



MOONBI 112

MOONBI is the name given by the Butchalla Aborigines to the central part of their homeland, Fraser Island or "Kgari"

MOONBI is the newsletter of Fraser Island Defenders Organization Limited

FIDO, "The Watchdog of Fraser Island", aims to ensure the wisest use of Fraser Island's natural resources

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Since MOONBI 111

Weather: After a year of reasonably good rain when Fraser Island and Cooloola appeared less affected by drought than most other parts of South East Queensland, the lake levels started rising at last. There had been some good early summer storms in November, and December shaped up as a very promising month weather-wise.

Fire Issue Ignited: In early December, a summer storm lightning strike caused a large area between the Bowarrady and Woralie tracks on the western side of the island to be burnt out before the fire was extinguished. On 17th December, a similar storm in Cooloola burnt out a huge area between the Cooloola Way and the Rainbow Beach Road. Neither fire had a serious adverse impact and initial assessments suggest that there were some very positive outcomes. However, in December, one of Australia's top fire ecologists, Jeremy Russell-Smith, took his family on a private visit to Fraser Island. He was appalled by the outcomes of poor fire management he saw whilst he was there. (See story p 9) Jeremy will be Keynote speaker at the Fraser Island conference in September.

In early March, sustained strong winds whipped up huge seas. In late March, Cyclone Wati also created waves which stripped the beach of millions of tones of sand.

Weeds: December was a busy month for Fraser Island because the Fraser Island Weeds Workshop saw the establishment of a Fraser Island integrity alliance of all stakeholders with a responsibility for managing Fraser Island as well as some voluntary organizations (FIDO included) who are addressing the growing weed problem on Fraser Island. (Story p 4). FIDO is now in a position to take an even more active role in dealing with Fraser Island's urban weeds before they escape into the surrounding National Park. This follows the grant of \$28,200 from by the Burnett Mary Regional Group to help FIDO coordinate voluntary effort.

Other news: On Monday 19th December events occurred which demand some more mention elsewhere in this MOONBI. An English backpacker asleep on the foredunes in a 4WD track at about 7.00 am was run over and had his shoulder and elbow broken. He had been previously unimpressed by the volume of 4WD traffic on the beach and particularly that a dingo had been run down by a 4WD and left dead on the beach. (See p ##)

Predatory Pricing: Also on 17 December former barge operators Sid Melksham and Angela Burger and their companies were fined over \$1 million for the predatory pricing practices they engaged in on the Inskip Point to Hook Point barge service . (See p 3)

Looking to the Future: In conjunction with the Scientific Advisory Committee and the University of the Sunshine Coast, FIDO is organizing a conference on maintaining the Integrity of Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region. Details of this very exciting event on 28-29 September are in an attached supplement to this MOONBI.

Integrity: FIDO is determined to help preserve the integrity of Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region and that is the theme of the Conference. The Howard Government. Seems to have abdicated from its World Heritage obligations with respect to Fraser Island and that story is on pp 11-12. In a more practical way, FIDO is actively working on removing weeds from the island and that story is described on page 4.

Increasing Opposition: There is though increasing opposition being mounted to some very positive benefits that could result from better protection of Fraser Island from water extraction and a much larger no-take area in the Great Sandy Marine Park. See p 2 and p 8.

Photographs in MOONBI 112 are mainly from FIDO's photographic archives. Most were provided by a former McKenzie secretary. Below: McKenzie's sawmill which operated near North White Cliffs from 1919 to 1925



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Health of Hervey Bay's Marine Life Challenges Beattie

Not since the days of the campaign to stop logging on Fraser Island has there been such outspoken opposition to sustainable conservation in the Great Sandy Region. The same coalition of parochial, political and commercial self-interests, which supported sandmining and logging in the last century, has become re-established to oppose the declarations of Fraser Island as a wild river and the marine National Parks in the Great Sandy Marine Park.

History Being Repeated: These 2006 forces of darkness which lack both insight and foresight are almost identical to the pro-Fraser Island sandmining coalition of the 1970s and pro-logging coalition of the 1990s. Even some of the same players reappear including some media and local government. The agenda bringing these forces together has been the proposal to declare the Great Sandy Marine Park (Northern Section) (See Story p5) and the proposals to declare Fraser Island as a Wild River. (See story p7).

Fishing Interests: The opponents of conservation want to see the Great Sandy Marine Park declared with less than 5% being a "no-take" zone or marine National Park. They want an unfettered right to fish and exploit the marine resources of the Great Sandy Region to the maximum extent possible. They want to override the Australian government's commitment to implement the IUCN (World Conservation Union) recommendation of a minimum of 20-30% as no-take zones in marine areas. The lobbying is intense. It includes representatives of both sides of the political divide (as did earlier Fraser Island campaigns).

Water Extraction: The other big issue to re-establish this coalition has been the proposal to proclaim Fraser Island as a Wild River. This would remove forever the option to exploit Fraser Island's Bogimbah Creek. For decades the City of Hervey Bay has eyed Fraser Island's environmental water flow as an option for a future urban water supply, particularly Bogimbah which has the strongest flow of the lot and which is conveniently placed for Hervey Bay City. These water miners regard water running to the sea as a waste. They have failed to see that without this environmental flow of fresh water and nutrients into Hervey Bay the salinity and pH of the bay will be affected. Fish are extremely sensitive to these factors and with the cessation of flow from the Mary and Burnett Rivers due to the construction of new dams and weirs on those two major streams, it is only flow from



The Maheno 1935. This photograph was taken soon after this 52 ton luxury liner washed ashore in a July storm (not dissimilar to the severe storm in early March, 2006 which was judged to be the equivalent of a Force 2 cyclone). He Maheno is now a dangerous rusting hulk on the beach

Fraser Island which will maintain the productivity of Hervey Bay's fishery into the future.

