



# MOONBI 130

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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**More Fraser Island involvement for Sunshine Coast:** FIDO is anxious to provide more opportunities for Sunshine Coast members and supporters to become involved or participate in Fraser Island activities. After all, the island is on its doorstep. That is why we are holding a Forum at the Horton Golf Club Maroochydore on 7.30 pm on 29<sup>th</sup> October. **FIDO's Biennial Conference, "Sand Sea Sun"** is to return to the University of the Sunshine Coast on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2015. This is one of the many constructive collaborations FIDO has entered into in the last few years which is helping achieve a better outcome for Fraser Island.

**The Politics of the Environment:** The political attempts to kill off the activist environment movement is gathering momentum at an alarming pace just as there are also moves to water down /remove many environmental protection measures that have been built up over five decades. First it was to neuter the EDO, then grants to all conservation bodies were stopped. Some Liberal Party politicians are trying to reduce other sources of funds to conservation groups by removing tax deductibility. MOONBI explains just how much the government though is subsidizing the vested interests and big business that wants to eliminate the environmental constraints reducing their profits. (See p 6) Elsewhere we show how recent legislative changes to the Nature Conservation Act and Wild Rivers legislation have increased the potential threats to Fraser Island's OUV. (p5)

**The loss of trees causes concern:** There is a two-page spread (pp2-3) on some very recent and dramatic losses of trees on Fraser Island. FIDO has long been concerned at the potential impact of climate change on the composition of the Fraser forests. MOONBI details the severity of the driest 8 months known and its impacts.

**Pandanus:** There are also other factors at play. Almost every pandanus on Fraser Island is now being impacted by a small plant-hopper insect, Jamella. This has already caused a tragic loss as most of the pandanus between Happy Valley and Eli Creek have succumbed. Despite there being a known biological control which occurs naturally in North Queensland where Jamella is kept under control, there is a reluctance to introduce it to the island to counter the Jamella impact for fear it could be as disastrous as the introduction of the cane toads. All Fraser Island pandanus could be eliminated before a decision is made to let the predator wasp that is already helping restore Pandanus on the adjacent mainland across Great Sandy Strait.

**Arborists:** There are other stories on the impact of drought on the Fraser forest but the issue that causes greater grief was the deliberate felling of trees in the Pile Valley Beauty Spot by QPWS contracted arborists. MOONBI 113 (August 2006) carried an article warning to "Beware of Arborists" and showed the stump of a perfectly healthy blackbutt dropped by chainsaw wielding arborists. Now they have begun attacking the fabric of Fraser Island's Outstanding Universal Value.

**The continuing drought:** Some reasonable rainfall in late March marked the end of the driest eight month period on record for Fraser Island. The impact is described here.

**Discoveries:** There are many new discoveries all the time adding to the value of Fraser Island. This MOONBI carries stories of a prickly plant, a butterfly and a dolphin. They are important but Fraser Island remains the Cinderella of Australian World Heritage sites. See p8

**Backgrounders:** FIDO saw Dilli Village from its very beginnings and even gave it its name. We thought we should write a history of this important accommodation centre as a Backgrounder to make more people aware of this resource. The other backgrounder is produced by Lindsay Dines in an exemplary demonstration of citizen science showing the interaction between fish and fowl and how fish caught in commercial fishers nets spook other fish & impact seabirds.



The foredunes wild windblown sand between Dilli Village and the mouth of Govi Creek in 1983. The changes to these dunes since 1983 epitomise the degree of changes elsewhere on Fraser Island. Sandblows especially on the foredunes have been colonized at an unprecedented rate.

Call For Papers

Date Claimer

6<sup>th</sup> Biennial Fraser Island conference

Sand Sea and Sun

University of the Sunshine Coast 12<sup>th</sup> August 2015

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## Tragedy for Many Trees

**Many causes have coincided to take a severe toll on the trees of Fraser Island. Four of the causes for the latest dramatic loss are discussed here. The reasons range from loss due to a severe drought (the severity is discussed elsewhere) loss from a small unchecked invading insect, Myrtle Rust and poor human judgment**

### Drought Impacts

The intense dry was an economic tragedy for people in rural areas, particularly farmers. However the toll on the natural environment was very serious. As described elsewhere in this MOONBI, Fraser Island and the adjacent mainland experienced the driest eight months on record from July to December and the drought intensified over a hot summer before finally easing its grip about 26<sup>th</sup> March. The drought was severe enough to see many trees die. We first observed Monotocas succumbing in December but as the drought persisted by February many other species were struggling to survive the intense dry. Surprisingly the most vulnerable of the larger trees has been the Brush box (*Lophostemum confertus*). During our May working bee countless Brush box were noted as we drove through the southern end of the island. Losses were denser on steeper slopes and mainly with less than 40 cms diameter, but at the back of Eurong in a valley we saw one Brush box well over a metre in diameter that was clearly a victim of drought. Most of the Brush Box to die were outside the rainforest and the wet sclerophyll forest. Some very large Scribbly gum (*Eucalyptus racemosa*) also died. The ratio of dead brush box to dead scribbly gums was roughly 20:1 or better. It was also noted that Foxtails, banksia and casuarinas had also succumbed.



