

FIDO PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2004

After a decade as Fraser Island Defenders Organization President, Dr Ian Matthews, stepped down to become a Vice-President at the 2004 AGM. For all of this time Ian has travelled from Mapleton to Brisbane to preside over the monthly meetings. Ian has been replaced as President by Terry Hampson, who has served continuously on the executive since 1984. This is Ian's final report

I take this opportunity to thank FIDO, and in particular my friends on the Executive, for your support over the last 14 years. I am stepping down as FIDO President this year. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as President of one of Australia's oldest and most successful conservation organisations. Together we have fought some great battles and achieved great things. But it is time for me to move on, and for others to use their skills to further FIDO's goals. As I step aside, I feel it is worth looking back on FIDO's past, as well as looking to the future.

The political landscape has changed dramatically in FIDO's 33 years. Nowadays, the environment is a consideration in all Government decisions (although not necessarily to the extent that many of us would like). But in the early 1970s when FIDO was formed, conservation was a dirty word, and environmentalists were vilified. Joh Bjelke-Petersen was at the peak of his power. The federal coalition had been in power for a generation. It took great courage and commitment to stand against the might of all levels of Government, and suggest that mining Fraser Island for minerals was wrong.

FIDO was at the front of one of the first major environmental successes in the early 1970s. The end of sand mining on Fraser Island heralded a new era, where public opinion was heard on conservation issues and Government policy could be changed.

FIDO's campaign to end logging on Fraser Island was also a bitter battle against vested interests. It is hard to believe that only 15 years ago, rainforest and previously un-logged valleys on Fraser Island were being logged and burned. Now it is National Park and on the World Heritage List. Logging is being phased out of all State Forests in South East Queensland with most becoming conservation areas, in favour of farm forestry on private lands.

We have seen Governments become more environmentally aware. However, there is still much ignorance on environmental matters in all levels of Government. They tend to understand that voters are concerned about the environment so "talk the talk", but don't grasp the impacts of many decisions, and the interconnected nature of our environment. The environment is still low on the priority list, as is reflected by the lack of financial resources it attracts, particularly for ongoing management of natural areas, like Fraser Island.



New Toilet block, Nulwarr Hill above Lake Wabby

The Tourist Industry, which earns hundreds of millions of dollars from the environment annually, invests virtually nothing in the resource upon which it depends.

Precious environmental areas such as Fraser Island are being degraded daily, because government and industry fail to adequately fund their management.

The biggest battle ever facing FIDO, just as it is faces many popular World Heritage Areas and National Parks around the World is: How to manage tourism sustainably.

With this in mind, FIDO is hosting a Conference next week, gathering together the stakeholders, to look at long-term strategies for Fraser Island and Cooloola. This continues FIDO's role as a pro-active organisation, promoting positive discussion.

We have to get governments to understand that the environment needs more than lip service.

Unfortunately, the Federal Government has largely given up putting any resources into managing Fraser Island's World Heritage Area, despite being the body responsible for its nomination and the obligation to ensure its continuation on the Register.

Unfortunately, the State Government Environment Department budget shrank in real terms at the last budget. Almost all the funds going into its management come from the revenue it generates through visitation fees. This results in most of the money being spent in providing more facilities, so that more tourists will visit the island and generate more revenue, rather than going into environmental protection, research, nature conservation and long-term environmental planning.

Unfortunately, the 2 Local Government Authorities responsible for Fraser Island, Maryborough and Hervey Bay, continue to spend rates revenue collected on Fraser Island on the mainland to attract industry, tourists, and new residents to the area while exploiting Fraser Island. Fraser Island is still being exploited at an unsustainable rate. All levels of Government, and the tourist industry that relies on and benefits from Fraser Island, take out of Fraser Island much more than they return.

Clearly there is much work remaining to turn the balance around, and get all levels of Government and Industry doing things sustainably, rather than just talking.

FIDO has been doing that work to address the senseless exploitation for over 3 decades and will continue to do so. We did not work so hard for so long to see Fraser Island destroyed by neglect and mismanagement.

Organisations like FIDO need to make the most of the skills of each member, especially each Executive member. We need to take advantage of both the fresh faces and those with an understanding of history of the issues. I want to be part of FIDO's ongoing work, but will be handing over the reins tonight. Before doing so, I must thank the people who have done most of the work over the years.

FIDO owes a great debt to John Sinclair. Without his courage and commitment, none of what we have achieved would have been contemplated, let alone achieved.