Because of the decline of the Hervey Bay fishery over the last decade, along with other voluntary conservation organizations FIDO has been actively engaged in advocating the setting aside of 30% of the proposed Great Sandy Marine Park as "no-take" zones. There is now compelling evidence from other places in the world where the IUCN recommendation has been implemented that this is a very positive move and increasing the area locked up from any exploitation allows fish to breed and grow to a larger size and to within a short time increase the productivity of the areas zoned as open to recreational and commercial fishers. (See "No-take" backgrounder)

In 2002, a study by Kleinhardt FGI showed that Fraser Island tourism annually generates \$277 million and up to 2,880 jobs are generated in the Fraser Coast and Sunshine Coast regions from tourism and recreation on Fraser Island. This amounts to more jobs and income generated annually than Fraser Island sandmining would generate over its projected 25 year life. (Sandmining would have ceased by now but the jobs for tourism continue indefinitely). Tourist now creates many more jobs than logging ever did. (Fewer than 60 people claimed redundancies offered when Fraser Island logging ceased).

The Beattie Government now has to determine how it will respond to opposition to conservation measures which will benefit the whole of the Great Sandy Region. Will they be like the Bjelke-Petersen Government which for decades took the side of the anti-conservation coalition or will they take the enlightened view and realize that positive steps now will sustain the marine environment of Hervey Bay for future generations and take the necessary steps to create adequate "no-take" zones which will increase the productivity of the Hervey Bay fishery indefinitely.



Gone are the days of the bullock teams on Fraser Island. This was taken near Figtree Lake about 1905. Just as the transport of timber using bullocks was replaced, FIDO believes better transporting Fraser Island visitors is now overdue.

Barge Predatory Pricing Proven Background History

The following information is drawn from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) web site. The price of ferry fares has a significant impact on Fraser Island management.

In September 2002 the ACCC instituted proceedings in the Federal Court, Brisbane, against Eurong Beach Resort Limited [now ACN 484 540 858 Ltd], Mr. Sidney Albert Melksham, Jaigear Pty Ltd, Oser Pty Ltd and Ms Angela Kay Burger alleging predatory pricing and other conduct in contravention of the Trade Practices Act regarding vehicular barge services to Fraser Island. The ACCC sought declarations, pecuniary penalties and costs.

In December 2000 a rival barge, the Manta Ray, began operating from Inskip Point near Rainbow Beach to Hook Point on the southern tip of Fraser Island. Before the Manta Ray's arrival, the only regular barge service on the Inskip Point-Hook Point route was operated by companies controlled by Mr. Melksham. Those companies had held a virtual monopoly since 1989, apart from a brief period in late 1991 and early 1992.

Prior to the Manta Ray's arrival, the cost of travelling to Fraser Island from Rainbow Beach on one of the Melksham companies' barges was \$70 per standard vehicle (return), except for contract customers, whom the ACCC alleges were charged lower prices on condition they exclusively used the services of the Melksham companies. Passengers cost an extra \$4 per passenger, with trailers an additional \$22 to \$64 depending on the length.

Following the addition

of the Mantas Ray to the Ferry route the Melksham companies dropped their price to \$20 or less, with passengers and trailers free. The ACCC alleged that this was done to damage or eliminate their competitor Manta Ray and that some of the Melksham companies have previously engaged in similar conduct against other barge operators on the Inskip Point route. The ACCC also alleged that the Melksham companies have engaged in conduct that contravenes sections 45, 47 and 60 of the Act. Section 45 prohibits contracts, arrangements or understandings that restrict dealings or affect competition. Section 47 prohibits exclusive dealing and section 60 prohibits undue harassment or coercion in connection with the supply of good or services.

The ACCC successfully sought interim undertakings or injunctions, restraining the respondents from supplying barge services on the Inskip Point route at less than \$34 return (for vehicle and passengers), or \$17 one way (except in specified circumstances) and other anti-competitive practices.

Following that result in late 2002 ferry fares have risen rapidly and progressively to over \$60 per vehicle. The rapid rise in the cost of independent travel to Fraser Island seems to be a major contributing factor in the reduction of private 4WD visitation from 2002-03 to 2004-05. (See Table p 5). It is demonstrated that visitation to Fraser Island is currently very price sensitive.

(From "Courier Mail" 20 December, 2005)

Barge Pair fined \$1m for pricing out rival

Natalie Gregg, Tourism Reporter

Two former Fraser Island barge operators have been ordered to pay \$1million in costs and penalties after they were found guilty of predatory pricing and breaches of the Trades Practices Act.

Sidney Albert Melksham and Angela Kay Burger and their companies were fined after a Federal Court declared that they had used predatory techniques in an attempt to eliminate a competitor.

In December 2000, rival barge the "Manta Ray" began operating from Inskip Point near Rainbow Beach to Hook Point, on Fraser Island.

The Federal Court declared that Melksham and Burger and their companies, Eurong Beach Resort, Jaigear Pty Ltd, and Oser Pty Ltd, had a substantial degree of power in the market and "took advantage of that power for the purpose of eliminating or substantially damaging" their competitor. Melksham and Burger implemented a policy so that the price was kept at \$10 less than their competitor.

The companies also admitted to entering into a contract with another operator, who agreed not to supply barge services to Fraser Island at the same time as them.

Justice Keiffel ordered the following penalties: \$500,000 against Eurong Beach Resort; \$100,000 against Jaigear Pty Ltd; \$100,000 against Oser Pty Ltd; \$100,000 against Melksham and \$100,000 against Burger. He also ordered

the respondents pay the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's costs of \$100,000.



New Ferry at Inskip Point since Melksham left

Since the intervention of the ACCC and the sale of Eurong Resort to Tourism and Leisure Corporation ferry fares have risen to higher levels than before the intervention. This has contributed to the declining number of free and independent travelers (FITs) visiting Fraser Island — a fall of 25% in two years. The Manta Ray has a new barge as well and both companies charge the same rates.

FIDO Steps up its Assault on Fraser's Weeds

With the assistance of many volunteers, the two local authorities covering Fraser Island, some Fraser Island businesses and grants from Natural Heritage Trust through the Burnett Mary Regional Group, FIDO is dramatically stepping up its war on Fraser Island's weeds 2006. After a working bee at Eurong last October, FIDO is planning three working bees at Happy Valley (March, June, and August) and two at Eurong (May and October). FIDO's objective is to contribute at least 1600 volunteer hours towards bringing under control the weeds in these two major centres of weed introduction, infestation and dispersal.

