

Smart State Leadership

In Queensland, the rhetoric about being the "Smart State" is rapidly being demonstrated in many ways. Premier Peter Beattie has been obsessed by the benefits that science can bring to the state in the areas of economic growth. He has used scientific advice to address issues of land-clearing and on water quality of the Great Barrier Reef. However he has been slower to deal with Fraser Island, although it is worth over \$277 million annually to the Queensland economy. As far as FIDO knows, his visit to Fraser Island to open the Great Walk was his first. It is unusual for someone who is so intent on pushing the "Smart State" image, to ignore the significance of Fraser Island for so long. We hope that now he has experienced it at first hand, he will ensure that his stalled 2001 commitment to bring Fraser Island under the control of a single authority will gain some momentum.

On 27th June, Premier Beattie made a welcome visit to Fraser Island to open the new Fraser Island Great Walk. In view of a lack of any previously reported visit by Peter Beattie to Fraser Island, it is good that he has seen, even if so ever so briefly, this wonderful asset which is being run down by his government's failure to provide enough resources to manage it. We hope that he will now see that the "Smart State" needs to be even smarter about making the industry [which contributes more than \$277 million to the economy by using this wonderful asset] much more sustainable.

The Boardwalk

At Central Station the Premier said, *"The boardwalk is part of our strategy to encourage sustainable tourism in this World Heritage listed area. About 120,000 people, or 40 per cent of Fraser's total visitor numbers, come to Wanggoolba Creek every year, making it one of the most popular spots on the island."* He also said, *"When enthusiasts think of the world's 'must do' walks, Fraser Island and other Queensland Great Walks will be right up there with old favourites like the Overland Track in Tasmania, the Milford Track in New Zealand and the United Kingdom's National Trails".*

The new \$1 million Wanggoolba Creek boardwalk replaces a previous boardwalk built in the 1980s. An independent report commissioned by the QPWS in 2001 showed that even with remedial works the former walkway had only three years safe life remaining. The Queensland Government has paid for the rebuilding. It allows people to visit one of Fraser Island's most popular areas without damaging the creek and its banks. The boardwalk and bridge have been designed to provide disabled access in accordance with Australian standards. The new boardwalk is accessible to wheelchairs.

Wanggoolba Creek, with its crystal-clear waters, pure white sand, palm-fringed banks and rainforest, is very popular with tour groups. It attracts about 40 percent of the total visitors to the island and the number of visitors to the site is predicted to increase by about three percent a year.

One "Smart State" policy requires that all major Queensland Government building projects allow **"2% for art"**. Projects will incorporate artwork reflecting the surrounding environment. That is how the Wanggoolba Creek boardwalk came to feature three specially commissioned sculptures depicting Australian flora and wildlife by Maryborough artist, Monika Bayer. The sculptures, eye-catching totem poles carved from beautifully grained and polished native ironbark, now stand along the boardwalk. Each sculpture is individually detailed with palms, a python and flying foxes highlighted in a silver-metallic finish.



The Great Walk Fraser Island

The Wanggoolba Creek boardwalk at Central Station is part of the 90km-long Fraser Island Great Walk. The Fraser Island Great Walk project is the first of six Queensland "Great Walks" projects around the state to be completed. The 90 kilometre walk represents almost 22.5% of Queensland's 400 kilometre network of long-distance walking tracks but completed with less than 10% of the State funds allocated. FIDO congratulates the EPA/QPWS teams on their effort to get the project completed at a reasonable cost and on being first finished.

Unfortunately, although FIDO has been the strongest advocate for the completion of a great walking track down the length of Fraser Island, we weren't represented at the opening of the Walk because of short notice and poor arrangements. FIDO will continue to advocate for the completion of the great long-distance walk from Sandy Cape to Hook Point. The new Great Walk (with its feeder walk from Hook Point to Dilli Village) covers less than half the length of the island.

The Great Walks program allows access to protected areas but in a way that minimises the impact on the environment. Overnight campers will need to obtain permits and all visitors will be required to carry all rubbish out with them.

