



MOONBI 113

MOONBI is the name given by the Butchalla Aborigines to the central part of their homeland, Fraser Island or "Kgari"

MOONBI is the newsletter of Fraser Island Defenders Organization Limited

FIDO, "The Watchdog of Fraser Island", aims to ensure the wisest use of Fraser Island's natural resources

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ISSN 0311 - 032X

10th August, 2006

Since MOONBI 112

Fire Breaks — a major campaign: Virtually as MOONBI 112 was being posted out FIDO stumbled across what we regarded as an ambush. The QPWS had entirely unbeknown to us or to any of the members of the Community Advisory Committee, created the biggest single scar on the island since sandmining ceased almost 30 years ago. Because it was the beginning of April, we thought at first this very fresh swathe of destruction running from Dilli Village to Ungowa might have been an April Fools Day prank but the scale and extent was no joke. Without any background or explanation, FIDO was more than alarmed and sought to have all work on further firebreaks halted until the impacts and alternatives to this devastation could be evaluated. (See full story pp 4-10)

Renewed focus on fire: To our disappointment and dismay, the QPWS (right up to its highest officer) refused to make any concessions until the whole Fraser Island Community Advisory Committee unanimously condemned the work on 23rd June. This intransigence had FIDO gearing up for a major campaign and this was a major diversion from our main project this year the organization of the TRUE GRIT Fraser Island conference which will focus on maintaining the integrity of Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region. (See p 10)

TRUE GRIT Conference: The TRUE GRIT conference had already identified the issue of fire management as one of the most critical issues affecting the integrity of Fraser Island and Dr Jeremy Russell-Smith, one of Australia's foremost fire ecologists, had accepted our invitation to be the keynote speaker at the Conference. What FIDO would like to focus on is what is the best fire regime for Fraser Island rather than being diverted by the calamitous issues of firebreaks to fight fires. The issue concerning the fire regime on Fraser Island is certainly heating up and seven pages of this issue are devoted to discussion of fire and how it needs to be mastered on Fraser Island to produce the best ecological result. It promises to be a very interesting Conference. (See Conference Program attached.)

Additional sources of disaffection: Three critical issues dealing with water and marine matters also exploded onto the political arena during the past four months and added to our disaffection. There were threats that the Wild Rivers legislation might be scuttled, the zoning of the Great Sandy Region Marine Park to protect only 4% of the area and the plans to even further reduce the productivity of this marine park by cutting off virtually all of the environmental flow from the Mary River into Great Sandy Strait. It has been a horrible four months for FIDO. That is why pp 2 and 3 are devoted to explaining just why FIDO is so disaffected with the Beattie Government.

Great Sandy Marine Park (Northern Section) has only about 4% zoned as no-take areas. Most of these "green zones" are inaccessible and provide little additional protection. This is an appalling decision and shows how little regard the Beattie Government has for future generations that they will allow marine resources in 96% of this vast area to be exploited. It is a Claytons Marine Park which any government in a developed country should be ashamed of. (See MOONBI 112 & p 14)

Mary River Dam: This wasn't the smartest decision for the government of the "Smart State" because it has a considerable number of Queenslanders smarting over it. That includes FIDO which is still assessing the enormous impacts that the Traveston Dam will have on Great Sandy Strait. (See pp 13-14)

Wild Rivers: Luckily, while the Beattie Government has put the declaration of the majority of the proposed Wild Rivers into abeyance, it did proceed with six and happily for us that included Fraser Island. See p 14

REMINDER: Fraser Island conference University of the Sunshine Coast and post-conference Fraser Island inspection 28th September 1st October. Details inside.



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Beattie Is Failing Fraser Island and Great Sandy

FIDO is becoming increasingly disenchanted with the Beattie Government's increasing number of environmental failures and particularly the impacts of many ill-considered decisions on Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region. These are some of the reasons for our disenchantment:

1. Broken Promises

In January 2001, Premier Beattie promises that his government would protect the environment by:

- * *Giving statutory recognition to Queensland's responsibility to fulfill our obligations under the World Heritage Convention to formulate and implement WHA Management Plans that give priority to the protection and conservation of World Heritage values while presenting those values to the best advantage;*
- * *Giving legislative effect to World Heritage area Management Plans to ensure their planning policy and principles are reflected in local planning schemes and considered in the assessment of development applications, and*
- * *Giving priority to implementing the Great Sandy Region Management Plan (including bringing Fraser Island under the planning control of a single government agency) and finalizing submissions necessary to expand the Fraser Island World Heritage area to incorporate the entire Great Sandy Region including Cooloola National Park.*

Not one of those specific promises has yet been delivered after more than five years. There has been absolutely no progress towards giving legislative effect to World Heritage Area Management Plans. This suits the Environmental Protection Agency which is able to use weasel words and wriggle and avoid being pinned down by any uncomfortable requirement which it is reluctant to pursue. Without statutory management plans, the EPA can escape its obligations. Queensland is one of the only Australian jurisdictions that fail to give statutory effect to all of its National Park management plans. In fact there are still many Queensland National Parks that do not yet have management plans. Apart from the predisposition of the QPWS not to be pinned down, this failure can also be attributed to the lack of resources given for environmental protection in Queensland generally.

There are absolutely no excuses for the endless prevarications for failing to bring Fraser Island under the planning control of a single government agency. There is a bureaucratic battle in which the Environmental Protection Agency is fighting to preserve its patch of turf. It isn't willing to surrender any of its jurisdictions to anyone else even if it is in the best interest of Fraser Island. Many excuses are invented but the reality is that the agency that should be delivering on the Premier's core promise is the main opponent to it happening.

2. Great Sandy Region Marine Park

It is hard to imagine that in the 21st Century any government of a developed country would proclaim a Marine Park with so little of it being a no-take zone. With less than 4% of the Great Sandy Region Marine Park given the Marine National Park status and this 4% being mainly those areas not targeted by commercial interests, the Beattie Government has created one of the least protected marine parks in the world. (We understand that the Moreton Bay Marine Park may actually be even worse off than the Great Sandy Region).

Scallop Farms: Even before the Draft Great Sandy Region Marine Park zoning plan was put out for public discussion, some things were made non-negotiable. One of these was a proposal to allow scallop ranching to occur right in the heart of Hervey Bay regardless of the environmental consequences.

Pearl Farms: The allowing of a Pearl Farm inside a Ramsar area without any environmental impact assessment is another example of the Beattie Government's arrogant disregard for the environment and for the future of the Great Sandy Region.

3. Damming the Mary River

While many people are angry about the direct environmental impacts of the dam especially on the Dala, (Mary River lungfish), the Mary River Cod and the Mary River Turtle and its social impacts, FIDO is focussed on the downstream impacts. Great Sandy Strait will be denied the flow of nutrients, sediment and freshwater so vital to maintaining the productivity of that critical ecosystem and the productivity of its fishery.