### The Loss of Pandanus

It seems hard now to recall that when brumbies ranged Fraser Island right up to the late 1990s there were few Pandanus (*Pandanus tectorius*) occurring on the island. The horses chewed the growing centre out of every pandanus they could access. Every young coconut suffered the same fate then. There were no replacement pandanus coming through and by the early 1970s there were few Pandanus left along Fraser Island's eastern foredunes. After the last brumby was removed in the late 1990s there was a remarkable recovery of the panadanus from Ngkala Rocks to Dilli Village

Then only five years ago it was discovered that many of the Pandanus around Happy Valley were dying. This is a result of Pandanus dieback disease. It is caused by heavy infestations of a planthopper insect (*Jamella australiae*). The Jamella insects eat the new growing shoots of the pandanus trees and lay their eggs in the foliage. The new larvae emerge from their eggs and suck the sap from the leaves as well. This feeding results in a sticky residue that encourages further infestation of fungus and moulds. This combination of health-debilitating feeding and life cycle processes results in the overall dieback of the Pandanus trees. Mature trees can die within 6 months to 2 years from the initial infestation occurring.

Pandanus dieback has been an issue in southern Queensland since 1990. The Jamella insect was believed to be taken to northern NSW by pandanus trees brought in from North Queensland. It has slowly worked its way north since. And arrived on Fraser Island in about 2010-2011. In the north *Jamella australiae* is controlled by a natural predatory wasp (*Aphanomerous pusillus*). Further South the Jamella has no natural predator and therefore can thrive. The Jamella made it to Fraser Island but not the predator. The result has been a devastating loss of hundreds, if not thousands of pandanus.



### FIDO is keen to see urgent treatment given to preserve pandanus populations in key areas such as Eli Creek

The QPWS and the Fraser Coast Regional Council held a Jamella workshop in September 2011 exploring options to contain the problem around Happy Valley. Despite this, Jamella is now out of control and is now spread throughout the island. A biological control seems to be working in areas south of Fraser Island where the Jamella has been active for many years before it reached Fraser Island. QPWS has no plans to release Jamella's natural predator on Fraser Island. In the meantime places like Eli Creek are expected to lose a lot of their character unless the iconic Pandanus there are manually and individually treated to preserve at least a few.



**Almost every Pandanus on Fraser Island's eastern foredunes from Hook Point to Orchid Beach. Large scale treatment is impractical. Biological control does work.**



## Myrtle Rust

FIDO is unaware of any tree losses on Fraser Island due to Myrtle Rust but it can be assumed that Myrtle Rust is now widespread on the island. Myrtle rust is a fungal disease that affects plants in the Myrtaceae family. This includes eucalypts, bloodwoods, Lophostemons (Brush box), melaluucas (paperbarks), Syncarpias (Pibins), bottlebrushes, tea trees, lilly pillies and water gums). The disease is spread by wind, human activity and animals. It has a large potential hit list.

The impact of Myrtle Rust though is dependent on the load of rust that a plant is carrying and to a large extent this is weather dependent. So while no trees have yet died to anyone's knowledge on Fraser Island from Myrtle Rust some have been weakened.

Myrtle rust is recognised by spots or lesions that are brown to grey, they often have red to purple haloes that go all the way through the leaf. 10-12 days after the plant has been affected, the masses of yellow-orange spores appear on the lesion surface. Myrtle rust has the potential to have a significant impact on Fraser Island but so far while weakening the plants there is no evidence of outright death. However it will make all Myrtaceae vulnerable when affected by other stresses such as drought or other diseases.

### Loss due to poor judgement

A huge shock awaits anyone in the future visiting Pile Valley. A huge Pibin (*Syncarpia hillii*) has been recently laid flat right beside the main visitor area. The stump was 1.5 metres high and had a girth at breast height (gbh) of 3.1 metres. The tree that had once stood 47 metres high now lays flat on the forest floor. Ironically the stump reveals that this tree like so many other trees knocked over by professional arborists in recent year on this World Heritage island was solid to the core.

Fraser Island's OUV under the criterion that the island **contains areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance** states "*Majestic remnants of tall rainforest growing on tall sand dunes, a phenomenon believed to be unique in the world.*" The most visited area on Fraser Island where the public could see this phenomenon was Pile Valley. Now two of those Fraser Island giants are dead.

The irony is that for more than 100 years this area had been a sacred site. The Forestry Department refused to log it and set it aside as a gazetted Beauty Spot. The destruction was even more incomprehensible because a 40-metre brush box that hadn't stood in the way of the Pibin had also been felled. These trees though were solid to the core. There was an ill-founded paranoia that these trees might present a risk to the public. Already many giants close to the lakes, including Boomanjin, Boorangoora and Garawongera have been felled.