Spin-offs already: FIDO understands that the Great Walk has already resulted in a rapid increase in the number of walkers on Fraser Island and there is already a very welcome change in the patterns of recreation on Fraser Island. One of the beneficiaries of this pedestrian traffic is the Fraser Island Taxi Service which is now busier shifting walkers to and from various points along the walk.

FIDO is confident that the already demonstrable change in the patterns of recreation on Fraser Island so evident within a few weeks of the opening of the Great Walk can be repeated on an even grander scale by moving to a more sustainable form of transport — like light rail. It offers the ideal Smart State solution to what has been an intransigent problem.

Maintaining Biodiversity is Smart: In recognizing the enormous significance of Queensland's biodiversity, Premier Peter Beattie, recently said, *"Nearly 23 per cent of Australia's plants are listed as threatened, most of them in Western Australia and Queensland. Of about 5,000 Australian plants listed in 1995 as rare or threatened, 1,368 are in Queensland which has an estimated 7,800 native flowering plants."* Let us hope that this recognition of the importance of biodiversity is transformed into giving a higher priority to both preserving and managing it.

Dilli Village Re-opened

It was also very good news that after spending close to \$500,000 during the last year to upgrade Dilli Village, the University of the Sunshine Coast has now reopened this great facility for public and student use. It is available to the public but priority will be given to educational groups.

News in Brief

Road Closures

Moon Point Road: In May, one of Fraser Island's main arterial roads between Moon Point and Happy Valley had about a metre of water over the causeway making it unsuitable for low-clearance vehicles. This closed the road for several weeks in the section near the fens which lies between the Bullocky Road and the Moon Point barge service landing.

Woralie Track: Some decent, welcome rainfall in April brought with it a few problems for Fraser Island management especially when the Woralie track had to be closed for several days while rangers repaired the washed out sections.

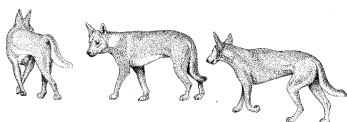
Dilli Village – Hook Point Road: Also in May, another major access road from Hook Point to Dilli Village was closed for about 5 days for maintenance. The closure was to provide safe working conditions for the grader to complete the maintenance program on the first 11km from the barge landing point. The work was aimed at providing an upgraded road surface and safer driving conditions for tour operators and the general public.

The Need for More Road Closures: There has been a philosophy in the tour industry that, to keep faith with clients, the show must go on regardless of road and weather conditions. In virtually no other National Park in Australia is such an inflexible position held. Commercial tour operations are regularly suspended in other parks in times of adverse weather and road conditions. The Queensland Government is not liable to guarantee access to Fraser Island commercial tour operators 365 days of every year but management seems to be under the impression that they are obliged to. It would be in the public interest if there was more flexibility in tour operations to Fraser Island, just as there has to be to other ecotourism destinations.

Assistance from 4WD Volunteers: In January a group of 194 4WDs and 548 people from the Queensland Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs (QAFWDC) picked up three industrial bulk bins of rubbish from Hook Point to Indian Head and inland. Sites targeted included the areas around bins along the beach, the waste transfer stations, and around the creek mouths. QPWS coordinated bins and rubbish removal after the event and waived permits for participants. This was a much appreciated effort.



Putting FI National Park on the Map: More than 7 years have passed since the southern half of Fraser Island was incorporated into the Great Sandy National Park. Yet many recent Fraser Island maps, show only the northern part of the island (north of a line from Eli Creek to Moon Point) as being National Park. This hasn't helped the case for the better protection of Fraser Island. Neither is the case for protection helped, when "The Australian" newspaper, comparing "Annual visitor numbers for selected Australian national parks", under-estimates visitor numbers to Fraser Island by more than 120,000. "The Australian" Travel section, 17-18 April, asks whether we are loving our national parks to death and then goes on to provide, as a highlight, a very misleading table indicating Fraser Island attracts only 217,500 visitors.



