



# MOONBI 124

MOONBI is the name given by the Butchalla Aborigines to the central part of their homeland, Fraser Island or "Kgori"

MOONBI is the newsletter of Fraser Island Defenders Organization Limited

FIDO, "The Watchdog of Fraser Island", aims to ensure the wisest use of Fraser Island's natural resources

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**Backgrounder:** The only Backgrounder in this issue is an objective analysis outlining Fraser Island's unhappy fate since it received World Heritage listing in December 1992. It attempts to summarize the Federal and Queensland Government's failure to provide adequate resources to preserve the island integrity and keep alive those eloquent aspirations expressed at the time of the island's listing.

This issue of MOONBI has three main themes:

**1. World Heritage Values:** The first theme deals with Fraser Island's World Heritage values. FIDO believes these are frequently overlooked in dealing with various aspects of management of this island as an economic resource rather than a NATURAL resource for which it is most famed. Some of the problems with addressing this issue are in the Backgrounder, "What has World Heritage meant for Fraser Island?"

**2. Aesthetic Values:** The second theme is how one of the World Heritage values for which the island is most recognized, the aesthetic values, suffers most in the process of dealing with other day-to-day management issues. FIDO is critical of some of the practices used in management of urban parks being employed on Fraser Island resulting in the degradation of the visual amenity.

**Petitions:** Part of our action on the issue of Aesthetic values involves Parliamentary petition. All Queensland Parliamentarians need to be aware that the visual integrity of Fraser Island is being seriously eroded and compromised by a series of management decisions. This must be halted and many past decisions reversed. The petitions should demonstrate that there is wide public support for restoring Lake McKenzie to a natural state and so that it does not remain a gardener's delusion. See p 3

**3. Story of Invaders:** This theme shows just how seriously Fraser Island is under threat from invasion from a variety of invaders from large fauna to the tiniest insects and even fungi that threaten the island's natural integrity. Recent unwelcome arrivals on Fraser Island include insects that can decimate the pandanus numbers, feral pigs and possibly fungi that have the potential to wreak ecological havoc.

**Bush Regenerators wanted:** The story of invaders has a role for anyone interested in participating in any of the three FIDO bush regeneration programs over the coming three months. Inside the wrapper and also on the FIDO web page are details of the operations to be led by John Sinclair in November, March and May. They promise to be fun events.

**FIDO Initiatives:** While there are many aspects of the Fraser Island issue that need to be addressed. FIDO is focused on undertaking positive things. That is why in this issue we have included a petition to put right the deliberate adverse modification of Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) and

why we are seeking bush regenerators. There are other matters we are also pursuing.

**Flight:** In August FIDO chartered a flight to explore as much of the Great Sandy region as we could afford to update our photographic library of Fraser Island. During a two-hour flight from Maroochy to Sandy Cape and return we captured over 1,000 images of Fraser Island and Cooloola so that we will have a basis for comparing future changes to the island and monitoring change. The last aerial survey of Fraser Island's Top End was made in 2003.



Fraser Island Top End Sandblows and Lakes - 17 August 2011

**Back in Safari Business:** FIDO is also determined to place more focus on the Great Sandy Marine Park and is proposing a special safari from Tin Can Bay to Maryborough retracing the route taken by 19<sup>th</sup> century log rafters. Only 30 people can be taken. See p8

**Conference:** Our very successful Fourth Biennial FIDO@40 Conference was one of the positives. While one attendee came in from Israel and another from Hong Kong unfortunately only three people from DERM and one from the Commonwealth attended this very insightful and important event that has helped improve our understanding of Fraser Island and its values. It was frustrating that no media attended or even mentioned the conference. Despite this there was a healthy attendance and the conference lacked nothing in the way of stimulating topics and healthy discussion. Papers are being placed on the FIDO's Web site as agreement for release of the papers is obtained from the authors.

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## Fraser Island World Heritage Values

Managing Fraser Island needs to be all about protecting its World Heritage values. So much of the focus unfortunately seems to be to catering for tourists that there is some blindness about protecting what the tourists go to Fraser Island to see, the wildlife and the natural features.

