

Appropriate Emergency Services for Fraser Island

For some time FIDO has been ambivalent about the need for emergency services on Fraser Island. This is because in the past Fraser Island was a frontier and a challenge to test out the preparedness of visitors to face challenges without the expectation of any outside support. It was a good and valid challenge and reinforced the notion of wilderness and what it meant. However, modern society has grown soft and this softness has been carried into places like Fraser Island which were previously deemed "frontiers". This has caused FIDO to re-evaluate what sort of emergency service, [without going over the top, need to be available on Fraser Island in the 21st Century

The Lost Age of Self Sufficiency: When FIDO came into existence 34 years ago (in January 1971) Fraser Island was regarded as a remote place with no services whatsoever. People who went to Fraser Island had to be both self-sufficient for the time they were scheduled to be there and very resourceful. Not only did they need to carry all food for their trip (which was usually over many days) but have some extra to cover contingencies. They also needed to be prepared for any mishap including a wide diversity of vehicle recovery gear. There was very little accommodation and most visitors had no option other than camping. Away from the eastern beach and the forestry barracks one was most unlikely to encounter any other person or group. There were then fewer than 10,000 visitors to Fraser Island annually, phone services only from the Forestry barracks and few services to the island. Gordon Elmer's new vehicular ferry at Inskip Point operated mainly by appointment.

The 21st Century: Gone are the days of self sufficiency on Fraser Island. These days, mobile phones operate from most parts of Fraser Island. There are multiple ferry services daily to four different points on Fraser Island. With over 350,000 visitors and more modern, better air-conditioned 4WDs which rarely break down (but which may still bog), the only recovery gear carried seems to be the occasional Snatchem strap which can be hooked up to the inevitable passer-by. These days most visitors to Fraser Island either slip over for a day trip or stay under hard roofs rather than canvas. Many visitors to the island have had no previous experience there or any idea of what to expect. Many drivers haven't previously driven on sand. The need for careful planning and preparation has largely disappeared. One can procure fresh food and replenish liquor supplies and fuel on the island. Thus the remoteness has gone and so has the need for self-sufficiency. With that has gone the need for preparedness to cope with any emergency from one's own resources, medical or otherwise.

Queensland Police recognized some time ago that there was a need for a permanent police presence on Fraser Island and established a base at Eurong where the officers are kept very busy. However, they are mainly required to deal with the law and order issues and not with the medical emergencies which are increasingly arising.

The result of all of this is that accidents are occurring with increasing frequency on Fraser Island; so are the other medical emergencies, such as heart attacks and other medical conditions needing urgent treatment. That brings us to consider what the most appropriate level of emergency services might be.

Unfortunately, the Queensland Government is approaching this need based on Fraser Island's population base and has not bothered to obtain the results of the last census for the number of Fraser Island residents or the number and disposition of the visitors on Fraser Island on census night. If it has these figures, they are being kept from the public. However, the current guesstimate is that there are still fewer than 200 people who regard Fraser Island as their principal place of residence. This seems to be what State Emergency Services is using as a basis for the provision of services on the island. However from the visitor statistics, it can be seen that more than half of Fraser

Island's visitors stay one night or more on the island and the average is greater than two.

On most nights there are over 1,000 people camping and many more than that in accommodation or resorts on Fraser Island and the number during the day will be considerably more. This is more than many small towns which have resident doctors and hospitals. Fraser Island has none of that. In fact, during his visit to Fraser Island last August, Minister for Emergency Services Chris Cummins made a huge concession when he said that there is now a full-time paramedic on Fraser Island for school holidays. This is being increased to 20 weeks a year to cover other peak periods. There is also the back-up of the 24/7 Energex helicopter medical evacuations from Maroochy and Bundaberg. FIDO is unaware of the number of cases or incidents on Fraser Island requiring emergency services and the reluctance of the Environmental Protection Agency to provide any such basic information to public interest groups makes it very hard to make a case for improving the level of services on offer. However, a reading of the newspapers provides some insights into the increasing array of situations which require some response by Emergency Services.