**The QPWS explained:** *These trees were recently felled by contracted arborists after they were assessed under the QPWS Fraser Island hazardous tree guidelines as being a risk to visitors and vehicles using the road and parking area, taking into consideration tree size, lean and likely fall zone. One tree was dead and a threat to the parking area, the other had poor structure - bifurcation with bark inclusion which had caused callous bulging (weak point) - at the top of the trunk there was a divided section with evident rot in the fork between two very heavy limbs. This tree was also a risk to visitors using the parking area.*

*Work is scheduled to tidy up the stump and logs to minimise any visual impact for visitors to this site.*

FIDO argues that the solidness of the stumps shows that the arborists got it WRONG. The contracted arborists showed absolutely no concern for the fact that Fraser Island was inscribed on the World Heritage List for its natural beauty and that Pile Valley had been an officially recognized Beauty Spot for almost a century. It took only minutes for the arborists to destroy these trees and the **beauty of Pile Valley that the Forestry Department had protected for decades**



**Until May 2014 this Pibin stood about 47 metres high with a 3.1 metre gbh (girth at breast height). It was condemned by an arborist ignorant of Fraser Island's OUV.**



**Ironically the sign reads "Rehabilitation Area"**

### Great Sandy Strait's Threatened Dolphins

After lengthy taxonomic revision *Sousa chinensis* in Australia is now recognized as a different species, *Sousa sahalensis*. The Great Sandy Strait and southern Hervey Bay has two sub populations, one northern and one southern. It is also very important habitat for the species in Australia. Studies have shown though that these two sub-populations had very low numbers — one below 60 the other just over 60 with a very high incidence of boat strikes on the southern population.

There will need to be urgent action to ensure this newly described inshore specialist *S. sahalensis* is protected now that it is no longer classified as *S. chinensis* in Australia. In QLD *Sousa. chinensis* was listed as near threatened under the NCA.



## A Very Dry Topic Fraser Island Rainfall 2013-14

**Rainfall Deficiency:** 2013 started out with a little rain until 25<sup>th</sup> January when Ex-Cyclone Oswald delivered just over 400 mm in four days by the Eurong readings. By 21<sup>st</sup> July the aggregate rainfall had tallied 1238 mm. Then the rain abruptly stopped. Only another 6.5 mm fell for the rest of July. No rain fell in August. The mini drought was extended in September when only 5mm fell on five wet days. October had 8.6 mm over 6 wet days. November 60.5 over 8 days and December, a hot month registered 34 mm over 8 days.

Thus although the annual total for 2103 of 1353.8 mm didn't look too bad and the lakes were still full the reality is that the last five months were exceptionally dry. While FIDO was working in the fens we noted that many trees were suffering stress from the prolonged exceptional dry.

The rainfall situation didn't improve during the start of 2014. January registered only 24.1 mm over 11 days and February recorded 64.4 mm over 10 days. The dry continued until 26<sup>th</sup> March when only 52.8 mm fell. The drought then eased when 179.4 mm fell over the next three days.

From 21<sup>st</sup> July to 26<sup>th</sup> March, a period that included the whole of a hot summer, Eurong registered only 355.9 mm of rainfall. That though was spread over 64 days of light falls. Only one fall on 10<sup>th</sup> March exceeded 20 mm.

In Early April the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) reported that Fraser Island was one of five places in Queensland where the 2013-14 summer rainfall was the lowest on record with only 33mm of rain falling in January-February compared with the median rainfall for this period of 272 mm. However the extraordinary rainfall deficiency began long before.

**The period from July 2013 to March 2014 was the driest 8-month period on record for Hervey Bay and probably the driest 8 month period since records began on Fraser Island. It lasted right through one of the hottest summers on record and this took a heavy toll on Fraser Island (Kagari's) vegetation.**

### New plant discoveries by FIDO Team

While working in Happy Valley in May attacking Abrus and Easter Cassia (removing between 1200 and 1500 of the latter) Peter Shooter and his team came across a fleshy thorny bush Peter thought it was evil and took it to the Herbarium for identification. The Herbarium advised that they had no previous records of this endangered plant from Fraser Island and are now seeking another specimen. However QPWS has known about the occurrence of this plant at other locations on Fraser Island for some time.

From Wikipedia: **Caesalpinia bonduc**, commonly known as **Gray Nicker**, is a species of flowering plant in the senna family, *Caesalpinaceae* that has a pantropical distribution. It is a vine-like shrub that reaches a length of 6 m (20 ft) and scrambles over other vegetation. Stems are covered in curved spines. Its 2 cm (0.79 in) gray seeds, known as nickernuts, are buoyant and durable enough to be dispersed by ocean currents.

