



# MOONBI 129

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

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

FIDO's Registered Office: c/- Inns of Court, Level 2, Ocean Central, 2 Ocean Street, Maroochydore Q 4558 ABN 59 009 969 135

FIDO's Postal Address: PO Box 909 TOOWONG QLD 4066 Editor: John Sinclair, #1/32 Weston Street, COORPAROO Q 4151

MOONBIs since 1996 and all FIDO Backgrounders can be found at [www.fido.org.au](http://www.fido.org.au)

Email: [john@fido.org.au](mailto:john@fido.org.au)

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**FIDO's exciting fens project:** When FIDO offered to take members of the International Mire Conservation Group who were visiting Australia for a Symposium in southern states to Fraser Island, we never expected it to become as big and as exciting as it was. The excitement came from learning just how the fens developed and now function. A lot more is yet to come out of the two week study and workshop as the scientists sift through the data but an initial report is featured on pp 2-3. While the fens aren't and should never become a tourist feature, it is important to understand these important ecosystems that act as a carbon sink.

**Still Discovering:** There has been other very interesting scientific data coming to light on things like green algae in Wanggoolba Creek and jelly babies in the fens and the advance of Irukandji. See p 4

**George Haddock Track start:** FIDO faces big but exciting challenges in 2014. There is our continuing (even ramped up) war on weeds and now approval for the joint project FIDO is undertaking with the NPAQ to build the George Haddock track. See opportunities to help on p 9.

**Poisonous Plant:** FIDO is seriously scared of the potential threat that Abrus or Crab Eye poses to Fraser Island. If it escapes from Happy Valley where it is currently choking lots of vegetation, it poses a massive threat. If not controlled, Abrus could become on Fraser Island what Cats Claw is to many South East Queensland streams; that is unless it is urgently brought under control. The BMRG has agreed to assist FIDO financially with a special week, working in Happy Valley on this very poisonous plant (see p7).

**Poisonous Politics:** There is now a clear pattern emerging throughout Australia of demonizing green policies and their advocates. This seems to have become an ideological mantra for both state and Federal governments. "Greenies" are found in every Australian political party yet they are seen by some political leaders in a similar light to communists during the Cold War era. In the article "Politicians Seeing Red at Anything Green" MOONBI attempts to summarize the litany of actions taking direct aim at conservation measures of previous governments and conservation groups. (See p7) This assault on the environment is unprecedented and a reason to be alarmed.

**Field Notes and Observations:** Since his retirement from paid employment, John Sinclair has spent much more time on Fraser Island (six weeks in 2013) and is able to more closely monitor changes and developments on the island. His observations in November cover a variety of issues from firebreaks to accolades to the Eurong and Happy Valley resorts for lifting their standard of landscaping.

**Recognition and Reconciliation:** There has been a 40-year history of antagonism to FIDO and in particular, John Sinclair in his home-town Maryborough on Fraser Island's

doorstep. Australia Day 2014 saw three very significant events coincide to break down the former hostility generated when sandmining and logging industries ceased to be replaced by tourism. See story p6

**The Weather:** The severe dry weather that has hit Fraser Island continues even as this MOONBI goes to press. It has resulted in trees dying in parts of the forest, the roads becoming very difficult and the three lightning strikes near Sandy Cape, Awinya Creek and Coolooli Creek have burnt out large parts of the island. However don't mention that "Climate Change" may be a factor.

**Backgrounders:** As FIDO is calling on volunteers to help with our 2014 projects it is worth recalling FIDO's most ambitious voluntary project in 1981-82 to build the first boardwalk at **Eli Creek**. That project provided a model that changed the management of Fraser Island forever. See this backgrounder. Backgrounder 67 covers the contentious issue of Fraser Island's **fire history and management**. Wildfires seem to be increasing in frequency and severity.

**Volunteers welcome:** If you would like to be notified of any voluntary work on Fraser Island that FIDO is engaged in, please register with [john@fido.org.au](mailto:john@fido.org.au). Our working bees provide all food, accommodation and transport from Brisbane and tours around the island for a week for as little as \$200.



The Lake Allom barracks are to become the centre of operations for volunteers working on the 52 kilometre George Haddock Track from Lake Garawongera to Arch Cliffs

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## Scientists Study Fraser Island's Fens

In late November FIDO hosted a workshop and study of Fraser Island fens by scientists from eight countries. They prodded, pushed and probed to learn more about our fens. Until 1996 no one had expected these unusual wetlands would be on Fraser Island. The scientists have established that the fens are fed by water seeping out of the dunes on the western side of Fraser Island. The water and the vegetation that helped created the fens as well as their structure were the main focus of the study.

The scientists from the International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) were all peatland specialists covering a variety of disciplines. They were joined for some of the time by scientists from University of Queensland led by Dr Patrick Moss, who has been working on the ages of the fens of the Great Sandy Region for the past two years, and two biologists from EcoSciences Queensland.

