

Fraser Island tourism has been burgeoning for decades. In 1971 the number of visitors to Fraser Island doubled from 5,000 in the previous year to 10,000 as a result of the publicity surrounding the sandmining controversy. It has steadily increased ever since. By 1999 it had reached over 300,000 visitors.

Positive Benefits

The positive benefits of tourism to Fraser Island are manifold and widely extolled and promoted as a raison d'être for continued growth of tourism by those who are the main beneficiaries:

Economic benefits are widely recognized. Fraser Island is conservatively estimated to be worth more than \$250,000,000 to the Queensland economy when it takes into account the many spin-offs. Apart from the actual expenditure to actually visit the island (access, transport, accommodation and food and recreation equipment) there is a multiplier as this expenditure percolates through all sectors of the economy and a much larger community. There is also the inspired spending based on Fraser Island. The number of television and other advertisements based on Fraser Island is testimony to this.

Understanding the Environment: The public campaigns to protect Fraser Island's outstanding natural values relied heavily on developing tourists' appreciation for the whole island. Tourism significantly helped stop sandmining and logging. It also raised public awareness of environmental values in other Australian regions. Fraser Island tourism has contributed to greater Australian environmental understanding.

Education: Many intangible benefits flow from Fraser Island into many aspects of education which is already being used increasingly by educationists. As more student groups visit the island, these student experiences are being utilized in all parts of the curriculum.

Aesthetic / spiritual: The value of inspiration cannot be overstated. This benefits all forms of the arts — visual, literary, and performing arts. Fraser Island has inspired visual artists from the famous such as Sir Sydney Nolan to people yet to make a name. Writers such as Patrick White to some of their most acclaimed works. It has inspired also musical composers such as Peter Sculthorpe to write symphonies. Photographers, poets, film-makers and other artists have all been inspired. The value of Fraser Island to the evolving Australian culture is very important.

Recreation: The range of recreation activities is well known. Bush-walking, recreational driving and fishing are the better known activities. It is the money spent on this recreation and recreation equipment which makes the greatest contribution to the Queensland economy.

The value of recreation on Fraser Island to personal health, self-esteem and overall personal productivity needs to be taken into full account. Long after a visit to Fraser Island the experiences endure in memories. Such values cannot be calculated in economic terms.

Negative Benefits

There are also many negative impacts of tourism on Fraser Island. These are not as obvious but they need to be addressed by management. Because of the need to minimise negative impacts in order to make tourism sustainable in the longer term these issues are addressed here in much more detail.

Establishing Unsustainable Recreation Patterns: The most demonstrable adverse impact of tourism on Fraser Island results from recreation patterns which are unsustainable. These include the four following factors:

* **Target Destinations:** Certain Fraser Island areas are identified and marketed by tourist interests with the result that they draw tourists to them like bees to a honey pot even to the extent that they become needlessly degraded and overused. Eli Creek, Lake McKenzie and Central Station are such sites. Daily hundreds of tourists from the Noosa area spend needless hours to drive past equally outstanding natural features in the Cooloolo National Park so that commercial tour operators can capitalize on the "marketing of these well known products". This focus is unsustainable. Such sites are being overused and yet tourists are reluctant to be redirected to other alternative areas which could sustain some increase in visitation.

* **Means of Access:** Once tourism becomes established, it is difficult to change. Tourist guide books tend to be based on past experience. Recommendations to intending visitors are largely based on past practice. Thus although there are better ways to see Fraser Island than in largely lumbering four wheel drive buses or self of four wheel drive vehicles, this method of visitation has become so entrenched that it is difficult to change.

The most serious adverse environmental impacts now being experienced on Fraser Island are result of this form of transportation. This aspect is separately elaborated elsewhere in this paper.

* **"Traditional" Visitation Practices:** It takes very little time for modern society to claim that certain practices are so "traditional" that practitioners claim they can't be changed. This has been used by commercial fishers to demand to camp in the same site contrary to the Recreation Areas Management Act and to have vehicular access to beaches closed to other vehicular traffic. Likewise the "tradition" of free range camping has become so entrenched that although this practice has been shown to be unsustainable there is a reluctance to phase it out despite compelling evidence that this form of tourism should be ended. Similar conservatism allows Fraser Island tourists to continue to squander resources and degrade the environment through open camp-fires

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* **Surface disturbance:** On Fraser Island, the impact of surface disturbance of any sort is more critical than most other natural areas which have a much more robust substrate (ground surface). The susceptibility of the substrate to any disturbance magnifies the impacts of tourism on Fraser Island more than most other natural areas. (Coral reefs and semi arid areas with cryptobionic crusts may be as susceptible to disturbance). The reason for this fragility is due to the fact that exposed sand surfaces in vegetated areas of Fraser Island have a very high degree of water repellence which makes them very susceptible to water erosion. Vegetated sand surfaces are much less

If the visitors can be carried in such a way that they do not disturb the substrate surface by such means as board walks or by light rail, then the surface disturbance and thus the environmental impact of visitation is contained and reduced.