**Another reference:** Seeds of this species are found washed up on beaches throughout the world. The seeds are used in the manufacture of necklaces in various places. The seeds are sometimes used by Indian children as marbles. Oil pressed from the seeds has been used to remove freckles from the face, as a cosmetic, and to stop discharges from ears.



### SS Maheno

It is now over 110 years since the keel of the 5,323 ton 400 feet long *SS Maheno* was laid down in Scotland. It was built for the Union Steamship Navigation Company and was the first turbine steamer to cross the Pacific Ocean. It was capable of 18 knots. It saw war service for New Zealand as a hospital ship treating and transporting wounded troops from Gallipoli and the Western Front. Following WWII it went back into civilian service operating the trans-Tasman passenger run between Sydney and Auckland.

The *Maheno* was fast but it had a narrow beam ("narrow-gutted") and rolled a lot to the passengers' discomfort. One impact of the Depression of the 1930s was that the *Maheno* drew not enough passengers and it was therefore sold to the Japanese for scrap steel. In July 1935, as the Japanese were towing the *Maheno* back to Japan (minus its propellers) with another smaller ship "*Oonah*" (also destined for scrap). It was caught in a wild East Coast low off the Fraser Coast. The tow-rope broke and after two days adrift the *Maheno* washed up on Fraser Island. As the ship drifted towards the island the skeleton crew saw the huge cliffs looming and thought that they would be smashed rather than have a soft landing. They therefore took to the life-boats and it isn't known whether the *Maheno* or the handful of its caretakers were the first to land on Fraser Island's beach where it has remained now for almost 80 years quietly rusting away.



The rapidly disappearing *SS Maheno* in May 2014



## Wild About Wild Rivers

**A Broken Promise:** Prior to the election of the Newman Government, John Sinclair met the Shadow Minister for Environment, Andrew Powell, at Parliament House to assess the impact of policy changes proposed by the then Opposition if they were elected on Fraser Island. John Sinclair specifically sought information on the impact to Fraser Island from the proposed repeal of the declaration of some Wild Rivers in Cape York Peninsula that had been clearly announced. Andrew Powell categorically advised that the repeal would be limited only to the disputed Cape York rivers and that that all declared Wild Rivers (including Fraser Island) would remain protected under the legislation. The repeal of the Wild Rivers legislation means that we can't take this Minister at his word. Claiming that a declaration as subordinate legislation is equivalent to the Wild River Act is stretching credibility to breaking point.

**Taking Fraser's water:** FIDO's concern is that the Wild Rivers legislation gave an additional layer of protection to the streams on Fraser Island, particularly Bogimbah Creek that has long been proposed as a future water supply for the city of Hervey Bay. Now the layers of protection are being peeled (and repealed) away. It began with changing the Nature Conservation Act so the cardinal principle that for more than 50 years sought to *"provide to the greatest possible extent for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values"* to now includes *"social, cultural and commercial use of Protected Areas"*. This partially negates the cardinal principle allowing economic exploitation of parks. It is amazing what a few word changes have done to affect the future of Queensland's National Parks.

The Act now allows greater social, cultural and **commercial uses** of protected areas, including national parks. So under the amended Nature Conservation Council the prospects of Wide Bay Water tapping into Bogimbah Creek are significantly increased.

**Consultation lacking:** The repeal of the Wild Rivers Legislation was done without any community consultation. Fraser Island World Heritage Advisory Committees were not consulted although all are administered through Andrew Powell's EHP Department. Community consultation is totally farcical with the Newman Government when the DEHP responsible for Wild Rivers legislation and administering World Heritage properties doesn't consult with stakeholders of the properties concerned.



Before 1980 there were no casuarinas along the beach south of Waddy Point, only small hummocks

## How the Watchdog Measures Up

The lack of data collected from Fraser Island has been a major impediment to formulating good management policies. For example, for some time FIDO has made a rough estimate that every visitor to Fraser Island results in one tonne of sand being shifted down a slope. This remains unverifiable because while there is very clear evidence that large volumes of sand are being shifted down roads in heavy rainfall events, so far nobody has any clear calculations of the volume involved.

- The QPWS has installed many "Whoa boys" with sand traps beside the roads to try to arrest the movement of sand down some slopes, however the amount of sand caught has not been quantified.
- Several sections of roads are rising above the surrounding land. For example, sections of the road leading from Lake McKenzie are more than a metre above the adjacent ground level.
- Many of the steeper roads are being down-cut, but again nobody has any idea of the volume of sand that is being washed out or over what period of time.
- Alluvial plumes are occurring in some lakes, notably Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) and Lake Allom but again while FIDO draws attention to the impact of such plumes, no measurements are made.
- One lake, Yidney Lake, has already been lost as a result of being progressively filled up with sand washed off adjacent roads during the last half century.
- Large "black holes" are developing in many roads. These begin as small puddles but are self-exacerbating and become ever deeper as vehicles drive through them splashing out both sand and water. The water drains back into ever deepening holes but the sand doesn't return.
- In many places there are now significant alluvial plumes where sediment washed off the road is being deposited and this sand is smothering some vegetation and changing the soil profiles most significantly by deepening the A horizon.