Flying High over National Parks

The New South Wales Government has been able to establish minimum heights at which aircraft are supposed to fly over the Blue Mountains World Heritage National Parks. We quote from the March 2004 "Colong Bulletin" which described the culmination of the long debate triggered by many requests for aircraft-based tour operations and increasing public protests:

We are pleased to have received a letter from Peter Langhorne, Chief of Staff of Ministry for Transport, detailing proposals for the control of flights over national parks and heritage areas. Operators will have to secure the support of the local council. Permits will include specific noise abatement procedures. Aircraft must maintain an altitude of not less than 3,000 feet above ground level for propeller driven aircraft or 5,000 feet for subsonic jet aircraft overflying National Parks and the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

FIDO congratulates the Colong Committee for achieving that outcome in New South Wales. FIDO has long urged the Queensland Government to establish minimum height restrictions for aircraft over-flying Fraser Island but so far without making any apparent headway. This follows experience with F111s flying low at supersonic speeds over the Top End wilderness. Since then, island residents regularly complain about windows, even houses shaking as a result of F111s flying low and very loud along the beach. The Environmental Protection Agency said that it was powerless. Clearly the NSW NPWS did not give up and have achieved a very good outcome. While apparently the F111s and other military aircraft are still exempt from restrictions over the Blue Mountains, this is a very positive move. Anyone who has been to visit the Grand Canyon or other popular natural sites will know how intrusive the sound of low-flying aircraft is on the experience of anyone not in the aircraft. We can't allow that kind of situation to develop on Fraser Island or indeed in other Australian National Parks.

Misplaced Spending Priorities. FIDO is amazed at the incredible generosity which the Commonwealth Government displays towards the private sector and how parsimonious it can be with protecting the jewels in the crown of our natural assets. In the very same year as the Commonwealth reduced its funding for Fraser Island from more than \$700,000 to just \$6,000, it announced \$3 million funding for the Fraser Coast Interpretive Centre. This is part of an integrated tourism development proposed on a site adjacent to the Great Sandy Straits Marina. This, a private development within the marina precinct, was given a further boost by the announcement of Forester Kurts to proceed with the \$27 million Outrigger Resort Hervey Bay.

Eli Creek Break-Out: Just prior to Easter, there was an amazing transformation to one of Fraser Island's most famous tourist destinations. Heavy rains, high tides and strong winds forced Eli Creek to cut a new mouth immediately east of the boardwalk. The creek, shortened by more than a kilometre, had a much steeper gradient and flowed much faster. The resulting erosion lowered the creek bed by almost two metres. It made some of the recreation there much more dangerous and access to the water from both bridges was stopped. Among the many consequences of this natural event is that children riding boogie boards down the much faster current were being rocketed across the beach and so were potentially in danger from beach traffic. Beach traffic was also seriously inconvenienced. The previous dispersal of cars along the creek bank has stopped and there is a much more concentrated parking near the boardwalk.

News in Brief

How Fraser Saved Fraser

At the 25th anniversary celebration of the moratorium on whaling on 6th of April, former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser whose efforts were honoured by the Australian Conservation Foundation gave an insight into his government's decision to protect Fraser Island from sandmining back in 1976. On his government's environmental record, Mr. Fraser said: *My government did some things that people didn't expect. We banned sand mining on Fraser Island. I got into more flak on that issue than a lot of others because one of my ministers had left the room and as he left the room he told me "of course I'll change my vote, I'll support you" and with him, I think it was sort of equal, and none of my other colleagues had heard him say that. But anyway, on that decision, business people were tuned up to get on my back in New York etc etc and the Treasury Department was under a fair bit of pressure. But again, there'd been an impartial inquiry and anyone who's been to Fraser Island and members of the government who might have been against the decision at the time would see Fraser Island and see how right it was. ...*

Whale Kill



While whales were saved from commercial whaling, the Queensland Government is now catching whales (and lots of other larger marine animals) in sharks nets placed off popular surfing beaches. The government seems deaf to calls from FIDO and others to remove these lethal shark nets.

