



# MOONBI 135

MOONBI is the name given by the Butchulla 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/- Stephen Comino & Arthur Comino, G2/524 Milton Road TOOWONG Q 4066 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

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26<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

## Would you like to receive MOONBIs by Email?

The transformation of the increased costs of postage on ordinary mail has prompted FIDO to ask this question. Postage added to the printing costs and the slower delivery are reasons that FIDO finds it easier to send MOONBI by Email. For recipients it is easier to store and search MOONBIs in computers than on bookshelves and the illustrations can be seen in colour. Please notify [john@fido.org.au](mailto:john@fido.org.au) if you would prefer to receive future MOONBIs by Email.

## Since MOONBI 135

In the last six months FIDO has increased its on-island presence with working bees and a BioBlitz. These are themes that will be discussed more fully in our Biennial Conference on 16 August. We have also been dealing with Native Title issues, which are outlined on p2.

**Citizen Science:** A theme strongly running through most of the stories in this issue of MOONBI is the ever-increasingly important role that citizen science is playing in improving our knowledge and understanding of Fraser Island (K'Gari). FIDO has always had a bent towards citizen science but this interest has progressively grown over the years, from subjective observations such as those on tree deaths (p6) to measuring sediment flows and increasingly to collecting and analyzing weather data.

**Climate Crisis Worsens:** The whole global community can't wait until 2030 to reduce atmospheric carbon to stop climate chaos resulting from global warming. Atmospheric greenhouse gas reduction must be accelerated. We are already seeing serious impacts affecting the environment and every aspect of life on Earth. The severity of the impact was seen in the extremely dry weather in South East Queensland during 2016 and continuing into March, combined with higher temperatures has evident on K'Gari. Lakes dropped to extraordinarily low levels; many trees died and the impact on fauna remains unknown. It has caused FIDO to seek further analysis of weather observations to see if this is part of a trend. See stories p2-3.

**The BioBlitz:** FIDO has been pursuing citizen science almost since its establishment including measuring the movement of sandblows, sand movement along and from roads, gaining better weather data, photo-monitoring and most recently a BioBlitz. The BioBlitz was an enjoyable and productive event that we are planning to repeat as soon as we have another opportunity. Read about it from a participant's perspective. P5.

**Sustainable Transport Options:** A University of the Sunshine Coast PhD candidate has taken up the Barbara Winkley Scholarship to undertake a 3-year study exploring Sustainable Transport options on K'Gari to reduce environmental impacts.

**FIDO is now on Facebook:** While working with FIDO in Eurong in March, a persuasive young volunteer, Ashleigh McMillan, convinced FIDO to reach a younger audience by opening a Facebook page. She quickly created it to enable potential volunteers to know about FIDO's programs.

**Biennial Fraser Island Conference:** Over the past 13 years FIDO's biennial conferences have grown in significance and attendance. FIDO keeps building on the successful formula and plans that our "Time, Tide and Tourism" Conference at University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs will continue the growing standard for public discussion of contemporary issues on Fraser Island (K'Gari). See program summary p 7.

**Backgrounders:** It is 40 years since sandmining ceased on Fraser Island before it had got into full swing. Most people alive today in Australia would be unaware of the mammoth fight FIDO presented to stop it nor why the environmental impacts were so frightening. Backgrounder 80 summarizes the sandmining operations and the attempts to rehabilitate the mine sites. Backgrounder 81 revives the personal account of **Ethel Richards**, a Butchulla woman who grew up on Fraser Island in the 1930s as the last traditional people were passing on.



FIDO has collaborated with the Kingfisher Group to improve the natural integrity of the busiest hub on the island at Eurong Resort. A new 30 metre long garden in the core area of the resort has been established using almost 200 plants that FIDO had grown in the Eurong Nursery with the support of QPWS.

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## Native Title and K'Gari

**Native Title is changing many decisions on K'Gari. This may change even more as a result of a fresh log of claims by the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation to be resolved in the Federal Court. The Butchulla people fought for and won their native title rights to Fraser Island in 2014 but now they want financial compensation "in the millions".**

The Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation PBC has lodged a claim to the Queensland Government seeking freehold land, joint-management of the island, and financial compensation.

They are seeking freehold land to allow them to run their own businesses such as a cultural centre, a ranger's program camping, and cultural tours.

They also want joint management with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), to help to manage the island's environment and resources.

The Butchulla are basing their claim for monetary compensation on a precedent from Timber Creek in the Northern Territory where Aboriginal claimants were awarded \$3.3M. That matter is under appeal in the Federal Court.

However, the spokesperson for the Butchulla, Ms Christine Royan said that their claim was about more than just financial compensation. "It's about caring for country and your own mob," she said.

Any money gained would be injected into preserving the Butchulla culture and improving Fraser Island. She said that they would use the compensation to start their own barge service. They want more from this Australian tourism hotspot that draws hundreds of thousands of people every year.



From front page Fraser Coast Chronicle

## FIDO and the Butchulla

Since its formation in January 1971 FIDO has fought to protect the outstanding natural and cultural values of Fraser Island (K'Gari).

