



MOONBI 117

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 116

There have been several political changes since MOONBI 116 that have many potential impacts on Fraser Island resulting from changes in government at a national, state and regional level.

a. Commonwealth Government: The election of the first non-conservative government for over a decade at a national level has the potential for change for the better at the national level. It would be hard to get worse than the neglect inflicted on Fraser Island by the Howard Government. As MOONBI goes to press we await the new budget to see if Fraser Island is about to get a FAIR GO from the Feds or not. Thanks for signing the petitions that FIDO delivered in Canberra in February.

b. Queensland Government: The handing of the baton from former Premier Peter Beattie to Anna Bligh and the consequential Cabinet restructure also with a restructure of the Environmental Protection Agency has significant implications for Fraser Island. There is a new Minister whose title doesn't even refer to the “environment” and some of his decisions so far have disappointed us. There will also be new players in the bureaucracy responsible for Fraser Island. There is some optimism that Premier Bligh may break the impasse that has held up for three decades advancement of the light rail for Fraser Island proposal.

c. Local Government in Queensland has been profoundly altered. Maryborough, Hervey Bay and Fraser Island are now all in one Regional Council — Fraser Coast with the new councillors elected in March. Again we have to wait to see if this will result in any improvement in the delivery of services and policies that will benefit Fraser Island.

Murrayng the Mary: The Queensland Government released the Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Traveston Crossing Dam. It was a heavy tome which tried to obscure the impacts which will be sustained in the estuarine reaches of the Mary River. FIDO regards this as a major threat to the natural integrity of the Great Sandy Region. See story p2

Climatic Vagaries and Fire: After a series of El Nino years on Fraser Island, there was a short and dramatic climate swing into a La Niña mode with a sudden deluge which resulted in hundreds of thousands of tonnes of sand being scoured downhill. However there is now alarm that the flush of new growth may soon begin withering if the predicted El Nino returns later this year. That will present a huge threat to life and property from the potential wild fires. The opportunity to safely manage the dramatic increase in biomass may rapidly disappear before the inadequate proposed management burns on Fraser Island occur.



A Fraser Island sign being progressively buried by the sand being scoured off an island road.

International Recognition: MOONBI carries two articles on Fraser Island’s international recognition. One was part of a survey for sustainable tourism on 111 islands which cited “*busloads of tourists*” detracting from Fraser Island’s appeal. The other is the move by the BMRG to have Fraser Island and other parts of the Great Sandy Region recognized as part of a larger International Biosphere Reserve. However there is to be a new review of the values of the Great Sandy Region for inclusion on the National Heritage Register. See story p 10

Dingo Developments: The sudden decision to construct a dingo proof fence around both the Eurong and Happy Valley townships caught most people by surprise and resulted in some urgency that truncated community consultation so that it was a farce and needlessly alienated some landholders.

FIDO is an entirely voluntary organization. It has no professional staff. All work on its behalf is done in an honorary capacity. However, FIDO needs financial support to meet necessary expenses to deal with the major issues and projects, and to pursue research and campaigns to improve Fraser Island management.

Backgrounder: MOONBI 117 has with it a Backgrounder on tourist impacts on Lake McKenzie and a poster for our forthcoming “Shifting Sands” conference.

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The Impacts of the Traveston Crossing Dam

During the last six months since the release of the Environmental Impact Statement for the Traveston Crossing Dam thousands of others have examined and have been appalled at its abysmal failure to adequately address the impacts on Great Sandy Strait Ramsar site and the Fraser Island World Heritage site. This is reflected in the 16,800 submissions sent in to the Queensland Government pointing out the deficiencies of the study. FIDO was alarmed that the many aspects of the voluminous EIS was “*exceedingly sloppy, negligent, or contemptuous of the process it is supposed to serve*” with respect to Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region and the national interest.

The premature decision by the Queensland Government to virtually stop the flow of the Mary River into Great Sandy Strait by constructing the Traveston Crossing dam without even considering and weighing up all of the environmental impacts has now been very seriously questioned. This dam has presented the greatest threat yet to the integrity of Great Sandy Marine Park (Northern Section).

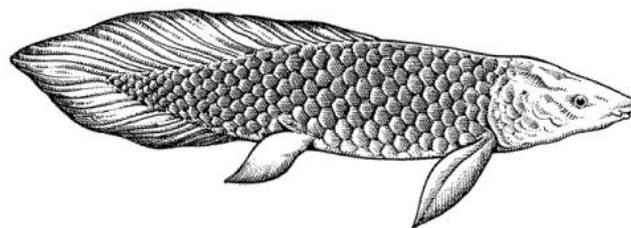
FIDO’s submission was just one of 11,261 (after duplicates were removed) to question the impact on the estuarine outflows of the Mary River into Great Sandy Strait. The EIS seemed determined to select only facts that suited the Queensland Government’s position. FIDO confined its review of the farcical EIS to consideration only of the impacts.

