

The Impacts of Getting to Specific Fraser Island Sites

This FIDO Backgrounder (No 50 - November, 2010) focuses on the fact that the footprint of travelling to specific sites on Fraser Island is frequently much larger than the footprint at the destination sites if it is done by 4WD. This is particularly true for some specific destinations including the island's most popular destinations. While people are more aware of the visible impacts on the destination sites they are frequently oblivious to the environmental impact of getting there.

In most cases the impacts of getting to particular sites is far greater than the impacts on the sites themselves. This is less true of sites reached by beach traffic but demonstrably true of sites away from the beach that are accessed by road. For example, in the case of the controversial redevelopment of Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) the area around the lake actually impacted by tourists is only a fraction of the area surface of the road to reach there. Similar comparisons can be made for all of the lakes. To reach Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) by 4WD requires people to traverse at least 10 kms of road. The roads are each about 4 metres wide with a pavement width of 3 metres. This exposes the area of road surface by the shortest route from Pile Valley and back to the Wanggoolba Creek – Eurong Rod more than 10 kms. An area of more than 3 hectares (approx 7.5 acres) is regularly churned up by thousands of tyres as more than 40,000 4WDs annually find their way to the lake.

Some time ago FIDO identified road run-off as one of Fraser Island's most as the major factor in contributing to the unsustainability of the present patterns of recreation. However, it is a problem to which the QPWS has consistently turned a blind eye. This is despite an independent study commissioned by the QPWS that showed that 6% of the Fraser Island road network had moderate smothering and 7% had moderate down-cutting while a further 3% of the network suffered severe down-cutting or smothering. (GHD Sustainable Transport Management Strategy March 2002).

The Roads beside Yidney Lake

Two roads pass close to what was Yidney Lake — to the north the Yidney Scrub road and to the south the Lake Garawongera road. Almost a kilometre of these roads have been dramatically down-cut during rain events. So much sand has been funnelled into this once lake that it is now a forest of tall blackbutts!

The Road to Boorangoora:

As pointed out to reach Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) (a trip made by 217,800 people annually according to the SVC) more than 117,000 tyres of standard 4WDs and tyres of about 44,000 4WD buses churn up the surface each year. The impact is most obvious on the slopes greater than 2%. On most of the road to Boorangoora from Pile valley there is relatively little down-cutting until the immediate environs of the lake itself. Here the gradients are greater and down-cutting occurs. However where the road passes close to the lake the sludge and road wash ends up in the lake itself—truckloads of it every year. Yet still nothing is being done to save this precious icon. In the 15 years since FIDO first drew this matter to the attention of the QPWS there has been one unsuccessful attempt to stop the flow of sludge into the lake but these silt traps have been long-neglected.

Over 15 months during 2006 and 2007 a Working Group spent almost three weeks determining the visitor capacity of 43 sites on Fraser Island. They inspecting island sites, attended workshops and deliberated the sustainable visitor capacity of key sites at length. In addition to staff time and the cost of importing a mediator to preside over the process thousands of volunteer hours were contributed. Because never released for public discussion and buried by the bureaucracy, the exercise has proven futile and a waste of precious resources and public goodwill. FIDO and the public have never been given the opportunity to comment on the draft report.

Determining the visitor carrying capacity of specific sites on Fraser Island is not as important as how those visitors are to reach those sites. FIDO is concerned not only about the carrying capacity of particular sites and their ongoing degradation, but the impact of reaching these sites. FIDO had hoped to be able to make these submissions when the Draft SVC Report was released for public discussion. That never happened.

Road to Lake Allom:

Lake Allom is visited by far fewer people than Boorangoora but it is at least as attractive although very different being set in a most attractive rainforest. However in 1985 a road was built close to the lake. This road has now become a catchment for the lake and channels countless litres of road wash into the lake each year. Water quality tests show Lake Allom having more turbidity and algal bloom than other lakes. The QPWS dismisses this because they say the lake has a history of algal blooms and it is OK. FIDO believes that the algal blooms are a result of the road runoff.

The solution is simple. Close the road and stop people driving all the way to the parking area at the bottom of the hill. In the 1970s Forestry stopped 4WDs could driving right to Wabby Lakes. Now there is a reluctance to require visitors to walk any extra distance from their 4WDs to reach any lake.



The story of Yidney Lake can only be described by assessing the sheer vast volume of sand that has been carved out of the roads on either side of the lake and then walking down into the former lake to appreciate that where this forest is now growing was until the late 1970s shallow but full of water and reeds. As more sand pours into this the size of the trees increases.

The Road beside Wanggoolba Creek

The main cross-island road travels from the Wanggoolba Creek ferry terminal on the western side, through Central Station to Eurong on the eastern side. For about half its distance it runs parallel to Wanggoolba Creek but nowhere is it closer to the creek than between Central Station and the Pile Valley turn-off. This is a road that carries most of the freight from Hervey Bay and Maryborough to supply the Eurong Resort. The impact of thousands of bus movements annually added to that each year creates a lot of heavy seismic shaking to destabilize the trees between the road and the creek. This has already resulted in a disproportional numbers of large trees falling down to Wanggoolba Creek from the road side and more trees are leaning towards collapse. This is threatening the integrity of the island's most attractive features.

FIDO first raised our concerns about the impact of the road above Wanggoolba Creek at the Community Advisory Committee in 1995 but the relocation of this road like relocating other environmentally damaging roads in Fraser Island has been placed in the "Too Hard" / "Too Expensive" basket and a blind eye is turned to the damage.

Black Holes

Although there is no down-cutting on the level ground there is something else with also a significant impact — black holes. Black holes rapidly evolve from small puddles because when vehicles drive through puddles they splash not only water out but some sand mixed with it. This means that the puddle self-exacerbating and the traffic will forever make them progressively deeper as long as any puddles continue to hold water. However the deeper they grow the blacker and oozyer the water becomes. Hence the name "black holes".

The level road through Yidney Scrub is continually now developing an ever-growing and ever greater black holes as is the road approaching Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) from the east. .

These black holes are not just inconvenient to drive through and uncomfortable. They have significant

environmental impacts. These include major root disturbance to vegetation surrounding them. There is suffocation of the undergrowth splashed with the black ooze. In many national parks roads get closed when it is clear they will be damaged if traffic is allowed on them when wet weather means that traversing the roads in the park will do serious damage the road and/or the park. It is time similar restrictions were placed on Fraser Island as soon as it is apparent that black holes are developing and traffic should be kept off these roads until the water drains away from any developing hole.

The impact on the beaches:

While the impact of vehicles on the beach is less than along the internal road network of Fraser Island, it does take a toll on microscopic life in the beach as well as on both seabirds and shorebirds. While foredune camping has had a major impact by reducing the number of oyster-catcher successful nestings, there has been a significant

Some Paradoxes — Image and reality

Fraser Island is a 4WD Mecca and annually attracts billions of dollars worth of 4WD vehicles to explore it. It also draws a diverse contingent of drivers. However there are some contradictions in the attitudes of some 4WD drivers.

1. Because they have a 4WD many drivers are reluctant to walk very far from their vehicles. While they are claim to be outdoors people, they resist walking any further than they absolutely have to.
2. They claim to be keen to rough it and test their vehicles. but they don't want the beach between Dilli Village and Hook Point closed because the road parallel to the beach is too rough. However they also want the road kept open so that they can use it when the tide is too high to travel on the beach.

The carrying capacity of Fraser Island won't be solved by focussing exclusively on the sites to be visited. A sustainable carrying capacity must also address the means of accessing those sites.