- FIDO succeeded in leading the fight to save Fraser Island from widespread sandmining in the 1970s.
- FIDO fought a 20-year campaign to see the cessation of logging and the listing of K'Gari on the World Heritage list.
- Throughout this time FIDO has sought to work cooperatively with Butchulla people to advance the Butchulla interests on K'Gari
- It was FIDO that obtained and presented submissions from Isaac Owens and Ethel Richards to the Fraser Island Environmental Inquiry in 1975.
- It was FIDO who overcame objections by the Queensland Government to introduce Dr Peter Lauer to K'Gari which was the start of the recognition of the island's great archaeological treasures.
- Peter Lauer's interests snowballed into the uncovering of the cultural history published by the University of Queensland in 1978
- FIDO's representative on the Community Advisory Committee, John Sinclair, led the moves to restore Butchulla names so significant K'Gari places.
- John Sinclair at his own expense took Butchulla men on Kimberley safaris to provide wider cultural experience.
- FIDO volunteers have for the past decade been actively involved in preserving K'Gari's natural integrity by preventing the spread of weeds and controlling them in the centres of major weed infestation in the townships.
- For 46 years FIDO has published newsletters, backgrounders and a range of other publications to advance a wider appreciation of the Butchulla connection with K'Gari.
- FIDO fully supported the Native Title determination in November 2014 that was a long time coming.

## New Dangers for K'Gari

**Irunkandji Jelly fish were once recorded only above the Tropic of Capricorn. Now they are now well established on the protected shores along the western shores of K'Gari. We hear little about the loss of vast swathes of mangroves along the shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria that are directly attributable to climate change. Citizen scientists are observing the tragedy unfolding on Fraser Island (K'Gari) due to climate change. For the second time in three years trees are dying on Fraser Island due to extreme weather. These are all increasing evidence of climate change.**

Scientists say that the record-breaking heat that made 2016 the hottest year ever recorded has continued into 2017, pushing the world into "truly uncharted territory". While the evidence of climate change on Fraser Island (K'Gari) isn't yet as bad as the Great Barrier Reef, which has just experienced catastrophic coral leaching, it is evident and seems destined to get worse.

One of the worst instances of mangrove forest dieback ever recorded globally struck Australia's Gulf of Carpentaria in the summer of 2015-16. Even the relatively heat-tolerant mangroves have limits. A combination of extreme temperatures, drought and lowered sea levels likely caused this dieback. The dieback coincided with the Great Barrier Reef's worst bleaching event.

**All of this is happening while Australian politicians are fueling the fires that are heating and destroying our planet's biodiversity and putting human populations at ever-greater risk.**

## Fierce February Weather Foretelling Fraser's Future?

While there is a dearth of weather data gathered from K'Gari, on which to base what might be considered "normal" there are records from the adjacent mainland to provide clues. These showed that 2016 was the hottest year yet and that February 2017 was the hottest and driest February on record.

### Dry Summer Scorcher

If summer is marked as 1<sup>st</sup> December to 28<sup>th</sup> February then the 2016-17 was a shocker for South East Queensland but much worse in the Fraser Coast region and that includes K'Gari. The record and extended dry conditions were exacerbated by the hottest weather on record. The Fraser Coast region had the lowest rainfall in its recorded history. The lack of rainfall was exacerbated by record temperatures that took a heavy toll on the environment and rural production. Fraser Coast broke a record for the hottest January day with rainfall was well below average. This was followed by the hottest February on record. On 6<sup>th</sup> March Maryborough recorded 38 degrees its the hottest day on record, easily eclipsing the previous high of 36.6 degrees set in 1988. The whole region sweltered. This combination of heat and drought has taken a toll on K'Gari's flora and had an unknown impact on its fauna.

Table 1

Comparative February Rainfall in Fraser Coast Region		
Town	February 2017	Average February
Hervey Bay	2.2mm	142.2mm
Maryborough	5.6mm	172.9mm
Bundaberg	1.8mm	155.6mm
Gympie	21mm	165.7mm
Brisbane:	22.6mm	123.2mm

### Heat

The heat of the hottest year on record (2016) continued throughout the 2017 summer on the Fraser Coast. On K'Gari there is limited past data but the summer was a scorcher. This was evident by some sections of road across open white sand. It was remarkable to see that plants growing near some of the more open tracks were being scorched from the reflected heat from the white sand. Some foliage next to the road was burnt while the foliage of the same plants away from the roads bore no evidence of scorching. No scorching was noted where there was more shade.

The extremely hot summer was exacerbated by extreme dry. The heat of summer didn't abate with the official advent of Autumn. While there are no long records for K'Gari some indications may be gauged from records over more than 100 years on the adjacent mainland. Maryborough had its hottest day on record on 6<sup>th</sup> March as the mercury climbed to 38 degrees eclipsing the previous record of 36.6 degrees set in 1988. The same day the mercury in Hervey Bay climbed to 35.4 degrees making it the hottest March day since 1993. Bundaberg also had its hottest March day with the temperature reaching 38.5 degrees.