### Official World Heritage Values for Fraser Island

(from [www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au))

#### Criterion (IX) Outstanding examples of on-going evolution:

Fraser Island provides a globally significant example of biological evolution, outstanding examples of ecosystems that have developed in response to maritime conditions and poor soils developed on coastal dune formations. The World Heritage values include:

- \* an outstanding example of the combination of rainforests growing on tall sand dunes;
- \* species of flora and fauna which have adapted to the comparatively nutrient poor, acidic, sands of the island;
- \* vegetational chronosequences including successional stages associated with the development of these rainforest communities;
- \* an outstanding example of subtropical patterned fens which contain a variety of organisms not normally found in such acid conditions, including "acid" frogs; and
- \* the diversity of plant and animal species

#### Criterion (VII) Contains superlative natural phenomena

Fraser Island, the largest sand island in the world, has exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance and contains superlative natural phenomena including:

- \* over 250km of sandy beaches with long, uninterrupted sweeps of ocean beach, with more than 40km of strikingly coloured sand cliffs, as well as spectacular dune blowouts; and
- \* ocean surf beaches, strikingly coloured sand cliffs, spectacular tall rainforests growing on low nutrient sands, perched dune lakes including both clear "white water" lakes and dark "black water" lakes, banksia woodlands, heath, patterned swampy fens and sheltered mangrove areas in a spectacular mosaic landscape.

#### Criterion (VIII) Outstanding examples of stages of earth's history

Fraser Island provides a globally significant example of geological processes, including complex coastal dune formations that are still evolving, and an array of lakes that is exceptional in terms of number, diversity, age and the evidence of dynamic and developmental stages. The World Heritage values include:

- \* the largest sand island in the world which contains complex, evolving coastal dune formations; and
- \* an array of dunes and dune lakes which is exceptional in terms of number, diversity and age, and which provides evidence of dynamic and developmental stages in dune formation including:
  - \* freshwater dune lakes;
  - \* actively forming depositional dune forms;
  - \* erosional aeolian dune forms;
  - \* chronosequence of podsol development; and
  - \* chronosequence of dunes with its varying stages of soil development and associative successive and retrogressive stages of vegetation communities.

### Management Plan Review

DERM has recently announced a review of the Great Sandy Region Management Plan. We trust this won't be like the farcical review undertaken five years ago when there was no public consultation. One value of the current review to which FIDO has already made extensive submissions is that, unlike the Management Plan approved in 1994, it will have a statutory basis under the Nature Conservation Act. FIDO is concerned that the plan will adequately protect the World Heritage values that have been significantly ignored in the implementation of the current plan

### Protecting Biodiversity

There is growing alarm in biological circles that wildlife and other biological resources that Australian national parks were set aside to protect are disappearing from those reserves. The case of the depopulation of many of Kakadu's wildlife species has been well documented by some of Australia's most eminent biologists. While there has been little research into the situation on Fraser Island, the loss of some wildlife is acknowledged. Quolls have gone in living memory; koalas went before the arrival of European; many shorebird such as the iconic Pied oyster-catchers and Beach Stone-curlews are in serious decline; black swans once had vast populations in Great Sandy Strait; and many reptile populations including once common Death adders are in decline. Elsewhere in this MOONBI the decline of dugong is discussed in detail. Some of these losses may be attributed to the unannounced arrival of the cane toad on Fraser Island probably in the 1950s or 60s. Some such as the decline of shorebirds may be the result of competition from human visitors. Others such as the dugong, turtles and black swans may be the result of the decline of the sea-grass beds.

**A Fauna Management Plan?** Whatever the reasons for the wildlife decline, sediment on marine meadows, cane-toads, changed fire regimes, human disturbance or predation, the situation is serious. DERM has a Dingo Management Plan that FIDO supports but that plan addresses the management of only one species. FIDO is wanting a Fauna Management Plan to look at all fauna species to ensure that Fraser Island doesn't slowly slide along the same path that is seeing the disappearance of Kakadu's fauna.



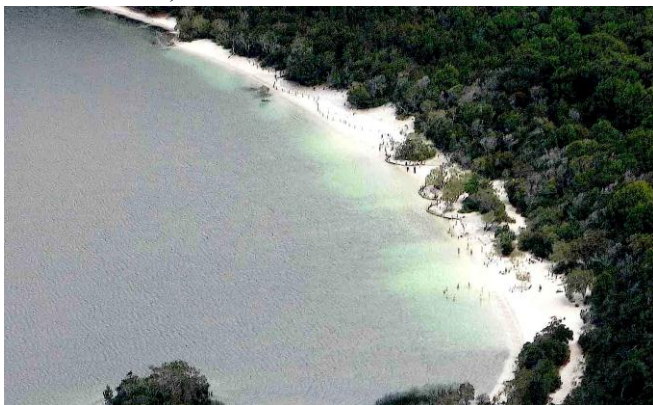
See what has become of the Lake McKenzie beach  
<https://picasaweb.google.com/106668843048738450637/ModifyingLakeMcKenzieBoorangooraBeach#>

# Managing Fraser Island's World Heritage Aesthetic Values

Fraser Island's World Heritage values recognize the island's outstanding aesthetic values. It is these values that have been responsible for its very significant tourist attraction. While some people go to Fraser Island just to "chill out" and some go just for the camaraderie built around the "boy's own" fishing weeks and yet others go just for the adventure of hiking or four-wheel driving, the majority are drawn there by its sheer physical attraction. Yet it is the preservation of these physical attractions that needs to be addressed.

