

FIDO's K'gari E-News No 14 (16th August, 2018)

Opportunities to help FIDO protect K'gari and Great Sandy Strait

The lead-up to the Cooloola BioBlitz to be held next weekend, 24-26 August, has been a particularly busy time for FIDO activities. The BioBlitz has been a wonderful collaboration with Cooloola Coast Care. It is on target to have 100 participants as it attracts attention from far and wide. It should advance both citizen science and our understanding of the biodiverse Cooloola.

Meanwhile other key projects are progressing very positively. On Wednesday FIDO and collaborating partners yesterday launched the \$25,000 research study into Great Sandy Strait.

FIDO is continuing to advance the planning for the 2019 **Community Collaborations and Culture Conference**. We are collaborating with the Butchulla to stage our first conference on Butchulla Country at the University of the Sunshine Coast's Fraser Coast Campus on **Saturday 31st August 2019**. It is shaping up to be the most interesting and interactive of FIDO's 8 biennial conferences.

While this is ticking along FIDO continues to take a lead in weed management in and surrounding the villages of Eurong and Happy Valley. FIDO has been dealing with urban weeds on K'gari for decades. For the last decade we have been supported by the BMRG through the National Landcare program.

The Turnbull Government's undeclared war on conservation groups in particular and the natural environment in general is very subtle but it has now cut off FIDO's funding to assist volunteers to carry out this labour of dedication. It seems more than coincidence that the only Federal funding, a paltry \$145,000 per annum provided to assist Fraser Island management, hasn't increased for 15 years and this continues to be eroded in value by annual inflation.

These and other stories are elaborated in more detail on other pages so please read on.



Representatives of the three organizations sponsoring the Great Sandy Strait Research Project at the launch at Mary River Heads with two of the scientists Assoc Prof Dr Ron Johnstone (left) and Dr Dan Harris (right) beside of the banner

Great Sandy Strait Research launch

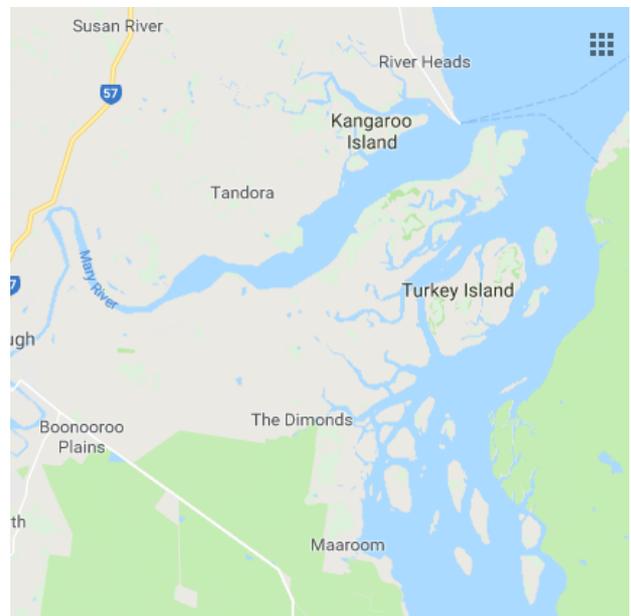
A \$25,000 research program into Great Sandy Strait partially funded by FIDO (\$10,000) was launched at Mary River Heads on 15th August aiming to assess any environmental impact of the proposed Colton coal mine on the Ramsar and World Heritage site.

The hydrodynamic research will be undertaken by a multidisciplinary team of three from the University of Queensland led by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ron Johnstone to assess how far the heavy metals released from the coal mine reach in this biologically rich ecosystem.

The research is being funded by a collaboration of three non-government not for profit organizations, the Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee, the Fraser Island Defenders Organisation and the Greater Mary Association.

The Research Oversight Committee met with Dr Johnstone and Dr Dan Harris to launch the research project at Mary River Heads with a preliminary inspection of the areas potentially impacted ahead of the research that is expected to conclude in June 2019. If the study establishes that heavy metals released from the coal mine are likely to be carried into Great Sandy Strait it will have far-reaching implication for the whole Fraser Coast marine ecosystems.

