

# A SINGLE AUTHORITY FOR FRASER ISLAND

## A FIDO BACKGROUND PAPER

*In February 2001 Queensland Premier Peter Beattie promised that if he was re-elected his new government would (bring) Fraser Island under the planning control of a single government agency. This was part of a series of great promises to better protect all of Queensland's World Heritage area. This backgrounder explains why "Fraser Island under the planning control of a single government agency" is critical to improving the management of this World Heritage island.*

The bulk of the responsibility for the management of Fraser Island is currently placed with Queensland's Environmental Protection Agency. However, a plethora of other government agencies also have responsibilities. While at first glance these do not appear to be significant, many involve strategic areas of responsibility and collectively they cripple efforts for effective, coordinated management of the island.

**Public lands:** Not all public land on Fraser Island falls under the jurisdiction of one department. In addition to the land which is National Park, there is Vacant Public Land within the townships of Eurong and Happy Valley. While this is the responsibility of the Queensland Government, it doesn't become the responsibility of the EPA. Instead, the responsibility rests with the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy (NRME).

This department is also responsible for implementing a policy for managing pest species of flora and fauna. So far it has failed to deliver the Pest Management Plan for the Fraser Island township areas as required under the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002 which it administers. It is also responsible for jointly administering with the Environment Minister, the Recreation Areas Management Act 1988 and the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003. It also administers the Forestry Act which overlaps the work of the EPA. NRME has control of a number of leases on the island from airstrips to Cathedral Beach.

**Other Queensland Government Departments:** The **Police Service** has now an established a permanent presence on Fraser Island. Two officers are based at Eurong. **State Emergency Services** has no presence on the island but plays a large role in bush fire services, ambulance, and emergency evacuations. Despite the small resident population, an average of 3000 people spend each night on Fraser Island. There is no resident doctor, nurse or pharmacy. The **Local Government Department** has a role in monitoring activities of two local authorities and for the administering the Integrated Resort Act under which the Kingfisher Resort operates.

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Since 1974, as a result of the direct and personal interference of the then Minister for Local Government, Russ Hinze, Fraser Island is split between two local authorities; Hervey Bay and Maryborough. Previously the whole of Fraser Island was part of the former Burrum Shire.

Local authorities are responsible only for the small percentage of Fraser Island which is alienated land. This small aggregate area is spread between Dilli Village, Eurong, Happy Valley, Orchid Beach, Kingfisher Resort, Moon Point and a few other small parcels. However, these small areas represent a huge part of Fraser Island's management problems. These include weed invasion, dingo management, waste management, planning, potential pest introductions and fire management. FIDO believes that neither council has been pro-active in addressing these critical issues. Indeed, they have been less cooperative than is desirable on some of these issues.

FIDO believes that because Fraser Island is difficult to service and the means of servicing has to be duplicated, it may be that both councils have found it difficult not to neglect their responsibilities.

**Local Government Revenue:** While both councils receive larger government grants based on the extra area Fraser Island adds to their jurisdiction, it appears they each effectively divert much of these grants and the revenue collected from Fraser Island to subsidise their mainland activities.

In 1996 the Local Government Commissioner reviewed the district's local government boundaries. He said that the Maryborough City Council had "*an estimated net excess revenue of \$78,000 for its portion of Fraser Island*" (even after allowing 10% contribution to general administration). The Hervey Bay City Council had net excess revenue from Fraser Isl. of \$122,000.

Both Maryborough and Hervey Bay are major beneficiaries of the \$277 million which Fraser Island contributes to the economy, yet neither

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Council seems fully willing to help preserve its World Heritage values. The lack of attendance of council representatives at Fraser Island Management Committee meetings may be an indication of the priority these councils place on the management of Fraser Island.

The Hervey Bay City Council controls all local authority functions north of Yidney Rocks including Happy Valley, Orchid Beach and a large area near Moon Point. This council has failed to adequately monitor the implementation of zoning laws on Fraser Island and refused the Development Control Plan which was prepared to give effect to the Great Sandy Region Management Plan. As a consequence, Orchid Beach has become a planning shamble with council appearing to turn a blind eye to the non-conforming uses in practice there.

**Unsatisfactory Arrangements:** FIDO believes there are too many authorities with responsibilities for Fraser Island and that most are not meeting their moral or statutory obligations to help manage to protect and present its World Heritage values.

Without a single authority to manage the island, the existing authorities can continue to pursue their own policies by simply failing to act when necessary.

**Marine Jurisdiction:** While responsibility for the island itself is shared between many agencies, there is also a division within the marine jurisdiction. The Fraser Island World Heritage Area extends 500 metres to sea. This is proposed to be extended when Fraser Island is re-nominated as is currently being proposed. Three different Queensland Government Departments share responsibilities for the marine area.

