

FIDO's K'Gari E-News No 10 (30th July, 2017)

A very busy period for FIDO leading up to the 7th Biennial Conference on 16th August

The Fraser Island Defenders Organisation has been engaged in many priority projects so far in 2017 with our biggest project our Biennial K'gari Conference coming up on 16th August. See details pp 3-5.

Already there have been six working bees to restore the natural integrity of Eurong and Happy Valley and another to carry out maintenance on the George Haddock Track. In between we have been making submissions including to a Senate Inquiry on the impact of climate change on infrastructure and the Queensland Parliamentary inquiry on a ban on lightweight plastic shopping bags and the introduction of a container refund scheme. (p2)

FIDO's alarm bells began ringing increasingly louder as more details of the open-cut Colton Coal mine emerged and we realized that we had been deceived about the scale of the mine and as we learnt more about the process of acidification and heavy metal release into the Mary River at the rate of 200 litres (10 x 20 litre containers) per second. Thus 46 years after FIDO was formed to stop Fraser Island on Fraser Island we have another fight against mining that will impact on the natural integrity of our beloved island on our hands.

Colton Mine Impacts

Q: What does the Colton Coal mine have to do with Fraser Island and Great Sandy Strait?

A: An awful lot.

That "awful" adjective is chosen deliberately. Although the Colton open-cut coalmine was approved without producing any Environmental Impact Statement about information its impact on the natural integrity of the Great Sandy Strait Ramsar site and the Fraser Island World Heritage site have dribbled out since and these deserve to have alarm bells ringing loud for anyone who cares about the Fraser Coast Region's crowning jewels.

Colton Coal mine escaped producing the requisite EIS by stating in their lease application that they would be mining less than half a million tonnes coal annually (0.5 Mtpa) for ten years. If it was more than that they would be required to submit an EIS with their application. The latest data confirms reserves at 12 million tonnes and in the proposed 10 year life span of the mine's production that would more than double the output to 1.2Mtpa and require an Environmental Impact Statement.

Because the mine will be a large and deep open-cut mine, the first in the Maryborough basin, groundwater from surrounding aquifers will enter the mine pit increasing the acidity and carrying a range of harmful minerals. The mine proponents admit that three of these, Cadmium, Cobalt and Manganese, will be pushed to levels

considered unsafe for the environmentally sensitive ecosystem of the Great Sandy Strait.

A much larger threat though will arise through the extent of that acid water that will be discharged into the Mary River just 8 kilometres up from the Great Sandy Strait Ramsar site. Once the coal seam is exposed to air the sulphur in the Pyrites begins an endless chain reaction generating sulphuric acid. This poses a huge environmental threat to the natural integrity of Great Sandy Strait arises. Because it is necessary to keep water out of the pit, the mine will need to discharge 946 megalitres of untreated mine water annually. This means that 200 litres per second (equivalent of 10 x 20 litre containers) will be discharged directly into the Mary River. This is 5.8% of the average daily Mary River flow.

Another threat to the Ramsar site comes from another direction. The Colton Coal mine is located catchment of the Susan River. In its lower reaches the Susan also forms part of the Great Sandy Strait Ramsar site. This means that if containment dams adjacent to the mine that hold acid and metaliferous forming waste overflow or are breached in flood events more toxic compounds may end up in the Susan River estuary and the Ramsar site.

Heavy metals do not breakdown like other pollutants do and they will continue to accumulate in the sediment and potentially in the water for year after year while the mine is in operation. While they may plateau when the mine ceases operation they will persist in the sediment and continue entering the food chain long after. If mining proceeds there is no intention to backfill the void which means that leaching into the pit will continue long after mining ceases.

Whatever pollutants end up in the marine environment may never be known because currently it isn't proposed to carry out any on-going monitoring of the sediments of the Mary River or Great Sandy Strait at any point. It seems that the natural integrity of the World Heritage Fraser Island and the world recognized Ramsar site aren't worth as much as 12 million tonnes of coal.



Map showing proximity of the Colton Coal Mine in the upper Susan River catchment to the Mary River and the Great Sandy Strait Ramsar site.

Beer Cans, Bottle and K'gari Waste

If you wonder why FIDO so strongly supports the Queensland Government's Waste Reduction and Recycling Amendment Bill 2017, you need to consider how much it may save the public purse in garbage removal from K'gari. Two key features of the proposed legislation are a ban on lightweight plastic shopping bags and the introduction of a container refund scheme for Queensland. While strongly supporting the Bill for what it may do for waste reduction generally, its implications for Fraser Island were not immediately apparent until FIDO examined the implications for Fraser Island (K'gari).

Until Fraser Island became Queensland's first Recreation Management area in 1985 rubbish just accumulated at any informal dumping site on the island. Most of these were stretched out along the beach. The worst of these was a kilometre south of Eurong. When a strong westerly wind blew the plastic bags from these dumps blew off the dumps across the beach and into the sea. When a strong South Easter blew the plastic bags went bush littering the forest. With the establishment of fenced in Waste Transfer Stations the stray plastic bags are mostly contained but we hope the legislation will mitigate this environmental hazard altogether.