The scale of the disjunctions resulting from the dam is mind bending. All of this is to provide an urban water supply where much more will be flushed down the toilet or used for washing and watering gardens than will ever be used for human consumption. This decision was made without any public consultation and before any Environmental Impact Statement was even thought about. That is the style of Mr Beattie. Environmental considerations don't enter his mind.

The dam is being fast-tracked to meet a predicted urgent water shortage for South East Queensland's rapidly expanding population. However, the water shortage could be resolved much more efficiently and more rapidly by using recycled repurified water. See the article *Damming the Mary River and Damning Great Sandy Strait* which provides more background on the downstream impacts of the dam and the alternatives to building a mega-dam on the Mary River.



4. Fraser Island Firebreaks

When QPWS firebreak program was shown to have the potential to create more than 200 ha of bare earth and transform virtually every major tourist route on Fraser Island, we had no support from within the Beattie Government. MOONBI 113 elsewhere describes the approach we have taken to stop this thoughtless destruction of more land than was exposed by over five years of sandmining on Fraser Island.

FIDO is angry that the Beattie Government has allowed the Environmental Protection Agency to distort its priorities so that “Environmental Protection” didn’t feature at the top of the agencies agenda. It was because of this that FIDO was forced to seek Federal intervention in the 1970s to stop the destruction by sandmining of Fraser Island’s outstanding natural values.



5. Light Rail Rejection

Since 1974, FIDO has been advocating a more sustainable method of visiting Fraser Island. Our considered opinion is that the most sustainable and most viable way to reduce the visitor impacts on the sand tracks on Fraser Island is to install a light rail people mover. This has been a consistent advocacy. However the Beattie Government has a virtually closed its mind on this topic.

In May Environment Desley Boyle wrote to FIDO saying:
... The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has no interest in pursuing the light rail proposal in line with the strategic Directions Document which has been endorsed by the Premier and myself.

The QPWS considers that the (light rail) proposal will do very little to reduce the impacts of transport patterns on Fraser Island and will not be committing any funding for the proposed development, or future operation and maintenance of the proposed project. ...

The very subjective assessment by the QPWS of the light rail and their dismissal of it without any justification is a sign of the QPWS’s arrogance which is condoned by the Beattie Government. It is significant that the Strategic Directions Document which defines policy remains under wraps and has not yet been publicly released.

6. General Approach to Consultation

The whole attitude of the Beattie Government is one of arrogance and a determination to ignore the process of consultation except in the most tokenistic way. Public consultation is a joke where the bureaucracy is concerned.

- (a) The Review of the Great Sandy Region Management Plan took four years to conclude and, despite promises by Dean Wells that the public would have an opportunity to comment on the review, this never happened. The Community Advisory Committee was supposed to have a session devoted to discussing the review and any changes from the 1994 Plan. This never happened. One senior bureaucrat said that they didn’t want to have to deal with the anticipated volume of requests for changes.
- (b) The flimsy reports on what has happened on Fraser Island most times arrive when issues reported for the first time are already a *fait accompli*. Most times the reports are not delivered in time to enable them to be discussed. **Telling after the event is not consultation.**
- (c) Failure to consult over the Fire Management Strategy resulted in the confrontation reported elsewhere in this issue.
- (d) Like most major issues which are of critical significance such as the Great Sandy Region Marine Park zoning plans and the Fraser Island Strategic Directions document, there is negligible change between the Draft and the Final documents, an indication that all public submissions are rejected. In one case the final document varied by only one sentence. Only the voices of vested interests seem to be heard.

7. Funding Failure

The Beattie Government’s inadequate funding for the environment reflects the low priority that is given to the environment. Blending the Environment portfolio with Local Government and Women’s Affairs is a further indication of the importance of the environment in the decisions of the Beattie Government. While Fraser Island received about \$6.2 million from the Queensland Government, much of this came from “user pays fees” under the RAM Act. The Beattie Government hasn’t had very deep pockets when it comes to looking after an island that generates more than \$277 million for the Queensland economy.

When FIDO sees the largesse of Beattie handouts in other areas including the arts and sport, we feel an inevitable twinge of envy. It would be good to see the same generosity shown to the environment and Fraser Island.





2006 Firebreak Saga

In April 2006 FIDO came across this 20 metre wide swathe slicing across Fraser Island. We quickly realized that this was a major firebreak that followed the Dillingham Road from Dilli Village to Ungowa. We paced it out in many places and soon established that its mean width was 20 metres. The environmental impact was obvious.

We also learnt that another firebreak ran from Dilli Village almost to Hook Point along a part of Fraser Island's Great Walk network. Without access to the southern end of it, we assumed that this Jabiru Swamp swathe was also a 20 metres wide. Since then we have learnt that the Great Walk was widened enough to allow just a mere 8 people to walk abreast, not the 20 people abreast that we had initially imagined. However this section of the Great Walk has lost a lot of intimacy and closeness to nature.

While we initially thought that the whole 40 kilometres scar was 20 metres wide (the width of the Queen Street mall), we have since learnt that only about 15 kilometres were 20 metres wide and the remaining 25 metres were about 12 to 15 metres wide.

Because of the QPWS's poor communication of its intentions, the discovery came as a complete shock and surprise. We calculated that if the scale of destruction was extrapolated to other proposed Fraser Island firebreaks, it would expose more bare ground than the five years of sandmining from the start of 1972 to the end of 1976. With biological destruction on such scale and QPWS intransigence, FIDO began preparing to launch a campaign similar to our campaigns against sandmining in the 1970s and logging in the 1980's and early 90's. It may not now be necessary.

While the QPWS has yet to concede that it was guilty of any errors of judgement, they are moving towards ensuring that they won't inflict such massive environmental impact again on Fraser Island. This MOONBI documents the history of this issue to date to help avoid similar mistakes in the future.

The recent heavy focus on the firebreaks has been a major distraction from a much more critical issue —the establishment of the optimum fire regime for Fraser Island. That will be a major focus of FIDO's "True Grit" Conference with the theme of maintaining the integrity of the Great Sandy Region at the University of the Sunshine Coast on 28-29 September.

Breaking With Reason The Horrifying Scale of QPWS Fraser Firebreak

In April 2006, FIDO discovered the horrific firebreak that had just been completed for the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service running almost 20 kilometres from Dilli Village to Ungowa. The Dillingham Road firebreak illustrated opposite was built without any prior public warning and created a wide swathe across Fraser Island. FIDO was alarmed at the environmental impact of this surprise development. If the Dillingham Road firebreak was to be the model for the remaining projected firebreaks, they will have serious impacts on Fraser Island's World Heritage values, tourism and wildlife. All attempts to have the matter calmly resolved were rejected by a most defensive and uncompromising QPWS which was in a state of denial. It was an issue though, that FIDO was preparing to deal with and give a priority at least as high as our priority to stop logging and sandmining on the island. If the QPWS had been prepared to take up FIDO's offer to discuss the issue at an earlier stage, they may have saved everyone a lot of angst.

