MOONBI 89

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
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Since MOONBI 88

FIDO is an entirely voluntary organization and the new address makes it easier for our volunteers such as the very busy Treasurer, Cr. Terry Hampson, to service membership. Please use the new PO Box from now on.

In the six months since the last issue of MOONBI there have been many exciting developments on the scientific, political and World Heritage fronts for Fraser Island. While there have been some potentially encouraging moves on the management front, the speed at which the Queensland Government is implementing the Great Sandy Region Management Plan is positively disgraceful. The political changes bring some encouragement and a lot of anxiety, particularly about allowing private enterprise in Queensland national parks (which include Fraser Island).

The Local Government Aspect: There have also been many negative omens on the Local Government scene including the continuing threats to change the ecology of Fraser Island and Cooloola by siphoning off the water from the sandmasses and frustrating the development of a Development Control Plan for the small urban component of the Region, Happy Valley, Eurong, Rainbow Beach, Tin Can Bay and the Noosa North Shore.

There has been some action to rationalize the number of local authorities in the Great Sandy Region according to the recommendations of Tony Fitzgerald.

On the scientific front Fraser Island's environmental credentials have been reinforced with the discovery of the significance of the fens which appear to be of world significance. As well as being the very first fens to be recorded in Australia, they are apparently the oldest fens yet known in the world. Fens have a very important value in preserving relics of previous ages. They are also, particularly in Fraser Island and Cooloola's case, very important biological zones in their own right.

On the other hand, there have been new appreciation for the significance of the **Orchid Beach Funnel-web spider** which almost every property owner on Fraser Island would prefer to be kept hushed up.

Other scientific discoveries are confirming many long advocated FIDO positions including preserving the integrity of Fraser Island's **dingos** (Story p 3) and the monitoring of the impacts of **free range camping** which is shown to be accelerating.

On the political scene there have been a very significant changes in both the national and the Queensland political landscapes. The changes to conservative Governments at both levels has profound consequences, some of them being potentially very positive. We have attempted to analyse the implications of the election of a Howard Government and the replacement of the Goss Government with the National Park FIDO has already met new Environment Minister, **Brian Littleproud** and we summarize the outcomes.

On the Management side FIDO is now more actively addressing the impact of the current level of exploitation of the fisheries in the Great Sandy Region. In the past we have heavily focussed on the terrestrial management of the Great Sandy Region while the waters surrounding it have been progressively emptied of marine life with the notable exception of the again growing numbers of humpback whales. Now we find that action is needed to address the management of our depleted fishery. This not only requires direct action in fish management and a cessation of events like the Fishing Expo (Story p 10) but also requires more direct action to ensure that the rivers continue to flow in the Great Sandy Region to nurture the fisheries of Hervey Bay, Tin Can Bay and the ocean beaches. FIDO is concerned particularly at the fact that at the current rate of increasing water extraction the **Mary River** may cease to flow at its mouth within the next two decades.

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Fraser's Newly Discovered Fens

(Based on article from Keith Twyford, Ranger in Charge Fraser Island, Department of Environment)

Following the Ramsar Convention on International Wetlands held in Brisbane in late March, John Sinclair organized a four-day post conference tour for conference participants to Fraser Island and Lady Elliot Island in conjunction with the Australian Marine Conservation Society, (formerly the Littoral Society). There were 23 participants on board from 11 overseas countries: South Africa, New Zealand, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Spain, Nicaragua, United Kingdom, Ireland, Scotland, and Hungary. Some were members of the International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG).

As these members came back from their flight to Lady Elliot Island along the western (Hervey Bay) side of Fraser Island they were excited to see some intricate patterns of potholes in the peatlands below in the Wathumba Swamp and especially in a very large area behind Moon Point. The pilots obligingly circled over the peatlands to enable a confirmation of their suspicions that these were indeed fens. These peat swamps had not previously been described either in the scientific literature or among the World Heritage values of Fraser Island. On the following two days the mire experts were able to examine some fens at much closer quarters on the ground although they did not get to the grandest developments behind Moon Point and they left a list of further research projects waiting to be pursued further.

What are Fens? Fens are formed on undecomposed plant material (peat). The striking and intricate maze of pools and vegetated ridges result from differential peat growth rather than simple patchiness within the vegetation community. Fens preserve a pre-historic picture of environmental changes though pollen grains and other material (including human remains) which have been trapped in the preservative peat over the millennia. Many of the processes of how the pools form in the peat and become progressively deeper have yet to be explained. The Fraser Island fens are described as "string fens". They contain a maze of pools and vegetated ridges forming intricate patterns of surprising complexity. The study group found pools up to 1.5 metres deep and small streams with sandy bottoms. It is likely that the special hydrological conditions associated with the sand are important for the establishment of this type of fen.

Significance of Fraser's Fens: Although somewhat similar in appearance to patterned fens found in the Northern Hemisphere particularly in Scandinavia, Canada and Siberia, it is probable that those formed on Fraser Island are the oldest in the world, perhaps being 6,000 years old, possibly older. All other known fens occur at high altitudes (alpine areas of New Zealand) or high latitudes. Fraser's fens are at almost sea level.

A remarkable feature of the Fraser Island fens is that they occur almost at sea level and merge on the seaward side with mangrove forests. Such an association of ecosystems which have such contrasting locations is not known elsewhere in the world.