Fraser Island has inspired some of Australia's greatest artists (Sidney Nolan), writers (Patrick White) musical composers (Peter Sculthorpe) and poets (Judith Wright) to produce some of the finest works based on their experiences there. Despite Fraser Island being originally inscribed on the World Heritage List because of its *exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance*, there has not been enough recognition given to these values. These are some examples:

- \* Casuarinas have been planted in sandblows (Eurong and Corroboree Beach) as well as other sandblows to stop the natural erosion processes that Fraser Island was inscribed for (now World Heritage Criterion IX)
- \* Fraser Island's most conspicuous landmark, Indian Head (Tuckee) has been allowed to become a visual eyesore. Many of the informal and totally unmanaged pedestrian tracks from the beach to the summit have become a network of eroded gullies and the thin veneer of topsoil near the summit has been permitted to continue to erode away;
- \* Casuarinas have been planted on the Ocean Beach in front of the Pinnacles coloured sands. Apart from the fact that this is a beach where there were not previously any trees and that is subject to storm surges, the effect of this plantation is to place a curtain across the front of the coloured sands preventing the public viewing them from the beach.
- \* An unsightly and wholly unnatural plantation has now been established on Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora)'s main beach. This plantation has been fenced off with a visually offensive fence without any appreciation of the natural processes by which the beach and the lake lunette were created;



The main Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) beach on 17 August. The fences and matted area are visible from the air and show how people have moved away from the fenced area.

- \* Roads have been widened to become wide firebreaks with an appalling loss of visual amenity. In 2009 the widest of these firebreaks (the Dillingham Road) proved to be ineffective in stopping a wildfire.
- \* The closed forest roads again have been widened unnecessarily without consideration of the loss of amenity and the increased desiccation resulting.

## FIDO's approach to Fraser's aesthetics FIDO's strategy to see the serious issues of managing the aesthetic attractions given higher priority includes:

- \* Organizing a petition to restore the natural integrity of Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora);
- \* Seeking justification from DERM for these modifications (So far DERM has refused to answer); and
- \* Having a Visual Management Plan developed for Fraser Island starting with the lakes.

### Visual Management Plans Work

In May John Sinclair visited the Yorkshire Dales National Park in England. Although most of this National Park is private land, he noted that the character of the landscape hadn't changed since he first visited that area 34 years earlier. Despite being 90% privately owned, this National Park has remarkably retained its character and visual integrity through good management. British National Park managers have been able to codify elements of the landscape that need to be preserved and allow traditional farming to be carried on as it has for centuries.

In October John Sinclair will study how the visual integrity of the Adirondack Park in New York State is maintained. This park covers some 2,470,000 hectares more than 15 times the size of Fraser Island. More than half the land within the Adirondack Park is privately owned, including several hamlets and much of the remaining land is a production Forest Preserve.

*The issue that DERM needs to address is can Queensland catch up to British and American park managers in the protection of natural landscape values and visual amenity.*

### FIDO's Lake McKenzie Petition

FIDO has preparing paper and E-petitions to be presented to the Queensland Parliament in late November. This should allow them to be discussed before the Christmas period and before the probable of proroguing of the Parliament. This is the substance of the petition we want people to support:

**Grievance:** *The beach of Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) is one of Fraser Island's most iconic attractions. An artificial plantation or garden has now been established on the beach in a misguided attempt at beautification. The artificial matting and an unsightly fence installed to protect the garden seriously detracts from the natural beauty of this site, diminishing the lake's World Heritage values, its amenity and its natural integrity. The plantation is also interrupting the natural process that shaped the lake and environs.*

**Request:** *That the Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) beach be restored to its natural state by removing the artificial plantation, the matting covering the beach and the unsightly fence to allow the natural forces that created the beach and the lunette be allowed to operate without further man-made interference.*

**Download petition and get signatures:** [www.fido.org.au](http://www.fido.org.au)

**Sign the E-Petition:**

<http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/work-of-assembly/petitions/e-petitions>

## Fraser Island's Alien Invaders

Since the formation of FIDO in January 1971, we have been battling to protect Fraser Island's natural integrity. We have seen off brumbies and feral cattle (not to mention the goats on Woody Island). However the list of aliens continues to grow and there is an alarming trend. Some aliens such as pigs and cats and even ants can be seen with the naked eye. What isn't so obvious is the miniscule Pandanus Plant-hopper (*Jamella australiae*) that have begun attacking Fraser Island Pandanus that were doing so well after the removal of the brumbies, the small weed seeds attached to our persons and vehicles and the microscopic spores of Myrtle Rust and Phytophthora.