In the absence of any QPWS assessment of the environmental impacts, FIDO has had make its own appraisal. Without being provided with any other data and based on our observations of the firebreak from Dilli Village to Ungowa, FIDO had to draw its own conclusions. Since the QPWS began providing more information about other firebreaks in July many of our initial conclusions have had to be since revised. Extrapolating on what we had witnessed Dillingham Road and Jabiru Swamp these were some of our conclusions:

- * Every kilometre of Category 1 firebreak creates 2 hectares of bare ground. 80 hectares were devastated during the push from Hook Point to Ungowa via Dilli Village.
- * This single operation did more damage to Fraser Island than was done in the last year of logging operations but whereas logging scars are being allowed to heal, it is the intention of the QPWS to make these scars permanent by maintaining them bare of vegetation.
- * More than 100 kilometres more of similar Category 1 firebreaks are proposed which will mean that ultimately over 280 ha of vegetation-free firebreaks will exist on Fraser Island. Every kilometre of a Category 2 Firebreak is at least two-thirds the width of a Category 1 firebreak.
- * The QPWS proposes to establish over 150 kilometres of Category 2 firebreaks on Fraser Island, which will create at least a further 200 ha of Fraser Island stripped of vegetation.
- * **If completed, the firebreaks will expose more ground than five years of Fraser Island sandmining operations did (200 ha). Sand miners at least attempted to revegetate their scars. The QPWS wants their scars to remain permanently.**
- * The routes chosen for this devastation include almost all of the major tourist routes and scenic drives on Fraser Island. They are all to be widened to at least the width of two or three bulldozer blades.
- * **The aesthetic appeal of Fraser Island will be so diminished that it is bound to attract many fewer visitors and the sand tracks will be much looser and more erosion prone as a result of less tree cover.**

- * If the network of firebreaks proposed is constructed, much of Fraser Island's smaller fauna will be isolated into small islands of vegetation. The wider the gap the greater the number of species that become isolated. Gliders can't cross a 20-metre gap and many smaller species of birds, reptiles and mammals are unwilling to expose themselves to predation by crossing such a large gap in their natural cover. The *Wildlife* part of the QPWS's title doesn't mean that it is about protecting wildlife, it seems
- * Although the QPWS is part of Queensland's Environmental Protection Agency, the strategy for the design of these firebreaks was done without any environmental impact assessment and without referring its actions to the Commonwealth Government as required by the EPBC Act.
- * Without competition from an undisturbed natural forest, the potential for weeds to take hold in this open bare ground doesn't bear thinking about. The only factor currently stopping a more dramatic spread of feral grasses on Fraser Island is the fact that generally throughout the island there is too much competition for them. Just imagine what will happen if feral grasses become established in these firebreaks. They will then become vectors for spreading fire.



The start of the Dillingham Road Category 1 firebreak at the former sandmining site. A group of American university students discovered a new subject to evaluate for its environmental impact.

The History of FIDO Fight Over Fraser Firebreaks

FIDO first became alarmed at the widening of the Fraser Island roads in 1991 when it was noticed that when QPWS plant operators were working on any roads, they deliberately drove into the bush to knock over *Banksia serratas*. FIDO termed this paranoid campaign to eliminate banksias near roads as “*Banksia Serial Killing*”. Most MOONBIs since 1991 carried articles or references pointing out the incongruity of *Banksia Serial Killing* being sanctioned in a World Heritage area.

The *Banksia Serial Killing* Issue: FIDO publicly questioned the methodology of clearing specific vegetation beside all major roads on Fraser Island. It was obvious that there was a culture of paranoia within the QPWS workforce. There were strongly held views that *Banksia* cones can explode in a bushfire and allow fires to jump over roads. All attempts to get a rational response to this deliberate modification of Fraser Island flora in an attempt to stop wildfires failed to get any response until the QPWS Regional Director, Bill Fisher joined a FIDO inspection on Fraser Island to see what was the basis of the continuing criticisms. He brokered a deal that he would invite an independent consultant and highly respected fire ecologist, Peter Stanton down from Cairns to inspect the practice and to arbitrate on the wisdom and validity of the practice. FIDO agreed to accept the outcome of Peter Stanton’s judgement.

In 1993 Peter Stanton said that *if the fire management was so out of control that roads had to be used as fire breaks then there was something wrong with the overall fire regime*. Following that and for the duration of Keith Twyford’s remaining tenure, *Banksia Serial Killing* ceased and an effort was made to address the issue of fire management..

The 2000 Fire Management Workshop: However, Peter Stanton’s recommendation for more prescription burning to occur on Fraser Island, while taken up for a short time, increasing lapsed especially when Keith Twyford moved interstate. The failure to carry out an adequate burning regime was resulting in increasingly obvious ecological changes. So from the late 1990s, FIDO began to vigorously campaign for a better fire management regime. FIDO urged that a conference on fire management be held but was advised that this was not affordable within the QPWS budget. However in August, 2000 at FIDO’s urging, QPWS managed its budget so as to hold a three day Fire Management Workshop at Hervey Bay with all stakeholders and most Ranger staff as well as outside ecologists including Peter Stanton present. Participants were told that the workshop was to be the precursor to developing a Fire Management Strategy for Fraser Island. Most of the workshop focused on the desirable fire regimes for the different ecotypes to be found on Fraser Island. The touchy issue of *Banksia Serial Killing* and firebreaks was not raised in the workshop. The workshop concluded with a statement that responsible officers in the QPWS would distill out the views from the workshop and incorporate them in the Fire Management Strategy. FIDO and most other participants at the 2000 workshop interpreted the outcome as being a much more proactive approach to undertake management burning to attempt to re-establish the kind of landscape bequeathed by thousands of years of Aboriginal occupation.

Four More years to the Final Plan: Because of FIDO’s support for a return to the Aboriginal fire regime, FIDO supported the introduction of the Fire Management Strategy believing it would create the ecology allowing for the maximum biodiversity for Fraser Island. However, FIDO hadn’t anticipated that few of the senior managers who were present in 2000 at the Workshop would have a hand in the subsequent written plan and/or still be present in 2004. Even fewer are still involved in 2006.

Soon after the 2000 Fire Workshop, *Banksia Serial Killing* resumed with a vengeance. Following a wildfire in the Worallie Creek area in September 2001, John Sinclair had noted that after the fire had been successfully extinguished without any extra clearing, a plant operator and rangers had moved in to do some extraordinary felling of banksias and even Scribbly Gums. At the Community Advisory Committee meetings he sought explanations. The CAC was subsequently advised that “*such work is in accord with Fire Protection Plan intentions to similarly widen key firelines to improve fire management capabilities.*”

Draft Fire Management Strategy Released: Soon after, in March 2002, the Draft Fire Management Strategy was released and the public and members of the advisory Committees were invited to comment. The Draft Fire Management Strategy contained a meagre and obscure description of the proposed firebreaks.

