

A History of FIDO and its Campaigns — Past and Present

The End of Logging and the World Heritage Listing

Logging: Following the 1975 Environmental Inquiry, and with its greater awareness of Fraser Island's unique ecology, FIDO began to more closely monitor environmental change on the island. Although resources limited FIDO's capacity, subjective observations and the mounting body of oral and recorded history indicated that there were serious, very slow changes occurring within Fraser Island due to logging. While in the short term this was not immediately obvious, the evidence over the long term was compelling.

It was clear that the rate of logging was unsustainable. Until 1940 the rainforest had remained virtually untouched. In the early 1960s about 60% of the timber taken from Fraser Island was blackbutt. Only a third of timber came from the rainforest. However as the Eucalypt forest was logged out, the rainforest was being more heavily exploited. By the end of the 1980s more than 65% of the timber taken from Fraser Island came from the rainforest and only 30% was blackbutt.

The following is FIDO's assessment of environmental impacts of the logging:

- * **Impact of the closed forest:** The timber industry used semantic arguments to obfuscate its exploitation of the closed forest. The public was opposed to logging "rainforest" so "rainforest" was redefined in a very restricted way so that the industry could say that "*Rainforest is not being logged*" while it took the bulk of the timber from closed forests on the island.
- * **Non-sustainable:** Timber was being removed at an unsustainable rate. The volume of the resource had been seriously overestimated.
- * **Forest structure:** Taking selected species and large trees resulted in significant changes to the structure of the forest.
- * **Non - target trees** were being damaged in the much mechanized operation. There was considerable soil and root disturbance and nutrient loss also as a result of the operations.
- * **Microclimate changes:** The loss of more than 50% of the canopy in logged areas led to desiccation.
- * **Weeds and other injurious agencies:** As a result of the disturbance and infrastructure of tracks and attendant traffic movements to remove the logs many more parts of Fraser Island were invaded by weeds than would have happened otherwise.
- * **Fire:** Because of the commercial value of the resource, fire was excluded from some areas and to protect the resource other areas were over-burnt with considerable ecological consequences.
- * **Wilderness values and aesthetic quality** were compromised by the exploitation of the forests.

Despite FIDO's advocacy the Queensland Government resisted any moves to curtail the timber industry until the Goss Government was elected in 1989 on a platform of declaring the whole of Fraser Island a National Park and seeking World Heritage nomination.

The Goss Government however, demurred for some time on implementing the policy it was elected on. Eventually it appointed Tony Fitzgerald QC to head a Commission of Inquiry into the Conservation, Management and Use of Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region.

The Fitzgerald Inquiry

FIDO was centrally involved in the Fitzgerald Inquiry which reported in May, 1991. Just as the previous Federal Inquiry into sandmining concluded that sandmining should cease, Fitzgerald recommended the phasing out of logging. Just as the earlier inquiry had led to the island being listed on the Register of the National Estate, Fitzgerald recommended that Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region should be nominated for World Heritage Listing.

The end of logging: A \$38 million growth and development program was jointly funded by the Goss and Hawke Governments to compensate for any immediate economic disadvantage for those affected by the cessation of logging. Logging ceased in December, 1991. About 60 people lost their employment when the timber industry withdrew. This was only a fraction of the numbers which the industry said were dependent on Fraser Island for their employment. All were re-deployed in other industries to minimize the economic impact.

World Heritage: Although the whole of the Great Sandy Region was nominated in 1991 only Fraser Island was inscribed on the World Heritage List in December, 1992. FIDO continues to pursue extending listing over the whole of the Great Sandy Region and having all of Fraser Island outstanding natural values recognized on the World Heritage List.

To meet the standards for maintaining the integrity of World Heritage site immediate preparation was begun on developing a Management Plan for the whole Region. After two years of public consultation and the release of a Draft Plan for public comment a final Management Plan was adopted in May, 1994. This plan has been the basis for managing the region since.

Legal Protection

National Park: Although the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science first proposed the whole of Fraser Island as a National Park in 1893, it took 105 years to achieve. It was 78 years before any part of Fraser Island became National Park.

To placate conservationists who opposed mining in 1971, the State Government declared a 28,000 hectare National Park on Fraser Island's northern end. This was extended in 1973, but it still didn't include any rainforest, surfing beach, coloured sands nor perched dune lakes. In 1978, 17,521 hectares were added to extend it to 49,400 hectares. Another extension was made in 1990 which meant that almost the entire northern half of the island was National Park. However the Goss Government elected in 1989 was sworn to make the whole island a National Park.

From January 1992, following the cessation of logging, the National Park Service was charged with managing the whole the island but it was not until 1998 that the southern half of the island was eventually made National Park.

Management Plan: There has been an appalling tardiness in implementing the Great Sandy Region Management Plan. It has been stalled by political interference, by lack of resources and by a lack of will by some public servants charged with implementing it. The Beattie Government though was elected in 2001 with a commitment to pass legislation to enact the Management Plan.

