

When Not Enough is Too Much

There has been an almighty furore in the Fraser Coast Region over the proposed zonings in the Great Sandy Marine Park (Northern Section). Most of the anger comes from recreational fishers who feel that they have been unjustly targetted while the professional fishers have been almost unaffected. MOONBI has tried to summarize some of the issues which have created so much angst and which are causing the Beattie Government to have second thoughts about the Marine Park.

Whilst elsewhere in MOONBI FIDO has outlined its response to the proposed new Great Sandy Marine Park (Northern Section), it does not reflect the huge amount of public agitation occurring in Hervey Bay, Maryborough and the Cooloola Coast over some aspects of the proposed Marine Park. The furore has mainly been fueled by the self-interests of the commercial and the recreational fishers.

There seems to be a consensus that fish stocks are seriously depleted. Most of the furore is over what local fishers have dubbed “No Go” and “Go Slow” zones.

No “No Go” Zones: A public misconception is that Green Zones or Marine National Parks are “No Go” Zones. The Regulatory Impact Statement makes it very clear that these are “look but don’t take” areas and are not “out of bounds”. The Regulatory Impact Statement indicates that this zoning “raises the profile of an area for marine tourism”. The local economy is expected to benefit as a result.

“GO SLOW” Zones: The reason for imposing “Go Slow” zones is to reduce the impact on a number of large marine creatures particularly dugong and turtles which have suffered an increasing number of propeller strikes. There are seven “Go Slow” zones: —

- one is off Mon Repos beach which is a most famous turtle rookery,
- one in the Puthoo Creek area east of Moon Point, a great dugong area infrequently used by boaties;
- one is off Burrum Heads and Toogoom which is famous for the density of the dugong population particularly in summer;
- three are in Great Sandy Strait, one small one on the eastern side covering the very popular yacht mooring area of Garry’s Landing, and two larger ones on the western (mainland) side. They are almost continuous from Boonooroo to Kauri Creek and form a significant frontage to the Wide Bay Military area. They exclude the inshore area off Poona but do include the inshore area off Tinnanbar.
- The largest “Go Slow” zone proposed for the western half of Great Sandy Strait from Mary River Heads in the south to Big Woody Island and almost to the Urangan Boat Harbour in the north has attracted the greatest ire of boaties. This is where small boats frequently take short cuts to avoid a much longer (and often bumpier) trip around the northern side of Big Woody Island. It is not through a “No-GO” area but if anyone takes the short-cut they are obliged to travel at slower speeds.

Unfortunately dugongs prefer shallow water because these are usually more productive areas for sea grass. Driving a boat fast through this area is like a high-speed drive through a paddock full of sheep when the sheep are oblivious to the presence of a motor vehicle and the sheep are also invisible to the driver. Shallow waters don’t allow dugong and turtles sufficient opportunity to escape the thrashing propeller of fast approaching boats which they may not realize are headed straight for them.

Opposition is based on the fact that most of the “Go Slow” zones are potential short cuts for people in smaller runabouts with shallow drafts as they can race across these shallow waters to reduce the time it takes to get back to the Urangan boat

harbour. One fisher said, “*Most fishing boats have a recommended hull speed to achieve the best performance and economy*”. His response was “*If channels are clearly marked and boaties observe the rules that apply in areas where slow speeds are essential, there would be no need for “Go Slow” zones*”. Unfortunately the only need he saw for “Go Slow” zones were “*anchorages, moorings, approaching divers or other vessels*”. There was no mention of dugong or turtles.

There are many other complaints but they are mainly based on the inconvenience of following the regulations such as having only one hook. Sunfish, the organization representing recreational anglers, is angry that an unofficial objective of the Marine Park has been to protect the interests of the commercial fishers, while restriction recreational fishers. Great Sandy Strait is clearly the most contentious part of the Marine Park. Many recreational anglers resent being restricted to having just one hook in the water at a time in Great Sandy Strait, while beam trawling, netting and other pre-existing uses can continue unrestricted. One of the few public statements supporting the conservation objectives came from Lin Powell who supported the restrictions on amateurs but slammed allowing trawlers to continue operating in Great Sandy Strait.

The angst has been both widely reported and fueled by the “Fraser Coast Chronicle”. Although one editorial did say, “*The waters inside Fraser Island have been flogged for decades by recreational and professional fishermen. More protected areas, seasonal bans and limits on catches by recreational fishermen are long overdue if stocks are to be replenished*”. they went on to have a big dig at the people who drafted the plan as being “*fresh-faced, university educated, city-centric bureaucrats who have no knowledge or compassion for anything north of Caloundra*”.

FIDO for the record supports the “Go Slow” zones and the proposed restrictions of the fishing activities of recreational fishers who, having made expensive investments in equipment seem determined to get their value through the maximum effort. If people are fishing for recreation, we don’t believe that they need more than one hook at a time in the water. FIDO though wants to see the restricted areas greatly expanded. (See pp 3-4 MOONBI 109).