Protecting the integrity is at the core of the obligation FIDO is undertaking two major initiatives help maintain the natural integrity of the Great Sandy Region during 2006. The five Weeding Bees are just one initiative. The other major initiative is staging a conference at Sippy Downs on 28-29th September on the theme of "Maintaining the natural integrity of the Great Sandy Region".

The conference is being organized with cooperation of the Fraser Island Scientific Advisory Committee and the University of the Sunshine Coast. This conference is the subject of a supplement attached to this MOONBI. Further information will be posted on FIDO's web site www.fido.org.au as planning progresses.

The conference will also feature an art exhibition underlining the point that aesthetics are one of the World Heritage criteria for which Fraser Island is recognized.

Happy Valley and Eurong townships are Fraser Island's two major centres of introductions, infestations and dispersal. It is important to get weeds under control there before they spread into the surrounding Great Sandy National Park.

While FIDO has been able get assistance through the Burnett Mary Regional Group to deal with weeds in the townships, no organization is able to get any Natural Heritage Trust assistance to extend this to any state owned land. Neither volunteers nor the QPWS can receive any Federal grants to deal with weeds which have spread from the townships into the National Park.

FIDO's Truly Great Photos

In association with our "Truly Great" Conference, FIDO is running a photo competition. It's open for entries during June, July and August in six categories:

1. Fauna
2. Flora
3. Landscapes
4. Historical
5. Recreation
6. My Favourite Place.

The subjects must relate to Fraser Island or other parts of the Great Sandy Region.

Renowned artist Erwin Weber will judge it along with FIDO President, Andrew Sinclair. Entry forms will be available from <<http://www.fido.org.au/>>. Winners will be published on the FIDO website and displayed alongside Erwin's art exhibition during the Conference. Up to 3 pictures per category will be allowed and photos can only be entered on CD or by email. Photos must be taken in the Great Sandy Region. Winners will show the World Heritage Values in the most artistic and aesthetic way.

FIDO in Weeding Action

FIDO has stepped up its weeding program in the of Happy Valley and Eurong townships. From 11th to 19th March FIDO President, Andrew Sinclair led a team of six volunteers coordinated by Greening Australia on weeds at Happy Valley. Based on GPS potting he reports that the group "weeded approx 4.1 Ha leaving .26 Ha of serious Cassia partially done in Cassia Canyon". He has set out priorities for future work in Happy Valley:

1. The area to the north of all houses and back to the ambulance station is about 1.4 Ha of mostly thick bush and light Cassia.
2. There is 1.3 Ha of follow up behind the village on the north of the road and about 2.8Ha with Mile a Minute.
3. There is 4.9 Ha of medium dense Cassia to the South of Cassia Cottage between the town and the Yidney Rocks road.
4. To the South and west is an area of 1.76 Ha around the start of the Great Walk and the mobile phone tower which is essentially weed free.

He estimates that it will take at least 2 more weeding bees of the same size before follow-up on the whole can begin.

The **Greening Australia Newsletter** described the effort: *The trip proved to be a huge success, with a great amount of weeding work completed on the site in Happy Valley. Many Easter Cassia, Umbrella and Broad Leaved Pepper trees were removed; and the Happy Valley area was mapped for future weeding activities and monitoring. Discussions were held with Hervey Bay City Council Community Environment Program officers regarding the need for education to the community about weeds on Fraser Island. Thanks to Andrew, who became the live in tour guide, and took us too many special environmental and cultural areas on the island.*

Volunteers Please Register

While FIDO has already recruited enough volunteers for the first two of the weeding bees (March and May), FIDO would like to hear from anyone interested in volunteering for the other three working bees in 2006. We also anticipate having to undertake more working bees in 2007.



Changing Patterns of Recreation

In this issue of MOONBI we examine several aspects of changing recreation patterns on Fraser Island. There have been several changes over recent years which have occurred but seem to have been almost unnoticed and unremarked on although the implications for both management and stakeholders are enormous especially if the trends continue. These relate to (1) the number of visitors, (2) the declining FIT 4WD numbers, (3) the increasing number of walkers using the Great Walk and (4) the proportion of visitors seeking softer options.

Table: 1
Fraser Island Recreation Area Statistics

Year	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	%
Camping						
Number permits	23,770	25,209	N/A	26,616	23,395	98.4
Number of campers	143,523	118,461	118,916	104,466	106,950	74.5
Number camper nights	331,695	338,088	320,974	292,505	311,401	93.9
(camping) visit days	437,363	N/A	77,991	396,971	418,351	
Commercial activity permits						
Number people carried—total	157,697	184,089	217,824	174,429	174,619	110.7
Film/photography	60	10	15	29	1	
Vehicle service permit						
– one month	38,957	41,277	40,328	35,078	29,507	75.7
– annual	29	61	48	66	30	
– exemption	N/A	849	668	376	532	

Source: Annual Reports of Environmental Protection Agency — Reports of Recreation Areas Management Board

Notes: *There continues to be a steady upwards trend in the numbers of people carried on commercial tours on Fraser Island (Up 10.7% over four years) while the number of Free and Independent Travellers (F.I.Ts) is down, the numbers of campers (down 25.5%) and the number of vehicle permits issued (down 24.3%). This requires a review of the factors because such shifts in the patterns of recreation have very important implications for Fraser Island overall management.*

The Decline of FIT Visitation

The most dramatic decline in the number of FITs to Fraser Island occurred between 2002/03 and 2004/05 when the number of one month vehicle permits plunged by 28.9% in just two years. All vehicles visiting the island other than residents or workers (who must still obtain an exemption permit) must buy a permit of either one month (a single visit) or an annual permit. In 2002-03 there were 40,328 single vehicle permits issued, in 2003-04 there were 35,078 and in the last financial year there were just 29,507 permits issued. This represents a decline of more than 25% in just two years. That is very significant and needs much closer examination.

While nobody has conclusively identified the reasons for the decline there are a number of factors. These include:

* **Costs:** The first and foremost is cost. Coincidental with a sharp rise in fuel costs has been an increasing cost of ferry fares. Most of the FIT traffic enters Fraser Island between Inskip Point and Hook Point. It was only a few years ago these same ferry services were running at a much lower price (In some cases a seventh of the price) than today (see story p3). The 25% decline in vehicle traffic immediately follows the abandonment of cheap ferry fares.

