gold and Sunshine Coasts. Trying to save these plants has been a lot of work. Stopping the movement of this insect from the Sunshine to the Cooloola coast did not occur. I am not aware of the pandanus population on the beach side of Fraser Is. We have been working at trying to stop its spread, but the current movements of this insect suggest that it is only a matter of time before it reaches Fraser (depending on how well we can contain it).

More information on this problem can be found on the website: www.cooloolacoastcare.org.au

FIDO’s Response: FIDO is acutely aware of the potential risk from these miniscule critters. John Sinclair has seen the impact of alien insects and diseases wiping out virtually all elm trees and chestnuts in North America. So far Fraser Island has remained free of these hoppers. FIDO would like to be advised as soon as possible if they are seen on Fraser Island. It is important to stop. Whereas the occurrence species of Pandanus in southern Queensland are limited to the coast, many species occur in the woodlands across northern Australia. It is vital to ensure that these insects never these woodlands where their impact could be at least as devastating as the cane toads.



FIDO inspects Lake Boomanjin November, 2003

Permanent Ambulance Presence on Fraser Island:

The matter of better ambulance service for Fraser Island has been a matter of major concern to all Fraser Island stakeholders for some time. There is a strong consensus that a permanent ambulance service on the island is justified. A fully equipped Ambulance station has already been established at Happy Valley. At present the station is only manned during school holidays in spite of the ever-increasing number of visitors to the island throughout the year. All Fraser Island stakeholders now support upgrading this to ensure that it is permanently staffed. There are at almost any time over 3000 people on Fraser Island and the visitor statistics show that there is little variation between the peak periods (when the Ambulance station is staffed) and the months of least visitation. Experience shows that incidents (particularly vehicle accidents) continue to occur on a regular basis. Many serious occur each year, which often require evacuation by helicopter from either Bundaberg or the Sunshine Coast.

It is hard to conceive any other Queensland community of 3,000 (and growing) which doesn’t have access to a permanent paramedical support. Unfortunately the low resident base ignores the huge number of visitors which may be there at any given time. Unfortunately, Fraser Island is so large that helicopters may still be the best method of reaching more remote calls. However, the Happy Valley Ambulance centre is within 30 minutes travelling time of about 2,000 people and it should be justified on that alone.



Eli Creek 1983. This was an aerial was soon after FIDO had constructed the first boardwalk and picnic shelter as well as the first public toilet between Happy Valley and Dundubara. Since most of the areas of bare sand have become vegetated again.