Erosion of Wilderness Values: Wilderness is an important emotional and notional need of humans. The concept of wilderness is based on remoteness from concentrations of other people and the artefacts of modern civilization. While few people actually need to physically challenge wilderness, this does not remove the necessity to zealously preserve it as knowing that it exists is important for our well-being. Tourism erodes wilderness values through its infrastructure — motor vehicles, roads, modern buildings and the sounds of modern engines. The increasing penetration of more people into parts of the island previously exempt from intense visitation erodes wilderness. Aircraft overflying remoter parts of Fraser Island and other intrusive modern noise also erodes wilderness values.

Spread of Injurious Agents: Injurious agencies which impact on other values of Fraser Island include the spread of weeds, feral animals and pests, new pathogens, wild fires and litter. Tourism has the potential to facilitate the introduction and spread of these injurious agencies. In the end the impact of injurious agencies resulting from tourism have a greater potential to degrade Fraser island than some other industries.

Diversion of Management Resources: Managing tourism is responsible for diverting much of Fraser Island's very limited resources from natural resource management (control of fires, weeds, feral animals etc. and resource monitoring) to recreation management (including access, waste management, behaviour control, provision of infrastructure, maintenance for roads, etc.). Tourism produces a great deal of waste and human waste and this is resulting in some water pollution particularly as a result of inadequate treatment of sewage.

Increasing numbers of tourists also impede natural resource management strategies such as fire and dingo management because of the high priority given to public safety and property protection over resource management and protection.

Perversion of political priorities: Pandering to perceived tourist demands has resulted in political decisions which have over-ridden the Management Plan for Fraser Island such as relocating the Toyota Fishing Expo and reopening the dangerous Orchid Beach airstrip. Many politicians are motivated more by pursuing popularity than with implementing a Management Plan which some vocal dissidents with vested interests disagree with.

Motor Vehicle Impacts

The impact of four wheel drives on Fraser Island are extremely significant affecting roads, wildlife, habitat and recreation amenity.

Roads: The largest impact is on the roads. Road traffic accelerates erosion. During every heavy downpour of rain thousands of tonnes of sand wash off the roads to fill lake basins and streams with sediment and smother many natural habitats. In February, 1999 over two metres of sand was deposited at the intersection of the Pile Valley and Wanggoolba Creek Road burying a large stump. Sand from adjacent roads is being sluiced into Lake McKenzie, Lake Allom, Lake Boomanjin, Lake Birrabeen and more.

Opening of the canopy over the roads results in desiccation resulting in considerable changes to the micro-flora and a reduction of epiphyte numbers.

Wildlife: Shore bird numbers have been decimated by the unchecked growth of four wheel drive beach traffic. Oyster catchers, Red-capped dotterels and Beach thick-knees have been most affected.

Eroding habitat: Roads occupy space, a space which takes a long time to revegetate after the roads cease to be used. Roads also act as barriers to the movement of wildlife. Distribution of many ant species and frogs is affected by roads. Some won't cross roads to identical habitat on the other side.

Pollution: Now there evidence is starting to appear that vegetation adjacent to "black holes" in the roads are suffering.

Noise: The aesthetic impact of noise is well known and understood yet it is largely ignored. The impact of the noise from traffic on the road above Wanggoolba Creek on the walking track beside this icon of Fraser Island significantly degrades this experience.

Distortion of Priorities: Because so much of Fraser Island tourism is vehicle based, roads have been cannibalistic, consuming a disproportionate share all the financial and staff resources. This stopped any progress towards a walking track management plan for the island for more than six years. Vehicle based tourism has also been responsible for preventing closing tracks due to be closed under the Management Plan for more than 6 years. Preoccupation with roads has stalled progress towards the establishment of a more ecologically sustainable light rail proposal.