Queensland Deputy Premier Paul Lucas said that most submissions on the EIS related to the adequacy of the assessment process and the impacts of the dam on downstream areas, on the World Heritage values and on the Great Sandy Strait Wetland of International Significance (Ramsar) site. **The coordinator-general will consider the submissions and determine whether the dam could proceed, proceed with modifications, or not proceed.** That decision also has to meet the criteria of the Commonwealth Government’s EPBC Act

Some Points made in FIDO’s submission:

- * The EIS failed to take into account the Fraser Island Scientific Advisory Committee’s Report: “Fraser Island World Heritage Area — Review of Outstanding Universal Values” published by the Queensland Government.
- * It ignored the revised World Heritage criteria and the boundaries and identified values of the agreed renomination of the extended World Heritage nomination.
- * It chose to overlook one of Fraser Island’s current World Heritage values of having “exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance and contains superlative natural phenomena including **sheltered mangrove areas in a spectacular mosaic landscape**”.
- * Although only 20% of the Mary River catchment lies above the dam site, it ignored that this provides a disproportionate amount of the flow discharged by the Mary River.
- * It fallaciously asserts that the main discharge from the Mary River is north into Hervey Bay when Great Sandy Strait’s tidal delta owes its existence to the tidal movement coming south down Hervey Bay driving the sediment load discharged from the Mary River.
- * It therefore relies on a spurious assumption that the Fraser Island and Great Sandy Strait aren’t reliant on the fluvial processes of the Mary River.

- * FIDO disputed the EIS assertion that the dam “*will have a positive effect on water quality down-stream due to reduced turbidity*”.
- * FIDO also disputed another assertion that “*The habitat (of a range of endangered species and migratory shorebirds) are **not directly impacted** by the Project and the migratory species will continue to occupy and visit these areas once the dam is completed.*” ... Elsewhere the EIS flippantly and baselessly asserts “... *a number of migratory shorebirds ... are estuarine species and forage, roost and breed on sand, mud flats and mangrove wetlands. As a result they do not occur within the Project footprint and are not directly impacted by the Project.*” The reality is refuted in a recent study of Eastern Australia’s shorebirds.



The Mary River Lungfish – a critical link in the evolutionary chain found naturally only in the Burnett and Mary Rivers

Japan Has No Big Dams

MOONBI has previously reported that such large dams as proposed by the mind-set dam-builders of Queensland are not the only solution to the critical water shortages that South East Queensland with its population of less than 4 million people has recently experienced.

Japan meets all the needs of its population of 125 million people (30 times more than SEQ's) without big dams. FIDO has used Google Earth to search Japan for any signs of dams of the equivalent size to those already in Queensland. The searches have revealed nothing as big even as the Somerset Dam. This isn’t surprising because anything downstream would be devastated if there was a failure of any large dam in earthquake-prone Japan. Japan has a huge water recycling program which means new water is only required to meet 20% of its needs and much of this demand is managed by very clever, small but well located water harvesting schemes. Another method that needs to be noted is the use of enclosed reservoirs, frequently in basements of large buildings where earthquakes won’t have catastrophic impacts and where evaporation is eliminated.

Why isn’t “The Smart State” as smart as the Japanese?

Dramatic Decline in Australian Shorebirds

Coincidentally with the realization of the wide range of potential environmental impacts of the Traveston Crossing Dam and the Ministerial decision not to close any of Fraser Island's Ocean Beach to 4WD traffic comes yet another report revealing just how urgent and critical it is to maintain the habitat for shorebirds both in the estuarine wetlands and on the beaches.

A 23 year long Australia wide study headed by Professor Richard Kingsford has revealed that three-quarters of eastern Australia's millions of resident and migratory shorebirds have disappeared in just one generation

Shorebirds are spectacular birds, migrating from north to south and spending half their lives in Australia and the other half breeding in Russia and China. Worldwide, shorebird numbers are in decline. Of the 237 species with trend data, more than half are in decline, while only 8% are increasing. The extent of the Australian decline has attracted international attention and has rung alarm bells.

The large scale aerial survey study reported that migratory shorebirds populations in the eastern third of the continent plunged by 73% between 1983 and 2006, while Australia's 15 species of resident shorebirds - such as avocets and stilts - have declined by 81%. The study is published in the scientific journal *Biological Conservation*.

The study also revealed that Australia's inland wetlands are particularly important for migratory shorebirds, along with the better-known coastal sites - such as Roebuck Bay, Port Phillip Bay, the Hunter River estuary and Hervey Bay. Of the 10 wetlands supporting the highest number of shorebirds within survey bands across eastern Australia, eight were inland and only two coastal.

The scientists who have led this study believe that the drastic decline in shorebird numbers is primarily because of loss of wetlands through regulation of rivers for agriculture and urban use. Shorebirds are particularly vulnerable to the effects of damming rivers and extraction of water that results in their wetland habitats shrinking and their food source being reduced.

"Loss of wetlands due to river regulation is one of the more significant contributors to this drastic decline, but it appears such a threat is largely unrecognised in Australia's conservation plans and international agreements," says Professor Kingsford, who co-authored the report with Silke Nebel and John Porter, of the UNSW School of Biological, Earth and Environmental Sciences.

Richard Kingsford said: *"If we start returning flows to river systems we will start to restore some of this habitat."* Tasmanian shorebird ecologist Eric Woehler, agreed: *"The greater the use of water by humans the greater the loss of shorebirds."* Dr Woehler also claimed that water management practices in Australia have international implications as wetlands here are part of the East-Australasian flyway used by migratory species.



The fact that resident shorebirds in eastern Australia have also suffered dramatic declines points to serious conservation problems within the continent and reflects the pressures on river systems such as the Murray-Darling

Basin. Other shorebird populations in Australia's north and west, however, may not have declined so much.

Scientists concerned about the dramatic decline are urging the Australian Government to recognise our international obligations for shorebirds within our shores when we decide to develop rivers and wetlands.

