

Beattie Government Falls Short in Great Sandy Marine

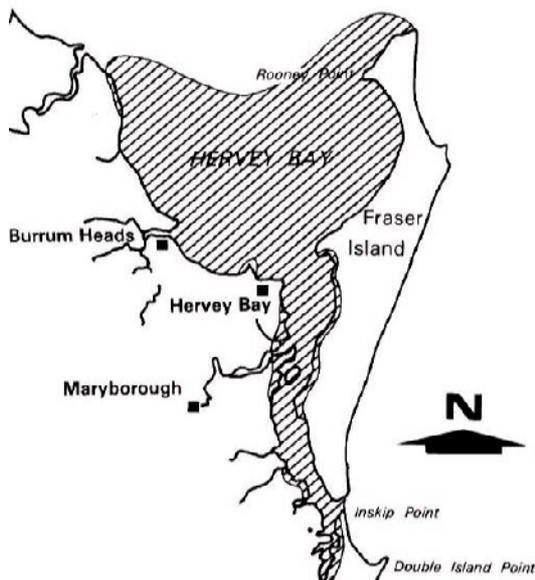
While the Beattie Government has been performing reasonably well in protecting the terrestrial areas of the Great Sandy Region, even if at snail pace at times, the same cannot be said for the marine areas of the Great Sandy Region. On 20 January 2005, when releasing a map and zoning plan for the proposed Great Sandy Marine Park, which showed how each of the significant marine environments would be protected, Premier Peter Beattie made a number of promises. He said that his government would "protect the Fraser Coast's precious whales, turtles, dugongs and other marine life, increase fish stocks and boost tourism and that it would help ensure the safety of humpback whales, thus giving certainty to the whale-watching industry."

In inviting the public to comment on the proposed zones before a final decision is made, Premier Beattie added, "Well-managed marine parks are good for the environment, are major tourist attractions and create jobs. It is essential that we give this beautiful and unique region the best protection we can to preserve it for future generations, while enabling people to continue gaining pleasure from it. It will also help us to manage the impacts of urban growth, as the population is expected to grow from 165,000 in 1996 to more than 243,000 by 2016."

While the rhetoric was wonderful, the reality when the plan was scrutinized revealed probably the most poorly planned Marine Park in Australian history which would give absolute protection to less than 4% of the designated area and allow the exploitation of most of the remaining 96+% in some form or another. It is a clear "open slather" for 77.61% with restrictions on only another 18.5% which aren't "green" zones.

The Great Sandy Marine Park (Northern Section) stretches from Baffle Creek, near Bundaberg to Double Island Point, just south of Fraser Island World Heritage Area. It stretches 3 miles offshore and includes all of Hervey Bay, Great Sandy Strait, and Tin Can Bay. It also includes Wolf Rock off Double Island Point but fails to include Breaksea Spit.

There is little doubt that the whole of the Great Sandy Marine Park deserves World Heritage status. Most of that area was first proposed for World Heritage as early as 1991 by Tony Fitzgerald QC. after an exhaustive public environmental inquiry by Tony Fitzgerald QC. Since then, new scientific information has come to light which justifies a significant extension of the World Heritage area on the eastern side of Fraser Island (which currently extends only 500 metres off shore) to recognize the unique submarine geomorphic features where the sand is falling off the edge of the continental shelf. The whole of Breaksea Spit also needs to be included.



Marine and Estuarine area identified as meeting World Heritage criteria by 1991 Fitzgerald Inquiry

FIDO has made an extensive submission on the Marine Park which is now located on FIDO's web site: www.fido.org.au. However in short, this is what we propose to fix the disastrous plan released on 20th January.

Table 1

Two Marine Park Zoning Proposals

Zone	Proposed Area (ha)	Proposed %	Conservation needs %
General Use (Light Blue)	458,355	71.61%	40%.
Habitat Protection (Dark Blue)	40,292	6.8%	about 8%.
Conservation Park (Yellow)	68,898	11.67%	about 10%
Buffer (Brown)	504	0.9%	2%
Marine National Park (Green)	22,501	3.81%	40%
Total	590,550	100%	100%

Table showing Queensland Government and FIDO proposals for the Great Sandy Marine Park (Northern Section)

The reason FIDO is advocating these variations and the key areas we are identifying which should be part of the respective zones are elaborated below.

These are our priorities: The pitiful 3.81 % Marine National Park may in fact be actually smaller because the map shows it including the terrestrial areas of Kangaroo Island. We believe that it should be at least 40%.

* **The Three Mile Limit:** The scientific advice for the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was that 40% is the minimum "no take" zone which is required to maintain a sustainable level of biodiversity and fisheries productivity. In the end this was reduced to 34% but much of the green or "no take" zones were in Commonwealth territorial waters beyond the three mile limit. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park extends much further outside the three mile limit and the embayments which are the only areas of State jurisdiction. In the case of the Great Sandy Marine Park, if the Commonwealth waters to the 12 mile limit were included in the Marine Park, the green zone would be reduced to below 2% of the area. Already much general use (i.e. trawling and large shipping) already occurs outside the three mile limit off Fraser Island and Cooloola.

