

Fraser Island Defenders Organization

President's Annual Report — August, 2018

In the last 12 months since my last Annual Report, FIDO has continued to pursue projects to protect K'gari (Fraser Island) as well as continuing our strong educational, collaborative and advocacy roles. Much of the last year has been involved in actively planning ahead as FIDO develops its vision for 2020 both for K'gari and the organization. FIDO is now 47 years old and some restructuring of how it operates is needed.

Education

Citizen Science: Since FIDO's 2016 Beach to Boomanjin and Birrabeen Bioblitz, FIDO has been exploring options to conduct another BioBlitz. If our applications for a permit are approved, we hope to organize a BioBlitz at Rainbow Beach later this year. Being on the mainland it offers more opportunity for wider public participation and if held on a weekend as planned would attract many more younger people who are keen to explore and learn more about Nature. From FIDO's perspective it will also provide much more information of the natural resources of Northern Cooloola — K'gari's sister sandmass that is already on the Indicative World Heritage List and will eventually go forward in an expanded area from the existing Fraser Island World Heritage site.

Weather Stations: With a recently announced \$7,000 grant from the Queensland Gambling Community Benefit Fund, FIDO will be able to significantly expand our network of on-line weather stations on K'gari. It will enable a better understanding of variations in weather patterns. People scrutinizing weather data from FIDO's current weather stations at Happy Valley and Eurong less than 20 kilometres apart can see a great variability. Knowing just how much variability is important for interpretation, especially for fire management and in understanding the ecology. The new weather stations will be installed by volunteers to add to the overall information available publicly on line and in real time.

Conference: FIDO continues to play a strong educational role. Plans are well advanced for the 2019 8th Biennial Conference. This will be a collaboration of effort and input with the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation and is appropriately to be titled *Community, Culture and Collaboration*. This already has the support of the University of the Sunshine Coast. It will be held at their Fraser Coast Campus on 31st August, 2019. Already exciting keynote speakers have been engaged and planning is rapidly advancing.

Publications: As well as producing MOONBIs 136 and 137 for the year, FIDO also continued with Electronic Newsletters to keep members informed on vital issues. We have produced five more interesting backgrounders to provide information to help wider understanding of history and environmental issues. FIDO's web site continues to be maintained by Keith Sinclair and it is a resource being widely used by students and for public reference.

History: FIDO's long term CEO John Sinclair is in the final throes of finalizing his 100,000 word history "*K'gari and Cooloola*". He has also compiled a book

of 52 of his children's stories "*K'gari Kids*" and assigned FIDO full copyright. We eagerly anticipate seeing the final versions in print and available to the public within the next year.

Collaborations and Volunteers

FIDO continues to develop active collaborations as FIDO works with partners on projects of mutual benefit in helping to discharge our responsibilities for protecting the natural integrity of Fraser Island (K'gari). A major catalyst for this has been FINIA (the Fraser Island Natural Integrity Alliance) which FIDO strongly supports. It is a collaboration of government, non-government and community partners.

Many volunteers and various collaborations have enabled FIDO to achieve so much during the past year. Collaborators included the Eurong Resort, the Kingfisher Group, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Fraser Coast Regional Council, Happy Valley's Fraser Island Wilderness Retreat, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines and the University of the Sunshine Coast. FIDO's most significant collaborations in the last 12 months have evolved in response to the threats to Great Sandy Strait posed by the potential discharge of huge volumes of untreated, polluted water from the proposed Colton open cut coal mine. With the Mary River Catchment Coordinating Committee and the Mary River Association, FIDO has established a Research Fund to expose the significance of the environmental harm that could result unless existing approvals for the mine are reviewed.

Weeds and Bush Regeneration: In the last 12 months, FIDO has organized and delivered ten week-long trips for volunteers to work on the weeds in the two main epicentres of weed infestation Eurong and Happy Valley as well as three much smaller interim working bees to follow up work in the nursery at Eurong. While FIDO has made consistent and noticeable progress in weed control and bush regeneration at Eurong over the years, this year spectacular progress was made in early May when 14 volunteers conducted an Easter Cassia Blitz surrounding Happy Valley. FIDO is particularly indebted to Peter Shooter who since 2014 has now given up 19 weeks to lead our Happy Valley working bees that are now showing such demonstrable results. I would like to thank him and Suzanne Wilson who is taking over our popular working bees at Eurong. Suzanne's expertise is also helping to rapidly building up the capacity of the Eurong nursery. It is notable that the volunteer experience is very enriching as evidenced by the number of volunteers who keep

returning. One has now logged up more than a dozen weeks-long trips. I would like to thank all of the volunteers who have contributed to the on-going efforts that are making environmental positive gains.