The leader of the IMCG Study team, Richard Lindsay described the field work at Puthoo as the hardest he has ever done due to the density and height of the vegetation and because the ground surface is so variable with sudden steep drops and rises. He summarized the study's objectives with the following background:

*Although peatland ecosystems occur on every continent except Antarctica, and even there can be found to dominate the outlying Antarctic islands, the major part of the peatland resource is located in northern temperate, boreal and sub-arctic regions. The distribution of peatlands in sub-tropical regions is markedly discontinuous and apparently limited in total extent. This is because peatland formation requires an excess of static or slow-moving water giving rise to low oxygen levels in order to reduce the rate of plant decomposition sufficiently to produce peat. Where waterlogging is provided by groundwater or surface water, the system is said to be 'minerotrophic' and is more commonly known as 'fen'.*

*Where waterlogging is provided exclusively by direct precipitation inputs with no direct contact between the living vegetation and mineral-enriched groundwater or surface water, the system is said to be 'ombrotrophic', which is more commonly referred to as 'bog'. In warm regions such waterlogging is generally provided by groundwater, but in such warm regions the rate of evaporation and rainfall input are also therefore key elements in the water balance.*

*In northern temperate, boreal and sub-arctic regions, peatlands on gentle slopes fed by groundwater which is provided intermittently by, for example, snow melt, often form distinctive surface patterns, most typically in the shape of long narrow irregular 'strings' separated by wide shallow pools known in Scandinavia as 'flarks'.*

*The 'string' ridges are only a metre or so wide but may be as long as a kilometre and are aligned, counter intuitively, directly across the direction of water flow. They moderate the flow of the intermittent water supply and hold water in the system for longer, thereby maintaining waterlogged conditions in the strings. For the remainder of the year these*

*systems are fed by slow groundwater seepage or they are frozen, or they are dry.*

*It is therefore of considerable interest to find extensive patterned peatlands on sub-tropical Fraser Island where there is high evaporation, no snow melt and no possibility of freezing. The interest is further enhanced by the fact that the Moon Point fens display a surface pattern quite unlike that of typical temperate or boreal fens with 'strings' and 'flarks'. The pattern observed in the south-eastern corner of the Moon Point fens more closely resembles either sub-arctic polygonal mires (a mire being any peat-forming system) with underlying permafrost, or the patterns typical of rain-fed peat bogs in temperate and boreal regions. Clearly there is no permafrost on Fraser Island, ruling out the processes associated with sub-arctic mires. The possibility that the balance between rainfall and evaporative losses could support a peat bog ecosystem, supported exclusively by direct precipitation inputs, seems extremely remote. The Moon Point fens (and other patterned peatlands on Fraser Island) therefore present something of a conundrum. Parts of the peatland complex appear to mirror patterned fen systems which generally rely on snow melt and periods of freezing but the Fraser Island sites have no possibility of experiencing such conditions. Meanwhile other parts of the complex appear to mirror even more extreme conditions of freeze-*

*thaw, or resemble peatlands from a climate with regular rainfall inputs and low evaporative losses. None of these various sets of conditions appears to apply in the case of the Fraser Island fen complexes.*

The team did many transects to plot the water flow, the temperature, conductivity and pH of the water as well as the vegetation and the micro-topography. A vast amount of data was collected and recorded and plotted on

computers. The results of the field-work are proposed to be published in a paper to be published in "Mires and Peat", the journal of the IMCG. There will be an interim progress report in the bulletin and newsletter of the IMCG.

FIDO hosted scientists assisted by a grant from the Burnett Mary Regional Group for the workshop and the Norman Wettenhall Foundation supported the study. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service provided free access to Fraser Island and the Lake Coomboo barracks and the Kingfisher Group provided free ferry service. Thanks to them all.



IMCG scientists explore the Puthoo Fen tracing subterranean water flow, and recording the micro topography and vegetation





This aerial photo of the Puthoo Fens Complex taken during the workshop shows the area studied. The photo has North at the top and south at the bottom. The patterned fens are in the foreground and the string fens are in the background at the top of the photo. The edges of the patterned fens and the fingers extending from the high dunes towards the centre of the fens have no pools because they have a stronger flow of water. It can also be noted that the alignment of the strings that occur are generally more or less at right angles to the flow of water which emanates from the high dunes on the right hand side of the photo.

### The Nature of peat and fens

**Peat** is partly decomposed organic material formed *in-situ* that persists due to water-logging. The lack of oxygen forms peat. A **peatland** is part of the Earth's surface where a peat layer has formed in-situ on the surface.

**Mires** are wetlands where peat is actively forming, sequestering carbon and turning it into peat. *Mires support at least some vegetation which is normally peat forming.*

**Bogs** are mires that only receive water as precipitation. This needs to be reasonably persistent to maintain it as a mire all year round. Bogs are ombrotrophic (fed by a shower of rain)

**Fens** are peatlands fed by mineral enriched ground or surface water. Fens are minerotrophic. They can occur where there isn't rainfall all year round because fens can receive water from other sources such as groundwater or surface flow.

**Some observations relevant to the Puthoo Patterned Fen:** More details are anticipated as the scientists analyse and review their data.

