

Tourism Threatens Lake McKenzie's (Boorangoora's) Survival

Lake McKenzie (or Boorangoora as it was known until the 1920s and should revert to in future) is the most famous and best known icon of Fraser Island. It is used by tourism marketers of Fraser Island more than any other single landscape feature. Yet now it's very survival in the long-term is threatened in several ways by the tourists it attracts or rather the patterns of recreation adopted by those tourists often innocently. This FIDO backgrounder demonstrates the significance of those threats which, if left unaddressed, threaten the very survival of the lake which is slowly filling with sand sluiced off the roads that take up to 1000 tourists there a day. This is causing the water quality to decline.

Boorangoora covers an area of 130 hectares and is perched about 100 metres above sea level. It is many metres above the regional water table. It averages 6.6 metres in depth with the deepest point being 8.5 metres. Like other Fraser Island lakes, it contains some of the world's freshest water occurring in the natural environment. It's crystal clear.

Boorangoora lacks the tea colour of so many other Fraser Island lakes because the fine organic colloids have been precipitated out. These can be seen away from popular swimming areas as a fine sooty layer on the undisturbed white sand. Boorangoora figures largely in both Fraser Island history and aboriginal legend.

For two decades FIDO has been drawing the attention of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife to the progressive infilling of Boorangoora due to sand being progressively sluiced off the roads. Because to date the volumes of sand moved have not shown a very visible impact, the QPW has preferred to turn a blind eye to the problem. However the problem is about to reach crisis point because until now the infilling has been occurring a long way from the public view and where it has been occurring close to the main day-use area the sand has been filling up a swale behind the lunette. However with almost two metres of sand deposited in the swale the sediment will within the next few years (depending on rainfall) overtop the lunette and begin pouring on to the beach. This is most serious but it seems that the QPW is prepared to wait until disaster actually strikes before it begins to act.



The above photograph was taken 19 April 2008 during an inspection by the Fraser Island Joint Advisory Committees.

It illustrates the volume of water and sand being washed off the road and rushing down towards the Lake McKenzie bus parking area and the commercial tour operator's day use area. This was taken after only a modest amount of rain. It is one of many streams which scour sand towards Boorangoora even without any great downpours. All of this sand is currently caught behind the lunette. The sand build-up is about two metres deep.

In just 30 years this swale has almost filled to overtopping. Tens of thousands of tonnes of sand and detritus washed off the roads that carry tourists to the lake and from the car-parks, picnic and camping areas have accumulated here. Once the rising sand build-up overtops the lunette, (probably at the main pedestrian access points), there will be a conspicuous alluvial plume starting to spread across the beach.

A sample of what can be expected is to be found at the southern corner of the lake where the main access road to the lake passes within 50 metres of the lake shore.



This is what visitors see from the road. The level area below the sign is sediment washed off the road. Unfortunately the flow of sediment doesn't stop here. The QPW has attempted to catch the flow of sand rushing down the road from reaching the lake. QPW efforts have included trying to divert the runoff from the road coming from the palletted hill above this point and creating a series of silt traps. All efforts so far to stop the sand, detritus and nutrient enriched water overflowing the layers of barriers constructed here have been unsuccessful. The result is that the alluvial plume shown overleaf keeps growing. This is not only speeding up the process of filling Lake McKenzie but it is slowly changing the chemistry of what has been regarded as a body of some of the freshest naturally occurring water in the world.



The alluvial plume above the water extends over three metres into the lake. That is like the tip of the iceberg. The small peninsula covered in reeds and sedges is an artefact of the road made up of truckloads of woodchip mixed with the sand.



The growth of this alluvial plume is unsustainable. It is a case of “Out of sight— Out of mind”. If the public saw trucks tipping tonnes of dirty sand into Boorangoora every time there was a downpour, they would be rightly outraged.

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FIDO continues to draw this issue to the attention of authorities and continues to be ignored.

The impacts of tourists on Boorangoora described above are quite alarming but most of the 250,000 visitors annually are oblivious to their contribution to slowly killing this most beautiful lake. However, if the QPW acquiesces to a current proposal to open up what is loosely called the “Second Beach” for the exclusive use of people on commercial tours, the footprint(s) of the tourists will spread further around the lakeshore. While FIDO isn’t opposed to some separation of people on commercial tours and free and independent travellers, FIDO believes that this can be done on the existing beach without attempting to gain exclusivity for those who pay. FIDO continues to strenuously oppose this proposal being pushed by commercial tourist interests.

It will be a sad testimony of the current Fraser Island management if tourists are allowed to love Boorangoora (Lake McKenzie) to death through either ignorance of the impact they are having or if QPW takes the line of least resistance and does nothing to rectify the position and minimize impacts.

The issues relating to how tourists are slowly but progressively destroying this icon of Fraser Island are not just confined to the results of driving there, parking their vehicles and picnicking there. There are countless instances where tourists are just ignoring QPW edicts not to feed dingos there. The result is that Boorangoora is rapidly becoming the main trouble spot in dingo management as the dingos become ever more brazen. While the QPW finds it hard to catch and prosecute offenders many instances are recorded on the internet. FIDO recently found a website of a former backpacker describing his visit to Fraser Island. One photo on the web site showed a backpacker enticing a dingo to come closer for a photograph. However the most interesting photo showed his backpacker group clearly flouting rules about not camping at Boorangoora (Lake McKenzie) and erecting their tents right on the lake’s beach. It is clearly late evening **after the Rangers had gone home**. The backpackers apparently knew the Public Service hours and would have moved on before any rangers appeared next day.



These backpackers tents were apparently being erected after the Rangers had gone home.