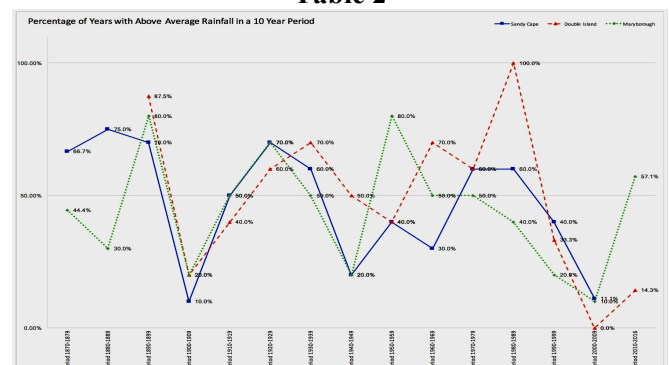
The elevated temperatures continued for days remaining about two to five degrees above the March average. As the above average temperatures continued on K'Gari. Relief was late to arrive. Cloudy days preceding Ex-Cyclone Debbie dropped the temperatures and delivered some rain relief. (See K'Gari Weather Data p4)

### Drought

The lack of soil moisture took a heavy toll not only on rural production but also on the natural environment. From mid February FIDO started to note trees dying. MOONBI 130 in 2014 reported on the impact of K'Gari's intense deficit in rainfall over nine months including the summer of 2013-14. Many trees were then observed to die. The drought of 2016-17 that was only relieved in mid-March added to the tree loss with mainly the same species being mainly affected.

Droughts and oscillations in rainfall are too well known, but the severity of the most recent drought caused us to examine the long-term trends. Using Bureau of Meteorology records on, or close to K'Gari each extending over 100 years revealed an unexpected trend. In the case of Double Island Point the mean annual rainfall since records began early in the 20th century show that annual rainfall may have fallen by 300 mm over the century. This caused us to consider the other two long-term records relevant to K'Gari — Sandy Cape lighthouse and Maryborough. To smooth out the annual variability to find the average FIDO's analyst, Keith Sinclair graphed the 10-year averages for the three. The result shows an increasing number of decade averages falling below 50% — a downward trend in regional rainfall.

Table 2



Graph for 10-year periods for Maryborough, and Sandy Cape and Double Island Point Lighthouses over more than 100 years showing years with below average. Enlargement is available.

### Fire

Some evidence of K'Gari's vulnerability to wildfires was gained when a storm passed over Dilli Village during the BioBlitz. Although the storm delivered very little rain, one of the lightning strikes triggered a fire that burnt through a large swathe of the southern end of Fraser Island over the next few weeks. Although the QPWS said that there were some positives from this wildfire, FIDO eye-witnessed just how wildfires occur naturally. In very dry conditions with wind, they can be catastrophic and unstoppable.

Throughout Summer firefighters were kept busy fighting grass and bushfires when they might be expected at that time of the year to be dealing with heavy rainfall events. The environmental impact of hotter and more frequent fires resulting from greater heat and less moisture is already becoming apparent on K'Gari.



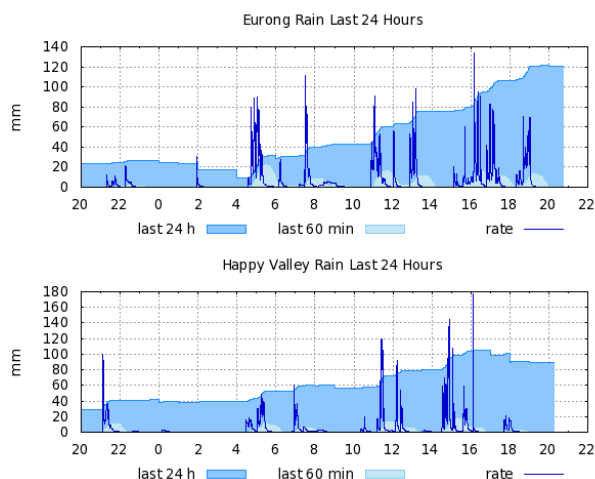
## K'Gari Weather Data

One of FIDO's more significant projects in recent years has been to seek better weather data and to make better use of the data that has been collected.

In 2015 FIDO installed a weather station at Happy Valley to record rainfall, wind strength and direction, barometric pressure and both the aggregate rainfall and its intensity. In 2016 a similar weather station was installed at Eurong. The data is shown in real time on line and can be accessed by anyone in the world at [www.fido.org.au](http://www.fido.org.au). The weather stations are collaborations with Fraser Island Retreat at Happy Valley and Eurong Resort that supply the sites and the power to operate these instruments.

FIDO is now able to examine the rainfall and other weather variability on Fraser Island (K'Gari) with two on-line weather stations. There was little rain to compare but on 21-22 January 2017 while Happy Valley recorded 50 mm Eurong measured only 15 mm. The following graphs show the comparison of rainfall and intensity as Ex-Cyclone Debbie passed K'Gari with less impact than elsewhere.

Tables 3 & 4



The Web site shows data for the previous 14 days but FIDO feeds the data for long term storage to [Weather Underground Site IQUEENSL878](http://Weather Underground Site IQUEENSL878). This following tables from 2 April show the variability between the two sites.

