

Environmental Changes at Wabby Lakes — This Backgrounder No 16 is compiled from FIDO's photographic archives.



Lake Wabby Aerial 1971. Note the vegetation on the sandblow periphery and the absence of trees on eastern shores



Lake Wabby 1974: A record wet season flooding caused water levels to rise in water table and the lake to create a small bay separated from the lake by a sandbank with tall sedges.



Lake Wabby 1975: The lake levels had risen further. The line of vegetation along the shores included melalueca seedlings.



Lake Wabby 1985: The melaluecas germinated 10in 1975 are still growing despite sand building up around them. Other vegetation is encroaching. Hammerstone sandblow is shrinking. (See top right).

Environmental Changes are shrinking Fraser Island's famous sandblows as vegetation encroaches



Waddy Point 1975: There is no vegetation evident along the far (ocean side) beach — no spinifex; no cassuarinas.



Waddy Point July 2003: Quite dense vegetation has been established beside South Waddy Point Beach. This is actively encroaching on the sandblow shrinking the area of bare sand.



Badjala, Stonetool and Hammerstone Sandblows 1974. The larger sandblows had their origins when major sea-level changes which began many kilometres east about 10,000 years ago began the erosion process. For thousands of years the rate of advance of the very large sandblows has been roughly in equilibrium with the rate of vegetation encroachment.

It is noteworthy that the rate of encroachment is now significantly faster than the rate of sandblow advance. If this continues all of Fraser Island's sandblows could be stabilized within the next century.

In 1974 there were also many smaller and younger sandblows closer to the beach. Significantly the most obvious change during FIDO's three decades of observations has been the disappearance of the smaller sandblows closer to the beach.

FIDO's photographic archives are proving an invaluable resource in documenting environmental changes on Fraser Island. They begin before the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service was established in 1974. They help establish benchmark data and keep track of the dynamic nature on Fraser Island. FIDO's records also reveal other significant changes such as the disappearance of grasses and the establishment of a thicker woodier understorey.