- Two types of fens occur in the Puthoo complex: Patterned Fens and String fens. The string fens are the result of intermittent high surface flows of water, possibly augmented by groundwater. Similar string fens occur in Canada and Finland where they are fed mainly by snow melt.
- The water source is the aquifers in the adjacent high dunes that are higher than the fens
- The water in Puthoo Fen is fed under pressure to emerge as springs near the margin of the complex
- Where there is the most upwelling pools may be entirely absent or the pools are fewer and smaller, for example, the fingers extending into the peatland and around the edges closest to the dunes.
- The larger pools occur where there is least upwelling.
- The formation of pools results from peat becoming drier and compacted, thus making it harder for the water to get away.
- A test pipe was inserted into the fens to test the pressure. During six days a water column of 5.5 cms rose above the level of the water in the fens indicating the water pressure. Given more time it was expected that the water would rise higher.
- As water moves in all directions from the centre of the patterned complex they become progressively shallower/smaller.
- The source of the peat in the Puthoo Fen is mainly the sedge *Empodisma minus*.
- The flarks (wide shallow pools) are formed by the peat becoming compacted as the peat dries out.
- The longer strings separating the flarks are aligned more or less across the flow of the water through the fen.



## A new Cynobacteria found on Fraser Island

### *Komvophoron kgarii*

Countless people have walked the boardwalk beside Wanggoolba Creek at Central Station and commented on the green sand in the bed of the creek. It took two Queensland scientists Glenn McGregor and Barbara Sendall to examine it and describe it. The not only discovered that it was a new species of cyanobacteria but they gave it a distinctively Fraser Island specific name, *kgarii*. It goes to show that nothing in nature should be taken for granted and countless people were unaware that the organism that coated the sand grains with an emerald film had never been recognized by science previously.

### Fancy a Jelly Donut?



Suspended in the water in the pools of water in some fen flarks were found some curious gelatinous blobs of what have been dubbed "Jelly Donuts". Some flarks had many donuts floating about. Eco-scientist Glenn McGregor examined the "Jelly donuts" and described them thus:

*"The gelatinous masses are composed of Ophrydium versatile, a sessile peritrichous ciliate which forms endosymbiotic relationships with ingested algal cells (zooids). There were also large numbers of naviculoid diatoms (possibly Brachysira) and other microalgae and cyanobacteria imbedded in the colonies."*

An EcoSciences colleague responded by observing that it seems that it seemed to be a huge volume of jelly per volume of cell, suggesting that it may have a large energy cost, and questioning the benefit of this volume of jelly to the organism.



Science is full of such wonders and fascinating studies.

## Alarm Bells ring regarding Irukandji jellyfish



The Irukandji is one of the deadliest marine animals in Australia. It is so venomous and the pain it inflicts is so excruciating that it can cause death.

Irukandjis have been relentlessly moving southwards down the Queensland coast. In January 2013 seven people were airlifted from Fraser Island in a 9-day period suffering suspected irukandji jellyfish stings. All were stung along Fraser's western shores in the late afternoon. This extension of its range is attributed to climate change. Irukandji could devastate South East Queensland's tourism industry if they become established. The Irukandji epitomise a worldwide trend, where tropical marine species are moving towards the world's poles as oceans warm.

While scientists are still uncertain about the impact of these deadly organisms on the tourist industry and how safe swimming along the Queensland coast may be there are still some cynics who question the whole concept of climate change. In the years leading up to his election **Prime Minister Abbott on climate change** stated "*the science isn't settled*", it is "*highly contentious*" and "*not yet proven*", that "*it's cooling*" and "*it hasn't warmed since 1998*" and there's "*no correlation between carbon dioxide and temperature*".

### What members and supporters can do

1. This MOONBI lists many projects where volunteers can become actively involved in very enjoyable and affordable physical projects to improve the natural integrity of Fraser Island.
2. The QPWS's bowing to lawlessness is depreciating Fraser Island Top End's wilderness values. Write to national parks Minister, Steve Dickson and let him know how important this wilderness is to you even though you may have no intention of ever visiting it.
3. Urge any Federal politician you know to cease regarding Fraser Island as a Cinderella and provide it with its overdue fair share of Federal funding and other deals. For example, ask why Fraser Island was overlooked when the list of National landscapes was developed and when is this deliberate oversight going to be remedied.
4. FIDO is a lively vibrant and active organization. Become more involved and if you can't do so physically you can be an advocate at any opportunity to help expand our network.

## Fraser Island 2013 Field Notes and Observations

**During 2013 John Sinclair has spent seven weeks on Fraser Island leading weeding operations, working in the fens & monitoring management generally. The following is from his November notes.**

**Inskip Point:** There were exceptional numbers of people camping. The sink holes have swallowed up so much of the beach that it has eroded back almost to the road. At the rate that the sink holes are swallowing up the point at Inskip Point the current road will disappear within a few years.

November is usually the slackest time in the tourism industry in the Fraser Island and Cooloola area but this November seems exceptional. Inskip Point was packed with campers although amongst the many (over 100) caravans in the point area there were only two tent camps to be seen.