Tables 5 & 6

Eurong Weather Station 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017

Recent Rain			
Last 7 Days	Daily Rain	Week Before	Daily Rain
Fri (yesterday)	0.2 mm	Fri (8 days ago)	3.2 mm
Thu (2 days ago)	51.8 mm	Thu (9 days ago)	60.8 mm
Wed (3 days ago)	79.6 mm	Wed (10 days ago)	9.8 mm
Tue (4 days ago)	41.4 mm	Tue (11 days ago)	0.0 mm
Mon (5 days ago)	3.2 mm	Mon (12 days ago)	19.6 mm
Sun (6 days ago)	1.0 mm	Sun (13 days ago)	19.2 mm
Sat (7 days ago)	15.6 mm	Sat (14 days ago)	2.0 mm

Happy Valley Weather Station 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2017

Recent Rain			
Last 7 Days	Daily Rain	Week Before	Daily Rain
Sat (yesterday)	0.0 mm	Sat (8 days ago)	4.4 mm
Fri (2 days ago)	0.4 mm	Fri (9 days ago)	15.0 mm
Thu (3 days ago)	58.8 mm	Thu (10 days ago)	61.4 mm
Wed (4 days ago)	117.4 mm	Wed (11 days ago)	11.6 mm
Tue (5 days ago)	26.6 mm	Tue (12 days ago)	14.4 mm
Mon (6 days ago)	4.6 mm	Mon (13 days ago)	14.2 mm
Sun (7 days ago)	1.6 mm	Sun (14 days ago)	0.2 mm

## Saving K'Gari's Pandanus



Joel Fostin with a pandanus

In another example of citizen science, Joel Fostin is working to stop the dieback of K'Gari pandanus. Joel, a final-year environmental science student at USC discovered that a sooty mould was devastating Fraser Island pandanus. The mould built up to lethal proportions because of the exudate of the excessive numbers of the Jamella leaf hopper insects within the tree's crowns. Joel realized that the Leaf Hopper populations can only be kept in check by the parasitoid wasps. He then began breeding the wasps in captivity.

Since then with the support of the QPWS, FINIA and FIDO the former carpenter and horticulturalist has spent several months assisting rangers to release the wasps at 37 affected sites on Fraser Island. The wasp release has reduced leafhopper numbers on Fraser Island to normal levels, but he is now working with a team of arborists to remove the mould-affected leaves to prevent further tree mortality.

Joel's interest started while writing a fact sheet on the parasite and its distribution as a USC assignment on environmental management. Since there wasn't much information available on the dieback and how the parasitoid wasp could combat it wasn't available he set about researching the problem. Since then it's become his mission to save the Pandanus from Coolangatta to Gladstone. He has launched a crowd funding appeal to help him stop the dieback of the iconic and ecologically important species. <https://www.gofundme.com/fraserrescue>

## Fraser Island Repository

One of the most exciting developments for K'Gari in recent years has been the establishment of the Fraser Island Repository within the USC Library at Sippy Downs. This is storing and cataloguing as much data, literature or photos produced about K'Gari to assist future research. FIDO welcomes keeping as much K'Gari data as possible in one place to prevent it becoming lost or forgotten. **Anyone with old K'Gari photos or records should contact the library to get them preserved. They may help future researchers.**

## Two trawler tragedies off K'Gari

The November-December period saw two trawler tragedies off Fraser Island. In the first a 12-metre trawler capsized about 2:30 am, approximately 8 kilometres off Indian Head on the eastern side of Fraser Island. Two of the crewmen were rescued but their skipper, who was in the wheelhouse wasn't found despite extensive searches. The trawler capsized is not the first off K'Gari and is thought to be the result of a trawl net becoming snagged on the sea-bed.

More mysteriously another trawler is believed to have vanished without any trace or clue at about the same time in the same general area east of Fraser Island with a crew of three. Extensive air and sea searches found no trace of the missing vessel or crew.

## Citizen Science on K’Gari

For more than 40 years FIDO and other groups have been applying citizen science to assist in the establishment and later the management decisions for the Fraser Island World Heritage site. The data gained by tracking the advance of sandblows and the invasion of weeds, photo-monitoring, measuring erosion were all valuable. More recently our Citizen science has turned to installation of weather stations, and the BioBlitz that has sharpened our eyes to focus increasingly on biological observations.

### K’gari—connected by curiosity and conservation

The following report by Maria Miller reflects the value of the BioBlitz 28<sup>th</sup> November to 4<sup>th</sup> December 2016.

The opportunity to take part, as a citizen scientist, in the November 28th - December 4th BioBlitz organised by FIDO\* and USC\* was one I could not pass up (I spotted this opportunity in my email Issue 43 of Neck of the Woods – NPAQ). Indeed, the nine days I spent on the island exceeded all expectations. My goal was to observe how a BioBlitz was run, while learning about the biodiversity on this World Heritage listed island. I had read the Australian Guide to running a BioBlitz, but hands on experience is what I was after, and that was what I got.

Most BioBlitzes are 24 to 36 hours long. We had the luxury of spending five and a half days as a group based in Dilli Village, exploring 5 areas in the southern third of the island. The last time I visited Fraser was in the winter of 2004 with our German exchange student. We were day trippers on a 4WD bus, unable to really appreciate the immensity and bounty of the place; 2016 would be very different.

The daily drill for the 40+ participants (who were divided into 4 flexible groups; Plants, Critters, Fungi, and Birds) consisted of an early breakfast, fieldwork with packed lunch, then dinner – followed by a group spokesperson recapping their discoveries and finally an evening talk. Topics for these talks included: Collembola, Ants, Fungi, Bats, Grasses, Birds, Bees, Top End Tours.

Those attending the BioBlitz not only represented a wide age range but also broad abilities from specialists to amateurs, scientists to artists, students to retirees. It was this blend that I found stimulating and conducive to learning. Sharing of knowledge was constant and generous and everyone could contribute to the observations.