The trend in growth of visitation to almost all major natural destinations in Australia has slowed down in the last decade as tourists are increasingly seeking softer options. Some destinations such as Kakadu have had declining visitor numbers for much longer than Fraser Island.

- * **Softness:** There is an increasing softness amongst Australians who want more creature comforts and are abandoning the “roughing it” type recreation. (See p6.)
- * **Salt Sensitive:** Ironically, despite the increasing proportion of 4WDs in the Australian motor vehicle fleet, many are in the luxury class and owners are increasingly reluctant to expose their expensive vehicles to salt and sand and are determinedly keeping their precious vehicles off the beaches.



The old McKenzie locomotive which operated on Fraser Island from 1918 until the mid-1930s. When the McKenzie sawmill shut down the Fraser Island light rail was taken over and operated by the Queensland Forestry Department until the mid 1930s.

Seeking Softer Options

The number of campers on Fraser Island and the number of camper nights plateaued some years ago and has remained relatively stable since. However this doesn't tell the full story. The number of Australian campers appears to have declined significantly but the coincidental growth of international backpacker visitors has helped maintain the overall number of campers.

Of the Australian campers who are visiting Fraser Island and Cooloola, most are having much more elaborate camps. For example, the proportion of caravans appearing is ever increasing. Amongst the tent campers, more people are sleeping on beds or stretchers rather than thin mattresses separating them from the ground. There are more electric generators and electrical appliances appearing in camps and the trend can be observed in many facets of camping.

Despite the greater range of creature comforts used in camping, an increasing proportion of Fraser Island visitors are opting for hotel, resorts and an ever-higher standard of housing. The trend is not limited to Fraser Island. All around the Australian coast, the traditional beach holiday shacks are being upgraded or being replaced by "McMansions". In the past, holiday accommodation was often inferior to the standard of accommodation at home. Now an increasing proportion of the market demands more elaborate accommodation for their holidays than they have at home. The contrast between the houses erected in the 1960s at Eurong and Happy Valley contrasts with the housing erected in the 1990s and more recently at Orchid Beach.



The Great Walkers

Going against the above trend are the Great Walkers. It is clear that, while starting from a small base, the number of people who are hiking rather than driving around the island is escalating at a very rapid rate. Recent interviews of walkers using the Great Walk, which is now gaining an international reputation, indicate how the word about the quality of the experience is rapidly spreading. One walker from England said that she learnt about the walk by searching the internet for a suitable destination for a walking holiday. She had wanted to visit Fraser Island but not to ride around it in a 4WD. She flew to Australia specifically to walk the length of the trail. Two Germans who said that they had previously walked Tasmania's "Overland Track" and were keen to do it again also heard about Fraser Island's Great Walk and decided to add the walk to their itinerary for their Australian visit last October. More significantly was the encounter with a group of five Aussies from Sydney's North Shore. They had flown up from Sydney on the newly established direct flights to Hervey Bay, travelled across to Kingfisher Resort and were hiking to Dilli Villi. They said that it was hard to pick up any bushwalking magazine which didn't feature Fraser Island's Great Walk. They were determined to get in before the walk became more popular because they said that many walkers in Sydney were now placing it on their agenda.

All of this supports the latent demand amongst younger people identified last year by Tamara Jacobi which was reported in MOONBI 110. She investigated the expectations of 283 backpackers and what they wanted. She concluded, "*Responses of backpacker surveys indicated many different problems with four wheel drive tours. The majority of backpackers, both male and female, and of many different nationalities, expressed a significant interest in hiking on Fraser Island as well as an interest in supported hikes on the island. Only 3 backpackers of the 283 surveyed had even read about hiking on Fraser Island ... this lack of awareness was not from lack of interest. When asked if they would be interested in hiking on Fraser nearly 70% of backpackers said 'Yes' they would be interested.*"



Two Picnics from the McKenzie Era (1918-1925)

Both photos were provided to FIDO by a former McKenzie Sawmill employee and are now part of the FIDO photographic archives, copies of which have also been donated by FIDO to the QPWS and the Oxley Memorial Library. **Above:** This was obviously taken around the company base at North White Cliffs near Jetty and sawmill. **Below:** This is a picnic on the foredunes of Fraser Island's Ocean side. Even here the foredunes had a grassy understorey until the 1970s.



ALLIES WORKING ON WEEDS

The Fraser Island Weeds Alliance was established during a workshop in December was a result of an initiative by the Burnett Mary Regional Group which brought together all stakeholders. FIDO was interested to learn of some of the other groups working on Fraser Island such as the Friends of the Sandy Cape Lighthouse. This group has been quietly tackling one of Fraser Island's other major centres of weed infestation, but within the Great Sandy National Park. The Butchalla people are also keen to help eliminate virulent weeds also introduced through 19th C paternalism to the site of the old Bogimbah Mission.

Pilot Plays Chicken with Fraser Island Motorist

A pilot played chicken with FIDO conservation campaigner, John Sinclair, on Fraser Island's ocean beach on 25th January. Sinclair was just getting back into his 4WD after gathering wongs just south of the Pinnacles when the aircraft landed even further south (outside the designated aircraft landing strip) and taxied north towards his vehicle. When Sinclair wouldn't move his vehicle the pilot just kept revving the plane engine and edging the propeller ever closer to the 4WD. He stopped the plane, got out and demanded that Sinclair let him through so that his passengers could be unloaded right in front of the Pinnacles.

When Sinclair refused to move on immediately the pilot verbally abused him and then disembarked his passengers before getting aboard a bus which had stopped just north of Sinclair's vehicle. Some of Sinclair's party were able to monitor a radio conversation between two buses discussing the stand-off.

After being told that he had picked the wrong person to confront, the pilot then recruited more aircraft joy-riders before taking off on the beach outside the designated aircraft landing section.

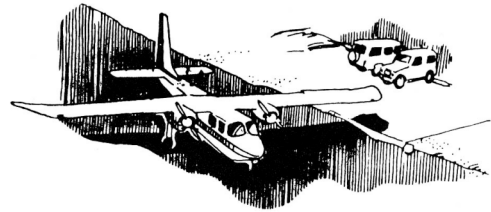
There is a very high risk of a serious aircraft accident on Fraser Island's main beach which is a designated main road. Just as it is hard to imagine motor vehicles being able to drive up and down an airport runway, so is it

incongruous to have so many take-offs and landings on a designated main road.