**Shearwater fatalities:** The beach was littered with the thousands of dead and dying shearwaters. It was hard to drive along the beach without running over the carcass of a shearwater. This is an increasingly common occurrence when the short tailed shearwaters are returning to southern Australia coastal areas after their trans-Pacific flight from Alaska. With all of their energy spent they are unable to fly and dropped into the sea to be washed ashore. Some years are worse than others but this years was one of the heaviest tolls on the shearwaters for a number of years although not quite the worst observed on the island.

**Melaleuca Invasion:** In 1993 we first started observing the invasion of melaleucas into the large swampy area between Dilli Village and the Boomanjin airstrip (possibly a fen). At the time we thought that it was attributable to the fire regime (in this case the lack of regular burning). Over 20 years the melaleuca invasion seems to be gathering pace suggesting a drying out of the swamp. Melaleucas will accelerate that.

**Lake levels:** The exceptionally dry winter and spring has meant that evaporation has rapidly lowered the level of all of the lakes. At Lake Boomanjin the adventitious roots growing from the previously submerged Melaleuca trunks suggest that by mid-November, the water levels have fallen at least a metre from the peak earlier in the year. They still though remain well above the normal level.

**Dry conditions:** The lack of any significant rains since a very heavy rain from late January to March abruptly ceased has had many consequences: The monitoring stations installed by FIDO have shown nil build-up of sediment in six months; the vegetation is showing acute stress with several smaller shrubs withering but not quite yet at the point of death; The ground litter is thick and tinder dry and if a firebreaks out before we get some good rainfall it could be catastrophic; most of the walking tracks on the island have been closed as a precaution because if a fire broke out it could be fatal for any walkers caught in its path: The roads are in about as bad a condition as they can be not only being exceptionally rough with deep holes forming on the one-way roads but with many 4WDs becoming bogged even while trying to exit from the Kingfisher Resort.

**Firebreaks:** It was interesting to observe that the wide firebreaks that were put in a few years back with negligible benefits in stopping wild fires are in various state of neglect. The firebreak beside the Dillingham Road looks reminiscent of a golfing fairway, having been regularly slashed despite

failing to stop the 2009 wildfire that devastated the southern third of the island. Other firebreaks including the firebreak down to McKenzies Jetty that the 2011 Kingfisher wildfire completely ignored however have had no maintenance since. FIDO remains critical about the effectiveness of firebreaks of any width and questions the justification for such a heavy impact. There has never been an Environmental Impact Study for the firebreaks on Fraser Island.

**Persons at One Time:** Much has been made in Fraser Island Visitor Management of POAT, that is persons at the one time at particular sites. While it isn't possible to regulate Free and Independent Travellers (FITs) it should be possible to regulate people on commercial tours. Thus Commercial Tour Operators (CTOs). Unfortunately with the Tag Along Backpacker Tours that are otherwise working well we have convoys of four vehicles containing over 30 people descending on different sites at the same time. This has an impact. However there is now an increasing frequency to have more than one convoy from the same company at the same place at the same time. Having 60 or even 90 people on commercial tours wasn't envisaged when the backpacker tours were first regulated and it is detracting from the experience of other visitors.

**Presentation of the Resorts:** While Happy Valley is a mass of weeds and getting worse as each month goes by, there is one shining beacon of hope. The Resort is assuming a new identity as a natural eco resort. The landscaping has been extensive and wonderful. Feral plants including the coconuts have been removed and the whole area has been treated with tones of bark and planted up with thousands of native plants. While these are still developing the potential to transform the appearance and outlook of the resort is clearly evidence of a determination to change the profile of Happy Valley. As FIDO does more weeding in Happy Valley in 2014 we hope to complement existing efforts there.

It isn't only Happy Valley having a makeover. Kingfisher Resort has long been recognized for its attractive landscaping and setting. Now Eurong is becoming also ever more natural. Using nursery stock from Kingfisher Resort Eurong Resort is also undergoing an interesting makeover but since it covers a much larger area than Happy Valley it may take longer before it becomes obvious

**Orchid Beach:** This northern most village on Fraser Island is slowly losing its elitist status. A tour of this hybrid community reveals an interesting mix of million dollar plus houses with a conglomeration of sheds that are converted into living quarters and homes of commercial fishers with boats and tractors and fishing equipment spread around. There is little natural about Orchid Beach as every house on the eastern side of the ridge vies for ocean views and landholders grow little more than lawns. This is perhaps helping prevent weed growth. A quick survey indicates that Orchid Beach is surprisingly clean of weeds that got out of control in Happy Valley and Eurong. The long grass on the airstrip could never be called lawn though. The airstrip doesn't appear to be attracting much aircraft traffic.





## Lawlessness Rewarded

**Expensive attempts to close the North Wathumba track on Fraser Island failed due to sabotage and criminal activity of those opposed to the closure. QPWS has capitulated and given in to the crooks. Lawlessness has had its willful way and won.**

The North Wathumba Road was closed under the Great Sandy Region Management Plan. However despite this many Orchid Beach landholders have refused to accept it should be closed and that only the South Wathumba Road across the northern part of the island should remain open. For more than a decade despite attempts by the QPWS to keep the road closed, opponents destroyed every barrier installed to close the track to all but management vehicles. This infrastructure included gates to prevent access at the road's eastern end (near Orchid Beach) have been destroyed. This has included gates, chains, concreted-in steel and timber posts and signs. Some of these barriers have required the use of heavy machinery and/or generators with cutting equipment to remove. A surveillance camera was even installed in an attempt to capture the vandalism / illegal entry, but the camera was discovered and stolen.