Professor Kingsford and Dr Woehler called for national action to target for conservation wetlands of high conservation value for migratory shorebirds.



The findings of the Shorebirds study comes as no surprise to FIDO which has been drawing attention to the demise of Pied Oyster-catchers and Red-capped Plovers on the Fraser Island beaches most heavily used by 4WDs for many years.

The above needs not only to be considered in the light of the potential impacts of the Traveston Crossing Dam. It also needs to be considered in the light of the decision by Minister McNamara to refuse to close the 18 kms of beach north of Hook Point to vehicular traffic.

FIDO Is Not Alone

There were 11,260 other individual responses apart from FIDO's to the EIS on the Traveston Crossing Dam. The number of organizations from local government to environmental groups opposed to the construction of the Traveston Crossing Dam is daunting. It will make a mockery of democracy if the tunnel-visioned dam-builders of Queensland are allowed to prevail and proceed with construction of this wasteful and ill-conceived dam with such devastating consequences.

FIDO believes that the impact it will have on endangered species such as shorebirds, dugong, lungfish, Mary River cod, and Mary River turtles as well as other marine turtles could be catastrophic over time. This plus the impact on the physical attributes of the World Heritage and Ramsar sites will not meet the standards required by the EPBC (Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act) unless parochial politics are allowed to over-ride the national interest.

Changing Guards at Three Levels of Government

The changes in the politics, personnel and structures of the three levels of government affecting Fraser Island have been most profound. While there are some signs for optimism including a new political regime in Canberra, a new Minister in Queensland whose responsibilities (but not title) includes the environment and whose electorate also includes Fraser Island, a new Premier, and a new council with responsibility for all local government matters on Fraser Island, it remains to be seen if the delivery of services and resources match the promises.

The Federal Scene

While FIDO hasn't yet been able to meet with the new Federal Environment Minister, Peter Garrett, we did meet with his Shadow Minister, Greg Hunt, and Peter Garrett's Policy Adviser on World Heritage. On 12th February, John Sinclair delivered the first instalment of the "Fair Go" petitions to Canberra. Apart from drawing the attention of both the Opposition and the Rudd Government to the iniquities of Federal funding for Fraser Island (see below), he also made both the Government and the Opposition aware of FIDO's alarm at the potential of the Traveston Crossing Dam to heavily impact on the marine and estuarine parts of the Great Sandy Region.

FIDO drew attention to the Commonwealth Government's responsibilities under the EPBC Act with respect to the Traveston Crossing Dam. There is now abundant evidence that this dam will heavily impact on Great Sandy Strait, a Wetland of International Significance, and the Fraser Island World Heritage area.

Fixing Fraser's Finances

Apart from better application of the EPBC Act, and an urgent attention to addressing Climate Change, (FIDO has been quick to see the likely damaging impacts of Climate Change on Fraser Island) what FIDO most wants from the new Rudd Government is a fairer go for Fraser Island. Fraser Island has been short-changed during the 12 years of Howard Government. It received only 4% of the money that the Commonwealth distributed to the states for the management of the nine state managed World Heritage areas. As it is, the state managed World Heritage sites get a very poor deal from the federal government compared with three Commonwealth funded World Heritage sites — the Great Barrier Reef, Kakadu and Uluru. Fraser Island has received less than 0.2% of all the Commonwealth Government money spent on Australian World Heritage areas. This is most iniquitous and we are looking forward to the new Rudd Government rapidly removing such iniquity.



FIDO's original Eli Creek Boardwalk in 1982, built with voluntary assistance. Note the environment then.

National Parks get big Boost

Two new initiatives have just been announced which on paper look really good for helping National Parks in Australia generally but particularly in Queensland.

While attending National Park centenary celebrations at Queensland's first National park, Witches Falls, on Mount Tamborine, Premier Anna Bligh announced the expansion of its National Park estate by 50% by 2020 with the area under this protection rising from almost 7.6 million hectares to around 12 million hectares. She said that 12 million hectares was almost two Tasmanias or the size of North Korea. "In addition – at the same time – the total area under conservation tenure will grow from 8.3 million hectares to 20 million hectares – that's the size of Scotland and England combined."

The massive expansion will be paid for by an innovative - Australian-first - green fund, Eco Fund Queensland. Eco Fund Queensland will allow the government, companies and in time even interstate and overseas entities to invest in it - while at the same time securing the benefit of adding to Queensland's conservation areas.

This was followed a couple of days later by the new Federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett announcing a \$180 million boost to Australia's National Reserve System, as part of the Government's \$2.25 billion Caring for our Country initiative.

He said that expansion of the reserves to protect key habitats was essential in the fight against climate change as native species such as the mountain pygmy possum, tree kangaroos and hare wallabies need them most -as they struggle to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Mr Garrett said, "*It will also leverage millions more in cash and in-kind support from partners who will provide at least \$1 for every \$2 invested by the Australian Government to buy land for new reserves. This new program has clear priorities, including targeting bioregions with low levels of protection. These include the sub-tropical savannah from Cape York to the Kimberley, the Mitchell grass country of north-west Queensland, and arid central Australia.*"

A report from the CSIRO confirms the crucial role national parks and reserves will play in averting an impending extinction crisis as species struggle to cope with climate change. Expanding and strengthening the National Reserve System will help fortify species against this looming threat.