Our three voluntary organizations consider that protecting the natural integrity of Great Sandy Strait is of such a high priority that we are prepared to commit significant sums from our precious financial resources to get a definitive answer to the critical question of heavy metal pollution in the marine environment



The discharge from the Colton mine into the Mary River will occur at the Devils Elbow at the left adjacent to the Maryborough-Hervey Bay road. The research aims to establish how far the heavy metal pollution reaches down-stream and into Great Sandy Strait and to assess potential impacts.

FIDO's War on Weeds

FIDO's volunteer programs at Eurong and Happy Valley in July and August were fully booked and made enormous advances extending the area of weed control. The July Eurong Bush Regeneration Program had 13 participants with most being repeat volunteers. Six came from interstate (all returning) and another from Germany. Returning volunteers have generally high productivity. Features of the week to be noted were:

- Over 300 on-ground hours were worked. *FIDO actually counts only the hours of on-ground work. This doesn't include hours of administration and planning nor the hour of travel to reach K'gari.*
- Over 150 plants raised by FIDO in the QPWS nursery were given away to island landholders in an exercise planned to be repeated for other villages when it rains.
- The plants given away were more than replaced at the nursery as the range of plants continues to expand. Additionally, FIDO has established a second nursery to grow larger hardier plants such as pandanus and to avoid cluttering the QPWS nursery.
- the lantana attack extending our work further into USL



Preparing for the Plant Give-Away at the nursery

Earlier this month Peter Shooter led his 19th team of volunteers to work for a week purging those areas of Happy Valley where he is allowed to work on the nasty weeds. This aggregates to close to a half a year of his life as a dedicated volunteer working on Happy Valley weeds. During the week the team of 9 extended the area purged of Easter Cassia since Cassia Blitz in early May further on the Northern side of the village. The team reported that there was little lantana to deal with because the biological controls are progressively knocking it out. This accords with other observation and demonstrates that at least on K'gari where the lantana is not too dense biological control works but a key factor is to reduce the density of the lantana population.

Happy Valley teams continue to monitor and deal with Abrus that is increasingly coming under control (in the FIDO area) but requires constant monitoring. Peter is also hoping that there can be management burning before the Easter Cassia Blitz next May.

FIDO is seeking collaboration with the DNRME which is responsible for the management of Unallocated State Land (USL) on the issue of fire management. Fire management is critical in helping us manage lantana and through that improving access to manage other weeds.



The banner that the Australian Government wanted brandished

Funding for future FIDO weed work

Until this week there was a deafening silence over the fate of FIDO's application for \$30,000 under the National Landcare Program – Environment Small Grants to continue to support FIDO's continuing volunteer programs on Fraser Island. Earlier in the year we were advised that BMRG were not continuing with their program "Keeping the Great Sandy Great" which had previously funded our weeding program. BMRG is moving out of funding the natural environment and the World Heritage site and is applying its reduced program (another Federal funding cut) to focus on the modified environment in their region. FIDO was directed to apply for funding under the Commonwealth Government Small Grants scheme for the 2018-19 financial year. This we did. Then we had to wait and wait to know if we were successful. More than six weeks into the financial year on 15 August we were advised, "*Unfortunately your application was not successful as it did not rate sufficiently high against the merit criteria set out below when compared to other applications in this round:*

- *Merit Criterion One - the extent to which your project contributes to improving the quality of the environment through natural resource management activities*
- *Merit Criterion Two - your capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project.*

Decisions are final and will not be reviewed."

It shows ignorance or lack of due diligence to say that FIDO lacks the **capacity, capability and resources to deliver the project and** that our project doesn't contribute enough to *improving the quality of the environment.*

Unfortunately, weeds don't stop growing pending decisions of governments, so well before this announcement FIDO had booked and paid for accommodation. Some volunteers had arranged travel from interstate. By the belated time of the announcement FIDO had conducted two working bees that will bleed over \$7,000 from our limited resources and there are still another two working bees in 2018 that FIDO is committed to because the only way to control weeds is to keep working to eliminate them.

