

## Environmental Values for the Great Sandy Region

On 20<sup>th</sup> October, Environment Minister Desley Boyle announced that the issues of water quality in the Great Sandy Region are to be addressed. Unfortunately, the initial project for the Mary River Basin and the Great Sandy Region failed to address the issues of water quality in the parts of the Great Sandy Region which FIDO is most interested in, namely Fraser Island, Cooloola and marine and estuarine areas of Hervey Bay and Great Sandy Strait.

The Minister's announcement said that *"the proposed Mary River Basin and Great Sandy Region project covered the freshwater and estuarine reaches of the Mary and Burrum River catchments including their tributaries and wetlands."* While the project focusses heavily on the Mary River Basin, it deals very poorly with the Great Sandy Region. Fraser Island apparently wasn't included on the agenda because at some indeterminate time in the future, it is apparently scheduled to come within the scope of the Wild River Project. FIDO hopes that we won't have to wait for the implementation of the Premier's 2004 promise on Fraser Island's "wild rivers" as long as we have had to wait (and still wait) for action on his 2001 promise to bring Fraser Island under a single authority.

FIDO wants the wild rivers project brought forward and integrated into the water quality project to protect the Great Sandy Region water quality more fully.

Part of our history has also dealt with the need to cap the taking of water from both Searys Creek and Teewah Creek to meet the urban water needs of Tin Can Bay and Rainbow Beach. We believe that these two communities must not be allowed to grow if their growth is dependent on drawing any more water from those streams as such use will have an inevitable environmental impact on water quality in both the Noosa River and in Tin Can Bay estuaries.

The study involves monitoring of water quality and we have been very impressed by the data collection undertaken to date. However the data collection has been focussed on sites within the Mary River catchment and Great Sandy Strait. We believe that there is a need for wider monitoring within Hervey Bay and close to the major stream outlets on Fraser Island. For example, in the early 1990s, there was a catastrophic loss of dugongs in Hervey Bay due to the increased turbidity of the water which killed much of the sea-grass in the bay. This was the result of flooding in the Mary River.

This organization's concern for the water quality of the Great Sandy Region has been articulated over many years in our newsletter, MOONBI, and in April, 1999 we set out our concern most succinctly in our Backgrounder on the importance of maintaining environmental flow in the Great Sandy Region. A copy of that Backgrounder is attached.

The Backgrounder was a response to continuing calls within the Hervey Bay community to tap the freshwater discharge from Bogimbah Creek on Fraser Island to provide an urban water supply to Hervey Bay. When preparing this backgrounder I was unable to obtain critical data which is needed for justification for the maintaining of the natural environmental flow, although this is widely recognized intuitively.

One of the major values of Bogimbah Creek and Wanggoolba Creek as well as other major Fraser Island creeks is the constancy of their daily discharge rates which barely varies in times of flood or drought. Thus the fluctuations in water quality of Hervey Bay is beneficially moderated by the environmental flow which comes from Fraser Island. We believe that monitoring sites are needed in

and around this stream to establish better environmental values for these streams.

The Noosa River similarly benefits from the flow out of the Cooloola Sandmass. For this reason it is important to establish the environmental flows of Teewah Creek (whose flow is made up almost entirely from Cooloola), the Noosa River above Kin Kin Creek as well as the lake system on the Noosa River.

Kauri, Tuan and Poona Creeks make a significant contribution to the water quality of Great Sandy Strait. These streams also make important contributions to the water quality of the marine areas.

FIDO has long been concerned at the quality of the water discharged from the Mary River. In 1987 we found that silt discharged by the Mary River in one flood was deposited more than 4 cms thick on the North White Cliffs beach between Kingfisher Resort and McKenzie's Jetty. Another flood also made the waters of Hervey Bay so turbid that much of the seagrass which was denied sunlight died with a resulting decimation of the dugong population. This epitomizes the environmental impact that the Mary River has on the Great Sandy Region as a whole.

FIDO appreciates the Queensland Government's efforts to improve the water quality of this major stream. We support measures which will make a significant contribution to this end.

### What's in it for Fraser Island?

In February, Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell, and for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Warren Truss, (also the MP representing Fraser Island) and Queensland Minister for Natural Resources, Stephen Robertson, and for the Environment, Desley Boyle announced that Queensland's 15 Natural Resource Management (NRM) Regions stand to reap \$146.6 million over the next three years to protect and restore the state's water quality, World Heritage Areas, biodiversity hotspots, RAMSAR sites, cultural values and agriculture.