The Queensland Government Scene

The public can only hope that the omission of “*Environment*” and “*Service*” from the various titles of responsibilities in the new Bligh Government isn’t ominous. It began with the deletion of the title “*Environment*” from the list of portfolios, but it now extends to deleting “*Service*” from the title of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service so that it is now just QPW (Queensland Parks and Wildlife). The Environmental Protection Agency which has been semi paralysed for the past six months while it again goes through a restructure now falls within the jurisdiction of the Member for Hervey Bay, Andrew McNamara who is “*Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation*”.

There may be room for hope in the emphasis on “Sustainability”. FIDO has met with both Andrew McNamara and with the Premier Anna Bligh to discuss the endless political impasses that have stopped the Queensland Government from properly investigating a light rail option to transport people across Fraser Island.

There seems to have been some unseemly haste in the Bligh Government’s attempts at being “decisive” at least as far as some of the Fraser Island decisions are concerned. Perhaps with a little more careful reflection, they may not have prematurely blundered into making some ill thought through decisions.

The decision to leave both the southern 18 kilometres of beach north of the Hook Point ferry landing as well as the parallel road, open for 4WD traffic is a lose-lose outcome. The Government is now committed to maintaining the road at great expense just on standby for those 4WDers who want to be able to use it only when the tide is too high or it is too inconvenient to use the ocean beach, while it is going to (a) deny the option of having any significant Fraser Island surfing beach vehicle free, (b) threaten the

already dramatically diminished populations of shorebirds that use this section of Fraser Island Ocean Beach more than any other and (c) increase the already widespread perception around Australia and of global observers that Fraser Island is overrun by 4WDs and that 4WDs rule Fraser Island. It isn’t a good decision and it breaks a series of promises previously made by a succession of Environment Ministers (when we had Environment Ministers).

The decision to fence the townships of Eurong and Happy Valley, in the circumstances of the numbers of dingos becoming habituated in those townships is not a decision that FIDO disagrees with. The urgency that was applied to that decision has alienated many people who should have been consulted with more. The political shamble is described elsewhere in this MOONBI.

It is hoped that the early falters of the Bligh Government will quickly be addressed and that future environmental decisions affecting Fraser Island will be made with less haste and with more genuine consultation.

The Local Government Scene

New Fraser Coast Regional Council: Queensland’s radical local government reforms have brought all of Fraser Island under the control of the same local authority for the first time since it was split up by Russell Hinze in 1974. The new Regional Council incorporates all of the previous Maryborough and Hervey Bay City Councils and the former Woocoo Shire areas as well the northern half of the old Tiaro Shire. The new Fraser Coast Regional Council elected in March comprises six women councillors and four men including the Mayor Glen Kruger. Deputy Mayor is Belinda McNeven. Each of the councillors were assigned one of the ten portfolios as chairperson. The Planning and Development standing committee chaired by the Mayor would comprise all members of council with fortnightly meetings alternating between Maryborough and Hervey Bay council chambers. The other portfolios are: Corporate Governance, Belinda McNeven; Arts and Culture, Linda Harris; Community and Recreation, Les McKan; Business Development, Barbara Hovard; Marketing and Tourism, Anne Nioa; Economic Development, Gerard O’Connell; Water & Sewerage Infrastructure, Julie Arthur; Environmental Sustainability, Sue Brooks; Rural & Urban Infrastructure, David Dalglish; Strategic Policy & Sustainability, Debbie Hawes. The mayor will receive \$120,230 per annum, deputy mayor \$85,430 and councillors \$75,940. Council meetings will be held on the first and third Wednesday of each month alternating between Hervey Bay and Maryborough Council Chambers. FIDO welcomes Sue Brooks as the Chair of the Environmental Sustainability

Committee. She has been actively interested in Fraser Island and has been an active observer on behalf of Local Government at meetings of the Community Advisory Committee for the past two years.

Levy to promote Fraser Tourism

CEO of Fraser Island’s biggest resort, Gary Smith, is urging the Fraser Coast Regional Council to impose a tourism marketing levy on Maryborough and Hervey Bay ratepayers to help counter current deterrents to tourist activities including interest rate rises, high fuel prices, bad weather and new school holiday arrangements that he says have caused visitor numbers to the Fraser Coast to dwindle. He said that other councils already have a tourism marketing levy and that ratepayers have a responsibility to pay a nominal fee towards the tourist promotion of their region.



One of Sid Melksham’s Buses, Central Station C1978

Fraser Island Falls Short

Fraser Island fell short when the sustainability of its tourism was recently assessed. A panel of experts ranked the world's top tourist islands by comparing their commitment to sustainable tourism and preserving the environment for future generations of tourists. The survey was undertaken for the *National Geographic Traveler* magazine.

522 experts ranked 111 islands around the globe including Hawaii, the Greek Islands, Tasmania and the Maldives by comparing their commitment to sustainable tourism and preserving the environment for future generations of tourists. Of the Australian islands, South Australia's Kangaroo Island with 80 out of a possible 100 points was ranked equal fifth in the world. The panel scored Fraser Island and Tasmania at 76 behind 14 others. This is not a score which Commonwealth and State authorities responsible for World Heritage management should be proud of.

A score of 0-25 was "catastrophic" - all criteria very negative, outlook grim; 26-49 in serious trouble; 50-65 in moderate trouble; 66-85 minor difficulties; 86-95 authentic, unspoiled, and likely to remain so; 96-100 Enhanced. Kangaroo Island, ranked at fifth in the world, was ahead of Fraser Island, Hawaii, the Greek Islands, Tasmania and the Maldives.