Maps: The absence of a single map showing the location of the various category firebreaks was a major deficiency of the strategy. As a result virtually everyone who read the document failed to recognize the profound implications of the specifications and impact of the new network.



Even before the new Jabiru Swamp and the Dillingham Road firebreaks along it were constructed, the former Fraser Island roads were clearly visible from space. The former Great Walk along Jabiru Swamp and the new Hook Point to Dilli Village road and Category 1 Firebreak can be seen in this Google Earth photo based on a photo taken by satellite in 2005

Poor Description of Location and Extent: The description of the roads wasn't helpful in making the intention and the extent of the firebreak program clear either. Some colloquial names used only within the QPWS were used to identify the routes. Only a few people extremely familiar with Fraser Island would know where to locate "New Exploration Break". No maps showing the proposed firebreaks were included with either the Draft or the final Fire Management Strategy.

Although FIDO hadn't picked up the detail and specifications of the proposed firebreaks in the Draft Fire Management Strategy, FIDO's submission clearly and unambiguously opposed roads being widened to act as firebreaks. FIDO said:

***Roads not to be widened to act as firebreaks:** While we applaud the principles stated, we do not see that this plan will address the issue of road sides being deliberately stripped of trees and particularly of banksias so that roads can act more effectively as firebreaks. Currently we are seeing every road on Fraser Island open for public use as well as several management roads being progressively and aggressively stripped of all tall vegetation, most notably banksias. There is an unjustified and obsessive paranoia amongst some National Park staff (former Forestry workers in particular) against having banksias growing too close to any road because they believe burning cones may explode and this is like throwing a hand grenade across the road. This scenario has been described to FIDO several times as the justification for eliminating any banksias close to roads. It is clear to anyone driving around Fraser Island that banksias have been singled out for special treatment by tractor drivers.*

FIDO went on to reinforce this submission with many examples and references from various MOONBIs from the previous decade of criticism of (a) the Banksia Serial Killing and (b) the lack of adequate management of burning to correct the buildup in fuel and the rapidly changing ecology resulting from decades (from the 1960s) of an inadequate burning regime due to budgetary considerations. It turns out that **FIDO's submission on widening roads for the purpose of making firebreaks was totally ignored.**

No Discussion of the Final Fire Management Strategy:

Before the closing of submissions to the Fire Management Strategy and the release of the final document in 2004, nobody from the QPWS consulted any member of the advisory committees about the submissions received especially when submissions such as that from FIDO ran so contrary to what was surreptitiously contained in the Strategy. Members of the Community Advisory Committee were handed CDs with the final Fire Management Strategy at the end of one meeting. The matter was not addressed. The CAC is not consulted about many matters deemed "operational" and receive very little in the way of reports and most frequently reports are not even made available until the end of a meeting.

No forward advice of works to be undertaken: It is not only the Community Advisory Committee which is kept in the dark. Despite Queensland Native Title legislation requiring traditional Aboriginal owners to be notified of any new works on Fraser Island, no notification was given before the massive land clearing went ahead. At the

Community Advisory Committee meeting on 23rd June, 2006, members were told that because the work involved only the widening of existing roads, no prior notification was necessary. The fact that the width of the existing roads were to be doubled, trebled or quadrupled was conveniently ignored. Traditional owners are understandably angry.

The Discovery at the Scale of the Firebreaks: It wasn't until early April 2006 that while leading a safari to Fraser Island, John Sinclair, FIDO's Honorary Project Officer, was astonished to discover a wide swathe of land clearing near the Boomanjin Airstrip. He concluded that this freshly completed swathe, stretching from Hook Point to Dilli Village and across Fraser Island to Ungowa, was 40 kilometres long and 20 metres wide.

FIDO's attempts to stop new firebreaks rebuffed: The following weekend, the FIDO Executive and members of both advisory committees (which were meeting at Dilli Village on Fraser Island) were able to inspect the swathe of destruction. John Sinclair carried out an inspection with the Regional Director of the QPWS, the District Manager and the Senior QPWS Ranger on Fraser Island to express alarm and dismay. He immediately wrote to the Executive Director of the QPWS seeking a moratorium. FIDO unsuccessfully sought to be present on an inspection of Fraser Island by the Senate Committee on the Environment, Communications, Information Technology and The Arts on 20th April to express the strongest concern at the scale of the firebreaks. Only QPWS officers including the Executive Director, Alan Feely, showed about the Senators.



Ground Inspection shows the fire hazard being created by pushing windrows into the forest adjacent to these horrific scars.

Making Firebreaks an EPBC controlled action: It was only after this QPWS intransigence and flat rejection of FIDO's moratorium proposal that FIDO wrote to Senator Campbell seeking to make the matter of firebreaks on Fraser Island a controlled action under the Commonwealth EPBC Act

Ministerial Meeting in Queensland: On 7th June three representatives of FIDO met the Queensland Environment Minister to express the most serious concern and sought to have further work on the firebreaks stopped while the firebreak policy was rethought. The QPWS Executive Director also attended the meeting. He insisted on pushing ahead with new firebreaks and the Minister did not support FIDO's request for a moratorium and a rethink.

CAC Response: When the Community Advisory Committee met on 23rd June, the matter of the firebreaks was at the top of the agenda. Terry Harper, QPWS Southern Regional Director, chaired the meeting. There was unanimous opposition expressed to creating any more firebreaks similar to Dillingham Road. All members said that they were taken by surprise at the scale of the firebreaks. Nobody had appreciated the implications of Table 18 of the Fire Management Strategy.

Federal Funding for Firebreaks: It was also revealed at the CAC meeting that much of the money to pay for the bulldozing came from the Commonwealth. While not yet

confirmed, FIDO believes that the money being used to make such a serious impact on Fraser Island is provided by DOTARS (Department of Transport and Regional Services) **Bushfires Mitigation Program.** This states: “*State Government agencies are eligible to apply for funding under the program where that agency is the relevant responsible agency (e.g. environment agencies). The range of fire trail related mitigation works and measures qualifying for funding under the program include construction of a fire trail in an area identified as needing to be accessible for fire suppression and/or mitigation purposes ...*”

The 185 page Fire Management Strategy was released in 2004. Laypersons and many scientists could be forgiven for not picking up on the only description of the proposed firebreaks and their dimensions in Table 18 on page 156. This extract was the only description of the proposed firebreaks. Not one of the 25 maps in the Fire Management Strategy plotted out where the different categories of Firebreaks were to be located. This is exactly as it appeared.

| Track category | Description and specifications | Locations |
|----------------|---|---|
| Category 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategically important fire control line Maintain to high standard with all weather access at all times suitable for 8X8 truck Recommend three blades wide - bare sand for two blades wide, with slashed verge to 1.5m either side | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracks around fire reference zones Platypus Bay Road New Exploration Break Awinya Creek Road Woralie Road Happy Valley to Moon Point Road Dillingham's Road |

Potentially hundreds of hectares were condemned on the basis of just these few words and this list of routes in Table 18. Oddly none of the 25 maps accompanying the Fire Management Strategy showed these routes. FIDO has sought to have a revised and fuller description of the firebreaks and how future firebreaks will be shaped and maintained as well as maps incorporated into the Strategy.