Fraser Island's fens are the only open landscapes apart from lakes and sandblows. They are therefore important and attract biota preferring a more acidic and/or open environment. They provide a sharp contrast to the forests and coastal features as well as habitat for a completely different flora and fauna. The structure of the fens provides important habitat for threatened species such as the ground parrot (Pezoporus wallicus) False Water Rat (Xeromys myoides) and acid frogs (e.g. Litoria cooloolensis, Litoria freychinetti).

It is significant that each of these animals are the subject of much special study. While False Water Rats had been previously known from Cooloola, it was only in May or June 1996 that they were first recorded from Fraser Island. Yet in the ground studies of the fens near Ungowa a large rat like animal (believed to be a False Water Rat but unconfirmed) was disturbed and sighted bounding away over the dense vegetation.

An Australian First: No fens have previously recorded from anywhere in Australia. Preliminary studies of aerial photos since the Fraser Island discovery has revealed some fens in Cooloola but none on Moreton or Stradbroke Islands. There are possibilities that there may be other fens sites in Queensland with peat and potholes but they have yet to be identified.

In the Global Context: While similar patterned fens have been recorded in Scandinavia, Siberia and Canada in the northern hemisphere the only records from the southern hemisphere come from New Zealand. No fens have been previously recorded in a sub-tropical environment although there are extensive peatlands in Kalimantan (Borneo). Fens have previously been associated with mosses and mossy bogs. Fens have also played a very significant economic role providing peat and open areas for transportation. The Fen Country of England is a well recognized centre of human activity from prehistoric times.

Goats-foot Convolvulus Forest Boronia

Fens Enhance World Heritage Values: Richard Lindsay from the United Kingdom, Chairman of IMCG, said after visiting two of the fens that they would add significantly to Fraser Island's World Heritage status. Discussions between the staff from the Commonwealth World Heritage Unit, Queensland Department of Environment, the Australian Marine Conservation Group (AMCS) and the IMCG have proceeded since the initial inspection with a view to developing a comprehensive research program into the peatlands on Fraser Island. Funding has been provided to the Department of Environment by the Commonwealth Government.

The research project involves the first stage of a comprehensive survey and research program into the status, biology and ecology of Fraser Island. A small number of overseas scientists with expertise in peat/fen ecology will be required to be involved in the project as there are relatively few Australian scientists with expertise in this field. Overseas involvement will be valuable in providing a framework in which to adequately categorize and classify fens on Fraser Island and thereby provide the necessary basis for assessment of the World Heritage values of these systems.

So far for inexplicable reasons Fraser Island has only been credited with meeting two of the four World Heritage criteria. The discovery of the fens further enhances the recognition of its other values.

Fens Extend the Wetlands of Significance: John Sinclair, who accompanied the Ramsar group, said that the previously overlooked value of the fens will be addressed as an urgent priority now that their significance has been drawn to the attention of both government and non-government conservationists and he hoped that they would be included in a Ramsar nomination which included Great Sandy Strait. The previous National Party Queensland Government was paranoid that any international conventions may result in some increased influence for the Commonwealth Government. They therefore refused to nominate any Queensland areas as Ramsar wetlands sites on ideological grounds. The Goss Government did nominate some Queensland sites but not Great Sandy Strait long regarded as one of Australia's most important potential Ramsar sites. The recognition of the fens, which are also wetlands means that the borders of the potential Ramsar site should not be confined to the High Water Mark but should extend to include the fens which mainly lie between the tidal wetlands and the high dunes.

One of FIDO priorities in the immediate future is to encourage more research into the fens of Fraser Island and Cooloola and to have those fens given the appropriate international recognition. The newly recognized value of the fens are justification for more research and greater protection. In the past the fens have been burnt more frequently and with more ferocity than perhaps any other feature of Fraser Island's vegetated landscapes. FIDO and the DEH need to understand more about the fens to be able to manage them best.

New Wildlife Discoveries

False Water Rats

The presence of the threatened False Water Rat (Xeromys myoides) has been confirmed on Fraser Island. It was first identified in dingo scats from Dream Island but now has been confirmed in several other records including one while surveying the fens. The False Water Rat had been previously recorded in Cooloola.

Shorebird Study

A year long research program into the effects of 4WD vehicles on shorebirds of Fraser Island has been undertaken by Fiona Fisher from the University of Queensland. MOONBI 90 hopes to be able to summarize the findings which by reports confirm FIDO's observations that the density of beach traffic and camping has the greatest impact on the survival of shorebirds. It is significant that the greatest density of shorebirds occurs immediately south of Eurong and area which has been heavily affected by intense traffic movements during the Fraser Island Fishing Expo. We have observed groups of up to 10 pied oyster catchers there in March as well as one sooty oyster catcher.

Dingo Study

A study of Fraser Island's dingo population has determined that a relatively small proportion of the island's dingoes (17%) are hybrids. The joint study between the Department of Environment and Heritage and the Queensland Department of Lands and looked at the level of hybridization between dingoes and wild dogs in Queensland. The study suggests that the past practice of bullockies and timber workers keeping working dogs, particularly in the south of the island, has resulted in some interbreeding between dingos and dogs. This finding has implications for management including reinforcing the policy of excluding domestic dogs.

It is significant that FIDO was the first organization recognize the purity of Fraser Island's dingoes and the ban on the taking of domestic dogs to Fraser Island was a result of FIDO advocacy to protect the integrity and health of the dingo population. (Fraser's dingo population was decimated by Parvo virus taken on to Fraser Island some years ago by domestic dogs). This scientific confirmation vindicates FIDO's stance.