FIDO is now attempting to try to quantify the volume of sand shifted by heavy rain in an attempt to help better manage this very serious problem.

**Data Deficiency:** There is a sad lack of historical weather data from Fraser Island. This is attributable to a deficit of weather stations to collect data. Despite the area and spread of the island there are only three BOM recording stations: Sandy Cape (that has records back to 1871) Eurong (records back to 1978) and Kingfisher Resort (records from 1992). These are supplemented by two mainland BOM weather stations at Hervey Bay and Rainbow Beach. The daily records are put online for Hervey Bay. The Hervey Bay records though only date back to 1999.

There has been a deficit of rain gauges on Fraser Island for some time. In addition to the BOM records other records are collected from Dundubara. Now with grants to support other FIDO projects including monitoring and the fens, FIDO has been able to acquire some very sophisticated rain gauges to gather rainfall data. These will help augment the BOM records. So far three rain gauges have been installed at Lake Coomboo, Central Station and Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora). However it may be some time before the records are cumulative to give a larger long-term pattern of rainfall distribution around Fraser Island.

## A Very Uneven Playing Field

**Conservative Australian governments seem intent on starving the environment movement of funds to force us into (a) total submission or (b) total extinction or (c) total silence as they blame environmental measures for impeding the rampant economic growth demanded by big business.**

**Taxpayer subsidised lobbyists:** It is interesting how governments who argue for a level playing field can tip the balance so deliberately against environmental protection. While the State and Federal Governments have been defunding voluntary not-for-profit conservation and environmental groups we are just learning how vested interests are able to buy political favours with tax-payer subsidised lobbying. The Commonwealth Government subsidizes the lobbying by vested interests to the tune of millions of dollars annually. Now it is denying the conservation movement any Federal funds that would help move towards a more level playing field when weighing up environmental considerations. It was never overly generous. In 2013-14 the total amount handed out to all voluntary Environmental and Heritage Organizations in Australia under the Gillard Government was \$1.3M. Under the Abbott it is \$0 (NIL).

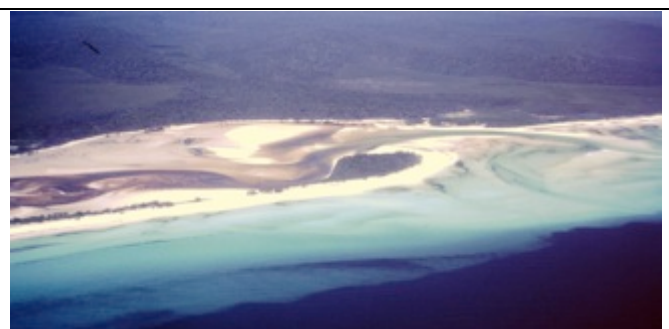
**Removal of other Grants:** Our Governments are for sale to those who stand to make the most profit from their decisions. The not-for-profit environmental movement wasn't playing on a level playing field before BIG business persuaded the State and Federal Governments that the environmental movement was an impediment they could do without in their rape, pillage and destruction of Australia's natural heritage and resources. They targeted any organization that was a thorn in their side. The deliberate targeting of the Environmental Defenders Office around Australia is clear evidence of that. Now their attempts to silence the opposition to policies impacting on the environment a step further and defunded the voices of the voluntary conservation movement.

**Tax-deductibility questioned:** Having cut off the small government grants to organizations such as the EDO, ACF and QCC and regional groups doesn't seem to be enough for some politicians though. Some now want to remove the tax-deductibility of any donations given to organizations such as The Wilderness Society and the Environmental Defenders Organization. Doubtless there are even some politicians and certainly many corporations who wish that the voluntary conservation lobby didn't even exist.

While governments pretend that there is a virtue in saving a very miserly \$1.3M on the expenditure side of their budgets by cutting funds for the environment movement, they continue to allow millions of dollars on the revenue side to be lost by allowing extravagant lobbying to remain taxpayer funded. This makes for a very uneven playing field

**Access to the right ear:** It was interesting Four Corners discovered that by paying \$5,000 (tax deductible business expenses) to the then Brisbane Lord Mayor, Campbell Newman, Australian Water Holdings was able to lobby for a lucrative deal in Queensland. Perhaps it is because conservationists can't pay a fee to get access to the National Parks Minister in Queensland that he hasn't met with any true green groups since his appointment over two years ago. Big business knows that all of the money that they spend lobbying you to get their destructive projects approved is coming out of taxpayers' pockets as tax deductions.