Category 1 could expose 2 ha/km: The recommended clearing was for “*two blades wide - bare sand for one blade wide, with slashed verge to 1.5m either side*”. That was exceeded on the Dillingham Road. Having discovered that a recommendation of “three blades wide” could result in 20 metres of clearing, FIDO immediately drew the scale of the firebreak to the personal attention of the hierarchy of management of Fraser Island including the QPWS Regional Director, the District Manager and the Senior Ranger on Fraser Island.

Another 200ha: FIDO estimated that, not including the Category 1 firebreaks around all settlements (fire reference zones), the Platypus Bay (15k) Woralie (20k) New Exploration (20k) Moon Point to Happy Valley (30k) and Awinya (20k) roads would add another 100 kilometres of similar firebreaks and destroy 200 hectares of vegetation. This would expose as much bare ground as was done in aggregate during the whole of the QTM and DM Minerals operations in the five year period from the start of 1972. It would further isolate other wildlife populations into increasingly smaller islands of bush on Fraser Island. During this debate, the QPWS failed to inform the members of the CAC of the work done on the Category 1 firebreak along the Woralie Road.



Category 2: It appears that the Category 2 firebreaks proposed are almost as horrific. During our inspections, we were unaware that the firebreak along Jabiru Swamp, which has widened part of the “Great Walks” track network into what must be the widest bushwalking trail in Australia, was only supposed to be a Category 2 Firebreak. Yet, such was its scale where we saw it, it was least as wide as the Category 1. The following routes have been proposed to become Category 2 firebreaks: The Wathumba Road, Bullock Road, Northern Road, Happy Valley Road (we aren’t sure which Happy Valley road this refers to), Bogimbah Road (again it intersects an important rainforest patch), Cornwalls Break Road (a major tourist route used by Kingfisher to access the Eastern Beach), Eurong Road (where there is already a system of dual parallel tracks for the most part), Wangoolba Road (again this is confusing because the Eurong Road is listed and there is no statement

of where it starts and where it finishes) and New Jabiru Swamp track (which has already been cleared).

Implications for tourism: What was more worrying was that some of the proposed 20 metre wide firebreaks followed major tourist routes through Fraser Island potentially converting them to a swathe of open ground. The “Fraser Island experience”, the “X” Factor in Fraser Island tourism would be destroyed with the loss of the sense of being so close to nature on the narrow albeit rough sand tracks. Such wide swathes would dramatically diminish the total aesthetic appeal of a Fraser Island experience for most visitors.

Economic Impact: Although the numbers have begun falling, Fraser Island attracts 300,000 visitors annually. The numbers will plummet if the attraction of the Fraser Island experience is taken away. Fraser Island tourism generates

\$277 million in the regional economy and creates 2880 jobs. The charm of Fraser Island has been the intimate closeness of visitors with the forest. Ill-conceived firebreaks could be a mammoth stuff-up which kills the tourism goose that lays the golden egg. Few tourists will be attracted to driving along sand tracks in the middle of a swathe as wide as Queen Street.

Effective Alternative: During its 100 year tenure of Fraser Island, the Queensland Forestry Department had successfully operated the double track system throughout Fraser Island for many decades and a similar double track on Moreton Island’s Middle Road was demonstrated to be most effective in stopping a wildfire there. The QPWS has shunned using double tracks on Fraser Island.

A Compromise Evolving

As a result of the unanimous alarm by members of the Community Advisory Committee expressed on 23rd June, the QPWS organized a field inspection on Fraser Island on 27th July to help resolve the issue. While the QPWS has yet to concede that the Dillingham Road and the Jabiru Swamp firebreaks should never have happened, some alternative models have been put forward

It helped that for the first time the group was provided with a map outlining where the various firebreaks within the different categories were to be located.

However as a result of being more closely able to assess the maps particularly on the fire history of Fraser Island, some myths were exploded. Rather than having too frequent a fire regime as had been previously thought, it appears that even on paper it is being significantly underburnt.

Category 1 Alternative Model: CAC members were shown the Woralie Track that has, in the sections outside the rainforest, been developed as Category 1. In the areas of tall timber, there were many large trees left resulting in a canopy over the road which would encourage more small fauna to venture across the gap with less fear of predation. It turned out that the Woralie Track through the rainforest was Category 3.

The Category 1 Firebreak as illustrated below is very similar to the double track system of firebreaks which FIDO had long advocated for Fraser Island. These are in dramatic contrast to the Dillingham Road firebreak. In some ways they may be less disfiguring.

Category 1 Firebreak — Woralie Track



Category 2 Alternative Model: The group was then shown the Northern Road between the Woralie and Moon Point Roads. This was in complete contrast to the Jabiru Swamp Category 2 line. The existing road pavement area remained the same width. Only the fringing vegetation 1.5 metres each side of the road had been slashed.

This was much more acceptable than the Jabiru Swamp debacle which some of the group later travelled 25 kilometres along. Along the Northern Road virtually no trees were pushed out of the way. Although many larger trees were left in the Woralie Track Category 1 firebreak, (see photo left) none were left along the Jabiru Swamp. The difference in the interpretation of the Table 18 prescription for Category 2 firebreaks is mystifying



Northern Road — Category 2
CAC members measuring and discussing the appearance and impacts compared with the Jabiru Swamp firebreak.

Category 3: It appears that there is almost no roadwork necessary to convert existing roads to Category 3 firebreaks than establishing passing bays so that the necessary larger fire trucks can be effectively manoeuvred and the safety of fire fighters won't be placed at unnecessary risk. FIDO wants to see some Category 1 breaks in the rainforest become Category 3 firebreaks.

New Firebreak Guidelines to be Documented

The outcome of a very exhaustive evaluation of the alternatives is dependent on the QPWS documenting the proposal for how the various category firebreaks are to be developed in the future.

One of the agreed points is that there needs to be closer supervision of similar operations in the future to avoid such tragedies. Work will also be undertaken to encourage regrowth of some trees in some of the disaster firebreaks to help soften their visual impact. Some Category 1 Sections may be reclassified where there is no need for such width as for example where the road the firebreak is following passes through rainforest. This should avoid possible future mistakes in interpretation. FIDO, however, reserves its position on the firebreaks and making a conclusive response until it has seen the documentation. FIDO hopes that the issue of Fraser Island firebreaks will be resolved well before the FIDO-SAC conference at the end of September where Fire Management will be a hot topic. It is the subject of the Conference keynote address and a workshop.



CAC members & QPWS Officers — Cat 1 Firebreak

More Prescription Burns Needed Urgently

FIDO believes that the most urgent priority to address fire management on Fraser Island is to shift the focus from the firebreaks to the issue of the prescribed burning policy as quickly as possible.