### Ant Invasions

(From the QPWS "Sandpaper")

The **African big-headed ant**, also referred to as the coastal brown ant *Pheidole megacephala*, is steadily invading Fraser Island. These ants are easy to recognize. There will often be a large number of small worker ants accompanied by the occasional soldier ant with a comparatively large head. This invasion could severely impact about 300 native ant species and have devastating flow-on effects for the island's ecology.

Native to southern Africa, the **big-headed ant** is now distributed throughout the tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world and is recognized as a major threat to biodiversity and agriculture. This is because of its ability to outcompete and displace native invertebrates, particularly ants. In a 2007 study in the Northern Territory, Hoffman and Parr reported the degree of impact by a **big-headed ant** infestation on native ants was the most severe ever reported anywhere. They found a complete absence of native ant species in older infestations and, in the youngest infestation, only one individual native ant was found.

In 2009 PhD student Wayne Robinson used his Cliff Thompson Memorial Scholarship to study Fraser Island ants. Native ants are important seed dispersers. Alien ants are too small to fulfil this role, quite apart from the fact that they have different habits. Big-headed ants consume quantities of sugars and honey dew (a sweet secretion of scale insects) and, as a result, encourage the spread of scale insects and sooty mould. The combined effect is long-term change in the vegetation structure for individual species and whole plant communities.

African big-headed ants have multiple queens in each nest, similar to all other invasive ant species. A single infestation can have hundreds or thousands of queens. All African big-headed ants come from one original colony, meaning an ant taken from the Fraser Island infestation would be accepted into a Brisbane colony. This enables infestations to become super-colonies covering many hectares.

The cost of an initial control treatment on known infestations on Fraser Island—155 hectares on national park, 68 hectares on other lands—has been estimated at 1300 person hours and 540 kilograms of pesticide, totalling about \$120,000. Infestations have already been treated at Central Station, QPWS Eurong ranger base, northern Eurong township, Dundubara, Waddy Point base and campground, Waddy Lodge and Wathumba campground.



### Preventing new alien infestations

The number of identified weed species on Fraser Island has doubled in the 19 years since its World Heritage listing. Two recent arrivals on the island are Winged slender thistle *Carduus tenuiflorus* and Inkweed *Phytolacca octandra*. The proliferation of weed species on Fraser Island highlights the importance of implementing stricter bio-security measures to prevent further introductions of weeds, pests and diseases. Once established on the island, weeds produce thousands of seeds that are dispersed by wind, birds, animals and people via their vehicles, camping gear or shoes.

While FIDO's physical efforts are addressing the actual weed on the ground, our major advocacy efforts are directed at improving the biosecurity of Fraser Island. Being an island it has a natural degree of immunity from aliens although Great Sandy Strait isn't wide enough to stop foxes and pigs making it across the water any more than it has stopped the migrations of kangaroos and perhaps even dingoes in the past. However even at its narrowest point, Great Sandy Strait has helped stall the introduction of some unwelcome pests such as *Jamella* that was held at bay for ten years. It may have been successful in helping keep *Phytophthora cinnamomi* off the island to date.

### *Jamella* havoc at Happy Valley

The most serious demonstration of the need for better biosecurity has been the outbreak Pandanus dieback in the Happy Valley Yidney Rocks area. It is caused by an infestation of tiny insects called flatids (*Jamella australiae*) that feed on the plant's sap. This causes yellowing and death of leaves within the central leaf whorls at the heads of branches. If left untreated, the plant will slowly die, dropping leaves and branches. *Jamella* are native to north Queensland, where they are controlled by a natural predator. This predator isn't found naturally this far south. While *Jamella* can be controlled (and now is) it has caused headaches and havoc. Just imagine the foredunes of Fraser Island denuded of Pandanus.

**It is most important for all residents and land managers on the island to continue the coordinated and sustained efforts in weed and pest management.**

**New Biosecurity Efforts Needed:** Almost all introductions of alien plants and pests have occurred through innocence or ignorance. Better biosecurity requires that we overcome these two obstacles to the natural integrity of the island. FIDO is seeking better public education programs for visitors to the island akin to the dingo awareness program. We are also seeking to have wash-down facilities for all 4WDs **BEFORE** they go on to the island to ensure vehicles are not carrying seeds and spores as stowaways. The most serious threats to Fraser's biological integrity are now posed by hitch-hiking spores and seeds.