The EPA is responsible for marine conservation and the management of Marine Parks and the protection of endangered species such as whales, dugong, turtles and dolphins. The agency responsible for the management of the fishery (both commercial and recreational) is the Department of Primary Industries (DPI). However, even here the responsibilities are very fuzzy as the DPI includes the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol. This service overlaps the work of the Marine Parks Division of the EPA. DPI is also responsible for the surveillance and enforcement

of the Dugong Protection Area within Great Sandy Strait.

The Queensland Fisheries Management Authority (QFMA) is charged with managing an ecologically sustainable fishing industry. However, FIDO believes it has failed to monitor the impact of the Fraser Island Fishing Expo. Despite producing a Discussion Paper in 1996, which should have resulted in a Management Plan for the inshore fishery including Fraser Island, it has yet to produce a plan, which will result in a sustainable fishery.

**Intertidal Areas.** There is a problem defining which Queensland Government department has jurisdiction of the land between the high and the low water mark. This seems to be a no person's land. This is a major problem on Fraser Island because the beach is a main highway as well as being an aircraft landing strip and an important recreation area.

### A SINGLE AUTHORITY

FIDO believes that it is urgent to create a single authority to provide coordinated leadership and management for the island as promised. What FIDO is advocating is the creation of an autonomous Fraser Island Authority (FIA).

### LORD HOWE ISLAND - A MODEL FOR FRASER ISLAND

FIDO advocates a model to administer Fraser Island based on the Lord Howe Island Board (LHIB). This Board was established by an Act of the New South Wales Parliament in 1983. It is charged with the overall management of Lord Howe Island. It provides a great precedent, has been viable and worked well for a small World Heritage island.

LHIB is a statutory board with wide ranging powers to administer to the needs of a resident population of about 360 and about 13,000 visitors annually. Its 2001-02 budget includes \$6.5 million expenditure. As well as managing the Lord Howe Island Permanent Park Preserve (which is the equivalent of National Park status), the Lord Howe Island Marine Park and several other land titles including recreation reserves etc., the LHIB is responsible for all of the normal functions of local government and more.

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The LHIB is responsible for the operation of the island hospital. It operates a nursery enterprise with a turnover of about \$1 million and which is the island's second largest industry after tourism. It also operates a liquor store which turns in a profit of over \$250,000. A further enterprise involves generation and distribution of all of the island's electricity. It manages the island's airstrip and undertakes all of the stevedoring for freight arriving on the island all on a profitable basis. It also is responsible for regulating the tourist traffic which it attempts by enforcing a ceiling on the number of "tourist beds".

The LHIB is the only planning authority on the island and oversees all subdivisions, rezonings, building approvals and even approvals to import motor vehicles on to the island. It is responsible for all waste management and has developed a world class waste management system. It works in close collaboration with various other NSW State Government agencies which have a special role on the island including the Police Service, SES and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Officers from the latter are seconded to work for the LHIB. The LHIB is the largest employer on the island. Its large bureaucracy is headed by a CEO.

The LHIB is composed of 7 members. Four are elected by the island residents for a three-year term. Three, including the Chair, are appointed by the New South Wales Government. It meets quarterly in the island and has the capacity for meeting by telephone conference.

	Lord Howe Island	Fraser Island
Area	1,455 ha	168,000 ha
Number of residents	353	>200
Visitors 1999-2000	12,900	330,000
Budget	\$6.5 million	\$4.5 million

### INTEGRATING MANAGEMENT

Some compelling reasons to establish a statutory Fraser Island authority similar to the Lord Howe Island model are:

# Because of the confused jurisdiction over Fraser Island (and the lack of resources) no Queensland Government Department even has the statistics gathered in the last census such as

how many permanent residents are there and how many visitors spent the census night there.

# Fraser Island isn't suited to being managed by the traditional Queensland local authority model because residents are outnumbered by visitors by 1,500:1. Visitors are major stakeholders and need representation in island management. This justifies an authority not elected exclusively by the handful of residents or worse, by mainland votes on mainland issues.

# Few people concerned with Fraser Island's future are represented by the existing local authorities or in the management structure. About 90% of the rate notices for properties on Fraser Island are sent to mainland addresses outside the Maryborough and Hervey Bay local authority areas. Fewer than 10% of all island visitors come from Hervey Bay or Maryborough. 180,000 people on commercial tour operations come from outside the region.

# About 40,000 free and independent travellers (FITs) are international backpackers. A majority of the remaining 95,000 FITs were from southern Queensland (outside the region) or interstate.

# The Fraser Island World Heritage Area (including the marine and inter-tidal areas) needs to be managed as a whole unit.

# Fraser Island needs to have a strong corporate memory to keep the World Heritage values in a longer-term focus. While the EPA/QPWS has competent managers, it is handicapped by its bureaucratic structure. Because talented managers are usually promoted they move away from Fraser Island. In 2004 no EPA officer with significant management responsibilities for Fraser Island possessed more than five years continuous experience with the island.

# A separate Fraser Island Authority could provide the fairest way to cater for the bulk of Fraser Island users. It would be able to integrate management over the whole area in the same way that local authorities have jurisdiction for their total geographic area. It would also have more focussed management.