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FIDO inspects QTM sandmining rehabilitation 1975

This is one of the surprise inspections by FIDO Executive members who flew in unannounced, landed on the adjacent beach, inspected the work on the site, took photographs and were back in Maryborough in time to start work at normal times.

eMoonbi

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A Vision for the Great Sandy Region

By Dr J.G. Mosley

Keynote Speaker at FIDO's 20-20

Geoff Mosley was Keynote Speaker at FIDO's Fraser Island 20-20 Vision Conference. This article presents Geoff's central ideas which can be read in full at www.fido.org.au

MORE DETERMINED ACTION NEEDED

When we think about the future of the Great Sandy Region, the point we need to keep constantly in mind is that we are dealing with one of the greatest natural areas on earth and that we Australians manage it for the people of the world. A world heritage area such as this has the potential through education and inspiration to make an enormous contribution not just to individual happiness but to the necessary move to a conserver society. Optimising this role is one of the key tasks of the manager.

Once this and the nature of the international treasure are fully understood, the vision for the Great Sandy Region should fall readily into place. It is a vision which must embrace all of the areas of significance and provide a type of management appropriate to the areas' special values and their level of importance.

My main vision for 2020 is that long before that year, the World Heritage Area will have been expanded to embrace all of the areas nominated in 1991 – the full 860,000 hectares.

That only the 184,000 hectare Fraser Island section was listed in 1992 was a travesty of environmental justice and Premier Goss was right to promise that the Queensland Government would seek through renomination the listing of the other four fifths. The extension would bring in not only the other major sand mass, Cooloola, but also Hervey Bay, the Great Sandy Strait and the littoral areas around Tin Can Bay.

With regard to management, my vision is that by 2020, all of the internationally important values of the Great Sandy Region will have been given world heritage recognition and that protection and presentation of these will be reflected in management priorities and practices. By 2020, the main mode of access to the terrestrial parts of the Great Sandy will be pedestrian and the use of motor vehicles will have been greatly reduced.

How are we going towards the realisation of such a vision and what needs to be done to make it come true? Overall, rather badly I believe. Twelve years after the Queensland Government declared that it would seek renomination of the whole Region, there has been some discussion of certain areas but little solid progress towards a renomination of the whole. In 2004, twelve years on, it seems the Great Sandy Region is not even in the world heritage queue. There are also some worrying signs that the Queensland Government may once again kow tow to the federal Government and agree to renomination of only Cooloola.

What about interim protection of the areas promised for renomination? Here the story is no rosier. The proposed Great Sandy Marine Park (Northern Section) is still just that – a proposal. In the meantime it seems anything goes in these potential parts of the world heritage area. A trial scallop ranching project in Platypus Bay was approved prior to public consultation. What next!

On the ground at Fraser Island, there has been some progress with the development of walking tracks but the overall development of a management regime which pays greater respect to the protection of the prime natural values and their enjoyment by visitors has a long way to go. By 2020, for instance, the Great Sandy Walk should stretch all the way from Noosa to Sandy Cape.

The history of the protection of the Great Sandy Region so far is one of much pushing by the conservation movement and sporadic spurts of action by Government. By my reckoning the next spurt is long overdue. With so much ground to make up it needs to be a big one, one which measures up to the Region's importance.

Over to you Mr Beattie.



DM Minerals begin sandmining May 1975

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Accident Prone: It is interesting to note the diversity of incidents on Fraser Island requiring emergency medical services over a year. On one day there were three reports of accidents on Fraser Island. Then also, a 50 y.o. man was washed off rocks at Waddy Point and treated for multiple cuts and bruises. A female backpacker was treated after the vehicle she was travelling in rolled over. Another man was flown out with suspected neck and back injuries after a vehicle on an island road hit a bump. A yacht anchored off Kingfisher Resort caught fire and the owner who had been cooking his meal at the time was lucky to escape. A lone yachtsman fell overboard while his yacht was under full sail near Rooneys Point. He swam ashore and signalled for help via SMS messages on his mobile phone which survived the incident. A light aircraft Cessna 172 landed on the beach near Dilli Village after being unable to locate the Toby's Gap airstrip. As it was attempting to take off, it flipped over. Many accidents involve backpacker driven 4WDs. A 23year old Irishman was charged with driving offences after a roll over left three of the passengers seriously injured. In February two carloads of visitors, one carrying nine backpackers had a head on crash on the island's northern road. (Both vehicles were hired from Rainbow Beach). And so the list could continue....

This is not a complete list of the mishaps, injuries or illnesses which have occurred on Fraser Island during the last year but just a sample of those that have been in the media and epitomize why the island is deserving of more medical treatment and evacuation procedures. It shouldn't be a case of expecting just a handful of amateur volunteer residents to cope with the injuries and mishaps amongst the thousands of ill-prepared and ill-equipped visitors to Fraser Island every year. These range from diabetics turning up on the island without their insulin (one of the most frequent) to those rare and difficult cases involving serious trauma.