



## 2003 FIDO PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The Fraser Island Defender's Organisation has had another productive, busy, frustrating, sad, productive, and otherwise varied year.

Our thanks go to John Sinclair, who continues to campaign for Fraser Island with great enthusiasm and tenacity. He produces one of the most comprehensive Newsletters of any Australian Conservation Group, especially given the resources available to FIDO. He also is ever vigilant, regularly inspecting the island, attending Great Sandy Region Consultation Committee meetings, handling media, preparing Government submissions, and international inquiries.

FIDO is also indebted to our long-serving and tireless Secretary Billie Watts, who suffered a stroke 6 weeks ago and remains in hospital. Billie has been central to FIDO for over 20 years. She has also done untold voluntary work for other groups, and we all hope her recovery and rehabilitation are successful. Billie's contribution to FIDO has been enormous, and it is hard to see how FIDO will not change without her energy and dedication. In recognition of her determined spirit, and in expectation that this continues to be directed towards her own recovery, Billie will be re-elected to the Executive tonight.

Thanks also to Terry Hampson, who has taken over much of Billie's role, as well as continuing his own role as Treasurer for the time being. Also to Judy Tambling, who has been assisting Billie with her work many months, and has also taken over other parts of Billie's work.

FIDO is also indebted to John Sinclair Junior, John Davey and Ronda Cook for their ongoing commitment to Fraser Island.

FIDO also appreciates our dedicated band of members and supporters. A strong membership gives us credibility when we are negotiating with Governments, provides us with ideas and strategies, and is essential for our financial viability.

FIDO is keen to reinvigorate the Executive. We are always interested in welcoming people who share FIDO's aims into the organisation and onto the Executive. It is some time since we had new Directors with fresh ideas. If you share our love of Fraser Island and would like to help us continue the campaign to save Fraser Island, in any way large or small, please contact us at any of the FIDO contact points listed in MOONBI

FIDO continues to work on various fronts:

### Education

MOONBI is a great publication and Edition 105 has just been circulated. As well as informing our members, it is circulated to a wider readership including the media, politicians, conservation groups, supporters, and is posted on the net. It is widely accessed by students and schools, both here and overseas. It helps educate and inform the community on Fraser Island.

Educational Backgrounders have been inserted in many MOONBIs over the years, more regularly in recent years. They go into greater detail on single issues, and are also available at the FIDO website.

### Research

Monitoring continues with regular inspections of the Island. The 2 John Sinclairs recently did an aerial survey of Fraser Island (reported in MOONBI 105 and developed in future editions). FIDO has now collected a vast wealth of photographic history of Fraser Island, particularly over the last 30 years, but including images back to the early days of logging. This record is great resource to understand the changes occurring on Fraser, especially given the transient nature of the Bureaucrats and Politicians empowered with the daily management of this fragile ecosystem.

### Pro-active Programs

FIDO has a long tradition of active programs of intervention. In the 1970s we constructed the first boardwalk on the island to stop the degradation at Eli Creek. This year we had another successful Weed Working Bee, removing weeds (including trees) from the Council land at Eurong and Happy Valley. Another similar venture is planned for later this month, and may continue next year if our resources permit.

### Publications

FIDO is currently preparing a new book on Fraser Island entitled Balarrgan, after that part of the island adjacent North White Cliffs, where Kingfisher Bay now stands. FIDO is also going to compile all the Education Supplements into a Booklet.

### Lobbying

FIDO spends much time doing work that is not seen by the membership or the community. In the 1970s and 80s, Governments often ignored Conservation Groups such as FIDO, and the only way we could be heard was to mount public campaigns. These days Governments have endless Committee meetings and Consultation. This occupies an enormous amount of time and effort by groups like FIDO, especially by John Sinclair and Billie Watts over the last 12 months. Unfortunately, progress through this pathway can be excruciatingly slow. But we remain in there, fastidiously working to ensure Fraser Island's resources are used wisely.

If you would like to offer assistance in any way, large or small, please contact us. If you know of others who share your love of Fraser Island, please pass MOONBI on to them or direct them to the website.

Thanks for your support,

Dr Ian Matthews  
August 5, 2003.

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT ADDENDUM

As you will have read elsewhere in MOONBI, Billie Watts passed shortly this Report was delivered to the FIDO AGM.