On the first field day, instead of joining one of the groups I went with a USC researcher to check 18 camera traps located across the mid-section of the island. We covered about 100km over diverse terrain. We downloaded the data from the SD card to the laptop, replaced the card and then sprinkled more truffle oil to attract wildlife. Alas, no potoroos appeared on the first batch of data.

The remaining four days of fieldwork saw me join the Critter group having completed the camera checks. We spent time around Dilli Village, Central Station, Eurong and the Lakes where we dutifully filled out our data sheets. I also had an impromptu trip out to Cathedral Beach via Eli Creek and the Maheno Wreck. There, some traps were placed in the soil at the edge of the campground to catch springtails/collembola.

Throughout the BioBlitz we saw many types of flora and fauna. The highlights for me being 3 dingoes, Caspian tern, white-bellied sea eagles, Brahminy kites, reptiles, eels, crayfish, katydid, blue triangle butterfly, turpentine trees, kauri, and hoop pines and so many palms, cycads and the list goes on. The data sheets are being added to WildNet and the Fraser Island repository at USC.

My favourite ecosystem was the rainforest around Central Station simply because we could get close to the stream, hike to Basin Lake, picnic under the pines and then stroll up Pile Valley. There was something to marvel at the entire time.

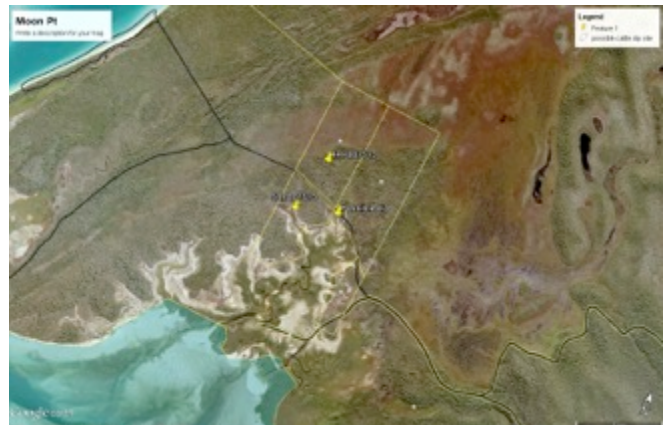
Having the regional artists document the event and journalists from the ABC broadcast our endeavours made me think others would be inspired to join such activities or perhaps even organise them. Engaging us in science. I spent a day both sides of the BioBlitz days helping with (and learning about) the bush regeneration taking place around Eurong. This is a long-term project, mirroring much of what many of us do here in the western suburbs. Priceless.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-05/fraser-island-bio-bltitz/8092310>



Participants in the 2016 Fraser Island (K’Gari) BioBlitz came from as far as Darwin to Ballarat to help identify as much as possible of K’Gari’s biota. This is the group on the last day of this event.

### Moon Point Freehold



Many people believe that these 313.3 ha next to the Puthoo fens should be incorporated into the National Park.



## Citizen Science K’Gari Observations

### The Toll on Trees

MOONBI has previously reported that about 50% of the larger trees growing on K’Gari are at the northern limit of their range. Pibins (Satinay), Tallowwood, Blackbutt and Scribbly gums (*Eucalyptus racemosa*) are not found north of K’Gari suggesting that this is the hottest climate that they will tolerate. The *Atlas of Living Australia* shows other widespread species on K’Gari — Brush Box (*Lophostemum confertus*) Old Man Banksia (*Banksia serata*) Blueberry Ash (*Eleocarpus reticulatus*) Phebalium wombye and *Monotoca scoparia*, are ominously near the northern limit of their range. It isn’t surprising therefore that these species have suffered badly during the summer of 2016-17 with many of these trees seen dead or near-dead during four different inspections or working bees carried out by FIDO during February and March.

Around Lake McKenzie’s (Boorangoora’s) lunette large Scribbly gums were observed dead or dying from the heat and drought. Monotoccas, Phebaliums, and Blueberry Ash were affected. The death of so many vines surrounding the Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) picnic area looked as if there had been an attack of Agent Orange. This isn’t the first time that FIDO has noted Scribbly Gums dying. A similar and only slightly less severe drought in 2013-14 saw many of the same species die (See MOONBI 130).



The 2013-14 drought took a heavy toll on Scribbly Gums growing on the Lake Coomboo lunette. The 2016-17 drought has added to this death by drought.

The most obvious species succumbing in both droughts were Brush box (*Lophostemum confertus*). Because some grow north of K’Gari, they might be more heat tolerant but they won’t survive with insufficient soil moisture. Brush box are a key species in K’Gari’s closed moist forests but it is in the transitional forest that most of the deaths were observed mainly amongst trees of less than 30 cm. The progressive depletion of recruit brush box should be a major concern. Just as concerning should be the loss of *Banksia serata*, known to the Butchulla as *Walim*. The progressive loss of this iconic species that have thrived on K’Gari for millennia is of great concern. More monitoring is needed because so many widespread plant K’Gari species are near the northern limit of their range and vulnerable to rising temperatures.

**The combination of severe droughts combined with higher temperatures is already seeing a change in the composition of K’Gari’s forests.**

**Impact on fauna:** Sadly without more data and more constant environmental monitoring of the populations of all fauna on K’Gari, it will be difficult to know the full impact of the increasing heat. That is why FIDO is keen to engage in more citizen science projects such as the BioBlitz to establish more base-line data.