Rate of Prescription Burns Appallingly Low: In 2005 the QPWS burnt only 350 of Fraser Island's 180,000 hectares in 19 fires. At that rate, it will take a 500-year cycle for the return fire to any particular point. This is creating a potential firebomb. That sort of fuel accumulation endangers not only QPWS staff but also other life and property. The rate improved in 2006. Although the number of planned burns fell 19 to 10, the QPWS has increased the area proposed to be burnt to 1669 hectares. That represents a 500% increase in the rate of burning from 2005. At that rate it will ONLY take 100 years to go around the island instead of 500 years.

Property Protection is the only Priority: All of the fires in 2005 and all but one of the proposed fires are intended to protect settlements or infrastructure. Nine of the ten fires planned for 2006-2007 are Property Protection burns: Kingfisher Bay Resort – 55 ha, Eurong Ranger Base – 135 ha, Waddy water tank block – 9 ha, Waddy Lodge block – 26 ha, Happy Valley South – 30 ha, Lake Boomanjin – 3 ha, Dilli Village – 7 ha, Sandy Cape Lighthouse reserve – 19ha, Orchid Beach Resort site – 2 ha. There is just one planned environmental burn which substantially increases the aggregate area to be burnt. This is the “Ungowa Mitigation Zone” of 1383 ha. So while the small print of the Fire Management Strategy on firebreaks has been enthusiastically embraced, it looks as if the matter being least addressed is the matter of reducing the overall fuel load to that which prevailed under the Aboriginal burning regime. If this doesn't occur soon, when the inevitable fire does move through the island, it will do so with more devastating impact than anything seen in living memory.

Of course the QPWS is scared of fire rather than being masters of Fire as the Aborigines were. Thus they are frightened to light fires especially from the ground which is the only way any fires have been lit on Fraser Island since the Fire Management Strategy was adopted.

For budgetary reasons the QPWS has yet again resolved to ignore the key recommendation of the Fire Management Strategy: *The use of aerial incendiary technology will be critical to achieve the recommendations outlined in this Fire Strategy. In particular, its use will be essential to reverse the entrenched pattern of large-scale, intense wildfires currently operating over much of the island, in favour of a more complex, fine-scale mosaic of vegetation at varying ages since fire and subsequent fuel loads.*

MOONBI 112 in April, even before FIDO became aware of the firebreaks issue was lamenting the lack of commitment to actually making Fraser Island not only a safer place but also an ecologically more sustainable place. If Fraser Island is to be made a safer place from fire, then it is going to require much more burning and this will not be achieved by burning from the ground around the edges. It will only be achieved with a well-managed aerial ignition program.



Category 2 Firebreak beside Jabiru Swamp

The width here exceeds recommendations and has needlessly transformed a what had previously been a most attractive section of Fraser Island's Great Walk network.

NEWS from the QPWS Sandpaper

Fraser Island a Safer Place

The stationing of paramedic, Mal Babb, on Fraser Island has saved a life and made Fraser Island a safer place. There are now two 4WD ambulance vehicles stationed on Fraser Island although the second vehicle may only be staffed during Queensland and New South Wales school holiday periods. However for twelve months, Mal is stationed permanently on the island. The Queensland Ambulance Service is establishing a “First Responders” scheme to enhance skills and response times to basic first aid. QPWS fully supports those rangers who want to get involved in this worthwhile community initiative.

Sandy Cape turtle census

The QPWS Sandy Cape Turtle Management Program has been monitoring nesting marine turtles on Fraser Island’s northern tip between December and February each year since 1993. Rangers and volunteers monitor the breeding activity, growth and mortality of nesting turtles and tag them with an individual identification number to help to track turtle movements and nesting habits around the world. Two species of marine turtle - the Green Turtle and the endangered Loggerhead have established rookeries on Fraser Island mainly in the Sandy Cape area. There were estimated to be about 40 Loggerhead turtles nesting in 2005-06, an increase on the 30 the previous season. The increase in numbers continues a five-year trend. While most turtles lay their eggs where the clutch will incubate successfully, on Fraser Island some factors such as steeply eroded dune faces, prevent turtles from reaching higher ground, thus exposing the nests to tides. The nests are relocated to dingo-proof cages above the high water mark. About 65 Loggerhead nests were relocated last season.

Whale find a mystery

The discovery of a 16.2 metre sperm whale between Coongul and Woralie Creek last November has many experts scratching their heads about how and why the whale’s body ended up on Fraser’s shore. Sperm whales are the largest Odontocete or toothed whales, and are found in all oceans of the world. The shallow waters of Hervey Bay are not their usual feeding grounds. These huge, deep-sea divers can withstand depths of over 1000 metres where they feed mostly on giant squid. The find was considered significant. Unfortunately its teeth had been stolen since the report was phoned in. This theft was a bitter disappointment as this was a rare opportunity to collect bones and piece together some more this whale’s story.

New QPWS Waste Transfer Stations

As the long-running dispute between the two local authorities with jurisdiction on Fraser Island over the responsibility for waste management moves slowly to being resolved to nobody’s complete satisfaction, the QPWS has constructed waste transfer stations on Fraser Island far away from the townships. The one shown on the left is located on the beach near the “Maheno”. As part of the resolution each Council has the responsibility for removing all waste deposited in their respective townships and the Parks Service for that deposited in the Park Waste Management areas. This is to prevent QPWS being responsible for disposing of urban generated waste.

King fern clones

The king or giant fern - *Angiopteris evecta* growing in Wanggoolba Creek, belongs to a very primitive family of plants called Marattiaceae. Fossils of ferns, very similar to today’s *Angiopteris* have been discovered and dated back to the Palaeozoic era - at least 300 million years ago.

The *Angiopteris* ferns on Fraser Island are relicts of a warmer and wetter period in South East Queensland, when conditions were perfect for spore reproduction of this once widespread species. These ferns have evolved over millions of years and survived some major landform changes.

Over 130 million years, as continental plates and ocean currents worked pressure on the huge landmass once connected to what we now call Antarctica, the Gondwana continent drifted north and into warmer waters. Seas soon washed over land and continental plates drifted apart and in effect “split” the super-continent into pieces. Australia, one of the larger pieces, is still drifting north, while India has hit the Eurasian continent and is buckling the land around the Himalayas. Plants and animals once able to spread across ancient Gondwana, were trapped on their separated landmasses and had to evolve to suit their new conditions as their pieces of the continent drifted around the globe.

No wonder then, that many Australian plants have gondwanan cousins in India and in the other major pieces of Gondwana – Africa and South America. The fern’s remarkable features include massive fronds that lack woody tissue for support. It relies on the pressure of water in its stems (turgor) for support - like water in a hose. This also explains its favoured locations - very close to or in permanent water.

Interestingly, *Angiopteris* ferns are reliant on mycorrhizal fungi. That is, fungi that grow around and in association with the root system of the plant. Sharing starches and sugars with the fungi, the fern gets nutrients in return.