Funding crisis: As a result of continuing cutbacks in Federal Funding for the environment, funds which used to support our volunteers' efforts under the National Landcare Program have been unexpectedly and unjustifiably cut off. The financial support from the BMRG (Burnett Mary Regional Group) has funded FIDO's weeding and bush regeneration programs over the past decade under its *Keeping It Great* program. That ended on 30th June. FIDO then applied under an alternative Federal National Landcare program that we were eligible for. On 15th August we were advised that we would get nothing. This belated announcement is likely to drain our resources by \$10,000. Because FIDO had to make a forward planning decision, this abrupt halt has left us bleeding financially. FIDO is committed to continuing the scheduled remaining four programs for the 2018 calendar year even without funding. Controlling weeds is vital to the natural integrity of K'gari and FIDO is determined to develop a new business model to enable work to continue into the future.

George Haddock Track: Unfortunately the George Haddock Track continues to be stalled awaiting necessary approvals. FIDO still has obligations for maintenance of the work established during the Friends of Parks program in 2014 when more than half the track was cleared and the first shelter established. FIDO wishes to continue to work with the Butchulla people in extending and finishing the extension to the Great Walk and in protecting this marvellous island we all love and respect.

Sustainable Transport Study: Ross Waldron's PhD study to determine sustainable transport options for Fraser Island has been enabled by a \$100,000 donation from Barbara Winkley bequest to FIDO. This will address how to address the severe down-cutting of K'gari's sand tracks resulting from 4WD traffic. It remains a work in progress.

Advocacy

FIDO is obliged to speak out strongly on some issues. Strong advocacy has become necessary as the potential environmental impact of the Colton coalmine became more apparent during the last year and the need for a review of previous government decisions became more apparent. FIDO has contributed \$10,000 to a \$25,000 research fund. University of Queensland highly competent scientists will use that fund to establish just how far the release of the discharge mine water loaded

with heavy metal pollutants will extend down the Mary River and into Great Sandy Strait. As well as its threats to the Ramsar Wetlands, Colton is a potential disaster for the global environment as coal burning continues to heat the planet. Although Cooloola, Great Sandy Strait and an extended marine area surrounding K'gari are on the World Heritage tentative list FIDO is concerned at the lack of progress to complete this long overdue re-nomination. The lack of progress to address the serious degradation and erosion at Indian Head (*Takky Woorroo*) is a blight on management that demands strong advocacy to rectify.

Changes: While John Sinclair is still active as the CEO, FIDO is now actively engaged in looking to the future of the organization when he retires. We see the need for a paid CEO in the future and are anxious to see this process advance while John is able to assist the transition.

Consultation: FIDO continues to work in consultation with government agencies and the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation and other K'gari stakeholders to see better outcomes for the island we love. We work through the World Heritage Community Advisory Committee although the due to government secrecy these committees often lack information on which to base sound advice.

The Executive: The Executive meets monthly and increasingly communicates electronically on key issues. I want to thank John C Sinclair, John Davey, John Cruickshank and Saren Starbridge (Vice Presidents), Suzanne Wilson, Sue Dawson, and Peter Shooter as well as our growing army of volunteers. Thanks go also to Keith and Pauline Sinclair for maintaining the web site and the weather stations on the island. Special thanks go to John Sinclair (Snr), John Sinclair Jnr, John Cruickshank and Jane Enchelmaier for the time they put into the running of the organization and thanks to Maria Miller for her involvement in organizing the Conferences and Bioblitzes, plus. Thank you all.

The need to protect wild places is ever greater with the present political climate and climate changes. With the growth of population and the pressures this brings to places like Fraser Island, FIDO's work is ever more challenging and now we have the privilege of working with the Butchulla as well.

Colleen Enchelmaier
President

Office Bearers 2017-18 Fraser Island Defenders Organisation

President: Colleen Enchelmaier

Hon Secretary and Honorary Project Officer: John Sinclair (Snr)

Treasurer: Jane Enchelmaier

Vice Presidents: John C Sinclair, John Davey, Saren Starbridge and John Cruickshank