Billie was an exceptional person. She was a woman with a vision of a better society, and a determination to strive to achieve that better society for everyone. She was generous with her time, skills and enthusiasm to many causes. She continued to work tirelessly in a voluntary capacity for many groups, including FIDO, despite increasing health problems over the last couple of years.

Billie's passions included the peace movement, the union movement, the Labor Party, women's rights, aboriginal rights, the environment, and of course Fraser Island. She championed the cause of the poor, the disadvantaged, and refugees. She also worked to improve services in her local community, including public transport, public health and public education.

We all admired her ability to not only be involved in this wide variety of groups, but also be a central person in these groups. She was often as Secretary or Convenor of a group, and found time to do all the work arising from each organisation, and usually more. Billie had an exceptional knack of communicating with people of all ages and social backgrounds. She developed strong friendships with a wide variety of people, and was a mentor to many. She was a great networker, and had friends and contacts in the most surprising, and useful, places.

It is an understatement to say that Billie will be sadly missed by all her family and friends. Many organisations, such as FIDO, are now needing to develop new ways of working, often finding several people to achieve part of the work that Billie embarked upon. FIDO will miss her vision, her strategic planning, her impeccable memory, her efficiency, her humour, her enthusiasm, her commitment, her contacts, her dignity, and her disdain for injustice.

FIDO has achieved much over the 17 years that Billie was Secretary. Whilst much of the credit has gone to John Sinclair as the Project Officer, Billie's work has been a major part in all our successes. We will remember her fondly, and aspire to achieving more of the goals that Billie has set.

*Dr Ian Matthews,*

October 2003



**EPA officers, Dean Wells, the Allom-Watts families and FIDO interacting at Lake Allom.**

MOONBI 106 was due out before Christmas. Because of the imminence of Queensland and local government elections, it was held instead after Christmas to ensure that it isn't overlooked in the "Silly Season". It is still planned to bring out MOONBI 107 in April.

## What you can do

**Strengthening the Political Will:** The major problems with Fraser Island has been the lack of political will to both provide the resources and the leadership to get the bureaucracy to deliver better management. The political will has been lacking at the State, Federal and local government levels. 2004 is the year to stiffen the political will because there will be State, local government and Federal elections (in that order) and all politicians will be made accountable. Anyone concerned with Fraser Island needs to take the opportunity to approach all candidates of every political persuasion. The fact that the candidate may be remote from Fraser Island is not important. Fraser Island is of national (even international) significance and it makes a huge and growing contribution to the national economy. It should not be allowed to be relegated to parochial politicians.

### 1. The Queensland Elections:

The Queensland Elections will be held before June. Approach all candidates irrespective of the electorates they are contesting.

- (a) Establish what they propose for Fraser Island in the future which might improve the management of this world wonder which makes an annual contribution of \$275 million to the Queensland economy. .
- (b) Learn whether they will ensure that the EPA actually delivers what the politicians keep promising and not continue their prevarication and stalling on such basic measures as the Transport and Access Study (outlined on pp 8-9);
- (c) Find out what they would do to bring the management of Fraser Island under a single authority. (See p1). Fraser Island cannot be left to be administered by many small managers who have priorities other than Fraser Island.

### 2. Local Government Elections:

The abrogation of their responsibilities of the two local authorities which administer Fraser Island (Maryborough and Hervey Bay) is outlined on pages 5-6. While Premier Beattie pledged to bring Fraser Island under a single authority, until that happens the two local authorities which are the principal beneficiaries of the Fraser Island bonanza must be forced to more actively shoulder their responsibility. There is increasingly recognition that collectively local authorities have more impact on the environment than the Federal and State Governments combined. The local government elections during March should be an opportunity to change the predisposition of many local authorities from a preoccupation with property to becoming more environmental responsible managers.

### 3. Federal Elections:

The Federal Elections will be held later in the year. The last Howard Government has been the worst ever Federal government FIDO has experienced as far as Fraser Island is concerned. They reduced an already inadequate \$600,000 contribution to the management of Fraser Island to \$6,000. This is worse than the halving of the grants they give to voluntary conservation organizations and their cutting back in other areas of environmental expenditure. The \$600,000 already compared very poorly with what the Commonwealth Government hand out to some other World Heritage areas. It is important that ALL candidates from all electorates should be approached to convince them that Fraser Island is a matter of the national interest and deserves much better from the Federal Government. It should not be just left to the Member for Wide Bay (Warren Truss) and parochial bodies such as a that led by failed Childers based National Party politician, Harry Bonanno.