**Corporations don't vote:** Despite the very uneven playing field in financial terms there is one overwhelming advantage for the voluntary conservation lobby. Despite their profit motive, and easy (affordable) access to politicians. Despite their access and generosity to politicians, corporations can't vote. Only citizens can vote and the vested interests are worried that despite their huge spending campaigns to get public support, such as removing the Super Profits Mining tax, citizen voters are still being influenced by environmental considerations. **Conservationists need to focus on reaching the citizens who vote rather than the politicians that we can't afford to reach.**



Wathumba Estuary at low tide

### Sport Wins

Playing fields are relatively well funded though compared with government expenditure on protecting our environment. Multiple media announcements about great government largesse for sport needs much more attention.

In addition to other government support each of the 90 Queensland members of Australia's Commonwealth Games team to go to Glasgow received a bonus grant of \$2,700 each. The spending doesn't stop there. The Queensland Government will spend \$320M in the next financial year on sport and community infrastructure to allow the Gold Coast to host the Commonwealth Games.

It is great for the athletes and the entertainment industry to have this huge pork-barrelling largesse but there are few elite athletes whereas our environment that affects every living person in the state. There needs to be a better public interest test applied to the distribution of public expenditure. While expenditure on environmental protection languishes it is interesting to reflect on the generosity of grants being handed out by the Newman Government in other areas.

It would be great if the environment needed to sustain healthy Queenslanders was funded as generously as sports but the National Parks Minister seems focused only on sport.

### Local Government keeps the change

The Wide Bay Burnett Environmental Council recently alerted FIDO that the Fraser Coast Regional Council had collected \$4.5M+ in environmental levies in the period 2010-2014 period but had spent less than \$3.0M. With the natural environment especially Fraser Island playing such a large role in the regional economy one would have thought that the local Council would have been keen to do as much for the environment as it could afford instead of seemingly pocketing over \$1.5 M

## Collaborations yield results

For more than a decade there have been some very productive collaborations between the University of the Sunshine Coast and FIDO that have been to the benefit of Fraser Island generally and to both organizations. Now the collaborations have stepped up by some notches.

Both helped establish FINIA. FINIA bring government and non-government groups together to works on commonly shared objectives. It has facilitated some great cooperation and outcomes to improve Fraser Island's natural integrity. Within this group there have been many collaborations, such as between local government, QPWS, volunteer groups and USC in weed management, and between QPWS and volunteers in building a wonderful extension of Fraser Island's Great Walk and in suggesting priorities for research projects.

**Conference/s:** For a decade FIDO has been organizing biennial Fraser Island conferences to provide a forum for discussion and sharing of new knowledge about Fraser Island with a much wider interested public. The 2006 Conference was held at Sippy Downs but the next three conferences were held in Brisbane. FIDO and the USC are collaborating to stage the next Fraser Island Conference "*Sand, Sea and Sun*" at Sippy Downs in the Innovation Centre on Wednesday 12th August. FIDO is now calling for papers to be presented at that conference.

FIDO is also interested in helping improve the usage of Dilli Village as an educational and research centre. One contribution has been to produce a short history of Dilli Village. FIDO was intimately involved in developing the name and was amongst the first to make use of it, even appearing as witnesses when it became a court-room.

Now that FIDO that is involved in a large project building a walking track, FIDO is trying to facilitate making research by helping locate facilities on the island that will help extend the research footprint of the USC into more remote parts of the island and serve as adjuncts to Dilli Village. FIDO hopes that barracks near Lake Allom that we helped restore will be used as an accommodation for researchers wanting to work in the most pristine lakes and rainforest and researchers will be able to use part of the barracks not accessible to George Haddock Track hikers.

**Current and projects:** USC research is helping FIDO understand some of the issues that have been puzzling the organization for years including proving the age of many Melaluucas on Fraser Island that FIDO believes could be over 3000 years old and the full impact of sediment being moved along and off the roads on Fraser Island. The collaborations between FIDO and the USC are proving to be mutually beneficial.

### Impossible to Save Fraser Island Now

It is sad that if the laws enacted by the Queensland and Federal Governments in the last two years had been in place in the 1970s it wouldn't be possible to save Fraser Island.

1. We wouldn't be entitled to object to mining leases
2. The Commonwealth can't/wont override State decisions under the EPBC Act.
3. Now governments provide no support for voluntary conservation groups and legal challenges — only barriers to any form of community advocacy in the public interest.

## George Haddock Track Progress

The work on the barracks at Lake Allom is all but complete. The leaky roof has been fixed. Every door and window has been fixed and the verandah levelled. A tank has been installed to supply drinking water. It is a comfortable secure and cobase for volunteers to work from on other parts of the project. It is planned to replace the water-damaged ceiling in the Common Room during October's fourth and final working bee of 2014 under the \$25,000 QPWS Friends of Parks grant. The Common Room will be eventually available to hikers on the 52-kilometre walking track. However it is hoped that the remaining part of the barracks will have wider use apart from accommodating maintenance teams. These rooms can also accommodate researchers, allowing them closer access to study the most pristine forests and lakes of Fraser Island and help improve our understanding of them.