In late 2010 FIDO was advised that the QPWS has made a prolonged and concerted effort to keep the road closed but their efforts were being negated "by quite a deliberate and organized campaign by parties currently unknown to QPWS to keep the road accessible." Although that FIDO was assured that the North Wathumba/Platypus Bay hadn't been reopened by QPWS we have since learnt that there are now no barriers in place and that Orchid Beach residents had been advised that they could use the road without any impediments. FIDO has been advised that the the concession has now been extended to anyone in the know and that includes just about every visitor to Orchid Beach. Furthermore the traffic can now drive on to the western beach north of Wathumba Creek that was intended to be vehicle free to preserve habitat for Beach Stone curlews and other shorebirds and the only true wilderness in South East Queensland.



This photo was said to have been "taken at between Rooneys Point and Station Hill on Fraser Island in Platypus Bay" to illustrate the devastation of the fierce wildfire that swept from Sandy Cape down to the North Wathumba Road. If the Great Sandy Management Plan was being adhered to only management vehicles would have access to this site. Even the blind eye policy says that vehicles should not travel on the beach past the where the North Wathumba Road reaches Platypus Bay.

## Recognition for protecting Fraser Island

FIDO's 43 year fight to protect Fraser Island was given Australia Day recognition when FIDO honorary secretary John Sinclair, who fought more than 30 years to protect Fraser Island from logging and sandmining threats, was among the 13 dedicated volunteers recognized by Queensland Parks and Wildlife (QPWS) for their ongoing volunteer efforts. He was recognized for co-ordinating volunteers for weed removal, revegetation, erosion monitoring, developing the George Haddock track, research, and community education.

**Home-town reconciliation:** Coincidental with this news came news of the thaw between the Maryborough establishment when the Fraser Coast Regional Council agreed to insert a plaque honouring Sinclair in the Maryborough Achievers Walk. This is on Wharf Street Historic precinct. Previously the Maryborough City Council had been hostile to Sinclair for opposing sandmining, logging and other developments on Fraser Island.

**Truce at last:** Mr Sinclair was also awarded an Order of Australia for his distinguished service to conservation and the environment. However the most significant recognition came in the form of an Editorial in the Fraser Coast Chronicle by the Editor, John Grey:

### *Sinclair's honour*

*THERE was once a time when conservationist John Sinclair was not welcome in these pages. It was the 70s, when Mr Sinclair was leading the fight to stop sand mining and logging on Fraser Island, and the Chronicle stood firmly in support of the island's industries. Time has passed, that fight was won and lost, and Fraser Island continues to be a mainstay of the region's economy, albeit with a different industry which, again, the Chronicle firmly supports.*

*Sincere congratulations on your Order of Australia, Mr Sinclair.*



## Vale Stephen Comino A.M, 1928-2013

Steve Comino was a pioneer in the use of courts to protect the environment. His work to protect Fraser Island helped John Sinclair win his landmark case (*Sinclair v Mining Warden at Maryborough*) in the High Court of Australia and ultimately to be inscribed on the World Heritage List.

Steve's contribution to protecting the natural environment and wildlife though extended over almost 50 years. He was more than just a solicitor. He was a wise counsel and a genuine friend and a key member of a network of people who shared his passion.

Through his generous goodwill and his passion to see Justice done, Steve helped more than just the conservation movement. Steve worked tirelessly to help many people and many causes many times in a *pro bono* capacity. Steve was sometimes criticized by other lawyers for being too close to his clients because he worked unstintingly in their matters as if they were his own. In many cases they also became his. His devotion to his many causes won him close friends at every level of society.

## Some Politicians See Red at Anything Green

Change of both Federal and state government has resulted in unprecedented political assaults on environmental policies, environmental law and on environmental groups and individuals. An ideology that the environment has to be crushed because it is standing in the way of economic growth seems to be prevailing. This ignores the fact that our environment is at least as important as the economy for health and happiness. Who wants to live in a clapped out polluted environment? Yet the demands to dismantle “Green Tape” and to “open up National Parks” have become rampant. Suppressing and stifling environmental organizations and deliberately muting their criticisms is only in the interests of governments setting out to allow vested interests to destroy or degrade the environment.

The assaults on the environment have never been more concerted or more deliberate even under the Joh regime. It isn't only the environment that is being savaged by a range of changed policies at all levels of government. The messengers are being singled out for punishment. It seems politicians have cut funding for organizations like National Parks Association of Queensland, FIDO and Environmental Defenders Office and hope that withdrawing promised funding will stop activism but there is an even more drastic reversal of funding by the Federal Government. Advocates for environmental protection are being bad-mouthed and demonized by parliamentarians and seem to be regarded as public enemies instead of people working selflessly in the public interest.