FIDO is now heading to the drawing boards to develop a new business model to enable us to sustainably continue our on-going project. In FIDO's 47-year history we have proven that tenacity in the pursuit of the public interest can have very positive outcomes. FIDO is committed at a minimum to another Easter Cassia Blitz in Happy Valley if possible next Autumn and with a small Community Sustainability Grant from Department of Environment and Science FIDO will keep the nursery moving forward during first half of 2019. **Meanwhile the Federal Coalition needs to understand that the environment and Greenies are not enemies to be eliminated.**

Citizen Science Projects

Because of the ongoing withdrawal of Government support (both State and Federal) for the environment, particularly the natural environment, FIDO has increasingly become engaged in Citizen Science and volunteer programs. One inevitably leads to other which is why FIDO has a long history in both.

Cooloola BioBlitz

Over the past few months an increasing proportion of FIDO's time and resource have been devoted to the organizing of the Cooloola BioBlitz scheduled from 24 to 26 August. Based on on-line registrations to date we look destined to exceed our target of 100 participants plus staff and organizers. Rainbow Beach is proving to be an inspired choice for this BioBlitz because of the ease of access and the range of amenities and support that it offers. While it is important to gather more biological data for K'gari, the experience being gained in Cooloola is likely carry benefits both for biological knowledge such as the soil DNA work (evening presentation) and on being able to operate a BioBlitz on the more logistically challenging K'gari when and if we are ever allowed.

The BioBlitz aims not only at gathering data to better manage and help the natural environment but also to recruit more citizen scientists to help the environment.



Dr Fiona Foley, Butchulla Elder, Sue Sargent Chair of Fraser Island Community Advisory Committee, and FIDO's Dr John Sinclair reflecting at USC's K'gari Symposium at Pialba that will also be the venue for the 8th biennial Conference

New K'gari weather stations funded

On 7 August FIDO was advised we are to receive \$7,000 from Queensland's Gambling fund to install new weather stations on K'gari. These will transmit weather data on-line in real time. The locations are still being finalized but sites being considered are the Wanggoolba Creek barge landing terminal, Kingfisher Resort and Cathedral Beach. The on line weather station enable people anywhere in the world to examine the on time weather. They can see wind temperature & barometric pressure. FIDO is negotiating on siting other weather stations in the island's interior to give a much more comprehensive picture of weather patterns that are so critical to protecting the natural integrity of K'gari especially in fire-fighting.

8th Biennial K'gari Conference *Community, Culture and Collaborations*

FIDO is very excited about our collaboration with the Butchulla that is helping to develop the 8th K'gari (Fraser Island) Biennial conference. It will be held at the Fraser Coast campus of the University of the Sunshine Coast on **Saturday 31st August**. We have agreed on four sessions and some key speakers in this fascinating one-day program that will justify people from a wide catchment travelling to Hervey Bay.

Session 1: "Community" will have as its keynote speaker outstanding social psychologist, **Steve Biddulf** who is willing to speak out on the public benefits of wilderness and the wilderness values of K'gari.

Session 2: "Culture" will feature as its keynote speaker, award winning actor and film director, and proud Butchulla **Wayne Blair**. We are negotiating with other Butchulla who have valuable contributions to make.

Session 3: "Collaborations" will include a number of the departments and agencies that have responsibilities on K'gari and well as tourism, conservation and others.

Session 4: Open Community Forum. This will be open to the public who may or may not have attended the conference. It will be a Q&A session with all presenters on the stage being open to questions However as with the ABC Q&A and in the interests of time constraints and balance questions must be presented to the chair prior to the start of the forum.

31st August 2019 was chosen as the date because this is when the University facilities are available to us and 31st August is the height of the whale watching season. That means that visitors having to travel to stay overnight in Hervey Bay will be able to join a Sunday morning whale watching cruise before returning home

The artwork for the conference poster and the conference logo was designed by Butchulla artist Karen Hall. Expect to see more of this art over the next year.



FIDO's K'gari E-Newsletters are irregularly produced between the biannual MOONBI newsletters to provide more current news to members and others with a special interest in K'gari (Fraser Island). These newsletters are only available electronically. They are free. Anyone wishing to subscribe or unsubscribe should notify john@fido.org.au

Sustainable Transport options for K'gari

Using funds from the Barbara Winkley Bequest FIDO is funding a PhD study being undertaken by Ross Waldron. This was stalled for a critical period while Ross waited for Butchulla approval to carry out environmental studies building on the preliminary work already done on K'gari. However with only another two years to finish the study a way has been found to move forward with this study that is critical to developing the most sustainable transport options not only on K'gari but other sandmasses such as Cooloola, Moreton and Stradbroke Islands. Ross is now working to produce four papers that will not only quantify current impacts but suggest better more sustainable alternatives.