The two sheds are now also waterproof. New roofs had to be placed on both and both required new doors to secure them. They are now both secure and already storing our equipment and tractor that has been purchased to assist with the project.

While earlier work heavily focused on the buildings and repairs, the main efforts have now turned to track clearing. In July five Sinclairs reviewed the current state of the project and the degree of difficulty to finish clearing the 52-kilometre track itself. They found that many former roads are overgrown with such dense regrowth that they could only push through. In the southern stage they covered only 8 kilometres in 8 hours of hard walking.

Breakdown of the work to be done between Lake Garawongera and Arch Cliffs

- \* 20.7 kilometres (8 sections) are already cleared and now only require on-going maintenance to keep them open.
- \* 10.9 kilometres (10 sections) require Native Title Approval.
- \* 3.6 kilometres (3 sections) of former roads that requiring clearing are currently isolated by Native Title considerations.
- \* 15.9 kilometres (9 sections) of accessible former roads still require clearing.

Between 19th and 25th October FIDO and NPAQ will have another 20 volunteers to finish off the 2014 Friends of Parks project which has so far contributed almost 1000 of on-ground hours (excluding travel time, and breaks). There could have been 50 volunteers based on applications and inquiries but 20 is the maximum that the resources allow. This workforce should get most of the 15.9 kms that is possible cleared, although the density of regrowth will make some sections very challenging indeed.

FIDO and NPAQ have planned further stages to complete the George Haddock Track but require QPWS and Native Title approval before they can proceed. However they have a formidable army of volunteers waiting in the wings for when this approval might be forthcoming.

**"Climate Change is one of the most democratic of all destroyers. It recognises neither geography nor colour nor class. Whoever is at fault, all of us are going to be victims of this catastrophe."**

Bittu Sahgal, one of India's foremost writers and activists on the topic of conservation



## Lifting Fraser's Profile

**FIDO isn't alone in claiming that Fraser Island is the Cinderella of Australian World Heritage sites. It is very significant that the recently released Fraser Coast Tourism Plan gives a high priority to "Rebuilding Fraser Island's status as a world heritage area." Recently some senior professors at the University of the Sunshine Coast have also commented on how much Fraser Island has fallen off so many agendas.**

**Fraser Island is one of the most stunning World Heritage places. It already meets three of the four natural World Heritage criteria. Few other World Heritage sites can boast that. Yet it remains under-rated and under-stated. It will only get the recognition that its outstanding natural values deserve when more people and more organizations are prepared to speak up more actively. If Fraser Island slips off the agenda it is much easier to get away with actions that devalue it. The conservation movement as a whole can't let that happen.**

**Left off the List:** Probably the most demonstrable example of how Fraser Island has slipped from the agenda is that it wasn't included in the sixteen areas of Australian National Landscapes described as "*places of great cultural, natural and spiritual significance*" and Australia's "*best destinations to experience Australia's outstanding nature and culture*". Places listed as National Landscapes include Kangaroo Island, Flinders Ranges and Sydney Harbour as well as most of the other Australian World Heritage sites. These are now being promoted internationally by Tourism Australia and Fraser Island doesn't get a mention. It is a stunning revelation of how Fraser Island has slipped so far out of the national consciousness

**Threats Ignored:** In the 1970s Fraser Island was top of the Australian environmental agenda when it was then centre of the nation's biggest environmental battle. What has happened that has let it slip off the agenda since? FIDO can't do it alone. There are many issues that public awareness needs raising. It needs more than just FIDO to speak up for Fraser Island For example, although the Great Barrier Reef is seriously threatened by climate change, it has only been FIDO to point out that that on a per area basis the impact of climate change on Fraser Island is most likely to be far greater. Tree species, Scribbly Gums, Satinay, Blackbutt and Tallowwood that account for over half the larger trees on Fraser Island are at the northern limit of their range. Temperature rise could cause all these species to retreat or even disappear. The highly erodible coastline is extremely vulnerable to sea-level rise and there is evidence of this already occurring. But what other organizations are speaking up for Fraser Island?



**Neglected by the Feds:** Fraser Island is in the Federal seat of Wide Bay held by Australia's Deputy Prime Minister yet by most criteria the Commonwealth Government is less generous to Fraser Island than any other Australian World Heritage site. It just isn't a fair or equitable arrangement yet the Commonwealth Government gloss over their neglect of Fraser Island with endless spin.

**Neglected by the State:** Fraser Island fares even worse at a State level when it comes to allocation of resources and interest. That is demonstrated by the declaration by the Newman Government that it is not going to proceed with the World Heritage renomination of Fraser Island and Cooloola that would recognize additional values of the most remarkable natural area in our region. Yet FIDO seems to be the only advocacy organization that is complaining.