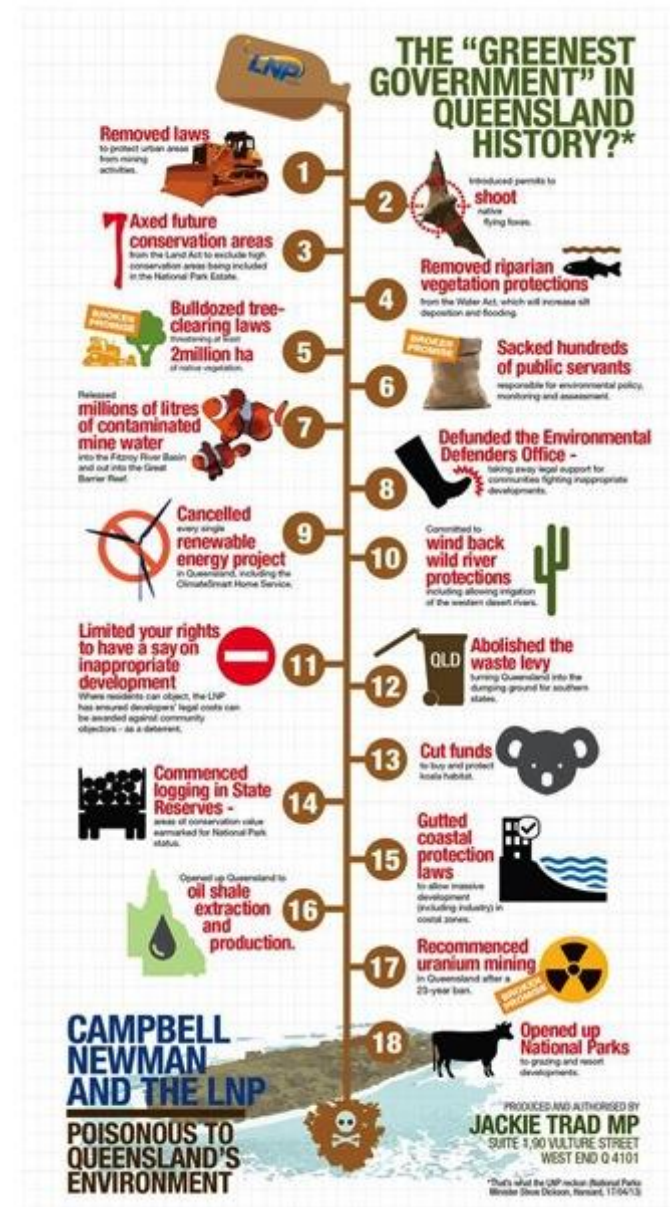
**Getting the ear:** Environmental protection is now more difficult because responsibilities are now spread between eight Ministers and Departments, and access by conservation advocates to at least one key minister seems nearly impossible. All of this is taking place while industries that rape and pillage our environment and organizations lobbying on their behalf are able to spend as much as they like lobbying to reduce or remove environmental policies using seemingly limitless tax-deductible expenses. While there seems to be an open door for economic and industrial lobbyists and the big end of town, key ministers are denying access by not-for-profit conservation groups.

**In seeking to summarize the list of the attacks on environmental programs FIDO came across a succinct list compiled by Queensland's Shadow Environment Spokesperson, Jackie Trad for World Environment Day last year. (illustrated in adjacent column).**

FIDO though has added additional points that include the Federal as well as State Government “green bashing”:

- Administratively emasculating government agencies that have any responsibility for environmental protection.
- Staff reductions and separation from other branches impede their capacity to act.
- Amending the key acts covering environmental protection and protected areas
- The Great Barrier Reef is being sacrificed to allow bigger port developments. Monitoring is a sham as shown in the disaster of Gladstone Harbour.
- Disrupting the Tasmanian forest agreement and withdrawing some of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, and cancelling vitally critical Marine Reserves
- Abolished the Climate Commission and scrapped the Climate Change Authority; Weakened the Queensland Coastal Plan; “opened up” Cape York Peninsula.
- Facilitated rather than regulated the short term coal seam gas and coal mining industries;
- Abolished the Climate Commission and scrapped the Climate Change Authority, weakened the Queensland Coastal Plan and opening up Cape York Peninsula.

The Public has a right to know why there is such a deliberate campaign to destroy the environment and emasculate any critics of environmental policies.



### Digest of Fraser Island news available FREE

FIDO compiles digests of news relevant to Fraser Island that appears on the internet, mainly through the news media. These monthly compilations can be Emailed free to anyone who requests them. They provide an insight into the plethora of issues that Fraser Island management has to deal with. Contact John Sinclair [john@fido.org.au](mailto:john@fido.org.au) and you will be added to the distribution list.