Although little is known of the growth rate and longevity of this species in the wild, botanists suggest that some individual specimens of Fraser Island’s *Angiopteris* could be up to 100 years old. It is suggested they are gradually replaced by their offspring through cloning, not by spores, which most modern ferns use for reproduction. *Angiopteris* grow relatively fast for such an ancient species. Once established, the crown grows about 10-15 cm per year in diameter and height, while fronds can grow 2-3 cm per year. This makes for a truly giant fern.



NEWS and VIEWS

Visitor Numbers Trend Down

MOONBI 112 broke the news of the very significant decline in Fraser Island visitor numbers. FIDO continues its analysis of the data available to us by examining the trend over the past 13 years for which data is available.

Table 1

Fraser Island Visitor Number Trends

| | Total FITs | Total CTOs | Total |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1992-93 | 111,199 | 127,775 | 239,974 |
| 1993-94 | 120,323 | 136,860 | 257,184 |
| 1994-95 | 122,797 | 141,434 | 264,231 |
| 1995-96 | 128,434 | 138,299 | 266,733 |
| 1996-97 | 130,163 | 143,459 | 273,622 |
| 1997-98 | 138,574 | 152,830 | 291,404 |
| 1998-99 | 135,763 | 161,585 | 297,621 |
| 1999-00 | 135,667 | 178,384 | 314,051 |
| 2000-01 | 150,765 | 180,887 | 331,652 |
| <i>The following figures are for calendar years</i> | | | |
| 2002 | 153,847 | 199,424 | 353,271 |
| <i>To this stage Visitor numbers were growing</i> | | | |
| 2003 | 152,536 | 185,551 | 338,087 |
| 2004 | 132,706 | 167,802 | 300,508 |
| 2005 | 86,656 | 174,057 | 260,713 |

Source: QPWS Reports

FITs = Free Independent Travellers

CTOs = Visitors carried by Commercial Tour Operators.

Abrupt and accelerating decline:

It is clear from the above table that there is a recent alarming trend. Fraser Island is rapidly losing its attraction to both independent travellers and people taking commercial tours. MOONBI 112 discussed some possible economic and lifestyle factors to explain the decline. The latest figures should have alarm bells ringing. Fraser Island is clearly losing its appeal and we need to know why.

FITs fall off faster than commercial visitors: In the 3 years from 2002, total visitor numbers declined by 26%. That is an amazing statistic. Between 2002 and 2005 there was a 35% decline of FIT visitor numbers. This is a much more abrupt fall than the number carried on commercial tours where the decline was only 13%.

Numbers on Fraser Island commercial tours continue to increase as a proportion of total visitor numbers. Commercial tourism now carries 66.7% of all visitors. The proportion of Fraser Island visitors on commercial tours continues to grow from 52.5% in 1992-93.

\$1.5 Million plus for Dundubara

The latest Capital Works Program for the Great Sandy Region belatedly includes \$845,930 to establish a new waste treatment plant at Dundubara which might enable the toilet block which has stood inoperable for years to finally be brought into service. The budget also provides \$171,512 for a Remote Area Power scheme (RAPS) at Dundubara and \$526,163 for the new Office and Visitor Information Centre to be opened by the end of the year. While good things may come to those who wait, there has been a long wait at Dundubara.

Beware of Arborists



Be especially aware of chainsaw wielding arborists in National Parks. For some time FIDO has been alarmed at the deliberate removal of trees from major visitor destinations. It is difficult to find any Fraser Island site more impacted on than Lake Garawongera. Whenever FIDO has raised our serious concerns with the Parks Service, we are advised that the trees to be removed in the interests of public safety are assessed by the most highly qualified arborists. While FIDO supports the principles of public safety, it seems that the criteria of arborists or assessment of risks has reached ridiculous proportions in this case at Lake Garawongera. Consultant arborists have been able to decree that this 70 cm diameter blackbutt standing in the Lake Garawongera car park more than 20 metres from any structure and with a centre pipe less than 7 cms in diameter was in danger of causing damage to life and/or property and then tear it down without being challenged. The site around Lake Garawongera is starting to look like an aborist's graveyard. FIDO believes that there needs to be a re-evaluation of the criteria for removing any trees within a National Park especially in the light of the Australian High Court judgement that persons entering natural areas had to accept some risks. Nobody can guarantee that a tree won't fall over in a severe storm or under the most adverse conditions. This should not mean that every tree has to be removed. Instead of looking like a natural forest, the major areas used by visitors on Fraser Island may end up increasingly looking like a city park.

Eli Creek Closed for All Visitors

In 1981 over a period of 16 weekend working bees, FIDO constructed a boardwalk at no cost to the public along Eli Creek. The QPWS, which has become obsessive on the matter of public safety, last year closed off the northern part of the loop after a risk assessment carried out by QPWS officers. This year they closed the Eli Creek walk in totality. It is now forbidden to enter a site where over \$600,000 of public money was spent only a few years ago upgrading the western end of the walk which now nobody is allowed to go anywhere near. The change to the Eli Creek mouth last year caused the creek to alter course and created some very severe erosion. However FIDO remains very distressed that the QPWS has responded to the risks it has assessed in such a negative way when it has found the risks of aircraft mingling with beach traffic to be acceptable.

Damming the Mary River and Damning Great Sandy Strait

FIDO is opposed to the construction of the proposed Traveston Dam on the Mary River because of its environmental impact on Great Sandy Strait. Even before the Beattie Government has commenced an Environmental Impact Statement to determine if the dam should go ahead, the proposal to dam the Mary River at Traveston has received a huge amount of attention because of the social impacts it will have on the people who will be forced to relocate.

The furore has brought a lot of attention to the environmental impacts on the actual areas to be inundated and particularly to the endangered species whose very existence is threatened by the proposed dam construction. However the downstream effects have barely been mentioned. The impacts extend right into the marine areas that for countless millennia have been dependent on the nutrient inputs from the Mary River. The silt has nourished the sea-grasses of Great Sandy Strait on which the dugongs graze. The Great Sandy Strait mangroves and mud-crabs likewise exist only because of the habitat created by the silt that flows down the Mary River. Many species are also reliant on the continued flow of fresh water to adjust the salinity and pH of the marine environment which otherwise wouldn't suit them.

Great Sandy Strait and the Mary: Geomorphologists tell us that 10,000 years ago, when Fraser Island was part of the mainland (like Cooloola is today), Great Sandy Strait was the ancestral bed of the Mary River. They point out that the syncline represented by Woody Island would have deflected its flow to the south so it flowed along what is now Great Sandy Strait. When the sea levels rose over 120 metres about 6,000 years ago, the sediment carried down the Mary River settled in Great Sandy Strait and filled up what would have been a deep river valley there. It was only when sea levels stabilized about 5,500 years ago that Inskip Point peninsula was formed. There is geological evidence that the river ran east between Inskip Point and Rainbow Beach.