One aspect causing the proliferation of beach landings appears to be because bus drivers encourage passengers to take joy flights during their beach tours. Without this touting for passengers there would be many fewer aircraft take-offs and landings from what has been designated a main road.

Aircraft safety authorities need to review the current policies where pilots can challenge motorists to move even when aircraft are making unsupervised landings in non-designated areas.

FIDO believes that as a minimum requirement (except in emergency situations) the aircraft operator should ensure that there is a person on the beach to certify an "all clear" before any take-off or landing. Whilst this is a requirement "at busy periods on Fraser Island", it seems that there are now only very few days in the year where this previously agreed procedure is followed.



News in Brief



Members of the McKenzie Football Cricket Team. In the 1920s social sporting events were regular occurrences at Balarragan where the cricket pitch near the lead lights is a relic of the times.

Minke whale in Great Sandy Strait: After spending over a week in Great Sandy Strait a 7.4m Minke whale was found dead on Picnic Island in January. It appeared to be hanging around a deep hole between Picnic and Duck Islands for several days but its sex could not be identified because it had been mauled by sharks. This wasn't the only whale tragedy this summer.

Dead Sperm whale on Fraser Beach: In November a dead Sperm whale was found washed up on a Fraser Island beach. However before Queensland Museum curators could inspect the carcass, trophy hunters found that the whale's lower jaw containing its teeth (which are important for research purposes) had been souveniered.

"Cowboys" on Fraser Island's West: FIDO is disturbed by a number of reports of laws to protect National Parks in Queensland being flouted on the western side of Fraser Island. A *Fraser Coast Chronicle* correspondent reported seeing domestic dogs running free on the beach at Garry's Anchorage. Presumably these were taken there by yatchies. However there have been other indications that other National Park regulations aren't being respected in other parts of Fraser Island's western coast.

Crocodile seen at Aldridge Creek: A Maryborough fisher saw a 1.5m (5 feet) estuarine crocodile while prawning in Aldridge Creek. Fraser Island is at the southern range of estuarine crocodiles. However Fraser Island and the Mary River seems to be a summer refuge only. The crocs seem to abandon it in winter and head back up north to warm up their solar panels.

Robot Croc: On a lighter note a group of American students in January saw a huge robotic crocodile on the back of a truck being transported from Kingfisher Resort to the Wanggoolba Creek ferry. The mystery was later explained as being a 600 kg prop in a new film about prehistoric creatures being shot on Fraser Island by the film-maker, Nigel Marven, who produced "Walking With Dinosaurs" and who was based at Kingfisher Resort.

More Cruise Ships call in: There has been a massive increase in the number of cruise ships calling in at Fraser Island. In 2005 twelve cruise ships called in. The 103 metre long "Orion" called in nine times and there were three visits by two ships.

Fraser is a Wild River

Fraser Island was one the first six rivers which the Queensland Government nominated for protection protected under its historic Wild Rivers Act 200. Since proclaiming the act on December 2, 2005, the Beattie Government moved swiftly with the process of nominating rivers for declaration after the Act.

This has sparked of a furious reaction from many sectors in the Maryborough-Hervey Bay area who believe that they should have an unfettered right to extract water from Fraser Island to meet their growing urban needs rather than implement water conservation measures.

Four of the wild rivers are in remote country draining to the Gulf of Carpentaria in the State's north-west. Both Hinchinbrook and Fraser islands have been declared as "rivers" because they have both have been largely spared the effects of development and have all of their natural values intact.

Modification of rivers through water storage, flood mitigation, irrigation and increasing development along their banks leading to pollution has already affected the majority of the world's rivers and streams. The Queensland Government believes that there are three significant reasons to act to save Queensland's wild rivers.

- * The protection of wild rivers is of global significance.
- * Freshwater accounts for only 0.003 percent of our planet's water but provides critical habitat for 41 percent of all fish species.
- * Wild river protection is an asset to the eco tourism and adventure tourism industries and supports the protection of rivers that feed into Australia's multi-million dollar recreational and commercial fishing industries.

Natural Resources Minister Henry Palaszczuk said, "The rivers to be nominated in the first round Catchments of this nature are becoming increasingly important in a rapidly growing state. This strengthens the case, and the need, for preserving them." This zone will offer strong protection against the construction of dams, weirs and levees and threatening activities such as land clearing.

FIDO welcomes this declaration because this adds an extra layer of protection. It not only protects the productivity of Hervey Bay's marine component but it will prevent diverting Fraser Island's water for urban mainland urban use. People who suggest that fresh water flowing freely to the sea is wasted do not understand the valuable contribution which the natural flow from rivers and streams are making to marine productivity. Without the flows from Fraser Island streams into Hervey Bay the plight of dugongs, turtles and many other species could be much more perilous and the productivity of the fishery substantially reduced. Without Fraser Island water Hervey Bay will need to use its available water more efficiently.

Unfortunately the protection of Fraser Island's aquifers may not be replicated in Cooloola where water is already being drawn from Teewah Creek to supply the township of Tin Can Bay and from Searys Creek to supply the township of Rainbow Beach

The Great Sandy Marine Park Rezoning Drags On

FIDO welcomed the intervention of Premier Beattie to stop the Great Sandy Marine Park Northern Section being declared in February with a pitifully small area set aside as "no-take" zone or Marine National Park. On our latest information the Beattie Government is still trying to pander to the intransigent commercial fishing lobby by defying the IUCN's recommendation that 20-30% needs to be set aside as "No-take" zones.

Unfortunately the public appears to be largely ignorant of the enormous benefits and increased productivity of the fishery that can come through providing a significant no take zone in the Great Sandy Marine Park. Commercial fishers have so far successfully led the fight to minimize the areas which they can't fish. Contrary to their dire predictions the creation of well-managed "no-take" zones around the world has been shown to increase the total harvest of the overall regions over time.