### Fraser Island World Heritage Advisory Panels

After a lapse of 12 months without any Advisory Committees, Environment Minister Steven Miles has appointed new members to the restructured committees. The Committees met in November 2016 and in March 2017.

The Fraser Island (K’garu) Scientific Advisory Committee includes Dr James Schulmeister (chair), Dr Sandra Brizga, Dr Terry Brown, Associate Professor Patrick Moss, Professor Ian McNiven, Associate Professor Annie Ross, Dr Andrew Olds, Dr Angela Wardell-Johnson, Dr Desmond Boyland and Associate Professor Neil Tindale.

The Fraser Island (K’gari) Community Advisory Committee includes Sue Sargent (chair), David Anderson, Glen Miller, John Sinclair, David Hay, Shirley Blake, Gemma Cronin, George Seymour, Luke Barrowcliffe, Emma-Kate Currie, Dr Kim Moreland and Paul Fishburn.



The Joint Advisory Committees 5<sup>th</sup> March 2017

### IRUKANDJI

For the past decade the tourism industry has been in denial over the occurrence of one of the world’s deadliest creatures in the waters of Hervey Bay. This is despite 8 people suffering Irukandji like symptoms after swimming on the Hervey Bay side of K’Gari in the summer of 2015-16. Last Christmas –New Year period saw a spate of 10 people being emergency evacuated with Irukandji symptoms and some definite confirmation. All victims last summer were stung while swimming on the western side of the island. Incidents occurred within five kilometres of each other between Coongul Creek and Woralie Creek, although one may have been swimming further north. All of the stings occurred in calmer waters with a lot of them occurring close to creek mouths, estuaries and away from the bigger surf.

**It is expected that the values based Management Plan for Fraser Island and Cooloola now being developed will be reported in future State of the Environment Reports.**

## FIDO's Time, Tide and Tourism (T,T&T) Conference Program

University of the Sunshine Coast Sippy Downs, Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2017

FIDO's 7<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference is intended to be complementary to a Fraser Island Symposium being organized by the University of the Sunshine Coast 1<sup>st</sup> November. FIDO's conference is targeted more at laypersons with a special interest in Fraser Island while the USC Symposium will appeal to a more academic audience.



**Queensland  
Government**

**Sponsored by the Queensland Government**

Because of sponsorship by the Queensland Government FIDO has been able to hold the prices for this 9.00am to 5.00pm conference to the same price as in 2013, despite increased catering costs.

**COST: \$100 Includes light lunch and morning and afternoon tea**

(\$60 for students and concessions)

**On line registrations can be made at:**

<http://www.queenslandconservation.org.au/fido>

The conference will again be held at the Innovations Centre, University of the Sunshine Coast Sippy Downs on the day of the Ekka holiday which allows the many Brisbane based people a chance to get away mid-week.

**NOTE: As catering for the conference exceeds \$40.00 per person, FIDO has to know exact numbers to be catered for in advance. Thus advance registration is vital.**

### Keynote

Writer and Broadcaster (ABC Classic FM) Dr Martin Buzacott, who has a strong family connection with the Great Sandy Region has entitled his paper "*Drawing Artistic Inspiration from the Landscape*". It is relevant to one of K'Gari's World Heritage values.

### Time

**Landmark Anniversaries:** 2017 marks **40 years since sandmining ended** on Fraser Island and **25 years since** the island's **World Heritage listing**. The recommendations of the Fraser Island Environmental Inquiry led to the end of sandmining on 31 December 1976. After 40 years the Inquiry's Presiding Commissioner, Dr. John Hookey can publicly speak on Fraser Island environmental issues. Dr Hookey was a pioneer in Australian environmental law. The three succinct recommendations of his Fraser Island Inquiry limited mining and laid the foundations for its subsequent World Heritage status. He will open the conference.

### Tide

In the tide of events, another player from the 1975-76 Fraser Island Environmental Inquiry is Chris Loorham. He returned to K'Gari in 2016 to participate in a working bee and was impressed by the changes he noted after a 40-year absence not only in the physical condition of the island, but in the relationships between those who are working to preserve its natural integrity. His paper is entitled, "*Fraser Island and the sands of times—from confrontation to collaborations—the Enquiry 40 years on.*" It is also hoped for an interesting presentation by a marine biologist.

### Tourism

FIDO founder John Sinclair, AO, who has visited over 100 World Heritage sites both natural and cultural around the world studying how visitation is being handled will present a paper on "*Handling the hordes — Lessons from how natural World Heritage sites manage visitation*".

Also looking at tourism will be Ross Waldron the Barbara Winkley Fellow who is working towards his PhD on the theme of *Developing Sustainable Transport Options*.

These aren't the only presenters and topics. We plan to have other speakers covering issues following the issues surrounding Native Title, Citizen Science and Volunteer Programs.

There will be two very impressive panels during the afternoon. The first will cover citizen science initiatives from the state of the weather to the birds and the bees all relevant to K'Gari. BioBlitz from the perspectives from various participants, librarians, specialists, citizen scientists, and the artists and the role citizens can play in collecting weather and other data. Another panel will cover a range of volunteer programs from Sandy Cape to Great Sandy Strait to protect K'Gari's natural integrity. Most of these are addressing pests particularly weeds. There aims to be time for questions and discussion for each panel.