New Attacks: After a lapse of two years, there have been new dingo attacks on children on Fraser Island. The attacks occurred at Garry's Anchorage along Great Sandy Strait. One witness said the attack was provoked by children throwing sticks and sand at a dingo. That prompted other reports to be forthcoming of people continuing to feed dingos. Even workmen repairing buildings at the DoE's Dilli Village have been seen feeding dingos. If dingos are encouraged to lose their fear of humans more attacks are inevitable.

Early Days on Fraser Island

GO BUSH Safaris has just released a wonderful well illustrated autobiography by the 86-year-old Rollo Petrie, "Early Days on Fraser Island ó1913 to 1922". Rollo Petrie, who has the longest living memory of this World Heritage area, describes his life as a boy on Fraser Island as well as the changes he has observed since then during his regular visits back there. The 96 page well presented and illustrated book can be obtained in book shops in Maryborough and Hervey Bay or from John Sinclair, PO Box 71, GLADESVILLE, NSW, 2111 (Phone (02) 817 4660 - Fax: (02) 816 1642) It sells for $17.95.

Orchid Beach Spider Attack

When a resident of Orchid Beach was bitten by a Funnel webbed spider in late 1995, they had to be evacuated by emergency helicopter service and treated in hospital. **Funnel-web spiders are potentially the most dangerous spiders in the world**. The victim survived thanks to very efficient first aid and evacuation procedures but the incident had several repercussions.

1. **Investigation:** Dr. Robert Raven of the Queensland Museum, an acknowledged expert on Funnel-web spiders, investigated the incident. Funnel webs are exceedingly toxic. Deaths from Funnel-web spider bites have occurred in as little as 15 minutes but nobody has yet died since 1980 when an anti venom was developed in Australia. Fortunately, the specimen which had bitten the man had been kept and it was identified as being of the Hadronyche species. It is not yet certain if this is a new species or not. If it was the Toowoomba Funnel-web, then it is the most lethal spider yet identified. Amongst all Funnel-web spiders the male toxins are three to five times more toxic than the female. However, the female Toowoomba funnel web has been found to be more toxic than males of the Sydney funnel-webs (Atrax sp). It is very difficult, even for the experts to positively identify the Funnel-web species and the Orchid Beach Funnel web has yet to be identified.
2. **Discovery:** Dr. Raven followed up this attack including field work in the area and meetings with residents. This is the first time that Funnel web spiders have ever been recorded from heath country. Funnel web spiders had been known from Fraser Island for years but only from rainforests. In the Ocean Lake- Orchid Beach area he discovered the highest density of Funnel-webs yet recorded (up to 252 per hectare). The Funnel-webs have been seen regularly in the houses at Orchid Beach but this is the only one person has been bitten so far.
3. **Suppression:** As the discoveries began to be revealed panic broke out amongst the land speculators at Orchid Beach. many Fraser Island residents and landholders are terrified that the land acquired at inflated prices (in anticipation of speculative gains) could dramatically depreciate if new of the spider leaks out. There has been absolutely no media coverage of the presence of the spiders and their potential danger.

As MOONBI readers would know, FIDO has always been opposed to the Orchid Beach subdivision since before it was approved. We have even had representatives present at auction sales warning the potential buyers of this speculative land that we would be doing our best to ensure that there would be no capital gains from this land and only potential losses. Despite our warnings of caveat emptor the speculators still were lured by the big prize. Now they are like the vendors of a shonky motor car that is a lethal potential bomb waiting to explode and they want to suppress anyone from alerting the potential buyers to its risks. FIDO intends to make as widely known as possible the information we have.

FIDO has always regarded Fraser Island as being important to science and research and the presence of a potential new species adds to that value. We do not believe that any important biological of other scientific data about the Great Sandy Region should be suppressed to enable some speculator to make a quick buck. After all most have sought to capitalize on Fraser Island's World Heritage status.

Camping Impact Research

Marc Hockings, a PhD student from the University of Queensland, has spent over two years researching to develop and implement a program for evaluating the management of Fraser Island. His study has focused on monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of implementing the Great Sandy Region Management Plan. He plans to establish whether the desired outcomes which are specified in the plan are being met. This will be achieved by a series of monitoring programs.

Priority areas for monitoring and evaluation include land form processes, wildlife, landscape and aesthetic values, cultural heritage resources, fire, roads, vehicle use of beaches, recreation tourism and visitor use, and beach camping.

It is the latter though which has already produced the most interesting outcome. At a World Heritage Area Managers Workshop in Ravenshoe in April he presented a paper which indicates that there is significant and accelerating degradation of the more popular beach camping sites on Fraser Island based on his monitoring program. Furthermore, it shows that although the volume of campers plateaued four years ago, during the last four years the rate of degradation has increased.

Marc Hockings findings only relate to the degradation of the vegetation. It doesn't address the equally critical issues of the impact on reproduction of shorebirds such as pied oyster catchers and red-capped dotterels which nest along the foredunes, nor does it address the leaching of faecal bacteria into the water-table.

This finding confirms FIDO's long held observation on the detrimental environmental impact of free range camping along Fraser Island's foredunes.