* **Productivity of the shallow, inshore areas:** The Great Sandy Marine Park (Northern Section) is largely confined to inshore, shallower areas which are far more productive and more critical as a marine habitat than the deeper water outside the three mile limit. Therefore there is a greater obligation to protect these areas within this Marine Park. The shallower littoral areas are recognized as the nursery areas for the marine stocks further afield.

* **World Heritage values:** Hervey Bay is a very significant and critical habitat for whales and dugong. Its significance was recognized by Fitzgerald in 1999. (See

appendices.) FIDO understands that the areas in boundaries which have been agreed between the State and Commonwealth Governments (all of Platypus Bay in a line running from approximately off Rooney Point to the Pelican Banks off Moon Point) are to be incorporated in the new nomination. FIDO therefore believes that as a very minimum, this area should be zoned as Marine National Park. Biological grounds for this are identified below. Prof. Ron Boyd from the University of Newcastle has identified the underwater geomorphological features of Breaksea Spit and the edge of the continental shelf east of Sandy Cape down as far as Ngkala Rocks as being of outstanding international significance. The paper he presented to FIDO's Fraser Island 20-20 Vision Conference in August 2004, made out a most compelling case for the inclusion of this area in the revised World Heritage nomination. Although the Great Sandy Marine Park (Northern Section) only extends to the three mile limit, in the light of the data provided by Prof. Boyd's recent discoveries, all of this should be included in the new World Heritage nomination and all of it should be protected. While much of the area he has identified is not within the Great Sandy Marine Park, those parts which are should be given the status of Marine National Park.

The existing World Heritage boundaries already extend 500 metres from Fraser Island and this area particularly on the western side needs much more protection. Much of that will be covered by the proposed enlarged Platypus Bay Marine National Park, but other areas within the proposed World Heritage site need to be adequately protected. The inclusion of Cooloola in the new World Heritage site can also mean that the area off Rainbow Beach and from Inskip Point to Double Island Point will have World Heritage status.

- * **Ramsar Area:** Just as the declaration of the World Heritage area warrants greater protection; likewise, the declaration of Great Sandy Strait and Tin Can Bay as a Ramsar site justifies a much higher level of protection than is afforded under this plan. FIDO supports making the central section of Great Sandy Strait from Garry's Anchorage to just north of Maroom and in the south, from Deep Creek (Fraser Island) to the Mary River South Head as the Great Sandy Strait Marine National Park. This would not impact too heavily on most residents of the southern part of Great Sandy Strait nor on Maryborough recreational fishers who travel there.
- * FIDO proposes minor reduction in the Conservation Park Zone to 10% because we would change much that is currently proposed as a Conservation Park Zone to a Green Zone.
- * FIDO advocates a marginal increase of the Habitat Protection Zone to 8% of the total area. However, almost all of this would be relocated away from its present locations to new locations. Because this zone allows for beach netting, none would relocate all of the areas immediately adjacent to Fraser Island's west coast (the Platypus Bay section and all areas north of Ngkala Rocks) as well as Burrum Heads and the Woongarra Coast where by-catch (netting of turtles off the rookery) is an issue.

(Continued from p 2 "News from the QPWS")

Natural Resource Management

The QPWS hasn't been forthcoming with a lot of news on natural resource management in recent years; yet, Fraser Island is World Heritage listed mainly because of its natural values. FIDO gives a very high priority to the protection of these natural values but natural resource management on Fraser Island is very low on the priorities of the Queensland Government and the Parks Service. An Annual Report is due for release in June! However "Sandpaper" carries the story of the successful rescuing of a 9 metre humpback whale stranded at Rooney Point. A Pest Management Plan has been completed (See comments elsewhere).

- * **Weeds:** "Sandpaper" also reports on the tackling of the sisal hemp infestation at Bogimbah Creek by rangers. Whilst spraying has ensured that there has been no flowering of the sisal since 2001, the ground in the vicinity is covered by a carpet of these plants which also propagate by underground runners. The Service engaged three different Conservation Volunteers Australia teams and a Green Corps group to help the Fraser Island rangers work on 17.7 ha of weed infestation at Sandy Cape. This is mainly climbing asparagus but also includes sisal. 11 ha still remain but the January 2005 'Sandpaper' notes optimistically, "It is envisaged that at least half of this will be cleared in the next six months. Another CVA team has helped rangers search for and kill Bitou bushes in the old QTM mine site, south of Dilli Village.
- * **Fires:** While FIDO supports the concept of management burns on Fraser Island to provide the ecology which will yield the maximum biodiversity, we remain critical of some of the practices of the current "management burns". There is precious little data being provided on the details of the current practices. (See elsewhere).



Photo Opposite: Governor's Falls, Happy Valley, September 1935. Charlie Sinclair, taking a shower on his honeymoon in front of Warry's Resort which closed soon after due to the Depression. The falls, named for regular guest, Sir Leslie Wilson, is adjacent to where Happy Valley's southern access ramp reaches the beach.