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Toilet Block Upgrades: Eli Creek and Middle Rock toilets have been upgraded with the recent installation of composting toilets. The new systems will direct waste into "green" drains where it will circulate through a sand filter until fully evaporated. No waste will be discharged from the system. The system will be capable of servicing a 5% growth rate in visitation for the next ten years. This is an example of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service's commitment to provide facilities, structures and services consistent with the protection of Fraser Island's natural and cultural values.

Problems with large bureaucracies: During the FIDO 20-20 Conference John Sinclair Snr pointed out the need to have a really good corporate memory. Lack of an accurate knowledge of history and context all adversely affect management. He identified the high turnover of QPWS managers, the moving from one position to another of most people dealing with Fraser Island and their relatively short tenure in the job as the main reasons for the loss of corporate memory. Good officers are usually promoted elsewhere in a short time. For the replacement officer/s, there is a steep learning curve which takes time. Planning for other career moves also is a distraction. The result is that few if any officers are in the same jobs for even five years. Thus the corporate memory of what has preceded them is lost. The QPWS has little corporate memory. He contrasted this with the long term memory developed by FIDO over a period of 33 years. His full paper can be found on FIDO's web site (www.fido.org.au).

Dingo News

While the Dingo Management Strategy is being implemented, Fraser Island dingoes continue to be destroyed at an alarming rate. 37 had been "put down" in the two years since the Clinton Gage incident because of dangerous or aggressive behaviour towards humans. Rangers have been kept active monitoring dingo populations. The behaviour of Fraser Island dingoes is now being better monitored as an increasing percentage of dingoes are caught and tagged. This has facilitated tracking the increase in activity, especially around the Happy Valley area.

Visitors have been surprised to witness the fishing skills of dingoes. Some watched a dingo fishing on the beach near Waddy Point while a lagoon drained back into the ocean. As the lagoon emptied, fish flowed out and it was seen to catch a fish and carry it onto the beach. The dingo proceeded to catch and stockpile another 8-10 fish before it stopped to eat its catch! Others have seen the dingoes searching for fish in the shallow waters of the surf.

The most positive benefits have come from creating exclosures to keep dingoes out of camping areas. Campers at Central Station now have to use the dingo-proof food lockers to store their food away from marauding possums. Bandicoots are now seen prowling in this dingo-proof area. Fencing of Dilli Village, and the Waddy Point and Dundubara campgrounds is complete. The biggest project fencing in Kingfisher Resort to keep dingoes out is well advanced.

Hervey Bay puts pressure on Fraser

In October, Environment Minister Desley Boyle released a report which showed that Hervey Bay had approved more new residential lots in the 12 months to March 2004 than any other Queensland centre outside the South-East corner. In the year to March 2004, 1987 residential lots were approved in Hervey Bay City. Hervey Bay's population has grown from only 30,000 in 1991 to approximately 48,000 in 2004.

This will all add pressure to Fraser Island which is also bracing for an increased visitation when Virgin and Jetstar airlines introduce Boeing 737 services from southern capitals directly into Hervey Bay. Given that the present level of visitation to Fraser Island is unsustainable with the current methods of transport, it will require a significant change in management and patterns of recreation on Fraser Island to cope with this ever increasing demand.

New Ranger Accommodation

15 new houses for ranger accommodation have been installed at Dundubara and Eurong. These buildings, designed to be cool, comfortable, energy-efficient and bushfire-resistant were prefabricated on the mainland and transported to the island in two halves. Prefabrication minimised waste during construction and damage to the fragile island environment during installation. The logistics of delivering the houses provided a challenge for contractors and QPWS staff.

Assistance for 4WD Volunteers: In January a group of 194 4WDs and 548 people from the Queensland Association of Four Wheel Drive Clubs picked up three industrial bulk bins of rubbish from Hook Point to Indian Head and inland. Sites targeted included the areas around bins along the beach, the waste transfer stations, and around the creek mouths. QPWS coordinated bins and rubbish removal after the event and waived of permits for participants.

Fraser Island also need volunteers to remove weeds.