These findings also justify FIDO's position that free-range camping will have to be limited. FIDO has for many years been advocating the establishment of more designated camping areas such as Dundubarra and Waddy Point with proper toilets and amenities and these new developments should be associated with the progressive phasing out of free-range camping which is where the majority of the accelerating degradation is occurring.

FIDO wants increasing funding to establish new camping areas in the Chards Rocks area, north and south of Poyungan Rocks and more in the Eurong - Govi Creek area. We need to ensure that the Department of Environment gives this an appropriately high priority to addressing the establishment of designated camping areas. So far the priority for infrastructural works seems to be determined more by the available funding than any longer term vision. As such, priorities are being given to building public toilets on the northern part of Fraser Island rather than places where there is a greater need such as Wabby Lakes.

Cards and Photos

Fraser Island continues to provide on-going inspiration to artists, writers, photographers and others. This is illustrated by the photographs on the opposite page by Andrew Sinclair. FIDO believes that the more people appreciate the aesthetics of Fraser Island and Cooloola the more there will be even greater public support for protecting this area.

This is a page of photos from Andrew which should lift the overall presentation of MOONBI

Pages 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 are fairly fixed. There is still more to finish the last four pages which I will send again as they are finalized.

Political Machinations

Since the last MOONBI there have been two changes of government in Australia. **The Queensland Government** underwent a bloodless coupe when the Goss Government capitulated in February after losing the Mundingburra By-Election and the Keating Federal Labour Government was replaced by the Howard Government which won in a landslide in the March 2 general elections.

The Queensland Political Scene

Queensland Labour's first Government after more than 33 years in opposition was voted out after just six years not because it attempted to do too much but because it attempted too little and too slowly. The lack of decisions about the Great Sandy Region since the adoption of the Great Sandy Region Management Plan may well epitomize the general frustration which Queenslanders were experiencing;

- The position of the Manager (Great Sandy) responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Management Plan, remained unfilled for more than 18 months while bureaucrats dithered about upgrading the position and then it was advertised in April (only after the change in Government) at the previous level!
- The Development Control Plan which should have resulted in a Discussion Paper being released in May 1995. It is now doubtful whether the new Borbidge Government will release the DCP at all. More than $50,000 has been allocated for this project but it languishes with the job half way through!
- The southern half of Fraser Island still has not been gazetted as a National Park. The whole of Fraser Island was nominated for World Heritage in 1991 and more than five years later the Department of Environment was still lacking any political instructions to proceed with the National Park gazettal. We expect the new National Party Government to score political points by finally accepting the fact that most of Fraser Island should become National Park.
- Other decisions awaited ministerial decisions such as terminating the Fishing Expo, demolishing the unsightly defunct and now dangerous Orchid Beach Resort, even the proper closing of the airstrip at Orchid Beach.

It is true that Tom Barton who was new to the job was getting on top of his portfolio and was starting to make decisions which were long overdue but from November, 1995 the whole process of Government in Queensland was further paralysed awaiting the outcome of the Mundingburra By-Election.

The Federal Scene

The end of 13 years of Labour reign and the installation of a conservative Government led by Prime Minister, John Howard, marks a massive political change, particularly on the environment. The election environment manifesto promises much which could be of benefit to Fraser Island but that is conditional on the very controversial sale of Telstra. The Howard Team's position reflects a lack of commitment to the environment that the environment. It was the only plank in the whole Coalition policy which is contingent on the sale of Telstra. Health, education and other major Commonwealth functions are not subject to any qualifications.

If the Howard Government's environment policy is implemented, then ways in which Fraser Island will benefit include funds to acquire the remaining freehold land on Fraser Island which is a potential disaster waiting to happen. The most critical area is in the Moon Point area which are now recognized as having even greater significance due to its proximity to the very best fens on Fraser Island which may be amongst the most significant in the world.

New Federal Minister for the Environment, Senator Robert Hill has given a high priority to visiting Fraser Island. However, it remains to be seen whether or not Fraser Island remains in the "B" Team of World Heritage sites in Australia.

New Qld Environment Minister

Brian Littleproud, Queensland's new Environment Minister, has initiated a flurry of activity over Fraser Island. He visited the island in March and met three FIDO members on 17 April in Parliament House. He had a surprisingly good and constructive grasp of most issues. The meeting was cordial and mutually helpful.

Some of the highlights of our meeting and understandings reached include:

- Both the Minister and FIDO recognize impacts of free-range camping and share a common view on the issue of reducing this problem.
- In general, he supports the Great Sandy Region Management Plan which also has such broad support from all stakeholders.
- The Premier made a pre-election commitment to re-open the Orchid Beach airstrip for the 25 residents of this small village. We are advised that none of this funding for this extravagant pork-barrelling will come from the DoE's budget. FIDO will closely scrutinize any developments if this extraordinarily stupid idea goes ahead and we will do a full expose.
- Brian Littleproud was unaware of the Premier's pre-election commitment to spend $10 million to upgrade the infra-structure on Fraser Island. While we don't support this being used for re-opening an airstrip which is essentially unsafe, potentially dangerous and environmentally unsound, there are many important infrastructure developments which have been withheld due to the lack of adequate resources.
- He promised to move quickly to fill the many vacancies on the Community Advisory Committee which have remained vacant for up to three years.
- He will be giving a priority to establishing a Great Sandy Region Board of Management. We hope that this will properly represent community interests and the need to protect the very significant natural values of this outstanding natural area. However, the precedent of the Ministerial Advisory Committee to review Environmental Protection in Queensland has been stacked so heavily in favour of industry and the exclusion of conservation interests that we have some apprehensions about any sort of balance.
- He is prepared to support the renomination of the Great Sandy Region to ensure that Cooloola and the marine areas receive their due recognition as well as that all of the values of the region are inscribed on the World Heritage List. While we appreciate that this is conditional on broad community support we are confident that this will be forthcoming as the research identifies more precisely all of the values.
- He has a good grasp of the problems besetting Fraser Island's commercial tour operations. The long overdue appointment of the Manager (Great Sandy) and review of commercial tour operations on Fraser Island should ensure that the unfortunate dominance of the day tour operation purely through aggregation of existing limited licences is broken.