On Kangaroo Island the magazine said, "Agriculture, tourism, and wilderness" meld with "high environmental quality and local involvement." Feral pigs and goats, and introduced koalas do disrupt habitats.

On Fraser Island the Report read: "Forested sandy island off Queensland, a World Heritage site, gets good marks for park preservation, but "busloads of tourists detract."

How the Island Survey Works

The magazine described its methodology thus:

This survey rates the qualities that make a destination unique—"integrity of place."

(The survey) selected mainly small and medium-size islands and groups, allowing a few larger exceptions with relatively unified character, such as Iceland and Tasmania. Since evaluating an entire destination involves such unquantifiables as aesthetics and cultural integrity, we decided the best measure is informed human judgment: a panel of 522 well-traveled experts in a variety of fields—ecology, sustainable tourism, geography, travel writing and photography, site management, historic preservation, indigenous cultures, archaeology.

We asked panelists to evaluate just the islands with which they were familiar, using six criteria weighted according to importance: environmental and ecological quality; social and cultural integrity; condition of historic buildings and archaeological sites; aesthetic appeal; quality of tourism management; and outlook for the future. Experts first posted points of view on each destination— anonymously, to ensure objectivity. After reading each others' remarks—a variation of a research tool called the Delphi technique—panelists filed their final stewardship scores.

The resulting Stewardship Index rating is an average of informed judgments about each place as a whole—all its many faces. Like the scores posted by Olympic judges, our experts' ratings reflect both measurable factors and the intangibles of style, aesthetics, and culture. And like an athlete, each island has a chance to improve.

"The world's most appealing destinations - islands - are the ones most prone to tourism overkill," says the magazine. "As micro-worlds, islands are also more vulnerable to population pressure, climate change, storm damage, invasive species, and now, tourism overkill." Denmark's Faroe Islands on 87 were the most highly rated.

The environmental ranking did not surprise FIDO. We have campaigned for more resources and better management of this World Heritage island for decades. It is interesting that the most significant detractor to Fraser Island's standing was "busloads of tourists". FIDO has long campaigned for an alternative means of moving tourists around Fraser Island on a more environmentally friendly light rail.

Premier Listens to FIDO's Alternative

FIDO has finally gained the ear of Premier Anna Bligh in our 34-year quest to get a light rail people mover established on Fraser Island. During the celebrations for the Centenary of Queensland National Parks at Tamborine on 28th March, John Sinclair was able to outline FIDO's proposal to the Premier.



Vale George Haddock

The above photo was one of the last taken by the late George Haddock who died just 12 hours later during a dinner dance celebrating the occasion. Apart from his role serving continuously for the past 21 years in executive positions with the National Parks Association of Queensland as Secretary, President and Treasurer, George made an enormous voluntary contribution to Fraser Island. He was a member of the Community Advisory Committee for over a decade and participated actively in a number of weeding bees on Fraser Island at both Happy Valley and Eurong. FIDO, NPAQ and others are planning a suitable way to celebrate George's contributions not only to Fraser Island but to Queensland National Parks in general with an extension to the current Fraser Island Great Walk. MOONBI will carry details and call for voluntary inputs when government approval has been granted.

Climatic Instability Threatens a Fraser Inferno

South East Queensland has just experienced for a short period a climatic event known as La Niña which brings with it above average rainfall. Fraser Island and other parts of the Great Sandy Region were beneficiaries of extra rain. The lake levels rose a little and the forest looks lusher and greener. However the fickleness of the current climate instability means that the Great Sandy Region is on the brink of prematurely returning to another period El Niño with below average rainfall. That has potentially disastrous consequences for the Great Sandy Region.

Playing with Fire

The better rainfall since September 2007 has brought a great flush of new growth on Fraser Island. However, if predictions are true and the El Niño returns by about August, then Fraser Island is about to revert to tinder-box conditions by the end of the year and the risk to public safety will soar with every consecutive dry day.

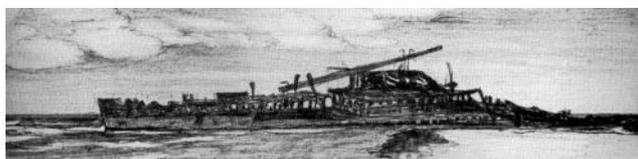
The implications of this climate swing on the built up forest fuel are potentially alarming for public safety.

While the Queensland Government is prepared to spend \$750,000 on building dingo fences around Happy Valley and Eurong in the interests of public safety, on whose conscience is it going to be if there is a fatality in the event of a person or persons being caught in a catastrophic conflagration. With the visitor numbers and the dispersal of people throughout the interior of the island, this is possible. FIDO remains alarmed at the pathetic targets for managed ecological burns on Fraser Island planned for 2008.

The planned burns on Fraser Island cover a pitifully small proportion of the island. Admittedly it has increased a little over recent years so that it will no longer take 100 years to carry out planned fuel reduction burns over the whole island. However we are not yet even close to covering 5% of Fraser Island with managed ecological burns. This is exacerbating the fuel accumulation.

A worse consequence of the lack of a more vigorous fire regime on Fraser Island is a loss of biodiversity. Even the programmed burns are mainly planned to be completed in PUBLIC SERVICE HOURS and despite a Fire Management Strategy that aspires for diversity, the planned burns are being limited to a FIRE SEASON. Thus there is no opportunistic burning carried out in the summer because the ground and moisture are deemed to be too high to get a complete burn. Thus the fires are deferred to the season beginning in June and July and going until October. This ensures that fires will be fiercer in drier conditions.