The foreshore area at McKenzie’s Jetty about 1919

News in Brief

Burning Issues on Fraser Island

A proposed hazard burn south of the Moon Point Road started on 22nd August was witnessed at first hand by John Sinclair who was conducting a safari across the island when the fire that burnt out 5400 ha was in progress. This very severe fire lasted for 9 days. It destroyed an area greatly in excess of the intention of the people who lit the fire on a very dry and windy day. It provided a good example of what QPWS should not be doing re fires. FIDO's criticisms are:

1. Even the original area intended to be burnt was far too large to be burnt all at the same time. It covered several ecotypes which each required a different burning regime. Such a mixture should have been dealt with in a mosaic of several much smaller units.
2. Burning should occur much sooner after rain. In August the environment was much too dry. Prescribed burns should be planned for April, May and June rather than August to get cooler, lower intensity fires.
3. In any event no fires should be lit before 2.00 p.m. so that as evening falls and the dew point rises, they would be self-extinguishing by about 10.00 pm to midnight. No fires should be lit if there is an unfavourable wind.
4. To achieve the best results and to meet the above criteria, aerial ignition of planned burns are more likely to achieve the best results. This seems to be out of the thinking and/or the budget for the QPWS on Fraser Island although planes were required to help monitor this fire when it got out of control within an hour of being lit.

This fire had been planned for that day many days before; yet other stakeholders affected by this intense and dangerous fire question the communication process involved with hazard burning and deplore the short notice given. The QPWS were scheduled to review the effectiveness of communication with the public during the fire de-brief process. They undertook to record for the future anything learnt, including condition reports, provision of a fire burn programme which will allow for contingency. It is likely that in future the QPWS will exclude all the public from areas where burning is scheduled.

In response to FIDO's explicit criticisms, the QPWS provided a summary of the prescribed burns. This particular burn had previously been deferred 3 times. The area had not been burnt for 9-10 years. Planning and effort prior to the burn followed all procedures, including meteorological predictions and the drought index. These reports did not reflect the fact that conditions on the ground rapidly deteriorated. An external person was investigating the burn and compiling a report. The QPWS insists that planned burns should always be lit in the morning reducing to a trickle effect towards a cool evening. The report compiled after the fire hasn't been released.



Operational McKenzie's Jetty about 1920

Changing Recreation Patterns Restrictions on 4WDs Soon?

The "Sydney Morning Herald" is but one of many Australian media groups calling on the Commonwealth Government to impose the same tariffs on 4WDs as they impose on all other passenger vehicles. This call was recently reiterated and noted that there has been a recent surge in 4WD ownership in Australia.

The call also coincides with a report of a Federal Parliamentary committee which has recommended that special new licenses or endorsements be required for towing caravans and for driving 4WD vehicles. If these recommendations are adopted as seems inevitable, it will inevitably have a significant impact on the patterns of recreation on Fraser Island which are currently very heavily 4WD dependent.

New Means of Access

Cruising in: A snippet of news indicating some changes in the recreation patterns of Fraser Island relates to the number of cruise ships calling in. While still a small proportion of the total amount of Fraser Island visitation, it shows a change to the pattern of recreation. More ships cruising up and down the east coast of Australia are including stopovers on Fraser Island. In February Kingfisher Resort reported that two cruise ships landed there. "MV Columbus" carried 180 German tourists and the 100 metre luxury cruiser "Odyssey", carried 128 naked passengers (nudists) some of whom paid \$7,000 for the cruise. "Odyssey" had a brief stopover, only from 8.00a.m. to 2.00p.m. on 27th February, before island-hopping up to Lizard Island. The voyage ended in Cairns.

Flying in: One of the most significant potential changes to the patterns of recreation is about to be unleashed with the opening of the new Hervey Bay airport in July. The direct flights in Boeing 737 jets flying non-stop from Sydney is likely to have a huge ripple effect on Fraser Island tourism. Already Virgin Blue has scheduled services and Jetstar has foreshadowed that it will also be providing a service. This is likely to have a huge ripple-out effect on Fraser Island. It is also likely to add to the increasing proportion of Fraser Island visitors being carried by commercial tour operators and continue the trend of visitation to Fraser Island away from being F.I.T.s (free and independent travellers)

How Wrong can the media get a story?

On 18th December, the "Fraser Coast Chronicle" ran a story describing how the introduction of 737 jet aircraft services from southern capitals to Hervey Bay would have an impact on tourist visitation to the area. What really got the alarm bells ringing was the following paragraph:

"Matt Fuller from the Fraser Island Company said he had recently increased his tour bus fleet to six and he expected this would increase to between 25 and 30 buses when interstate flights start in July."

This raised some very significant issues including whether existing permits would allow such an expansion and what would be the impacts of such an incredible expansion. However Matt Fuller reassured FIDO that *"I stated that we had recently increased our Budget Rental Car fleet by 6... And we envisaged a need to increase this by up to 30 vehicles coinciding with the airport's completion. Unfortunately the "Chronicle" took this as tour buses, and even misinterpreted the comment on existing numbers versus recent acquisitions"*.