National Parks for Sale?

Brian Littleproud has raised a very thorny issue of allowing some private enterprise in National Parks. Needless to say Kingfisher Resort's Tony Charters, who has hijacked the Ecotourism Association, enthusiastically endorsed this with a statement that "many national parks would be better off in private hands". This comes from the same resort whose environmental credentials are far from impeccable. They also sought to have the State Government subsidize a light rail on Fraser Island.

FIDO is in a difficult position because there are some areas where private enterprise can work. Multiple values which national parks have been established for should prevail over turning parks into type of theme parks or market bazaars. Selling off concessions or parts of any national parks is just "not on".

There are some positive ways private enterprise can assist: In New South Wales private enterprise contributes to National Park infrastructure through a Government Foundation. In Kakadu National Park private citizens collect camping fees and maintain the camping grounds on a contract basis. This works very efficiently and are relatively trouble free. That could work well at places on Fraser Island as long as the capital works and maintenance are still carried out by the government.

Allowing private enterprise within National Parks does not mean allowing special concessions within National Parks to establish new businesses. That could transform the whole approach to national parks and result in them becoming little more than market places for hawkers such as occurs within national parks in Thailand. In the United States similar incompatible developments occur immediately outside the boundaries of parks. FIDO doesn't want these types of development in the Great Sandy Region or in any Queensland National Park.

Light Rail People Mover

On the other hand, FIDO is keen to see the construction of a light rail people mover on Fraser Island to reduce the environmental impacts of the existing road network which are becoming increasingly expensive to maintain. From every signal from every government this will only be constructed if it is installed by private enterprise.

Following some encouragement from Brian Littleproud FIDO has now sought to interest a private company to undertake a more detailed planning study to define the most feasible route and to develop a more precise costing and planning as a pre-requisite to submitting to the Queensland Government a more definite proposal. FIDO aims to ensure that any light rail people mover development by private enterprise would not compromise the integrity of the Great Sandy National Park. We plan to put before the Government a viable proposal which would be fully underwritten by private enterprise.

The independent feasibility study which FIDO commissioned Gutteridge Haskins and Davey to carry out. found that the idea of a light rail was potential feasible.

In the meantime, one of the previously most outspoken sceptics of FIDO's light rail proposal, Sid Melksham, is now reported also to be investigating his own proposal to construct a light rail on Fraser Island.

Commonwealth Action

Some action initiated by the Commonwealth Government began before the election. The mere pittance given to the Queensland Government for Fraser Island management as a World Heritage site has been increased to $140,000 this year. This is still a mere pittance compared with what is given for the management of some other Australian World Heritage sites such as Kakadu, Uluru, the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics or even the Tasmanian World Heritage area.

The Federal contribution for World Heritage management has been increased to $140,000 per annum unless this is cut back in the New Government cost cutting. The first $140,000 is being spreading the butter very thinly over five projects: rehabilitation works (let there be no more planting sand-blows) developing a camping Management Plan, interpretation planning and delivery, the monitoring project and a research project on the Fens.

FIDO wants a significant commitment to use $100,000 per annum over the next few years to develop progressively more designated camping areas. It appears that the expenditure will be much more ad hoc than that. Clearly more money from both State and the Federal Governments is needed to properly manage Fraser Island.

Another $70,000 Commonwealth grant under the ecotourism program is being spent on developing a lookout on Nulwarr Hill overlooking Wabby Lakes and upgrading the walking trail from the top car park to the lake. However FIDO's priority project to have a toilet sited at Wabby Lakes isn't even on the DoE agenda yet despite the extensive public usage of this area. The $370,000 left over from an abandoned proposal for a new Moon Point landing will probably be used to build new toilets in the northern part of the Island but Wabby Lakes, where there is a greater need, will get nothing.

World Heritage Initiatives

Numerous submissions to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on the Environment Recreation and the Arts (HORSCERA) panned the management of the Fraser Island World Heritage area. Many submissions identified the 11 Australian World Heritage sites as falling into two teams as far as management and resources were concerned. Fraser Island is clearly in the "B" Team.

FIDO made its submission to the inquiry which was suspended with the calling of the Federal Election before any Report could be delivered. John Sinclair appeared before the Committee in public hearings in Sydney.

The then Deputy Chair of the Committee, Member for Wide Bay, Warren Truss, made it clear that he was dissatisfied with the management of Fraser Island. He is now urging Senator Hill to visit the island. He said in April, "It is really a national disgrace that this (neglect) has been allowed to happen to an area that was so important that it had t be a World Heritage area".

FIDO continues to be very keen to pursue the matter of World Heritage management and this is why John Sinclair attended a World Heritage Managers Workshop in Ravenshoe in April. FIDO will continue to pursue such initiatives.