The Horse Paddock Dump a kilometre south of Eurong village back in the late 1970s

The bulk of K'gari's waste and rubbish is left at waste transfer stations from where it is removed for mainland disposal. There are Waste Transfer stations at the villages, Central Station and along the beach. The substantial costs of this waste management strategy are shared between the Fraser Coast Regional Council and the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service.

The Waste Transfer stations also provided separate repositories for containers especially the thousands of beer cans and bottles emptied out on K'gari each week. Until recently each station had a recycling component with bulk bins for general waste and yellow-topped bulk bins for recyclable material (paper, cans and bottles).

Last year the recycling component scheme abandoned because there was so much extraneous general rubbish was being mixed with the beverage containers in the bins that had been designated for recycling that continuation with this scheme couldn't be justified. Now all unseparated rubbish including recyclable beverage containers are all dumped in the same bulk-bins and delivered to a mainland landfill.

There has been a long tradition for Fraser Island (K'gari) fishers and campers to be accompanied by generous supplies

of beer and other beverages all in small containers. The container refund scheme will provide an incentive at least some Fraser Island visitors, campers and residents to maintain their beverage container and take them back to the mainland to cash them in and retrieve their deposits. This might help offset some of the costs of their K'gari holiday. This could significantly reduce the bulk deposited at Fraser Island's waste transfer stations on thus reducing the cost of waste removal. There is also an incentive to kids or some "bower birds". To mop up containers of those unwilling to take them back to the mainland.

The issue of plastic shopping bags entering the marine environment is well documented so while not as obvious on K'gari the new legislation will improve the health of the marine environment that surrounds it

It is interesting to consider just how relevant the new legislation is for K'gari and its immediate environs and it will be more interesting to see just how much the volume of rubbish is reduced by.

Whilst litter from discarded containers into the bush on Fraser Island isn't as serious a problem as occurs elsewhere, unfortunately it still persists as lazy inconsiderate yobbos dump their garbage where it is most convenient for them. Most of this is garden waste creating a problem for weed management, but campers waste also occasionally is illegally dumped. FIDO volunteers are constantly picking up improperly disposed containers while working on weed management. We believe that container refund scheme would reduce this.



The informal dump at what is now the entrance to Cathedral Beach in 1980.



K'gari's Waste Transfer Stations have undergone a significant tidy-up in but the failure to separate recyclables remains a problem as does the unsightliness of the Happy Valley station from the well used cross island road.

Conference Celebrate K'gari's 25 Years of World Heritage

The Fraser Island Conference on 16th August will celebrate two landmark anniversaries of this amazing sand island — 40 years since the end of sandmining and 25 years since it's K'gari's World Heritage listing.

Sandmining ended on 31 December 1976 after six intense years of FIDO's advocacy and in December 1992 following the end of logging Fraser Island was inscribed on the World Heritage List .

More than a hundred delegates are expected to attend the *Time Tide and Tourism* conference at the University of the Sunshine Coast at Sippy Downs. It will be the 7th Biennial Fraser Island conference and bring together a large array of people concerned with the future of the island.

Conference convenor, John Sinclair AO said that the conference will look back in time to the great controversy over sandmining in the 1970s with the Commissioner of the 1975-76 Fraser Island Inquiry, Dr John Hookey, that brought an end to the mining opening the conference and one of the special advisors to the Commission Chris Loorham would be review the transition over 40 years from confrontation to collaboration.

Classic music (ABC FM) broadcaster and historian, Dr Martin Buzacott, who has a long connection with the Great Sandy Region will be the Keynote Speaker discussing one of the recognized criteria for the island's World Heritage listing when he discusses "*Drawing Artistic Inspiration from the Landscape*".

As well as discussing the tides of time the tides of Great Sandy Strait will come into some scrutiny with a paper on the marine life in the Ramsar listed waterway and the possible impact on these from the proposed open cut Colton Coal Mine.

Trend in tourism will also be subjected to some scrutiny with a presentation on a study now getting underway on sustainable transport options on K'Gari (Fraser Island) and some insights on how some overseas World Heritage sites are managing huge visitor number.

A feature of the conference will be two Q&A panels. One addresses the increasing role and ways in which Citizen Science in assisting management of K'gari. Another panel Tackles the topic of tackling the island's invasive pests and particularly the role that volunteers are playing to help preserve the natural integrity of K'Gari (Fraser Island).