FIDO and Fraser Island in the 21st Century

On-going Management Issues

FIDO first began developing Management Strategies in 1975 when it developed Fraser Island's very first Management Plan. FIDO considers Fraser Island's most serious management problems to be degradation resulting from roads, fire management, and problems arising from tourism and urban development centres.

Natural Resource Management

FIDO's highest priority in the management of Fraser Island is directed towards the protection of the unique natural resources which are the basis of its World Heritage status. This includes the full protection of its biodiversity and its unique geomorphic features. This includes the protection of wildlife as a greater priority than the indulgence of human recreation. FIDO deplors the dingo massacre of 2001 and other destruction of wildlife while controlling feral pests.

Transport and Access

Every heavy fall of rain erodes thousands of tonnes of sand. Sand is sluiced down the sand tracks at an excessive rate. This impacts on the island's environmental integrity. This has worrying consequences. Some lakes are silting up. The impact on the roads is also of concern. To alleviate the problem of sediment movement, FIDO has intensified its advocacy for installing a light rail system on Fraser Island.

The problems resulting from the constant disturbance of the sand surface has minimized Fraser's capacity to cater sustainably for ever growing tourist numbers.

Light rail could minimize the environmental impact of wheeled transport on Fraser Island in the same way that boardwalks have reduced the impact of pedestrian traffic. FIDO has advocated the introduction of a light rail people mover to replace most of the cross island traffic since 1974. It has so far commissioned two independent studies by engineering and environmental consultants, Gutteridge Haskins and Davey who established that *prima facie* a light rail was feasible.

An Appropriate Fire Regime

Long term ecological changes are occurring on Fraser Island as a result of the current fire regime. Fire is an integral part of the Australian environment. How it is managed affects every plant community on the island. There is now unquestionably a much denser woody understorey probably as the result of exclusion of fire. Environmental changes have reduced populations of both dingoes and other mammals. While the changes are not immediate nor obvious in the short term, they are very significant in the long term. A Fire Management Plan is urgently needed.

Urbanization

Poor management of Fraser Island's urban communities is also a problem. With local government of the island divided between Maryborough and Hervey Bay City Councils, administration is reduced to the lowest common denominator. There is no common Development Control Plan for the island. The Hervey Bay Council refused to accept a draft DCP which says of Orchid Beach: "*New housing tends to be of a large scale, at a higher level on the hillside at the expense of the landscape and visually more intrusive than the development in the other villages on Fraser Island.*"

Recreation Management

FIDO was a pioneer in ecotourism. FIDO first began conducting safaris to the island in 1971 and has guided around thousands of people since. Since 1971 FIDO has presented a positive proposals for the recreational use of Fraser Island. FIDO built the first boardwalk at Eli Creek in 1981 to cater for recreational users. FIDO's active promotion of a light rail is part of its strategy for better recreation management.

Fishing is one of the most popular forms of recreation on Fraser Island. However while FIDO accepts fishing FIDO is a very strong advocate that any fishing must be sustainable.

Four Wheel Driving: It is difficult to be mobile on Fraser Island without a 4WD. However these vehicles have significant impacts. FIDO has addressed these various impacts in a separate Backgrounder.

Walking: 4WDs are not the only means of exploring Fraser Island and since 1976 FIDO has strongly advocated a system of walking trails based around the Kgari Trail.

Commercial Tour Operations: FIDO supports the opening up Fraser Island to any commercial tour operator which meets basic accreditation standards. It seems ridiculous that the only restrictions on numbers visiting Fraser Island are the limits placed on commercial tour operators. If a person prefers to visit an island on a commercial tour rather than as a private independent traveller then they should be able to do so. The numbers on commercial tours should only be limited when the decision is made to limit the total number of visitations to make it more sustainable.

Preserving Wilderness

Wilderness is a rare and precious resource in an overcrowded world. FIDO has been a vigorous defender of the wilderness values of Fraser Island despite much opposition from groups wanting unfettered right to drive on any track or beach there.

Preserving Heritage

FIDO began collecting history of Fraser Island in 1971. In 1976 FIDO ran a veterans tour of Fraser Island for people with memories of the island which went back to 1905. We have gathered a large volume of oral history. As a Silver Jubilee initiative in 1996 FIDO initiated its Then and Now Project to collect and copy historic old photos now in private hands and put them be into the public domain. Over 1000 photos have already been given to the Oxley Memorial Library and QPWS managers.

Activism

FIDO has also been in the forefront of developing innovative mechanisms to resolve environmental conflicts. This has seen it involved in Mining Warden's hearings, the High Court of Australia, the Fraser Island Environmental Inquiry (1975), as well as various Local Government Court hearings and a number of other challenges to administrative law in the Supreme Court of Queensland. FIDO has also made submissions to a great range of inquiries from Parliamentary Committees to plethora of other tribunals.

For more than 30 years FIDO has been an activist organization and a vigilant watchdog ensuring that Fraser Island's natural resources as used most wisely.