An Academic Appraisal

A Griffith University team is currently looking at the management of Fraser Island. Tony Corbett of the Faculty of Environmental Science had this to say of relevance to FIDO's observations:

A high degree of inconsistency exists in the management planning across Australia's World Heritage Areas. It seems that not all World Heritage Areas are created equal This is at odd with Australia's international obligations under the WH Convention to provide the highest level of protection and management of these places of irreplaceable values. The disparities in Commonwealth funding and commitment has resulted in what Ian Dutton has termed an "A-Team" and a "B-Team. Generally, the A-Team members are those which were subject of a highly visible conflict over resource development at the time of listing, and enjoy a high profile internationally. These include Kakadu, the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru-Kata Juta, Wet Tropics and Tasmanian Wilderness. The B-Team are those areas listed "quietly " with State Government consent, and are not well known. B-Team members are Willandra Lakes Region, Shark Bay, Lord Howe Island, the Central Eastern Rainforests of Australia (CERA). An exception to those general trends is our own Fraser Island. As you are well aware, Fraser was the subject of rancorous conflict over sandmining and logging. Furthermore, the Island has a high public profile in Australia and, one would venture, is not unknown internationally. In spite of this, the evidence to the HORSCERA "Inquiry into World Heritage Areas" suggests that Fraser Island is a member of the B-Team. The submissions from stakeholders and interested parties regarding Fraser were unanimous in expressing a lack of confidence in the ability of the DEH to mange and protect the Island. Fraser does not enjoy levels of on-going Commonwealth funding granted to A-Team members. Coalition governments who have traditionally shown hostility to World Heritage are now in power at both State and Federal levels. No doubt there will be future challenges to maintain and increase the commitment to all World Heritage areas, and (particularly for FIDO) Fraser Island. Examples of funding disparities include: Expenditure of $100,174,530 on Kakadu over a 14-year period compared to Willandra Lakes budget of $329,000 over the same period. In 199/91 the Wet Tropics received $10,969,000 while CERA were allocated $15,000.

Overdue D.C.P. Decision

The Queensland Government must cease stalling over the release of the Development Control Plan (DCP) Discussion Paper for the Great Sandy Region.

In 1994 the four local authorities with jurisdiction over the region agreed that there needed to be a DCP to cover all private land, particularly urban land in the Great Sandy Region. It would be silly if Orchid Beach, Happy Valley, Eurong Tin Can Bay and Rainbow Beach townships were all allowed to develop in an ad hoc way and to different criteria. $50,000 was allocated to pay consultants from the residue of the $38 million. After a process of initial public consultation, a Discussion Paper was prepared by the consultants, Buckley Vann by April, 1995.

The Goss Cabinet was due to approve the release of the Discussion Paper in May, 1995 but it was stalled due to the calling of the Queensland General Election. Since then the political process has been paralysed in Queensland and now there is a substantial degree of backsliding by some recalcitrant local authorities who don't want any DCP to fetter their options for ad hoc development in the Great Sandy Region. Thus some councils have been surreptitiously lobbying to scuttle the DCP process. While the release of a Discussion Paper is only a first step, it appears that these councils (or rather one particular council, Cooloola) doesn't want any public discussion about development.

Secret Obstruction: FIDO wants the Queensland Government to act decisively and tell the errant obstructionists to the release of the Discussion Paper that the DCP process is one developed in the Public Interest.

As well as setting the parameters for development in the urban areas indicated above the DCP affects many other decisions such as the establishment of a new camping ground at Orchid Beach, use of the Light stations, etc.

Discussion Needed: FIDO has not been consulted about the Discussion Paper. We aren't privy to any of its contents, but we want its release so that the process of finalizing an agreed DCP can begin. We will then have an opportunity to examine it and comment on it.

There is no excuse for anyone continuing to stall. If nothing is done there is a great potential for developments incompatible with the Region's World Heritage status being approved. Having no DCP is like having a time bomb ticking away which will inevitably explode.

If the Discussion Paper is not to be released, then FIDO wants a public finger pointed at the people who scuttled it and an expose of their motives.

Local Council Boundaries Review

In April the Queensland Commissioner for Local Government, Greg Hoffman called a meeting of relevant Local Governments to consider arrangements for potential boundaries in the Great Sandy Region. This was a result of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into the Conservation, Management and Use of Fraser Island and the Great Sandy Region which recommended: *Consideration be given to in a review of local authority boundaries by the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission (EARC) to the alteration of the boundaries of the cities of Maryborough and Hervey Bay and the shires of Noosa and Widgee and the inclusion of the whole region within one local authority area or the inclusion of the whole of Fraser Island in one local authority area and he inclusion of the entire mainland part of the region into one other local authority area.*

Councils vie for Fraser Island: The result is that now the Hervey Bay and Maryborough City Councils are engaged in a tug of war over who should control Fraser Island and the Cooloola and Noosa Shire Councils are vying for the control of the southern part of the Great Sandy Region, namely Cooloola.

FIDO wants the whole of the Great Sandy Region brought under the control of one single local authority which would run from the northern shore of the Noosa River to Breaksea Spit.

Although this option would mean that there would be relatively few residents in the area, mainly based in Rainbow Beach and the Noosa North Shore, it could still be viable. Most people have discounted this as being an unviable proposition but we believe that it is more feasible than most people would imagine. If it is viable to allow remote Aboriginal communities with a smaller population at Mornington Island or Arakuun to operate their own independent local authority, then a more affluent community should be able to operate its own authority.