FIDO has produced a Backgrounder to help people better understand how extra productivity is gained. One doesn't need to be a rocket scientist to appreciate the logic of the "no-take" zones and the abundant evidence to show that they work successfully. NPAQ's analysis of the available data shows that Hervey Bay currently has a declining fishery. Rather than losing out by closing areas all fishers will be beneficiaries of the sound conservation measures within a few years. However if they succeed in limiting the "no-take areas" (presently proposed less than 5% is proposed) then the Great Sandy fishery will continue to contract and most commercial fishers will be poorer for it.

Anecdotal reports already indicate that productivity of the Great Barrier Reef fishery is starting to increase since it was rezoned in 2003 from 4.6% "no-take" area to 33.3%.

Fish which develop within "no-take" zones spillover to augment populations outside reserves. Animals are most abundant inside reserves and just across their boundaries. This has been established at several marine reserves around the world. Moreover, fishing boats often congregate along the borders of marine reserves, because that is where catches are highest. This practice of "fishing the line" can be observed at many marine reserves.



The former District Forester's Central Station house at Central Station (circa 1920). It was noted for its very wide verandahs. The verandahs were removed when it was relocated later to Ungowa.

Fraser Island Fire Management Debate Re-ignited

One of the key and core elements in maintaining the natural integrity of Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region is the establishment of an appropriate fire regime which maximizes the biodiversity. There is a Fire Management Strategy for the island but implementation of this strategy is being hindered by bureaucratic rules. Recent lightning strikes and advice from a leading fire ecologist have highlighted why there is an urgent need to review the current burning practices on Fraser Island.

Some summer season lightning strikes have led to what FIDO hopes will be some very useful burns. However fire management on Fraser Island has been badly managed over recent decades and that is the opinion volunteered to FIDO by one of Australia's leading fire ecologists after a private visit to Fraser Island in January. Jeremy Russell-Smith who advises four governments on burning practices across northern Australia from Cape York to Broome told FIDO that unless the huge volume of combustible material he saw on Fraser Island is broken up there will be an inevitable disastrous fire probably resulting from a lightning strike sometime in the future.

Fire management will be one of the critical themes of the Conference at the University of the Sunshine Coast on 28-29 September on "*Maintaining the Natural Integrity of the Great Sandy Region*".

FIDO's criticisms of the current fire regime on Fraser Island are directed at what we interpret to be some basic QPWS prescriptions for carrying out "management burns". These are:

1. **Must occur within working hours:** Uppermost in QPWS Public Service thinking seems to be that the fire should be extinguished before 5.00 pm or "knock-off time". Thus management burns are usually lit early in the day and burn ferociously in the hottest part of the day with the hope that the fire will die down or be extinguished by knock-off time. In fact this pattern makes it more to extinguish
2. **Must occur when maximum workforce is available:** With rostered weekends off there are only a relatively few days each month when the workforce on the ground has its maximum potential staff on Fraser Island. Thus burns are planned for these few days and so are not able to take advantage of the best times to burn when, in fact, this maximum workforce may not be necessary.
3. **Must be lit from the ground:** FIDO has been an urger for more burning on smaller mosaics to occur at different seasons. There has been steadfast resistance to using aerial ignition on Fraser Island. FIDO believes that this is due to budgetary considerations. FIDO also believes that this is false economy because the number of staff required to monitor the area designated for burning could be substantially reduced. Currently the QPWS employs aircraft to help them fight the wildfires when they get away.
4. **Must be lit from roadways and tracks:** This is for the personal safety of the rangers but this policy has a profound implication on the size of the patches burnt. Instead of obtaining a mosaic of patches up to five hectares in area, we end up with a mosaic on Fraser Island of patches thousands of hectares in area because the boundaries of the roads don't allow smaller areas to be lit. There may be different ecosystems within these

large blocks bounded by the roads which require different sorts of fire management. However this policy means that irrespective of the differing requirements, they will all be burnt at the same time.

5. **All fires must be able to take off at the first ignition.** Starting fires from roadways means at the edge. If a fire doesn't take-off this requires a risky process of the operators having to walking into the bush and further away from their escape routes to light the fire again. Lighting fires from the road verges requires a degree of dryness of the combustible material which almost certainly will result in a hotter fire.
6. **Must be lit in the prescribed season:** Rather than burning off soon after rain while the chances of fires getting away are minimal, the QPWS has a predetermined "Fire Season" on Fraser Island. This is normally advertised in July and August but may be as late as September or even October. This, in FIDO's view, is not the optimum time to get the best ecological outcome.

One of the worst wildfires on Fraser Island in recent times was a fire lit near Bogimbah Creek which burnt almost to Lake Garawongera, the Valley of the Giants and Yidney Scrub in August 2004. This management burn followed these prescriptions. They are a recipe for disaster.

Aerial ignition would allow the establishment of a better burning pattern. Each fire lit might cover only a few hectares and leave many small patches between them unburnt as a refuge for wildlife and points from which recolonization of burnt areas can begin. Aerial ignition much more precisely deals with the different ecosystems in any given area to be burnt. It also means that the burning could begin late in the day when the evening dew is likely to cause the small fires to self extinguish about 9.00 pm to 10.00 pm. The reluctance to employ aerial ignition on Fraser Island defies logic.



Fraser Island timber cutters in the early 1920s standing on a log beside its stump. This was felled for McKenzie's sawmill. Note the openness of the background forest. The change in the last century to Fraser Island's ecology has largely resulted from the exclusion of fire.

Lightning Strikes Twice

A wildfire caused by a lightning strike at the end of November caused some roads in the northern section of Fraser Island to be closed for a few days. Luckily the storms which caused the fire outbreak occurred again and helped put the fire out after a few days. The fire began on the island's western side, north of Woralie Road. The QPWS immediately began some back-burning but the fire escaped containment lines and forced more roads and tracks to be closed before it extinguished itself. A week after the fire went out, there was still a "Road Closed" sign across the Northern Road at the Bogimbah Creek bridge.

Cooloola: The summer storms continued throughout November and the countryside was looking green and refreshed when a lightning bolt started a wildfire in the northern section of Cooloola, part of the Great Sandy National Park. John Sinclair, who happened to be camping in Cooloola at that time, drove down the Cooloola Way just after the fire and was impressed by the coolness of the burn. It wasn't devastating and was probably very beneficial. It was on the northern side of the road which had not experienced a fire for some time and which was showing this by dense understorey.