## Fraser Island dingo collars

The amount of information now being extracted as a result of the radio tracking collars on 18 Fraser Island dingoes is most impressive. *Sandpaper* reports: *The overarching Fraser Island Dingo Population Study began in 2009 and will provide more reliable estimates of the total dingo population on Fraser Island as well as providing an insight into their natural population fluctuations. Various methodologies are being used in the long-term study, including a capture-mark-recapture (CMR) program, the GPS satellite tracking program, scat analysis and a dingo prey habitat assessment. GPS location data will be collected over a predetermined period. UQ has been contracted by QPWS to analyse the data and provide a report.*

FIDO has long been concerned about the health and strength of the Fraser Island dingo population but interim results of the dingo research currently underway is most reassuring. The data gathered is exploding a number of myths about dingo behaviour. Contrary to popular views there is no consistent behavioural pattern established for all dingoes. Some just prowl up and down the beach and one these that had a radio tracking collar was run down by a 4WD. However one that had a collar fitted near Poyungan Rocks then never came near the beach again in the first few weeks after being collared. The data also shows that the collars have been no handicap to their hunting

**Vehicle Strikes worrying:** FIDO is very concerned at the numbers of dingoes run down by vehicles. 14% of all autopsies on Fraser Island dingoes were reported to have been killed by motor vehicle strikes.

**Feral Cats:** Much of the work of collaring the dingoes was done by Bernie Shakeshaft. FIDO regards Bernie as an extremely creditable bushman who has an amazing understanding of dingo behavior. A few years ago FIDO was able to introduce Bernie to the QPWS. Bernie's dingo work on Fraser Island has had some valuable spin-offs. He has raised the alarm about the number of feral cats on the island. These secretive and destructive hunters were known to be present but were previously thought to have been kept at low numbers by dingo predation on Fraser Island. Bushman Bernie has a contrary view. Because feral cats have an impact on small native vertebrate populations, DERM is now monitoring Fraser Island's cat population and its potential impact on wildlife much more closely.

**Feral pigs (*Sus scrofa*)** have been now confirmed on Fraser Island. Because pigs have the potential to breed very rapidly, their population may build up enough to escape dingo predation. For this reason DERM has obtained funding to conduct aerial search or shoot once a year with the aim of eradicating all pigs within five years

**Council Action:** Following recent sightings of feral cats on the island and ongoing concerns over the fate of the dingo population, the Fraser Coast Regional Council has proposed to ban all dogs and cats except for the one dog already registered there. It will not be allowed outside its home nor will it be replaced.



## Fraser's Orkney Connection

While visiting Orkney Islands World Heritage sites, John Sinclair was surprised to cross tracks with connections to Eliza Fraser. Orkney's World Heritage listing is based on a collection of Neolithic sites with purposes ranging from occupation to ceremony including the settlement of Skara Brae. Because it is older than Stonehenge and the Great Pyramids and because of its excellent preservation, it has been called the "Scottish Pompeii".

Prior to setting off on the fatal voyage of the "*Stirling Castle*" from her Orkney home, with her seafaring husband, Captain James Fraser, Eliza entrusted the care of their 14-year-old daughter and two sons to the Presbyterian minister at Stromness, in the Orkney Islands. She was then 37 years old and her husband was 56. Following her return to England, her children remained destitute in Stromness until their guardians finally received \$964 from the Lord Mayor of London's subscription for their mother over a year after the "*Stirling Castle*" struck the Great Barrier Reef.

John Sinclair was surprised to hear that many Orkadians believed that Eliza Fraser had been a much younger woman at the time of her adventures on the island that takes its name from her husband and that she had lived for years with Aborigines rather than a mere six weeks.

**Another International Connection:** Fraser Island connections extend to unlikely places. In September John Sinclair was privileged to meet the Sultan of Ternate (where Alfred Russel Wallace wrote his *Theory of Evolution* before Darwin). The Sultan described how in 1943 as a young boy **Australian Z Force commandos (who were trained on Fraser Island)** rescued his family from the Japanese occupation forces in the dead of night. They were evacuated to Brisbane. Few Australians would be aware that the Brisbane suburb Wacol was home for an Indonesian Royal family in latter WWII years nor that it was also the base of the Indonesian Government-in-exile for the same period.



## Sinkhole at Inskip Point

At the start of the mid-year school holidays, Inskip Point campers were startled to see a hole open up on the beach. Within a four-hour period a 100m-wide section of beach had been swallowed up and the whole beach had been transformed to slurry as the expanding sinkhole sucked up large chunks of sand followed by trees and signs. One eyewitness said that the water was bubbling like it was boiling. It was the latest and largest of many Inskip Point sinkholes in recent memory. Usually they're about 5 or 10m long.