FIDO believes that it is possible to employ people or agencies on contract to carry out work such as administration, planning, health surveying etc. to carry out the requisite functions of a local authority. The Great Sandy Region Council could contract appropriate bodies including any neighbouring local authorities to carry out any significant works. There is no reason why the position of Shire Clerk need be a full time appointment. Many local Queensland authorities share Health Surveyors. As far as the community of interest is concerned, it is most desirable that the Great Sandy Region be under one single, separate local authority.

FIDO is opposed to control of any part of the Great Sandy Region (except Mon Repos which we regard as being more appropriately included in the Bundaberg district sphere of influence) being given to any of the four existing councils except Noosa. This is because the northern three councils are seeking to gain control primarily to maximize their exploitation for their residents based in the cities of Hervey Bay, Maryborough or Gympie rather than having the welfare and protection of the important natural values of the region.

Hervey Bay City Council is seeking to exploit the water of Fraser Island to supply its rapidly growing urban population on the mainland. It wants access to the outflow of Bogimbah Creek to augment its water supply. This issue is continually being canvassed even as this review takes place. While historically not as vigorous as the Maryborough Council in advocating the exploitation of Fraser Island's mineral and timber resources, Hervey Bay has never-the-less supported the continuation of those industries. It also has been responsible for allowing a disastrous subdivision to proceed at Orchid Beach. FIDO had to take action in the Supreme Court to stop Hervey Bay Council approving an illegally back-dated application to subdivide Orchid Beach in 1981 to prevent FIDO objecting. Hervey Bay Council hasn't convinced us that it would manage Fraser Island any better now if it was entrusted to it.

The Maryborough City Council has an appalling record of vigorous advocacy for the most destructive industries of sandmining and logging. It has allowed the two worst and most insensitive tourist developments on Fraser Island Eurong and Kingfisher Resorts to be developed with the minimum of standards and supervision. Fraser Island was only ever split away from the old Burrum Shire at the behest of selfish Maryborough interests who wanted to safeguard their access to Fraser Island's resources and were apprehensive that a new Hervey Bay City Council may impose controls which could frustrate the industrial exploitation of Fraser Island.

Maryborough Council is moderate compared to the old Widgee Shire and the Gympie City Councils over Cooloola. They placed advertisements in the "Courier Mail" to support the exploitation of Cooloola for sandmining. Widgee opposed the gazettal of the Cooloola National Park until they had been given access to the water of Tewah and Searys Creeks. The new Cooloola City Council united Widgee and Gympie into one. Now this Council is opposing even the DCP Discussion Paper being released until they are assured they can take even more water from Cooloola to meet the demands of an unsustainably large population at Rainbow Beach and Tin Can Bay. In the circumstances when the demands are so irreconcilable with the objectives of the Great Sandy Region Management Plan FIDO does not believe that this Council should be given control over any part of the Region despite its use of Cooloola's name.

On the other hand, during more than 30 years of controversy over Cooloola and the Fraser Island, the position of the Noosa Shire Council has never been in direct conflict with the advocates of conservation. Frequently Noosa Council has acted to protect the environment before some threats were apparent.

The only misgivings FIDO has about a single Great Sandy Region local authority is that with fewer than 1000 residents it is possible that the parochial interests of those electors could be in conflict with the much wider community who regard the Great Sandy Region as a very important natural area which is deserving of the greatest degree of environmental protection.

FIDO wants a single council covering the whole area which places the greatest priority on preserving the natural integrity of this outstanding natural region.

Managing the Mary River

The Mary River has as much potential to become an environmental disaster area as the Darling River. At the present trend in increasing demand for water from the Mary River the river could dry up and cease flowing in 50 years' time. The demand is coming from agriculture and industry but the majority of it is coming for meeting the future projected demand of urban growth. Already local authorities on the Sunshine Coast are drawing water from the Mary River and they want to increase that to supply the growing coast population. Maryborough, Cooloola, and Hervey Bay Councils are also looking to the Mary River for their future urban needs. As well Hervey Bay is about to dry up the Burrum River and is looking to take water from Fraser Island. Cooloola is opposing the DCP for Rainbow Beach and Tin Can Bay because they don't want to put a cap on their population growth and are aspiring to increase the amount of water they take from Cooloola National Park.

A river catchment plan has been drafted for the Mary River and FIDO is making an input. However, the larger problem is that of population growth which is fuelling the increased demand for water. FIDO is now also actively joining the campaign to urge the Commonwealth Government to establish a national Population Policy so that we can see the long term implications of the continuing exponential growth which (short of a catastrophe or natural disaster) will continue to grow for 40 years after a decision is made to stabilize it.

The consequences of this increasing regional demand for water are that the marine environment of the Great Sandy Region which relies on the nourishment of the permanent flow from these streams are at risk of being starved and the fisheries will further diminish. The siltation of the channels is a further consequence with unknown impact. The tidal sweep of sediment has severe implications and there will be little flushing of Great Sandy Strait. We cannot allow the Mary or any other streams flowing into the region to stop flowing.

The following chart from the QDPI illustrates the significance of the flow of the Mary River. It is central it is to maintaining much of the natural values of the marine environment of the Great Sandy Region.