Broken bridges close some roads

One of the consequences of the Woralie fire is that a bridge across Bowarrady Creek failed to support some of the heavy machinery brought in to fight the fire. This has resulted in the closing of the Woralie to Awinya Creek Road. This road was scheduled to be closed under the Great Sandy Region Management Plan. It has little use and FIDO believes that the QPWS would not be justified in carrying out repairs to this bridge. However, FIDO believes that a foot bridge here is warranted because this offers one of the great walks on Fraser Island between Arch Cliffs and Lake Bowaraddy and it is used with surprising frequency as the word spreads about the wonderful walking experience to be had here. In the meantime another road in a semi remote area between Ungowa and Hook Point has been closed south of Garry's Anchorage by another collapsed bridge. Precious funds should not be directed to restoring these bridges.

Great Sandy Region Place Names

A subcommittee of the Community Advisory Committee is currently reviewing place names on Fraser Island to determine appropriate Aboriginal names for previously unnamed features on the island. The subcommittee also felt that not enough use had been made of Butchulla names which were recognized and gazetted by the Queensland Place Names Board in 1980. Where these names apply to major geographical features they should be used in tandem with the English place names which have replaced them. These include:

Lake McKenzie	Boorangoora
Basin Lake	Tahwan
Middle Rocks	Berabee and Callah
Indian Head	Tuckee
Waddy Point	Binngih
Big Woody Island	Tooliwah
Little Woody Island	Walangoora
Yankee Jack Creek	Tumbowah
Fig Tree Lake	Goomboor
North White Cliffs	Balarrgan

However the Sub-committee had very strong views about the name of "Fraser Island" itself. The traditional name, "Kgari" long preceded the events of 1836 when the Captain James Fraser and his wife Eliza landed there. **Kgari** should eventually have equal or greater prominence in the same way that the 19th Century name of Ayers Rock has over time reverted to its traditional name "Uluru".



2076 AD

This poem came to light while we were recently fossicking through the FIDO archives. It was submitted to FIDO in late 1976 after the Fraser Federal Government has dealt the death knell to Fraser Island sandmining. Its author is anonymous.

I am very old
 But still young. —
 young enough to enjoy
 many more years
 of listening
 to people's voices
 and seeing their eyes
 entranced
 by my beauty.

A hundred years ago
 I was frightened
 at the sounds of madness.
 Machines
 Put on me by greedy men
 were ripping out
 my guts.
 Men,
 Whose only thoughts
 were for themselves,
 and their own
 inflated egos,
 and their dull brains,
 voiced inane thoughts
 as they planned
 how much they could profit
 from
 selling my soul
 to the highest bidder —
 Those men,
 Whose grasping hands
 Wounded me.
 But still I live. -
 Sane men,
 men who were merciful,
 saved me.

Those men
 Who 100 years ago
 Who wished to murder me are dead.
 Who thinks of them now?
 No one.
 They are dust.

10 years of the Howard Government's impact on Fraser Island

During the last ten years, the Howard Government has abdicated its responsibilities for protecting Fraser Island and some other World Heritage areas while accepting the full responsibility for funding and managing the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu and Uluru World Heritage areas. This is anomalous. Fraser Island has been treated shamefully. It would be euphemistic to describe the Howard government's contribution to this most significant region as tokenistic.

Tokenistic financial support: During the Howard reign the unpredictable federal funding for Fraser Island fell from \$950,000 in 1997-98 to as low as \$8,000 in 2002-03. See Table on p 12. The latest grant only provides secretarial support to facilitate meetings of Fraser Island Advisory Committees. (All members provide their contributions voluntarily). Commonwealth rules also prevent any funding from the Natural Heritage Trust being spent in State owned land and block any funding going to any national parks, even the World Heritage Great Sandy National Park. **This is just not good enough.** Fraser Island annually contributes well in excess of a quarter of a billion dollars to the national economy and it deserves to receive some of the revenue it generates being returned to help manage it.

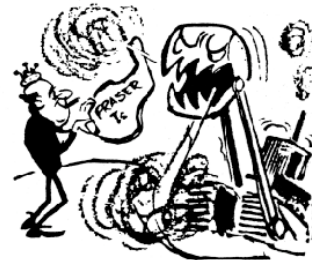
Hands and eyes off: The Commonwealth has also almost abdicated its role of ensuring that Fraser Island's World Heritage values are properly protected. It has a responsibility for ensuring that Australia is honouring its World Heritage obligations. This can't be done properly if it is treated only as a desktop exercise from Canberra, yet that is effectively what Fraser Island has become under the Howard Government. It requires more active monitoring than has been provided over recent years and it requires some regular Commonwealth presence in the region.

Three Monkeys Trick: In recent years the Commonwealth has even withdrawn from sending representatives to the quarterly meetings of the Fraser Island advisory committees. The Commonwealth Government seems to be behaving like the three wise monkeys. To avoid acknowledging any responsibility, the Federal bureaucracy in the Department of Environment and Heritage doesn't want to see anything or hear anything which might point to them having a responsibility. Likewise if they are not present, they cannot utter anything which might even sound like a commitment. The tradition of the three wise monkeys is maintained by:

- avoiding regular attendance as advisory committee meetings.
- having no projects on Fraser Island and never having any reasons to go there to inspect progress on projects and management generally
- not pressing to have the Fraser Island Management Committee convene. It6 has met less than annually in the last five years and now the rare business is discussed by telephone conference.
- Not having any meetings of the Ministerial Council for some years.

The Commonwealth's participation in Fraser Island management and monitoring verges on the farcical.

FIDO believes that the Commonwealth has an obligation to take full responsibility for all areas which it has agreed to nominate for World Heritage listing.



Great Sandy Strait Pearl Farm Evades Prior EBPC Scrutiny

In November FIDO was alarmed to discover a very large pearl farm was established in 2005 around Little Woody Island (Walangoora) at the northern end of Great Sandy Strait. This pearl farm appeared almost overnight and without any publicity. It is located wholly within the Great Sandy Strait Ramsar site and adjacent to the Fraser Island World Heritage area. It appeared in late 2005 and was discovered while FIDO was engaged in an inspection of Great Sandy Strait as a part of our focus on the better zoning for the Great Sandy Marine Park.