What FIDO wants to see established on Fraser Island is a fire regime with a patchwork of smaller burnt areas spread across the landscape which will minimize the impact of the inevitable ferocious wild fires that are likely to become more frequent as a result of climate change.



Rain Results in more than Water Run-off

While Fraser Island is composed entirely of sand, because of a chemical property which results in water repellence, the sand, particularly disturbed sand, is subject to erosion from high water runoff from even light showers. Because the roads and tracks are greatly disturbed the water repellence is much greater. That is exacerbated by a hard pan which develops in the wheel tracks about 10 cm below the road surface and results in a heavier run-off along any surfaces once used by vehicles, even tracks that are no longer used. Even with a series of El Niño years with below average rainfall there was still an alarming volume of sand sluiced down current and past Fraser Island tracks.

Unlike most other islands, Fraser Island is composed solely of sand which is very easily disturbed by tourist traffic, both pedestrian and vehicles. This loose sand is then sluiced downhill during heavy downpours of rain. On 23 August parts of the Great Sandy Region near Rainbow Beach received over 7,500 mm in 24 hours. This resulted in sand being flushed from any roads and tracks and the development of huge alluvial plumes spilling out at the bottom of slopes where the disturbed sand was vulnerable to erosion. The photo on page 1 of this MOONBI indicates the volumes of sand which are shifted even in much lighter downpours and reinforces FIDO's estimates that with current management every tourist visiting the island equates to one tonne of sand being sluiced into alluvial plumes. Unfortunately some of the sand ends up in the perch dune lakes. The backgrounder accompanying this MOONBI describes and illustrates the devastating but unnoticed impact of this erosion on Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora).

Climate Impacts on Lord Howe Island

John Sinclair Snr has just returned from his 12th annual pilgrimage to another Australian World Heritage site, Lord Howe Island with some alarming news on the devastating impacts of climate change on that small jewel in the Pacific. Already the Little Mountain Palm, one of the four endemic species of palms on Lord Howe Island, has almost disappeared from Mt Lidgbird due to global warming and if the present trends continue it will become extinct within 20 years from Mt Gower, its last remaining habitat. The cloud forests on both mountains have also been impacted as have the migration patterns and numbers of seabirds that nest on Lord Howe Island. There has been an appalling lack of monitoring to quantify the impacts of these changes now becoming more obvious even to untrained eyes. Lord Howe Island remains beautiful but the fate of its many endemic plants, marine life and fauna are subject to the impacts of climate change.

Invisible 4WD Impacts on Beaches

New research has shown that driving off-road vehicles over Australia's beaches has a devastating impact on a hidden ecosystem of tiny animals that live among the grains of sand. Dr Thomas Schlacher from University of the Sunshine Coast has been studying the unrecognized environmental consequences of beach traffic on the Sunshine coast and Fraser Island. He says that beaches are a habitat full of life and that a handful of sand contains dozens of species including tiny sea-snails, shrimp and other animals. Many of them are so small they can essentially tunnel between the sand grains.

Schlacher and his colleagues studied the impact of off-road driving on those species. They compared Sunrise Beach and Peregian Beach, where there is no off-road traffic, with Teewah Beach and North Shore, where more than 250,000 vehicles cross the sand each year.

They found that overall on the traffic-affected beaches, the number and variety of tiny animals were reduced by at least half. He said that some animals would have been pulverised by the wheels of the cars, while others would have suffered by the disruption of their habitat. Their results appear online in the journal *Environmental Management*.

Specific Fraser Island Impacts: Now Dr Schlacher has begun a project to assess the impact of 4WDs on Fraser Island beaches and foredunes. In outlining his research program, he had some already worrying findings. He pointed out that zones where camping is allowed along Fraser Island's foredunes totals 28.7 kms or 23% of the exposed beaches. There are 19 camping zones with a total of 253 tracks crossing the foredune. On average there are 8.2 tracks per kilometre but this can fall to 2.1 in one zone to a peak of 14.9 tracks per kilometre in the most heavily used zone. He also measured the average width of the tracks and found them to be 25 metres wide. This meant that just tracks crossing the foredune intersected 5.8 kms of Fraser Island dunes. About 20.2% on average of the dunes in the camping zones were impacted by 4WDs. His team plans to continue their research on Fraser Island if resources are available to identify the extent of impacts on birds and other wildlife particularly ghost crabs. (Only 0.01% of all Australian research monies is spent on beaches).

Dr Schlacher claims that overseas researchers are mystified that 4WDs are allowed on Fraser Island beaches. He said, *"Overseas people, they look at Fraser, and there is stunned silence for 10 minutes. They can't believe what we are doing (with 4WDs) – when they see people camping in the dunes."*



New Great Sandy Walk

Announcing the new Great Walks program for Queensland on 2 April, Sustainability Minister Andrew McNamara said that with three others in the planning Cooloola would bring the number of Queensland's Great walks to 10. However he noted, "The most popular at this point is the one on Fraser Island and it is seeing a couple of thousand visitors a year now walking that trail,"

The Noosa Parks Association, led the battle to preserve this natural Cooloola treasure. NPA spokesman Richard Erhardt said this would form part of one of the world's great wild walks. *"When it's finished it will be possible to walk from the northern tip of Fraser Island (with the help of a Fraser barge) down to Noosa North Shore."* It will cover the dunal areas between Rainbow Beach and Noosa and be away from the four-wheel drive tracks. Camping grounds will be built at Mt Seawah, the Upper Noosa River and Lake Cooloomera.