Details of the conference can be found at www.fido.org.au On-line registrations can be made at: <http://www.queenslandconservation.org.au/fido>

Time, Tide & Tourism

Program

7th Biennial Fraser Island (K'Gari) Conference

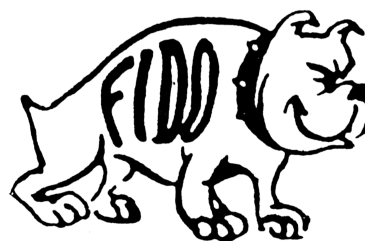
University of the Sunshine Coast
Sippy Downs, Innovations Centre
Wednesday, 16th August, 2017
(9.00 am to 5.00 pm)

Sponsored by the Queensland Government



Queensland
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Organized by Fraser Island Defenders
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and



The Conference is to be complementary to scientific Symposium being organized by the University of the Sunshine Coast. This T,T & T conference is targeted at a more general audience of laypersons dealing with issues more in the ordinary citizen's domain.

Art work inspired by the 2016 Bioblitz will be exhibited by the Fraser Coast Regional Artists and Tutors (RATS) will be on display in the Innovations Centre Conference venue.

Registration 8.30 to 9.00 am

90 minute opening session 9.00am to 10.30 am

Chair: John Sinclair AO, FIDO

Butchulla welcome to K'Gari Conference — Malcolm Burns

Welcome to the University of the Sunshine Coast: Prof Greg Hill, Vice Chancellor

Opening — **Dr John Hookey**, Presiding Commissioner 1975-76 Fraser Island Environmental Inquiry

Keynote: Martin Buzacott — *Drawing Artistic Inspiration from the Landscape*

Morning Tea - 10.30 — 11.00 am

11.00 — 1.00 pm — A 2 hour session for presentation of papers

Chair: **Dr Kim Walker**, University of the Sunshine Coast
Five speakers each with 24 minutes for presentations and questions.

"K'Gari's New Values Based Management Plan" Emma Henderson, Manager – Planning, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing

"Fraser Island and the sands of times— from confrontation to collaborations — the Inquiry 40 years on." Chris Loorham, Lawyer, planner, mediator, and adviser to the Inquiry in that recommended the end of sandmining on K'gari in 1976.

"Incorporating coral into the tidal tapestry: classification, typology and mapping of the intertidal and subtidal benthic habitats of the Wide Bay / Great Sandy region" Maria Zann A/Senior Program Officer, Intertidal and Subtidal Classification and Mapping CQ Biodiversity Assessment, Wetlands, Species & Protected Area Analysis Conservation and Sustainability Services Division, Department of Environment and Heritage Protection

"The Colton Coal mine and the Great Sandy Strait Ramsar site" Dr. Tanzi Smith, Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee.

"Exploring Sustainable Transport Options for K'gari" — Ross Waldron Barbara Winkley Fellow and PhD candidate

"Handling the hordes — Lessons from how natural World Heritage sites manage visitation" — John Sinclair, AO, FIDO founder has visited over 100 World Heritage sites both natural and cultural around the world studying how visitation is being handled in other World Heritage sites.

Lunch 1.00 pm to 1.45 pm

1.40 — 3.10 pm **Citizen Science Session**

Chair: Dr. Gabriel Conroy, University of the Sunshine Coast

This session addresses the increasing and diverse roles citizen scientists are playing to help K'Gari management. There will be an interactive panel session starting with

each panellist making a short presentation on their topic followed by a Q&A Session

7 Panellists:

The Role of Weather Stations on K'Gari — Keith Sinclair
The University of the Sunshine Coast's Repository — Beth Crawter

Art and citizen science in action — Kelli McGregor
Suzanne Wilson — *Developing the Nursery to meet Growing demand*

Perspectives from participants in the 2016 Beach to Birrabeen BioBlitz

- Patrick Leonard — Fungi
- Shelley Gage — Plants
- Maria Miller — Overview

"Citizen Science and other USC Initiatives on K'gari" Dr Kim Walker, University of the Sunshine Coast (20 minutes)

Afternoon Tea 3.10 to 3.40 pm

3.40 – 5.00 pm

Chair: **Sue Sargent**, Chair of FINIA and Fraser Island World Heritage Community Advisory Committee

Tackling K'Gari's Invasive Pests

A 60 minute panel session on weeds and other invasive pests starting with each panellist making a short presentation.

7 Panellists:

Peter Shooter — *Weed Management at Happy Valley*
Maree Prior — *Weed Management at Eurong*

Juliet Musgrave — *Fraser Coast Regional Council's Weed Management*

Linda Behrendorff — *QPWS Pest Management*

Don Bradley — *Sandy Cape and Great Sandy Strait Weed management*

Linda Wills — *The role of BMRG in Keeping the Great Sandy Great*

Sue Sargent will summarize the day's proceedings and close the conference.

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K'gari's Name Change

The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service has officially changed the name of the "Fraser Island Section of the Great Sandy National Park" to the **"K'gari (Fraser Island) Section of the Great Sandy National Park"**. The new K'gari name only applies to the National Park but not yet to the whole island.

FIDO's Volunteer Program

FIDO's program relies heavily on volunteers. We appreciate the donation of the many volunteers who donate weeks of their time to manage the weeds of K'Gari (Fraser Island) and to restoring the natural integrity particularly in Eurong and Happy Valley villages. FIDO will soon be issuing a call for volunteers for our 2018 program.