### Dangerous fabrication of facts

FIDO is mystified by claims made in a paper *Managing dingoes on Fraser Island: culling, conflict, and an alternative*. The paper relies on data on the number of dingoes that have been put down that neither FIDO nor QPWS can reconcile. While we can agree with the data since 2001 when there was a quite public removal of 32 dingoes this paper is the first in FIDO's knowledge to claim that there were previously 16 dingoes destroyed in 1994 and 35 in 1996. FIDO which has its ears very well attuned to anything relating to Fraser Island (K'Gari) had never heard of these two mass killings and it would be remarkable for such a slaughter to go unreported. That is sad because it slews the conclusions of an otherwise very interesting paper. However the data pre 2001 just can't be confirmed

### The Oil Spill

In October oil from mystery ship washed up on Fraser Island. Oil patties ranging in size from those of a 10 cent piece to a \$5 note washed up on the beach between Dilli Village on the island's south to north of the Maheno shipwreck. About a dozen clean-up crews worked on a 40 kilometre stretch of beach. Dozens of people helped remove small 'patties' found between Eurong beach and Dilli village with staff. Volunteers and workers used rakes and shovels to clear the beach at the high-tide mark. Despite a Government pledge to "*leave no stone unturned*" to discover what caused an oil spill, no culprit has yet been identified.



## FIDO's Weed Management Programs

FIDO is working on two main weed management programs in the two most weed infested parts of K'Gari — Eurong and Happy Valley.

**Eurong:** The Eurong work led by Maree Prior is having significant success. Su Dawson who has been involved in the program since 2005 is documenting the progress, and is seeking to progressively expand the declared Green Zone where weeds are under control but still need to be monitored and maintained. Su has identified 63 weed species in Eurong that FIDO volunteers are addressing. Six are priority weeds to be completely eliminated from the Green Zone. Another six are priority weeds being targeted in the Orange Zone, and nine are priority weeds that are substantially under control (e.g. Lantana and Easter Cassia) but need regular monitoring. There are now 42 weed species on the watch list. Sadly this list continues to grow.

**Happy Valley:** The situation in Happy Valley is much more serious. Because of some people's aversion to the use of chemicals, FIDO has been excluded from working in the core area of Happy Valley. On the outskirts, FIDO uses chemicals as a last resort to control the worst and most difficult of the weeds. The worst weed, *Abrus prectorius* (Var. *africanus*) is virtually uncontrollable over the extent of its distribution that goes well beyond the dingo fence without chemical assistance. For more than three years volunteers led by Peter Shooter have been tracking down and dealing with *Abrus* which is a very aggressive creeper that even under K'Gari conditions climbs into the canopy of tall eucalypts. The teams have ranged over 40 to 50 hectares searching for, treating and GPS documenting any *Abrus* they have found with the aim of eliminating existing plants, stopping them from setting seeds and stopping any seedlings from growing to set more seeds. It is a tough job over such a wide area and in such difficult terrain but persistence and dedications are paying dividends.

**Citizen science to find answers:** The great unknown is how long *Abrus* seeds that have been dropped might persist. This question is being addressed by one volunteer. Former nurseryman Pete Dorney, has set up a series of trials on germination rates. However FIDO remains very concerned that if the *Abrus* in Happy Valley's core area where it continues to set seed profusely isn't brought under control soon, this pest will spread far and wide across K'Gari. Seeds can be innocently spread. There has already been a small outbreak in the Wabby Lakes Lookout carpark.

**Thanks:** FIDO is indebted to the BMRG for funding support to enable these programs and for the collaborations with the Fraser Coast Regional Council and the Kingfisher Group and for community cooperation. FIDO also acknowledges the constructive role played by FINIA (Fraser Island Natural Integrity Alliance — [finia.org.au](http://finia.org.au)) in facilitating the collaborations that are making the programs work.

### To become a volunteer

**FIDO is blessed with many wonderful and willing volunteers. Most working bees are booked out months ahead. FIDO notifies all volunteers who have registered of the Annual program for the following year during the second half of the year.**

**Anyone wishing to take part in this program should register by contacting [john@fido.org.au](mailto:john@fido.org.au)**



**This citizen science project by Pete Dorney is establishing how long and under what conditions *Abrus* seed remains viable. It is invaluable information to address the management of this aggressive weed.**

## Kingfisher Group for Sale?

When the four integrated components of Kingfisher's Fraser Island interests — Fraser Island's Kingfisher Bay Resort, Eurong Beach Resort and the tour and marine businesses were offered for sale in February, the story made national headlines. It isn't the first time that the Japanese group Cosmos Initia has called for Expressions of Interest in the business. In 2009 a similar offer to the market was made without any changes to the company.

It was reported that in 2016 the resort group turned over \$55 million and made a net profit of about \$7 million. The two resorts account for 90% of the island's commercial holiday lodgings and the group carries the bulk of the majority of visitors on commercial tours.

Kingfisher Bay Resort and Village was developed 25 years ago coincidental to the World Heritage listing. Eurong Beach Resort, Fraser Explorer Tours and Fraser Island Ferries were acquired in 2002.

## A new diving site in Hervey Bay

The Queensland Government is creating an artificial reef aiming to be a world-class dive site in Hervey Bay waters by scuttling of the ex-HMAS Tobruk "half way between Hervey Bay (city) and Fraser Island". Before the decommissioned *Tobruk* can be scuttled, a sea-bed berth requiring dredging of about 15,000 cubic metres of material in Hervey Bay is needed. This to accommodate the mooring of the *ex-HMAS Tobruk*, which is scheduled to 'berth' at this site in early May. The proposed dive site is expected to provide unique experience for divers and attract international tourists.