Stopping sediment and nutrient flows: FIDO doesn't profess to have a great deal of expertise on marine matters but even the arrogant Premier Beattie must be able to appreciate the fact that Great Sandy Strait is a creation of the Mary River. However a person would have to be plain dumb not to see that a dam on a river on the scale of the proposed Traveston Dam is going to have very serious downstream impacts over time. Unfortunately the timescale of the impacts don't coincide with political timetables and so generations into the future will have many reasons to hate the builders of this dam.

An Alternative to Damming the Mary

Although the Premier of the Smart State initially off-handedly ruled out installing water purification plants to recycle water in Queensland, after his decision to build the Traveston Dam Premier Beattie (and many other politicians and the media) were converted. At the closing stages of the Toowoomba poll he argued for water recycling with evangelistic zeal. Unfortunately the decision to damn the Lungfish and dam the Mary was hastily taken before this dramatic conversion. Had it occurred earlier, there would be a realization that the existing water impoundments in South East Queensland could cope with a 50% increase in demand.

Japan's smart solution is water purification. The technology of water purification plants has been proven and has been successfully used in Japan for more than 100 years.

In densely populated Japan it isn't wise to build large dams because if they burst in an earthquake the released water would wreak havoc on the downstream settlements where most of the population lives. So in Japan they don't build large dams. They consider the impacts on the people.

All Tokyo water is recycled. There are countless purification plants all over Japan. Everyone who visits Japan also drinks this water. There is no evidence that the Japanese people are any less healthy than Queenslanders because they drink this water. Japanese people have also refined the art of their gardens through bonsai and garden design to reduce the demand for water that goes out of the system.

Recycling here is feasible: If Queensland started to install water purification schemes, these could be up and running before construction could even be started on the Traveston dam. Recycling is much more reliable because it makes supply less dependent on climatic vagaries to come up with the supply of water needed. The Toowoomba poll should not have Queensland politicians putting their heads in the sand.

The Environmental Impact Statement should have been undertaken before deciding to build the Traveston dam. A proper EIS should include the impact on Great Sandy Strait as well as investigating alternative ways to meet SEQ's water needs. The EIS is now expected only to be a rubber stamp for the Beattie Government's predetermined outcome.

If the Premier is unwilling to change his mind in the face of compelling evidence, it may be time to change the Premier.

Tokyo Waterworks Data

(Figures as of March 31, 2005)

| | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Service Area: | 1,222.3 km ² |
| Population served: | 12,134,000 |
| Service availability: | 100% |
| No. of sites supplied by water: | 6,433,000 |
| Staff: | 4,683 |
| Total length of supply pipes: | 25,021 km |
| Total production capacity: | 6,860,000 m ³ /day |
| Water source volume: | 6,230,000 m ³ /day |
| Total annual water supply volume: | 1,624,602,000 m ³ |
| Maximum daily water supply volume: | 5,114,000 m ³ |
| Average daily water supply volume: | 4,451,000 m ³ |

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TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Dam & Be Damned

A tangled web of issues affects the health and sustainability of the Great Sandy Region through what is happening to the water on, under and surrounding Fraser Island. The water on and under Fraser Island, which is vital to the integrity of this World Heritage property, is now more secure with the declaration of Fraser Island as a Wild River under Queensland legislation. It will also help maintain some environmental flow into Hervey Bay and Great Sandy Strait. This is vital for the sustainability of all marine life there. Unfortunately though, the Beattie Government is about to cut off most of the environmental flow into Great Sandy Strait if the Traveston Dam is constructed.

Wild Rivers

FIDO had great anxiety that the Beattie Government might renege on another promise involving Fraser Island when it stalled on its declaration of all of the proposed Queensland Wild Rivers. In April it placed the whole process on hold for some months. Eventually on 24th July, Premier Beattie announced that Fraser Island and five other Queensland wild rivers — the Gregory, Settlement, and Staaten Rivers, Hinchinbrook Island National Park, and Morning Inlet would all be declared but due to concerns of indigenous communities and mining interests in Cape York Peninsula and the Gulf of Carpentaria the rest of the declarations remain on hold. Under the legislation as it affects Fraser Island, existing developments and currently authorized activities will not be subject to the wild river requirements. However, any new development applications, which have the potential to degrade a wild river, will be rigorously assessed. FIDO believes that adds a layer of protection for Fraser Island not afforded under the existing Management Plan because the existing Great Sandy Region Management Plan isn't enshrined in legislation as promised in 2001. The wild river declaration will not affect recreational fishing. It prohibits stocking any of the water bodies on Fraser Island with non-indigenous fish. However, most activities will be prohibited in the proposed high preservation area, including dams and weirs. The Wild Rivers declaration effectively rules out the taking of water from Fraser Island to meet the urban demands of the City of Hervey Bay and guarantees that Bogimbah Creek should flow unmolested into Great Sandy Strait for the foreseeable future.

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are needed to see this picture.

Marine Park Disaster

The sustainability of fisheries and management of marine resources seems to be an Achilles Heel for the Beattie Government particularly in the Great Sandy Region. Protecting so little of the Great Sandy Region Marine Park as a no-take zone is a No-win for everyone. 4% of the marine park is grossly inadequate and flies in the face of all the advice and experience from around the world and recommendations from IUCN. Both commercial and recreational catches can be expected to continue to decline and nobody in the Beattie Government, least of all in the EPA, should be claiming any credit for a good outcome. The Beattie Government's refusal to accept the compelling arguments for a better conservation outcome for this marine park remains a sore point with FIDO and most others concerned with sustainability in the Great Sandy Region. The Beattie Government should be ashamed of itself.

The Dam Impacts

The plans to dam the Mary River at Traveston could be avoided if the Queensland Government were to bite the bullet and engage more actively in water recycling as is done in almost every industrialized country around the world. However FIDO is focusing on the downstream impacts of the dam especially Great Sandy Strait which will be denied the environmental flow to maintain the salinity and nutrient levels critical to this unique habitat. Without the regular flushing from Mary River floods, the sediment is expected to clog up this waterway which then could stagnate.

The Technical Advisory Panel Report (set up by the Government's own Department of Natural Resources and Mines) on Environmental Flows in the Mary Basin – the best available science currently available – states "*A reduction in fisheries productivity is implied by the reductions in total flow volumes and high volumes in Scenario Case R.*"

Permanent reduction in fisheries productivity will have serious implications on fishing and tourism industries in the Great Sandy Region. There will also be significant impacts on aquatic and terrestrial animals that live along the Mary River. The Traveston site will destroy key primary habitat of the Mary River Cod, the Mary River Tortoise and the Australian Lungfish. Reduced flows will also affect the endangered endemic Mary River Cod and Lungfish's spawning areas. The Beattie Government needs to do a rethink about the Traveston Dam.

Stop Press: Everyone booking for the Fraser Island Conference at University of the Sunshine Coast on 28th – 29th September can register at EARLY BIRD rates.



Clinging to life in Kirrarr Sandblow