News in Brief

Coroner Unhappy about Fraser Search.

Brisbane coroner Michael Burns criticized the search for British backpacker 35 y.o. David Eason whose remains were found two years after he disappeared very close to Wabby Lakes on Fraser Island. He said "*Serious errors of judgement led to a failure of the original (police led) search*" because the police concentrated on the theories that he had either drowned, committed suicide or left the island of his own volition .

Dingoes continue to be killed

Fraser Island dingoes continue to be killed by both official decree and unofficial means. In front of witnesses, a person well known to QPWS staff on Fraser Island recently swerved his vehicle in order to run over and kill a dingo on Fraser Island's beach.. He will not be prosecuted by the QPWS.

A dingo which startled two small children when it walked into their hotel room at Kingfisher Resort has since been destroyed. It is one of many dingoes which have been officially killed since the 2002 massacre when 32 were destroyed. Commenting on the destruction of the dingo Premier Beattie said, "*If a dingo poses any risk to any human it will be destroyed.*"

FIDO continues to be alarmed at the rate at which dingoes are being officially killed on Fraser Island. However, we don't have any grounds for any action to stop the shooting unless there is clear evidence that the survival of Fraser Island dingoes is at risk from the continued killing. The QPWS is monitoring the situation with the same concern as FIDO. The information about the number and details of Fraser Island dingoes destroyed is readily available.

Fraser Brumbies Making a Comeback

While FIDO has praise for the openness about the dingoes on Fraser Island, the same can't be said about the brumbies. Two years after a tender to remove all of the brumbies from Fraser Island was awarded, the removal has stopped and the brumby numbers are increasing. Four foals have recently been observed in the Indian Head, Waddy Point and Orchid Beach areas. FIDO regards this as a matter requiring a more determined action by the QPWS. After all brumbies are No. 26 in the list of Top Fraser Island pests. The tender may be deemed to have expired but other more definitive action needs to be undertaken to remove all brumbies from the island. .

New Barges for the Fraser Island Run

Tourist and Leisure Corporation, operators of both Eurong and Kingfisher Resorts and four ferry routes to Fraser Island, has introduced a new barge to run between Inskip and Hook Points. FIDO understands that the rival operator on this run, the Manta Ray Syndicate is also to introduce a new ferry to this service. FIDO understands that the new barge they commissioned was built in Chile. It was collected and sailed across the Pacific to begin service in Great Sandy Strait well before the Easter peak demand.

Photo Opposite: Fraser Island foredune at "One Tree" about 1918. (approx. 3-4 kilometres south of Eurong near Markwells Break). Despite the poor quality it shows that there was little shrubby growth of casuarinas or banksias. There was also a strong ground cover of grass that sustained the late Sid Jarvis's bullock team.

Shipwreck Thief Told "Drop the Anchor"

42 y.o. Paul Grunske, Bundaberg Cold Storage owner and also owner of the Marloo Chalet beach holiday units was convicted last year of removing a historic relic from a shipwreck – the "Marloo" which sank off Orchid Beach in 1914. In a well-planned operation, Grunske used three vehicles with winches and mobile cranes to drag ashore the anchor of the "Marloo" and load it on to a vehicle to remove it from Fraser Island. He later said that he intended to clean up the anchor and place it on display in the front yard of his Marloo holiday units. His two year sentence was suspended and he was placed on a good behaviour bond.

Recent Observations

Michelle and Andrew Sinclair recently visited the Island on a private trip in February which gave them a chance to see the current state of play. These are some of their observations:

Road and Rain: There was fairly heavy rain during the first part of our visit. This dampened our enthusiasm for swimming but gave the roads a solid base and made them fairly smooth given the light traffic. This made for quick transits and a good chance to look around. There were signs of heavy grading which seem to contribute to the state of the roads.

Dingoes a Go Go: The Dingoes were far and few between, especially north of Eli. A few running around Happy Valley gave us the best look. Most others ran when approached by a car (Second Valley at Eurong) or stayed a respectable distance from the car on the beach (near Wabby).

Brumbies Breeding: Three foals were observed in the Indian Head / Orchid Beach area. According to locals, they are breeding well now that dingoes have been killed in that area.

Eli Changes: Eli Creek now flows south not north. Its flow is lower and slower. The boardwalk now has no entry/exit near the bridge near the beach. Natural revegetation continues and each visit for the last 10 years sees the Eli environs looking more like they did 20 years ago.

Birds of a Feather: There were many more White-breasted Sea Eagles around than previously and fewer crows and masked lapwings which were recent arrivals. There were some Red-capped Dotterels on the eastern beach and even a lone Beach Thicknee at Toolooroo Creek as well as a pair at Urang Creek.

Groundsel Goes Bush: Thick groundsel in the unburnt area west of the Bogimbah Road was getting ready to flower. Urgent attention needs to be given to this weed whose name means "eater of the earth".