## Making K’Gari too Cheap

For years FIDO has argued that the Queensland Government hasn’t charged enough for visitation to K’Gari. No account has been taken of the fact that this is a World Heritage area. Compare the price of a one month vehicle permit for K’Gari of \$48.25 going to the management of this World Heritage site with the \$120.00 per return trip by the cheapest barge operated privately. While there is a political reluctance to increase prices for visitation, K’Gari is paying a heavy price for being sold too cheaply.

### Comparing Coastal Holiday Destinations

According to the Roy Morgan Holiday Tracking Survey, Fraser Island (K’Gari) is the cheapest coastal holiday destination in Australia. It costs on average \$94 per person per night to enjoy K’Gari celebrated for its rainforest, freshwater lakes and magnificent beaches, while the average cost per night of a domestic holiday in Australia is \$151 per person (60% more than a visit to K’Gari). When compared with other coastal World Heritage areas or island destinations again K’Gari was undervalued. For example, even in Queensland, Magnetic Island averages \$132 pp per night. This recent survey confirms how Fraser Island is being sold short and this is having serious consequences both on management resources and visitor behavior.

**Table 7**

#### Comparisons of Average Cost per night

Source: Roy Morgan Single Source (Aust), July 2014-June 2016, n=20,518 Base: Australian holiday-goers 14+

Forster to Coffs Harbour	\$120	<b>Fraser Island</b>	<b>\$94</b>
NSW South Coast	\$122	Bundberg Lady Elliot Island	\$111
Illawarra –Shoalhaven	\$131	Hervey Bay Gympie M’bro	\$122
<b>Lord Howe Island</b>	<b>\$341</b>	Port Douglas	\$245
Mornington Peninsula	\$114	Yorke Peninsula (SA)	\$102
Gippsland Lakes	\$115	McLarenVale Victor Harbour	\$111
Great Ocean Road	\$122	Eyre Peninsula Port Lincoln	\$141
Phillip Island	\$130	<b>Kangaroo Island</b>	<b>\$161</b>
Geraldton Kalbarri (WA)	\$107	Bay of Fires (Tas)	\$113
<b>Ningaloo-Exmouth WA)</b>	<b>\$112</b>	Tasmanian East Coast	\$131
Esperance (WA)	\$115	Tasmanian West Coast	\$140
Broome (WA)	\$234	Freycinet National Park	\$186

### Comparing Fees with Overseas Sites

By international standards, the cost of visiting Fraser Island compared with other World Heritage sites is amazingly cheap. Last October, the writer visited Jiuzhaigou National Park that was inscribed on the World Heritage list at the same meeting in Santa Fe in December 1992 that K’Gari was recognized. The Chinese Government charges was \$AU80.00 pp per day (\$AU40 for Seniors) to visit this beautiful Park. That hasn’t deterred visitation that has grown from 181,000 in 1991 to 7 million annually now (30,000 on most days) and still increasing.

**Compare entry fee for Jiuzhaigou National Park (China) at \$80.00 pp per day with Fraser Island (Australia) where \$48.25 per month covers all visitors in private vehicles.**

A comparison with other destinations shows that people intent on appreciating the environment at not deterred by cost. The main people deterred are people who undervalue the environment treat it casually and even abuse it with littering and occasional vandalism.

Compare entry fees for world class cultural events — the theatre, opera, exhibitions, or even a pop concerts by a visiting entertainer and it is clear that the visitor fees for the Fraser Island (K’Gari) are significantly underpriced. People have less respect for anything that they consider “cheap”.

### The case for increased fees

The Native Title holders for almost all of K’Gari, the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation lack any reliable stream of income, yet they are required to assess a range of proposals requiring Native Title consent yet their corporation receives inadequate income to enable them to properly fulfill that role. Their proposal that the vehicle permits be increased to provide them with an income stream of \$5.00 per vehicle has been strongly supported by the Joint Fraser Island World Heritage Advisory Committees.

The Queensland Government doesn’t provide the QPWS with enough funds to meet their responsibilities for managing this World Heritage site and the Commonwealth Government make a negligible contribution. By raising access fees, not only should the Butchulla receive funds to allow them to play their part, but the QPWS would be able to devote more resources to natural resource management.

Studies of human behavior show that charging more causes people to place a greater a value on the product they have bought, be it a car, computer, clothing or a visit to a National Park. FIDO believes that it is a fallacy to encourage more people to visit K’Gari by dropping the price.



**Wabby Lake from the Lookout**

### News Snippets

**Falling off the ferry:** Luckily nobody was inside the rented four-wheel drive that rolled off a barge heading to Fraser Island from Inskip Point and rapidly sank in eight metres of water on New Year’s Eve. A group of backpackers on their way to the island for lost their mobile phones, bank cards, passports and other valuables.

**A new Values-based Management Plan for Fraser Island and Cooloola** is being developed. It is a different sort of Management Plan. It has been in the development stages for about a year but it has yet to be released for public comment and discussion. FIDO is keen to see the Draft so that we can comment. We are also waiting the release of the Great Sandy Marine Park Plan with a much larger green zone area.