**No Visitor Centre:** Every other Australian World Heritage site either has a world class Visitor Centre or one being developed. Even most National Parks in other states have some most impressive visitor centres. Kangaroo Island isn't a World Heritage site and with no more annual visitation than Fraser has at least two excellent National Park Visitor Centres. A Visitor Centre for Fraser Island is not even under any consideration by the Queensland Government. Yet it can contribute millions of dollars to building museums in Outback Queensland while neglecting to interpret Fraser Island values to the world.

### Badging Fraser's OUV

FIDO has been engaged for several months now developing a logo that it is hoped will be used as widely as possible to "badge" the island and to focus on the key element underlying its World Heritage status, the sand. The draft logo attempts to show the nexus between the development soil profiles and mass of the vegetation above ground level and the depth of the "B" horizon in the soil profile. It is hoped that this will focus wider public attention on the world heritage values of this amazing island rather than only on its tourist attraction.



### Blue Tiger Butterfly - *Tirumala hamata*

This year very high Blue Tiger Butterfly populations turned up on Fraser Island. These occasional migration events are mainly associated with hot summers. Now more common. They migrate sometimes as far south as Coffs Harbour. When the temperatures drop they return North. On previous migrations clouds of Blue tigers were observed heading out to sea like lemmings. In late May 2014 large numbers were observed by FIDO volunteers single-mindedly heading due north up the island wondering what might happen when they reached Sandy Cape.



## Photos from FIDO's Archives

Over the past 43 years FIDO has assembled an amazing library of photographs documenting Fraser Island as it was when the various snapshots were taken. Future MOONBIs will feature some of these photos and discuss the subsequent environmental changes that have occurred since.

### Corroboree Beach

In 1978 Corroboree Beach became an official Queensland place name describing the area of foredunes south of Indian Head and named for the large number of middens there. The area behind the beach, previously locally known as “the Desert” was officially named Tuckee Sandblow

This 1972 photo by Cynthia O’Gorman shows that there were then no trees of any sort growing close to the beach for some kilometres south of Indian Head.



In 1990 the QPWS made a decision to protect the numerous middens in the Desert area from erosion and possible interference by planting casuarinas. At that stage beach spinifex that didn’t occur on Fraser. This 1990 photo taken on the ground shows the casuarinas becoming established.



The casuarinas took off and grew like weeds almost completely colonizing the former “Desert” and by 2011 this is what it looked like.



## Vale Ronda Cook

In April FIDO lost another of its founders and life members, Ronda Cook. Ronda was a feisty and energetic woman who did so much to preserve both the city of Hervey Bay and Fraser Island. She made enormous contribution to the Fraser Coast region and its government during the 1960’s and 1970s when she served the community both on and off the local government. One of her great legacies are the hundreds of trees along the Hervey Bay Esplanade that would otherwise have been removed to widen the Esplanade. When Ronda said “Over my dead body” she literally meant it. She climbed some of those trees and sat there until the bulldozer threat was removed. The most obvious tree still remains at Scarness where the esplanade widening had to surrender to Ronda’s determination to keep a tree-lined foreshore that is today one of Ronda’s legacies.

Ronda brought the same energy and determination with her to FIDO. She was innovative and unconventional. To stop people walking off the FIDO constructed boardwalk on in 1981-82 by placing prickly pear to deter errant walkers She became a Councillor of the Burrum Shire Council where despite the pro-development (some at any cost) she managed to make an enormous contribution. In the next election she contested as a Mayoral candidate and came within a handful of votes of winning. Had she won Hervey Bay today would be a much more natural place and the travesties that have befallen the foreshore since Ronda departed the scene would probably have been avoided.

In 1982 Ronda and Freda Goodsell, both grand-mothers decided that they shouldn’t sit in Hervey Bay while the Franklin River in Tasmania was in imminent risk of being flooded. They went to Tasmania, where they endured incredible discomfort until they were arrested for supporting the blockade on the Gordon River. They were proven right and they helped keep the Franklin flowing free.

Ronda played many parts in FIDO’s campaigns. She was part of the pre-breakfast flying inspections we would take to expose the environmental destruction of sandmining. She participated in meetings, safaris and field trips, the many working bees we had to build the first Eli Creek Boardwalk and more. She was also a leader of the Wide Bay Burnett Conservation Council.



### Fraser Island Forum— Sunshine Coast

Members would have received notification of FIDO’s Fraser Island Forum at the **Horton Golf Club at 7.30 pm on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> October.** The Sunshine Coast contribute an increasing proportion of the volunteers for FIDO’s programs and with an increasing number of working bees currently being held and planned FIDO is keen to engage with our supporters in the home regions as well as in the field.

This forum will enable supporters to learn more about our various field programs as well as dingo management, the fens, the light rail proposal, the George Haddock Track etc.