A scientist said the dramatic sinkhole-like conditions were likely caused by an "eddy" or "loop" current creating turbulence in the water and destabilizing sand. When enough water gets into the permeable sand and when there is enough water pressure, it forces the grains apart, the sand loses its cohesion, and it turns in to quicksand.

## Tourism Issues

Many parts of the Fraser Coast tourism industry may not recover from the recent downturn in the industry that has been sharp, sudden and severe in relative terms for a couple of years. The downturn results from a combination of bad weather and the high Australian dollar for more than two years according to a leading tourism operator.

To counter the downturn some operators have offered 50% discounts but this has done little to increase the number of customers. Also in an attempt to get the tourists back, the Queensland Government has been waging a public relations and tourism promotion campaign but so far with little impact on the volumes of visitors. The downturn is very evident on Fraser Island and tour operators are demanding more promotion of Fraser Island from the Queensland Government. They believe Fraser Island's attractions are being treated like Cinderella's and are not being given the promotion deserved by the various tourist agencies who are more concerned about the impact of the cyclones and floods on other parts of Queensland.

Some idea of how much the value of the Aussie dollar is affecting tourism can be gauged by some of the travel reports going global. In one report recently a writer wrote glowingly about Fraser Island but winced at the price of getting there: *"Backpacking isn't really possible here at the moment. It's entirely possible to trudge about with an overstuffed backpack on, sleep in fusty dorms of twelve and live off a relentless diet of pasta with tomato sauce every night. But it's futile. You may be living like a tramp, but you'll be spending like a king. ... I spent money to see ... beaches. I paid over \$300 – that's the going rate – for two days and a night on Fraser Island, the world's biggest sand island. It's a UNESCO World Heritage Site – like the Grand Canyon and Angkor and Stonehenge and central Edinburgh – which means the UN guarantees it's cool. I won't disagree with the UN. ..."* For most people in the Northern Hemisphere though it is cheaper to get to other World Heritage sites.



### New Backpacker rules bring dollars

While many lament the decline of visitation to Fraser Island and the economic consequences, a Noosa based operator of tag-a-long four-wheel drive trips to Fraser Island says the extended tourism permits to come into force next year could add millions of dollars to the value of his business. Cobus Van Staden is delighted his three-year operating option has been extended out to 15-year agreements and he can now transfer the operating permit to a purchaser should he want to sell his business down the track. Van Staden's customers pay up to \$365 for an all-inclusive three day driver escorted tour which can take up to 50 people a tour in eight vehicles.

## Kingfisher Hotel Rebranded

A new franchise agreement has meant that Kingfisher Bay Resort has become part of the Accor Hotel chain and is now marketed as Mercure Kingfisher Bay Resort Fraser Island. The resort will continue to be managed by the current executive team.

Only the 152 hotel rooms are included under the franchise agreement, meaning the villas, houses and wilderness resorts will remain Kingfisher Group branded. The rebranded resort also offers three restaurants, two lounge bars, a cafe and a late bar. Five meeting rooms are available for business events and conferencing.

General manager Gary Smith said the tourism industry and its operators had faced tough challenges during the past few years, and could expect more to follow. Joining up with Accor allows the resort to access the chain's global branch reach and buying power, and was sure to make it more visible in an increasingly competitive market.

## Queensland's new Coastal Plan

Queensland Government predictions of sea-level rises as a result of climate change have been released in a report, *Queensland Coastal Processes and Climate Change*. Maps show new shorelines, storm tide inundation areas and erosion danger zones. Ocean beaches on the mainland and Fraser Island are expected to migrate only slightly westwards, but tidal areas on sheltered shorelines are expected to become more extensive. With the expected erosion and inundation of Inskip Point Fraser Island ferries will have to find somewhere else to pick-up vehicles

Maps linked to the report show an *"indicative erosion prone area"*, with likely permanent loss of land, a default storm tide inundation area and an area of permanent inundation from sea level rises. These predictions will be used for development assessment purposes with the implementation of the Queensland Coastal Plan in mid-2011.

The specific effect on controversial developments, such as Rainbow Shores Stage II and the Fraser Straits Marina, is not known at this stage and may depend on how far along the approval process the projects have moved, prior to the plans becoming law.



### Shattering the serenity of the bush

It is not only visual aesthetics that are being assaulted by some DERM management practices on Fraser Island. DERM has defied the considerations of energy conservation, and air and sound pollution. In their endless pursuit of tidiness they have elected to use air brooms and have even taken to using these noise and sound machines to shatter the serenity of the bush to blow leaves off roads and car-parks. Air brooms are very environmentally unfriendly, use non-renewable resources and produce both CO2 and particulates (see MOONBI 110) and noise pollution but air brooms are being increasingly used in Queensland national parks. They are now being used to blow leaves and dust off roadside car parks. This epitomizes the determination of park managers to prevail against Nature which carelessly drops leaves and branches in areas they insist on keeping TIDY.