"Visitors will be able to enjoy spectacular views of Teewah Beach, Double Island Point and the natural beauty of the heathland plains, perched lakes and coloured sands," Mr McNamara said.

Proposed Extension to Fraser Walk

FIDO is planning with the help of volunteers to extend the Fraser Island Great Walk a further 32 to 40 kilometres north from Lake Garawongera to Lake Bowarrady subject to receiving approval from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife and this will also include complying with all requirements of Native Title. It is not expected that work will be able to begin on this project before 2009 but when the requisite approvals have been received, FIDO and other voluntary conservation groups will be soliciting volunteers to complete this ambitious project.

Planning for Inskip Peninsula

The imminent Queensland Government Inskip Peninsula Master Plan will consider both urban development and possible expansion of the Fraser Island World Heritage Area. It was expected to result in a detailed report by late April.

It will include assessment of land allocations for protected areas under the World Heritage estate, care with Aboriginal cultural heritage issues, development issues surrounding the controversial Rainbow Shores Stage Two site and assessment of suitable land uses for residential, commercial, tourist, recreational and industrial purposes. Also being considered are a public golf course, the Bullock Point jetty and boat launch area, the sewerage treatment plant, a waste transfer station and other public infrastructure, services and facilities.

Coastal and marine environments nearby will also be examined, with the results forming part of development decision making under the Integrated Planning Act.

It will also examine housing and business facilities and how existing laws impact on these assessments.

Coastal hazards assessment and flood modelling will also be carried out as a vital part of the planning process, according to Terms of Reference for the planning process.

Left: Wangoolba Creek at Central Station C1980

Fraser Island dingo fence controversy

The six-foot high wire fences designed to separate humans and dingoes erected around Happy Valley and Eurong has become a major subject of controversy. Although Fraser Island has fewer than 100 permanent residents compared with 350,000 visitors annually, some residents complained vociferously saying, "*It's a reverse zoo. It's like a concentration camp.*" These few residents believe the dingoes are generally harmless. One resident said that dingoes sit in a well-worn patch near the porch of the house. "*And Biff the big male sits way over there.*" That is background to some of controversy that the Queensland Government ran into over the siting, construction and land clearing for the 2.3km-long dingo-proof fence at Happy Valley.

The Queensland Government says the fences being built around Eurong and Happy Valley are necessary to reduce the chances of dingoes attacking people. Sustainability Minister Andrew McNamara says residents' relaxed attitude is a large part of the problem and that persistent illegal and reckless feeding of dingoes in townships has led to "*habituated and aggressive animals that pose a threat to humans and particularly children.*"

Some islanders doubt the fences will keep the dingoes out. Dingoes have occasionally been allowed to get into Kingfisher Resort and residents are already anticipating that the dingoes will be able to get into the townships despite the fences. The real trick might be getting residents to accept their cage.

Butchulla Disquiet: There were claims and counter-claims as to whether new federal Environment Minister Peter Garrett had responded to a legal application to protect sacred cultural sites in the area and ordered a halt to the work in early May. Canberra was assessing an application for an emergency declaration under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act but no formal stop-work order was issued. However Queensland Sustainability Minister Andrew McNamara said the Federal Government had issued no such directive and the fences, which ring the Eurong and Happy Valley townships, were near completion.

Lawyers for the island's traditional owners filed an action claiming the Queensland Government had used a sham cultural assessment to fast-track the roll-out of 1.8m-high fences around communities. Butchulla people said that the Queensland Government had this year employed two untrained indigenous women to assess the cultural significance of the area being cleared for the fence line. "They basically got these women to walk the line and see if there was any culturally important areas."

Barrister for the Butchulla people, George Villaflor, said that his clients were not properly consulted about the fences, which they say have damaged sacred cultural sites near the townships. He said that he withdrew an application to have the fences stopped because the Commonwealth failed to organize a meeting between federal and state Ministers over the issue but that the Butchulla people will consider other legal action. "*From a legal point of view we haven't even begun the battle if that's what it's called,*" he said. "*Because none of their legal rights were ever even thought of when they started all this, there's a whole raft of backlog of how many laws were broken, avoided, to get this fence up and done.*" University of New England's Professor Gisela Kaplan says Fraser's dingoes have lost their fear of humans. She said, "*Wildlife is only wildlife as long as they retain the fear of humans. If that fear is minimised by very often foolish*

things, people ... feeding them or tourist guides taunting them, then you're getting problems."

Dingo grid causes injury: A 75-year-old woman was airlifted to Hervey Bay Hospital after falling on a metal grid built to protect Fraser Island residents from dingoes. The woman got up early to see the sunrise at Eurong Village and fell while walking on the grid. She had only soft tissue injuries to her lower legs but was flown to hospital as a precaution. The grids are part of the controversial 1.8m fence to keep dingoes out of Fraser Island residential areas. They are made of angled bars over a concrete base, allow motorists access to the fenced-off areas and beaches. There are however many gates in the fence to allow pedestrian access and egress. While dingoes can tip toe across ordinary grids, these grids are electrified with wires above the grid to stop them. Luckily the grid the woman fell on wasn't at that stage electrified.