Specific "biodiversity hotspots", such as the Einasleigh and Desert Uplands and the sub-tropical Border Ranges were mentioned and the announcement went on to say, *"World Heritage areas that will also benefit from this funding include the iconic Great Barrier Reef, the Wet Tropics area of Queensland which contains one of the most complete and diverse living records of land plants, and Riversleigh, an outstanding fossil deposit of evolutionary significance."* However, even though one of the people making the announcement is supposed to represent the Great Sandy Region in the federal parliament, there was no mention whatsoever of Fraser Island, which is both an outstanding biodiversity "hot-spot" and a Queensland World Heritage site. Ms Boyle said Queensland's RAMSAR-listed wetlands which are of international significance would be better off due to the targeted investment identifying Great Sandy Strait but she provided no details

## Fraser Local Government Under Scrutiny

Local Government and Environment Minister Desley Boyle said after a visit to Fraser Island that the local government boundary which splits Fraser Island in half is a nonsense. The "Fraser Coast Chronicle" reported, "After two days on the island, Ms Boyle was convinced more than ever that the Hervey Bay, Maryborough and all Queensland councils had to look seriously at amalgamations. 'The government would not step in to force amalgamations in the short term but would try to encourage councils to come up with their own proposals', she said" 21/1/05

**The review of local government boundaries in Queensland may see either Maryborough and Hervey Bay City Councils merge or at least the rationalizing of boundaries so that all of Fraser Island falls within one jurisdiction. There is widespread expectation that Hervey Bay may end up in the driver's seat.**

Given that Minister Boyle is now actively looking at rationalizing local government boundaries with respect to Fraser Island, it is timely to review the roles of the two Councils. Although Maryborough City Council did not attend the Fraser Island 20-20 Conference because it was held at Noosa, the Hervey Bay Council did and presented some very interesting data.

Until this financial year the Hervey Bay City Council budgetted for Fraser Island only \$65,000 annually to be spent by three different departments. In 2004-05 Hervey Bay Council allocated just over \$200,000 and has brought most functions under one area, the City Assets Directorate. This expenditure is made up of:

- \* \$70,000 on its Fraser Island roads (This is limited generally to township areas north of Yidney Rocks and is an increase on the \$40,000 previously spent annually).
- \* \$64,000 on waste commitment ---a study into waste management and \$50,000 on the removal carried out by the QPWS. (This is up from the \$20,000 per year previously allocated but does not recognize that the Council insists on the QPWS paying \$50,000 pa to dump the rubbish collected from Fraser Island at the Hervey Bay tip. Currently the council collects \$144.40 pa from each of "155 occupancies" yielding revenue of \$22,400).
- \* \$15,000 to upgrade the Happy Valley amenities block.
- \* \$5,000 on Orchid Beach Airstrip maintenance (This is based on Community support (grants assistance) and has remained constant).

Apart from the increased expenditure on the island, the Hervey Bay Council has also upgraded its monitoring responsibilities on the island. It has increased its number of inspections from two visits per year in the past to a proposed four, seven-day visits this year.

Unfortunately Hervey Bay Council hasn't provided a summary of revenue collected nor has the Maryborough Council offered an equivalent revelation of what they are doing on Fraser Island. However, even if there can't be a separate local authority for Fraser Island in its own right (FIDO's long advocated and preferred model), Minister Boyle will be making some significant improvement on the present situation if she can at least get one of the two Councils to hand their half over to the other.



### Hervey Bay Council still running a surplus

While FIDO welcomes the revelation that the Hervey Bay Council is to increase its expenditure on Fraser Island. It is on public record that almost a decade ago, the Hervey Bay Council was spending about \$250,000 annually on servicing its Fraser Island ratepayers than it received in revenue from there FIDO would also like to see the Council's revenue stream that is derived from Fraser Island. This should also include the \$50,000 it charges the Environmental Protection Agency to deposit the garbage which the Environmental Protection Agency collects on the Council's behalf from Fraser Island.

### Fraser Island Accommodation

The following Table was gleaned from data presented to the Fraser Island 20-20 Vision Conference and from our own Observations. It is incomplete because it does not include any dwellings or units managed by the QPWS which include the Sandy Cape Lighthouse, Ranger Stations at Waddy Point, Dundubara, Eurong and Central Station as well as other buildings at Ungowa, Lake Allom, Lake Coomboo, Poyungan Hill and other former forestry buildings. Likewise, there seem to be omissions of some other private dwellings at Waddy Point, Indian Head, Kgari Cultural Centre, The Oaks, Poyungan Valley and Poyungan Rocks. However, it is at least some guide to the capacity of Fraser Island to accommodate visitors.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Dwellings</b>	<b>Units/ Lodges</b>	<b>Resort Rooms</b>
Orchid Beach	69		
Happy Valley	33	18	9
Cathedral Beach	1	8	
<b>Hervey Bay CC</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>9</b>
Yidney Rocks	3	5	
Eurong Township	40	50	
Eurong Resort		12	114
FI Beach Houses		21	
Kingfisher Resort (plus 180 bed lodge)		110	152
Dilli Village	1	6	24
<b>Maryborough CC</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>290</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>299</b>
	x 6	x 4	x 2
<b>Potential beds</b>	<b>882</b>	<b>920</b>	<b>598</b>

*This amounts to potentially 2400 beds. It doesn't include Kingfisher Resort's 180 bed backpacker lodge, some minor settlements or camping accommodation but QPWS staff is included. Nor does it take account of the fact that many Orchid Beach dwellings can sleep 20 or more people.*