## Dugongs and Turtle Deaths Follow Queensland Floods

The floods and cyclones in Queensland have had a devastating impact on the state's dugong and turtles. In August, the Queensland government reported 649 known turtle deaths in the first seven months of 2011 - up more than 200 on the same period last year. The government also said 96 dugongs had washed up dead on the state's coastline over the same period, compared with 79 for the whole of 2010. Experts argue that the real toll could be much higher, as these numbers include only those deaths that have been discovered. In 2011 there has been a spike in deaths for both endangered species, blamed on starvation after the January floods wiped out seagrass beds.

**The seagrass needs light to photosynthesize and the increased turbidity in the water resulting from flood run-off has limited the amount of light passing through and thus the sea grass died. The result of the death of the sea grass beds is migration of the dugong population seeking food and the subsequent death by starvation of many. As a result, dugong deaths, as many as the 99 found dead in 1991 as far away as New South Wales, can be blamed on flooding in the Mary River.**

### Bad Land-use -> Silt run-off -> Death to dugongs

In June a team from Sea World and University of Queensland investigated the deaths and the health of dugong in Hervey Bay part of the Great Sandy Region. Their survey found Hervey Bay's dugongs fared worse than their Moreton Bay counterparts after the summer floods. UQ marine mammal researcher Dr Janet Lanyon said the 1991 floods showed that the Hervey Bay dugongs were more vulnerable than the Moreton Bay population because their feeding grounds were closer to the coastline.

### A History of Population Decline

The population decline of dugongs is particularly disturbing. George Thorne in his book *"Queen of the Colonies"* published in 1876 said: *"For between three and four hours there was a continuous stream of dugongs passing while the tide went out, which those in the boat could only liken to the rush of cattle out of a stockyard after a general muster. Some of the men in the boat said that millions ...some thousands must have gone out with the tide..."*

Since then the population has shrunk significantly. Some of the loss of the once massive population can be attributed to hunting that went on up to the 1960s. For decades Hans Bellert operated an operation at Bogimbah on Fraser Island for boiling down dugong to extract oil. The track across the mud flats along which he dragged the carcasses to the boiler remained clearly visible for several decades after he left the island. The plunging population is believed to be the result of land-use practices on the adjacent mainland rather than hunting. More silt from the run-off from mainland floods has dramatically reduced the volume of sea grass.

James Sheppard who studied Hervey Bay dugongs as part of his Ph.D Thesis noted the devastation of floods. *"In 1992 when Hervey Bay experienced two major flooding events followed by a cyclone, an estimated 1000 km<sup>2</sup> of seagrass was destroyed within a three week period and the dugong population plummeted from an estimated 1937 ... to only 166 ... animals. The intertidal seagrasses were uprooted by heavy seas and the deepwater subtidal seagrasses died as a result of reduced light intensities associated with the persistently turbid water."*

**Greater human population ->lower wildlife population**

**Dugong** (*Dugong dugon*) belong to the order **Sirenia**. Its closest modern relative, **Steller's sea cow** (*Hydrodamalis gigas*), was hunted to **extinction** in the 18th century. It is also the only sirenian in its range, which spans the waters of at least 37 countries throughout the Indo-Pacific. There has been a dramatic reduction in dugong populations in East Africa, the Red Sea and South-east Asia. The dugong's current distribution is reduced and disjunct, and many populations are close to extinction. The majority of dugongs live in the northern waters of Australia between Shark Bay and Moreton Bay. While dugongs look like a cross between seals and walrus, in evolutionary terms, they are actually more closely related to elephants.



### Turtle season

Story Courtesy QPWS *Sandpaper* published by DERM

Fraser Island Rangers and volunteers recorded 205 turtles nesting on Fraser Island beaches during the November–January period. They were mainly in the Top End although one was recorded near Dundubara. In addition to the 75 turtles that had been previously tagged there were 130 turtles that had never been tagged before). It was a big season for nesting green turtles.

Turtles nesting on Fraser Island have to deal with a predator not encountered at many other turtle rookeries — dingoes. The Top End dingo population swells during the turtle nesting season as dingoes migrate hoping to dine out on fresh turtle eggs. The predation has become so heavy for these endangered animals that the QPWS has established two dingo-proof hatcheries were installed before the season, and all the loggerhead nests were relocated to these hatcheries because they are less common and more endangered than the green turtles.

Most of the courting and mating of all loggerhead turtles in the South West Pacific region is reported to occur in the Sandy Cape-Rooney Point area of Fraser Island so a new project has begun during September to November to monitor any courting and mating before the turtle nesting season.