Residents Upset: Fraser Island Association president, Col Pearce, said a combination of dingo cunning and human negligence will render the barrier all but useless and that it was a "total waste of money" but the fence was all but a done deal" with Eurong fenced and the Happy Valley work well advanced before a fully voiced protest and moves for a petition began. Mr Pearce was upset at the lack of consultation with residents and the fact the money could have been far better spent on badly needed island infrastructure like roads and toilets. He added, "I have to say the fence has been done in a nice way – you can hardly see it in parts but I can't see it lasting....after a year it will be run down and in need of maintenance."

FIDO supports the Dingo fencing of the Eurong and Happy Valley even though the QPWS didn't consult with us about the route taken. As a result the fence line was bulldozed through an area FIDO had just cleansed of weeds and the bulldozing certainly has implications for weed dispersal. However it is hypocrisy for residents who have substantially modified the natural environment of the townships with buildings and other infrastructure and gardens and who have contributed little to addressing the weed problem to argue that a fence will threaten the natural environment when they are mainly concerned that they will not be able to come and go just anywhere they like in the townships.

FIDO-University of the Sunshine Coast

"Shifting Sands" Conference— 2-3 August

This MOONBI provides an outline for the third biennial conference on Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region. This conference will provide a forum for papers on issues impacting on Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region to be presented and discussed. This year we aim to publish the papers in full. To keep up with details and/or to register, look up the web site:

<www.fido.org.au>

Avoidable Accidents

FIDO is becoming increasingly concerned at the number of casualties occurring on Fraser Island that could easily have been avoided if those responsible had shown more responsibility. Both of the incidents listed below demonstrate the ever-increasing strain being imposed on the medical emergency teams who have to deal with these casualties:

1. Beach "accident": Last November a 10-year-old girl was injured on Fraser Island when she fell under the wheels of a 4WD she had been travelling 'in' on a Fraser Island beach. The girl was holidaying with her family and was reportedly hanging on to the outside of the car with five other children as it travelled along the beach near Hook Point when she lost her grip and fell. She was flown to the Royal Children's Hospital. The driver of the vehicle, a 43-year-old man was charged with driving without due care and attention.

2. Lake Wabby Casualty: Also Last November an English tourist suffered spinal injuries after he ran down a steep sandblow and dived into Lake Wabby. The 31-year-old Englishman attempted to somersault into the lake late in the afternoon when the accident occurred despite signs warning against the practice. A doctor from Brisbane was at the scene with the group who safely got the injured man out of the water and onto a flat surface before cushioning the man with towels to keep him immobilized until the Energex rescue chopper arrived to treat the man on the scene before loading him onto a vacuum mattress. This is a specially designed air mattress for people suffering suspected spinal injuries. It moulds to the patient's shape to maintain immobility. An Energex helicopter spokesperson said it was the second such incident within a couple of weeks.

Biosphere Reserves and Fraser Island

Although both the World Heritage List and the Register of Biosphere Reserves come under the jurisdiction of UNESCO they are managed by different divisions and have different aims although some notable World Heritage sites such as the Great Smoky Mountains and Uluru are recognized under both. Now the Burnett Mary Regional Group aims to nominate the Great Sandy Region which includes Fraser Island as a Biosphere Reserve. If accepted by UNESCO, the Great Sandy Biosphere Reserve will add the whole of the Bundaberg, Fraser Coast and Cooloola Shires to the area covered by the former Noosa Shire. In countries like the USA the Biosphere Reserve status for the Great Smoky Mountains seems to outrank its World Heritage listing. It is the reverse with Uluru. World Heritage sites come under a Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage that was adopted by UNESCO in 1972. It became active in 1981. It aims to encourage countries to ensure the protection of their natural and cultural heritage.

Biosphere reserves are part of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program which began in 1970 to innovate and demonstrate approaches to conservation and sustainable development. They have both conservation and development functions as well as a logistic function.

FRASER ISLAND DEFENDERS ORGANISATION LIMITED

NOTICE OF MEETING

NOTICE is hereby given that the Thirty-first Annual General Meeting of the Fraser Island Defenders Organization Limited will be held at 1/32 Weston Street, COORPAROO 4151 at 6.30 p.m., Wednesday, 20th August, 2008.

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.

M Sinclair

BY THE ORDER OF THE BOARD

Michelle Sinclair

Honorary Secretary

DATED this 14th day of May, 2008

PROXY FORM

31st Annual General Meeting

I,
(Please print in BLOCK letters)

of

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

or failing him/her as my proxy, to vote on my behalf at the Thirty-first Annual General Meeting, to be held at 1/32 Weston Street, COORPAROO 4151 E, 6.30 p.m., **Wednesday 20th August, 2008** and at any adjournment thereof.

Signed this day of, 2005



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 909 TOOWONG Q 4066 by Tuesday, 19th August, 2008**

Nomination Form for FIDO Office Bearers

To be returned to Secretary FIDO, PO Box 909 TOOWONG Q 4066 by Tuesday, 19th August, 2008

We, and

being financial members of the Fraser Island Defenders

Organization hereby nominate

for the position of for the 2008-09 term

Signed Nominator

FIDO will join with the Royal Queensland Geographical Society, Brisbane Forest Park, Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland and other groups in organizing a workshop to gain a better understanding of Biosphere Reserves and their implications at the Brisbane Forest Park, The Gap, Brisbane from 9.00am to 1.00 p, on Saturday 26th July. The workshop with expert speakers will be followed by a buffet lunch. More details will be posted in July on www.fido.org.au