FIDO 2019 Volunteering Program

For reasons outlined in this newsletter planning for 2019 programs have been delayed while new arrangements are worked out but it is anticipated to aim for at least six weeklong trips during the year because weeds won't stop growing when the funding support cuts out.

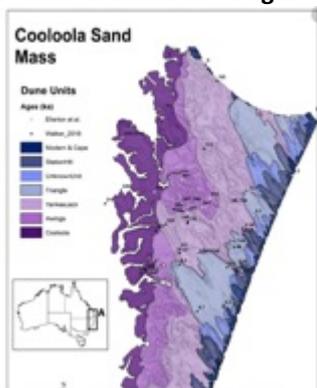
To learn more about our volunteer program and/or to be on the Email list to be notified when our 2019 program is finalized, register with john@fido.org.au. We plan to follow up the hugely successful Happy Valley Cassia Blitz with a Lantana Blitz near Eurong.

The K'gari Photographic Competition celebrating 25 years of K'gari's World Heritage status has now closed. The Department of Environment and Science has been overwhelmed by the volume and diversity as well as the quality of the entries. When the selection of the 12 winning photographs in the three classes are concluded the *Wildlife Australia* will feature the chosen photos in its December issue while the DES is working on the production of a K'gari Calendar for 2019. Some of the stunning details of that will be covered in FIDO's next K'gari E-Newsletter.

Exciting discoveries reveal K'gari and Cooloola dune ages

INCREASED KNOWLEDGE: Ages from K'gari are coming soon but we have ages from Cooloola

- Found one new dune system at Cooloola and 2 new dune systems on Fraser/K'gari
- Dunes on east coast (blue) are Holocene, Dunes in mauve are about 200,000 yrs old (Yankee Jack)
- Dunes on western side are 600-800,000 years old (Awinya and Cooloola - purple)
- Dunes formed at high sea-levels and the mid-Pleistocene transition story



Discover the greatness of Great Sandy Strait

Sunday 4th November 2018

FIDO's last 2018 cruise departs Urangan 9.30 am returns 3.30 pm

Join John Sinclair on probably the last tour that he will guide to explain the rich biodiversity and history of the wonderful Ramsar Listed Great Sandy Strait to where the two tides meet in this rich sub-tropical estuary.

Great Sandy Strait is now being considered for World Heritage listing but it faces some significant environmental threats, particularly from the millions of litres of heavy metal contaminated water that are to be dumped into the Mary River if the Colton coalmine proceeds.

The Cruise starts and finishes at the Hervey Bay Boat Club, Urangan where parking is available.

Cost \$100

Cost includes morning tea, a sandwich lunch and a contribution to the Great Sandy Strait Research Fund into potential environmental impacts. The Fraser Island Defenders Organisation has long experience exploring this internationally recognized waterway. This will be revealed in the expert running commentary by John Sinclair and others. FIDO ran its first cruises on Great Sandy Strait in the 1970s. This is FIDO's final cruise for 2018 and may be our last for sometime. To allow better communication passenger numbers are strictly limited to a maximum of 60.

Bookings are essential. Bookings can be made and confirmed by **Emailing: cruises@fido.org.au** Payments by credit card can be paid in advance.

New K'gari research reveals amazing insights

Aging the dunes on K'gari and Cooloola has discovered that they have been continuously capable of supporting human habitation longer than anywhere else in Australia. A team from around the world led by University of Queensland geomorphologist, Prof Jamie Schulmeister, has been working for three years examining dune soils, their age and origins. In the process they established the coincidence of the perched dune lakes with the Yankee Jack 2 dune with the occurrence of both the tall forests and the perched dune lakes. These dunes are between 800,000 and 1,000,000 years of age meaning that they could have provided food, water and shelter for Aborigines from the time they arrived in Australia. As they dig they are discovering more information about the world's large sandmass to support tall forests.