## In the Wake of the Rafters

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries Cooloola logs were transported to Poverty Point near the head of Tin Can Bay from where they were rafted up and taken up Great Sandy Strait to Maryborough. FIDO has already previously operated safaris to re-enact this event. However, because of the increased biological significance of Great Sandy Strait as a critical Fisheries Habitat Reserve and as a vital part of the soon to be enlarged Great Sandy World Heritage area, FIDO is planning to place more focus on this very vital and not easily accessible part of the region. After a lapse of more than two decades FIDO in planning a special safari for 25 people starting and finishing in Brisbane on the weekend of 31 March and 1 April, 2012. It will involve camping overnight on the shores of Great Sandy Strait at a time when there will be a maximum number of trans-equatorial waders assembled here. People wanting to be one of the 25 passengers on the chartered yacht should register their interest by Emailing John Sinclair: [john@sinclair.org.au](mailto:john@sinclair.org.au)



Towing raft of logs behind Palmer.  
Seery's Creek, Tin Can Bay.  
Chas Mathison photo.

## Sustainable Fishery

Fraser Island is renowned Australia-wide amongst amateur anglers. Great Sandy fish stocks are also targeted by commercial fishers. While few fishers are members of FIDO, FIDO shares concern at the mounting evidence that the fish stocks have been over exploited. Evidence is provided by the average the size of fish now being caught compared with historical records. FIDO supports any moves to make the Great Sandy fishery more sustainable including bans on netting and stricter bag limits. The bag limit on tailor in Western Australia is about half of that of Queensland and it has been like that for many years. In 2005-06 FIDO was to the fore of an unsuccessful campaign to have a realistic no-take zone when the Great Sandy Marine Park (Northern Section) was declared. This is when the Beattie Government made the appalling decision to set aside less than 4% zoned as no-take areas. FIDO is now determined to see that area dramatically enlarged.

**Bogimbah Pearl Farm:** An opportunity to protect a critical part of Great Sandy Strait and the Great Sandy Marine Park may have emerged with the demise of the pearl farm established between Bogimbah and Little Woody Island. It is amazing how enterprises such as this pearl farm are announced in the media with great fanfare and then the media fails to even note when many fail. However without this aquaculture, there is an opportunity for a significant part of the Great Sandy Strait Fisheries Habitat Reserve to also be zoned as a no-take zone when the Great Sandy Marine Park is reviewed. The principles of sustainability decree that the present 4% no-take area needs to be increased.

## Washing the Hands Like Pilate

In her eloquent and powerful poem, *Dark Unmarried Mothers*, Oodgeroo Noonuccle used the term “*Washing the hands like Pilate*”. Such a phrase seems to be most appropriate to the Commonwealth Government’s approach to Fraser Island. The Feds persistently claim that because the Queensland Government has the responsibility for the day-to-day management of Fraser Island, they are absolved from all responsibility for what happens there.

Commonwealth funding for Fraser Island was recently raised in Federal Parliament. On 25<sup>th</sup> May during the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee’s Estimates hearing Greens Senator, Scott Ludlum, raised the issue while questioning what action the Commonwealth was taking to address the risk of Myrtle Rust reaching the island.

He was told by Paul Murphy, Assistant Secretary Heritage Division in the DSEWPC that the Commonwealth does not “*have operational responsibility for the management of parks in Queensland*”. .... This is the usual cop out used by the Commonwealth but Senator Ludlum pressed on stating, “*I do not want to come away with the impression that the Commonwealth is doing nothing at all if that is not the case.*”

Mr. Murphy responded, “*There is funding that goes to Fraser Island under the Caring for our Country grants. The major funding at the moment from the Commonwealth is to fund the executive officer for the advisory council. I know that there is also some funding to do with myrtle rust but I am not sure if that is specific to Fraser Island, so I will have to take that on notice.*”

Senator Ludlum concluded the exchange, “*What I am asking you to take on notice is specifically Fraser Island but particularly myrtle rust and whether you are aware of what is going on there as they relate to the World Heritage values and as they relate to Commonwealth responsibilities for preserving the values of that site.*”

**FIDO waits to see if the Commonwealth demonstrates any increased interest in what happens on Fraser Island following this Parliamentary exchange or whether the Feds will continue to back away from their responsibilities to protect Fraser Island’s World Heritage values. During this session Senator Ludlum observed that there had been a 31% cut to the budget for the Heritage division. Since then there has been a dramatic reorganization of responsibilities within the Federal Environment Department and the Heritage Unit and it seems Fraser Island could get even less attention — but we won’t pass judgment yet.**



MOON Point as seen 17 August 2011. Rising sea levels and coastal erosion have transformed Moon Point to an island