FIDO also benefited from the dedication, enthusiasm, and commitment of the late Billie Watts, who passed away during the last year. Billie was the powerhouse that drove FIDO for the last decade or more, and was responsible for much of the success that we achieved on logging and National Parks and

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World Heritage listing. She is fondly remembered and deeply missed by us all.

I especially want to thank Terry Hampson for introducing me to Fraser Island and FIDO, and his ongoing commitment to conservation of the Great Sandy Region. Without Terry and Billie's dogged determination, the Goss Government would never have ended logging, created the National Park and supported World Heritage listing.

Judy Tambling, John Davey, and John C Sinclair where all long- serving executive members of FIDO before my arrival, and I have enjoyed and benefited from their enthusiasm, encouragement, and dedication to FIDO, conservation, and Fraser Island.

FIDO is also fortunate to be in the process of rejuvenation. The return of Michelle and Andrew Sinclair onto the Executive coincided with the arrival of Colleen and Jane Enchelmaier. Colleen edits John Sinclair's articles for MOONBI for which the society is thankful. Michelle and Andrew both bring great experience and enthusiasm to the Executive. They all bring new ideas, which bodes well for our future.

And the future looks good. As well as new members, our finances are currently sound. We have a Conference next week which will hopefully result in greater cooperation between the stakeholders and help steer Fraser Island's management in a more sustainable direction. There is talk of another, bigger conference in 2006.

We have a forthcoming Federal election, in which environmental issues will figure prominently. Hopefully better funding of Fraser Island, the Great Sandy Region, and the environment generally, will be "core promises" of all parties.

Enthusiasm for FIDO's Light Rail proposal is gathering steam. This would lead to a significant improvement in the sustainable management of the island. It is another example of FIDO's role as a pro-active organisation, and our capacity to pursue an issue, for decades if necessary, until others finally see the wisdom of our argument.

Ian Matthews



Other Changes to the FIDO Executive

After serving as Treasurer of FIDO for many years as well as in other capacities and having now retired as a Councillor on the Brisbane City Council, Terry Hampson has resumed a term as President. His role as Treasurer has been taken over by a newcomer to the FIDO Executive, but no newcomer to FIDO, Julie Bush. Thus in the last two years, there has been a very significant change in the FIDO leadership team. However, the continuity which FIDO has maintained since it was established almost 34 years ago means that the incredible memory which enables FIDO to have such a healthy perspective on the state of Fraser Island and to be able to observe changes and impacts which others can't immediately see continues.

FIDO Photo Festival

Following up on the community engagement of its very well received initial conference, FIDO will devote some of its efforts next year to a community based photographic competition. The competition will be run in the second quarter of next year and be open to all ages and abilities. Entries can be in 6 categories including a historical one. Photos will be eligible if they are taken anywhere in the Great Sandy / Fraser Island / Cooloolool National Parks.

FIDO will be looking for sponsorship for some great prizes and to Councils to help promote the competition and show the winning entries. FIDO will be working with local camera clubs and hopes that competition entries can earn contestants points for their medals.

More details of the photographic competition, planned for later in 2005, will be announced in future MOONBIs and at www.fido.org.au. FIDO trusts that the focus on photographic art will do a lot more to enhance the public's awareness of Fraser Island's outstanding aesthetic values. However by including a category on historic photographs, FIDO hopes that this will help add to the corporate record of Fraser Island by depicting the natural environment, historical events and everyday life in the past. FIDO has been building up an impressive historical record of Fraser Island and continues passing on copies of all photographs to the Maryborough office of the QPWS and the John Oxley Memorial Library so that they are available in the public domain.

World Heritage Re-evaluation

Currently Fraser Island is inscribed on the World Heritage List for only two values, "*as an outstanding example representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes;*" and "*as an example of superlative natural phenomena*". While there is justifiably a lot of emphasis on protecting and presenting the first of these values, there has been much less emphasis on the second. The Fraser Island aesthetics have not received as much attention as the ecological processes.

The EPA has just published two magnificent reports, "*Fraser Island World Heritage Area — Review of Outstanding Universal Values*" and "*Cooloolool — Assessment of Potential Outstanding Universal Values*". These are the basis for the renomination of Fraser Island and other parts of the Great Sandy Region on the World Heritage List. A limited supply of these two books is available for purchase from the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency Offices in Brisbane.



Vine embroidered sand — *Ipomea pes caprae*