It has also been reported to FIDO that "approval" was given for the operators of this pearl farm to use Bogimbah Creek as a refuge for their flotilla of small craft and barges in bad weather. Bogimbah Creek is a most significant site to the Butchalla people and, although adjacent to the pearl farm, it is certainly part of the World Heritage area.

FIDO has since learnt that this occurred without any approvals or applications under EPBC Act. However, the Commonwealth Government which administers the EPBC Act would not have even learnt of the pearl farm unless FIDO had alerted them. Many other affected stakeholders had assumed that just because this pearl farm was up and established that it did have EPBC approval.

The pearl farmers have potentially not complied with the EPBC Act and the Commonwealth Government hasn't tried to enforce it in this Ramsar/World Heritage site.

One of the mysteries is who in the Queensland Government gave approval for this to go ahead without EPBC approval. FIDO understands that the QPWS was unaware of the pearl farm until after it was an established fact. Despite them being responsible for Fraser Island the local managers were not informed about Bogimbah Creek being used as a pearl farmers' foul weather sanctuary.

FIDO is monitoring the position and reserves the right to issue a legal challenge to this operation under the EPBC Act if the Commonwealth takes no action. A network of rafts and ropes which creates a huge "no-go" area of hundreds of hectares in a Wetland of International Significance is not something which should be able to go ahead without prior Commonwealth approval.



MOONBI 112

MOONBI is the name given by the Butchalla Aborigines to the central part of their homeland, Fraser Island or "Kgari"

MOONBI is the newsletter of Fraser Island Defenders Organization Limited

FIDO, "The Watchdog of Fraser Island", aims to ensure the wisest use of Fraser Island's natural resources

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MOONBIs since 1996 and all FIDO Backgrounders can be found at www.fido.org.au

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Ten Years of Howard Government

Protecting the integrity is at the core of the obligation the Commonwealth Government undertook when nominating each of its World Heritage sites. However the Commonwealth now has rules in place which prevent any financial assistance to help with any kind of management of the national park or any other state land on Fraser Island. At the same time it has wound back its financial contribution to the Fraser Island World Heritage site as the following table clearly shows. Funding is only one of the issues relating to Commonwealth responsibility where the Howard Government has abrogated its World Heritage responsibilities.

Contributions to Fraser Island's Management

Year	Feds Contributes	Qld Contributes
96-97	\$700,000	
97-98	\$950,000	
98-99	\$70,000	
99-00	\$662,500	
00-01	\$505,000	
01-02	\$700,000	\$6.8M
02-03	\$8,000	\$6.2M
03-04	\$42,500	\$6.6M
04-05	\$127,000	\$8.6M
05-06	\$67,000	\$9.1

Whose Rubbish?

The long running dispute between the Maryborough and the Hervey Bay City Councils with the Environmental Protection Agency over apportioning the cost of rubbish collection on Fraser Island has been resolved. Each authority will now each be separately responsible for the cost of collection of rubbish from their respective areas of jurisdiction. This will cost ratepayers now much more.

In December there was a dramatic demonstration of the saying: "Rubbish Begets More Rubbish". A few days prior to the weeds workshop which involved FIDO and all other stakeholders concerned with Fraser Island management (except the Commonwealth), the Maryborough City Council workers felled a number of dead standing cypress pines in Eurong's Second Valley at the request of some landholders. The Council intended to gather them up and remove them but didn't have time during the visit. However the next day a local had a huge standing silky oak tree removed. This was carefully chopped up into small pieces and following the precedent of the Council workers the truckloads of silky oak were left lying on the Council land opposite where the fallen cypress had been left.

Hook Point to Dilli Villi Road

The upgrading of the inland road from Hook Point to Dilli Villi has been all but completed. The road should be able to better cope with heavy traffic which will all have to use this roadway when the work is finished to allow over 24 kilometres of surfing beach to become vehicle free. FIDO welcomes this. The road has a better surface than almost any other Fraser Island road and it is a challenge to observe the speed limit of 50 km/h. It will benefit a significant population of shore birds .

**FRASER ISLAND DEFENDERS
ORGANISATION LIMITED
NOTICE OF MEETING**

NOTICE is hereby given that the Twenty Ninth Annual General Meeting of the Fraser Island Defenders Organization Limited will be held at Downfall Creek Bushland Centre, 815 Rode Road, McDowall, **6.30 p.m., Wednesday, 9th August, 2006.**

BUSINESS:

1. To receive the Profit and Loss Statement, Balance Sheets and Reports of the Directors and Auditors
2. To elect Directors for the ensuing term in accordance with the Articles of Association.
3. General Business.

MS Sinclair

BY THE ORDER OF THE BOARD
Michelle Sinclair
Honorary Secretary
DATED this 1st day of April, 2006

or failing him/her as my proxy, to vote on my behalf at the Twenty-ninth Annual General Meeting, to be held at Downfall Creek Bushland Centre 815 Rode Road, McDowall, 6.30 p.m., **Wednesday, 9th August, 2006** and at any adjournment thereof.

Signed this day of, 2006



URGENT

Section 248 of the Companies (Queensland) Code provides that all members be given 21 days notice of any meeting (including A.G.M.s) at which they are entitled to vote. It is important that as many proxies as possible are received. The Proxy Form is also taken as your apology for non-attendance. This form (or a copy) should be completed under Article 31 of the constitution. **If you cannot attend the meeting please photocopy this form and return it promptly** to reach Secretary, FIDO, PO Box 70, BALD HILLS QLD 4036, on or before 8th August, 2006.

Nomination Form for FIDO Office Bearers

To be returned to Secretary FIDO, PO Box 70 BALD HILLS QLD 4034 by Tuesday, 8th August, 2006

We,and

being financial members of the Fraser Island Defenders

Organization hereby nominate

for the position of for the 2006-07 term

Signed..... Nominator

PROXY FORM

29th Annual General Meeting

I,
(Please print in BLOCK letters)

of

being a financial member of the Fraser Island Defenders Organization do hereby appoint