## Save Fraser Island from Abrus

During 2013 FIDO has been closely monitoring the rapid advance of a pernicious weed *Abrus precatorius*. This weed is often referred to as Crab's eye because of its bright red and black seeds. It is rapidly taking over the back (western) part of Happy Valley between the shop and the dump and near vicinity the Rotary shelter. This weed is now rampant climbing trees and the dingo fence and smothering many small bushes. It shows every trait as being as difficult as Cats Claw creeper to bring control. It produces prodigious quantities of seed, sending out roots all along runners in contact with the ground and having a deep taproot making it extremely difficult to uproot. Worse than that the vine and very attractive seeds can be deadly poisonous.

In December 2008, just five years ago, FIDO thought it had Happy Valley cleared of Abrus but in five years it has come back worse than ever. Unless it is brought under control urgently it could escape from Happy Valley, the only place on Fraser Island where it is known to occur and escape into the adjacent National Park where control could be near impossible. Because of its capacity to aggressively take over the areas where it becomes established, FIDO considers the control of the control of Abrus in Happy Valley to be a higher priority even than Easter Cassia or Lantana.

*Abrus precatorius* subsp. *africanus* is native to tropical Africa (i.e. Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Niger, Togo and Namibia), Madagascar and some islands in the western Indian Ocean (i.e. Mauritius and the Seychelles). The African subspecies closely resembles Australia's native *Abrus precatorius* subsp. *precatorius* that occurs in northern parts of Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland as well as southern Asia and the western Pacific. Although found to the north, the Australian subspecies has never been reported on Fraser Island. The two sub-species are difficult to differentiate but the African variety is not a native to Fraser Island where it is extremely aggressive and difficult to eradicate where it has become established.

Although a number of web sites state, "*Infestations are also being actively controlled on Fraser Island*," this is far from the case and years of lack of control measures has enabled it to become entrenched. Perhaps this relates to a weeding operation FIDO was involved in several years ago. It appears though that three consecutive El Nino seasons and a lack of priority treatment of Happy Valley weeds have let Abrus get away.

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Abrus now is the prime target for FIDO's weeding operations in 2014. We want to ensure that Abrus doesn't crop up anywhere else on Fraser Island before it is too late. It is for this reason that FIDO is prepared to draw on its own resources to launch a special weeding trip to focus on Happy

Valley exclusively in **11-17 May**. This will be based in Happy Valley and be free for volunteers.

FIDO already has been assured of cooperation and support of Fraser Island Retreat the resort in Happy Valley. The savings made because of the free ferry service that the Kingfisher Group provides to enable positive work such as this also assists and encourages this voluntary work.

## The Weather

After an abnormally dry period throughout the late autumn, winter and spring the dry weather on Fraser Island continued throughout a fierce summer. The three months of November, December and January were the driest of those three months on record. Many trees throughout the forest are wilting, dying or dead as a result of the rainfall deficiency. Small wonder then that lightning strikes at Sandy Cape, Coolooli and Awinya Creeks on Fraser Island in December ignited fierce fires that burnt out large areas of Fraser Island, particularly the Top End wilderness area north of Orchid Beach. It is depressing to see the devastation but if climatologists, predictions are to be believed, (even if Mr Abbott and other climate skeptics are unwilling to believe) we can expect much more weather like this in the future and

more serious wildfires on Fraser Island. Already alarm bells are sounding on the impacts of coastal erosion and the migration of some tropical species southwards.

## Valuing Wilderness

Wilderness is defined as being remoter from the artifacts of modern civilization (roads, houses and other infrastructure). As the finite wild areas on Earth continue to be overrun by the surging tide of an ever-increasing human population, any remaining wilderness areas gain ever-greater economic value due to their scarcity. The only remaining area of true wilderness in South East Queensland is Fraser Island's Top End. People don't have to physically visit wilderness to derive benefits from it spiritually and emotionally. That is why FIDO continues its strong opposition to losing the wilderness values of Kgari's Top End to appease a pack of people who don't respect or accept the rule of law and a Management Plan developed before these people purchased Orchid Beach land.

## Some Dingophiles Objected

MOONBI 128 referred to the distortion of Fraser Island management priorities due to the relentless obsession of dingophiles. Some of the most vocal dingophiles objected to the use of the term dingophiles even though it was applied in the same contexts as Anglophiles and Francophiles. FIDO apologizes to anyone who took offence at the term "dingophile". However it is notable that there is now more balanced and less raucous approach by lovers of the Fraser Island dingoes to their management and a wider appreciation that Fraser Island has more values than just dingoes than need protection and better management.



**Abrus forms a green wall over the Happy Valley dingo**





## Fraser Island Defenders Organisation & National Parks Association of Queensland George Haddock Track— Fraser Island Call for Volunteers

The Queensland Government has provided a \$25,000 Friends of Parks grant to the NPAQ to enable the NPAQ and FIDO volunteers to commence work on the 52 kilometre George Haddock Track on Fraser Island from Lake Garawongera to Arch Cliffs and linking with the walking track from Lake Bowarrady to Dundubara. This joint project aims to honour a model volunteer and Past President of NPAQ, George Haddock, who made exemplary contributions to NPAQ, Queensland national parks and Fraser Island in particular.

The work approved to be undertaken is:

1. Repair of the Lake Allom barracks to make them secure and weatherproof.
2. Groundwork to clear around the Lake Allom barracks.
3. Reopening of tracks north and south of Lake Allom as outlined in the Environmental Impact Statement for the George Haddock Track.
4. Acquisition of plant and equipment to assist in reopening and maintaining these walking track sections.

**Work Programs:** The first of the week-long working bees based at the Lake Allom barracks from 23rd February to 1st March, 2014 was booked out. Subsequent working parties are proposed include 5<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> June and 5<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> October that we are still seeking volunteers for.

**Volunteer Work:** We are aiming at a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer work during the week. We are particularly seeking (a) people with handyman skills to carry out renovation and repair works for the Lake Allom Barracks, (b) people with navigation, map reading and GPS skills to define the track; and (c) people with chainsaw skills.

**Coordinator:** John Sinclair, FIDO Honorary Project Officer who knows Fraser Island better than anyone else.

**Departure:** It is planned to leave Brisbane at 7.00 am on the Sunday morning and collect people by prior arrangement on our way north to Maryborough. If you wish to take your own 4WD this can be arranged and ferry fees (courtesy Kingfisher Resort group) and access fees (Thanks QPWS) can be waived by prior arrangement.

**Return to Brisbane:** We aim to catch the 10.30 am ferry to Mary River Heads. We expect to be delivering people to the Sunshine Coast in the early afternoon and Brisbane by 5.30 pm depending on traffic and events.

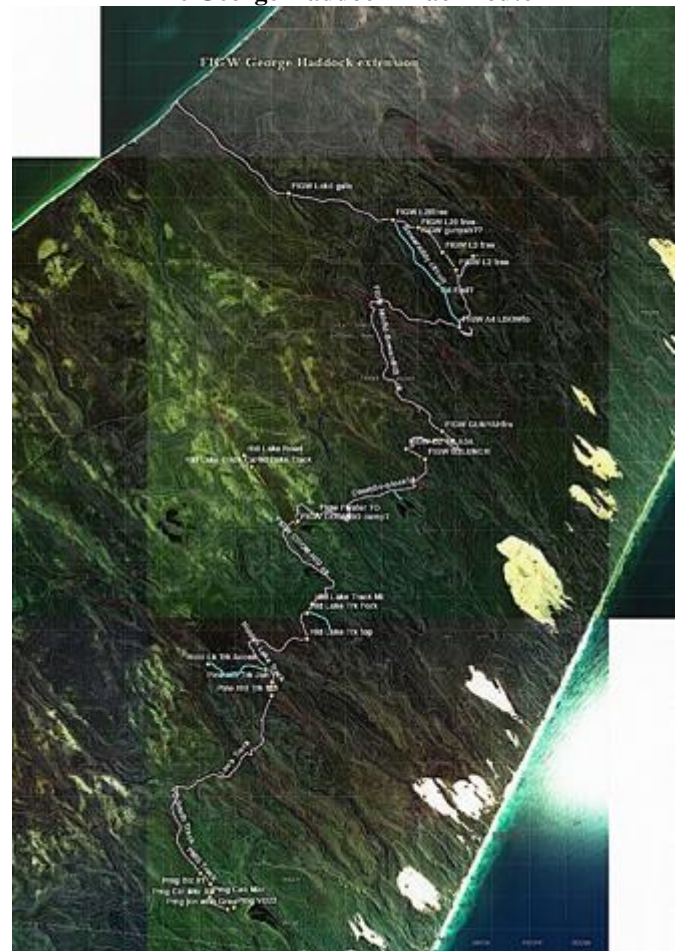
**Accommodation:** We can provide camping equipment for up to 18 people until the barracks are habitable. A portable 240v power generator can operate personal electronic appliances and charge devices.

**Recreation:** It is planned to allow ample time to explore parts of the island. This trip is not all about pulling weeds and working hard! Nobody knows Fraser Island better than John Sinclair and he is keen to show as much of it off as possible. Each day we will endeavour to visit different parts of the island for walks, talks, swims, sightseeing etc. It may be that we will alter the working time during the day to fit in with the tide times so that we can visit a good variety of places over the week. There may be days that we pack our lunch and head off for more than just a few hours.

**Food:** All of the shopping for the food will be completed before departure. Please advise of any special dietary

requirements (allergies etc.) and preferences for toast or cereal, tea or coffee etc. so this can be taken into consideration when planning meals and shopping. Alcohol can be purchased on Fraser Island for (higher than) normal prices.

### The George Haddock Track route



The George Haddock Track from Arch Cliffs in the north to Lake Garawongera in the south passes by four lakes closed to vehicular access, and some of the most pristine and best rainforest on Fraser Island.

**Volunteers** should complete the Application Form obtainable from John Sinclair [john@sinclair.org.au](mailto:john@sinclair.org.au) and submit it as early as possible. Numbers will be restricted to transport and accommodation available.

**Any inquiries** should be directed to John Sinclair [john@sinclair.org.au](mailto:john@sinclair.org.au) or phone 0418 650 535

FIDO offers volunteers a choice of either or both of two weeks in May to help maintain Fraser Island's natural integrity through weed control and bush regeneration.