Runoff Mary Valley and Sunshine Coast

Fraser Island and Cooloola Fisheries

FIDO wants an end to Fishing Expos on Fraser Island. The limited data we have been able to extract from the Queensland Fishing authorities indicate that there is a serious over-exploitation of the fish in the Great Sandy Region and that one of the factors which is leading to this decline is the Fraser Island Fishing Expo.

The decline in fisheries of the Great Sandy Region as indicated by the decline in the commercial catch.

(There is a very good table to go here)

The above table indicates the commercial catch in each sector of the Great Sandy Region.

The Tailor catch has declined in the Great Sandy Region. However, Queensland fishing authorities have been coyer than their Western Australia counterparts in acknowledging the scale of the problem. They have been even more reluctant to take measures to address the decline. In WA brochures are now freely available which state*, "Over the next two or three years we may see a further decline in tailor stocks to the point where they become only an occasional captureó rather than a regular bag filler. There are signs that this has already happened."*

The decline in the take of grey mackerel and sandcrabs has been affected by the loss of sea grass in Hervey Bay. While it is true that climatic effects such as rainfall and run-off provide considerable variability in the fishery and more data is required, it is indisputable that the decline is following a long term and accelerating trend. If it continues not only will the commercial fishery continue to decline but so will the take of amateur anglers which will drastically reduce the appeal of Hervey Bay & the Great Sandy Region for many traditional visitors.

There has been no survey of the impact of the Fishing Expo since 1992 when only 11 of the 1500 entrants were surveyed. That data indicated that if extrapolated to every entrant, 130,000 fish would have been caught in five days, which is equivalent to about 65 tonnes. This is equivalent to the whole annual commercial catch of some of the GSR sector. It is a catch so significant that it cannot be ignored any longer.

For 1996 Kgari Events has been exempted from paying the Queensland Government $10 per participant in the Fraser Island Fishing Expo although this fee to go to research has been required from every other fishing contest in Queensland.

The continued exemption and special concessions allowed to Kgari Events can no longer be ignored. It is a scandal that this event which has such an impact on the biota of a World Heritage area should be allowed to continue by the very Department which has a responsibility for managing the wildlife.

The worst part of this event is that the fish are not the only wildlife to suffer.

We are advised that in 1995 there were 914 tents in the Orchid Beach area associated with the Fishing Expo. With an average occupancy of 3.5 persons per tent (predominantly male) that accounted for 32000 people. They generated 80 cubic metres of general waste and 40 cubic metres of recyclable wastes (mainly containers which formerly held alcohol. In addition, the participants left a legacy of other rubbish including several drums. There were two infringement notices for ignoring regulations but the major problem results from the impact of such concentrations of people in such a small intense area.

FIDO will be responding to a still to be released Discussion Paper on Fish Management in Queensland. FIDO plans to become involved because:

a) We believe that the fish slaughter on the scale which occurs during the Fishing Expo is unsustainable.
b) We believe that more measures must be taken to protect the fish stock of the Great Sandy Region.
c) Selective fishing such as that which occurs in Fishing Expo's are like selective logging. Only the biggest and best are taken and certain species are shunned while others are targeted. The results are a severe disturbance of the natural balance which may never recover.

d) The biodiversity of the marine environment is being eroded before it has even been fully assessed.
e) As with the harvesting of any wild population and as has been demonstrated so often with fisheries there are frequent dramatic and catastrophic crashes in the wild populations which result from over-exploitation. Many wild populations have never recovered from past exploitation despite the elapse of many years.
f) If the Precautionary Principle which is supposed to be at the basis of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment were to be observed, we would stop the factors which are clearly influential in the decline of the fishery before it is too late.

FIDO will review the first Fishing Expo at Eurong Beach in the next MOONBI.

Just when we thought that there was some recognition of the impact of over-fishing in the Great Sandy Region the Kingfisher Resort announced that it was about to launch its own $7,000 "Golden Trevally fly fishing competition". While this will not have the same impact on Fraser Island as the Eurong based event it is selectively endangering this targeted species.

News in Brief

The demand for water from the Great Sandy Region is looming as the largest single threat to Fraser Island and Cooloola. Both Hervey Bay and Gympie interests are casting greedy eyes at the water which is flowing to sustain the critically important fisheries of the region. Hervey Bay residents are already advocating taking water and the Council is being very coy about its long-term intentions.

Accident Prone People: The spate of accidents on Fraser Island needs urgent comment and action. A new study indicates that four wheel drives are 7.5 times more likely to have an accident than normal passenger cars. The accelerating number of injuries and the cost of administering rescue and treatment must force all authorities to explore ways of minimizing vehicle accidents on Fraser Island. One way is to have more people use the much safer light rail. In the meantime, the diversity of the accidents which range from people being impaled on Xanthoreas to dying of various other causes makes life for rangers very difficult.

New Roadwork: The Maryborough Council will now have to find $23,000 to maintain the roads on Fraser Island. In the past this work has been done for years by the DEH. One of the more alarming implications of the DEH running out of money and staff for road maintenance is the comment by City Engineer, Alan Sims that "gravel will have to be taken over by barge and a place would have to be found to stockpile it. We'll have to look tat strengthening roads..." The Maryborough Council has regarded some Fraser Island enterprises with too much softness and may now squeeze some of them to stop them externalizing their costs on other tax/rate-payers.

Thoorgine Educational and Cultural Centre has not escaped the recent political scrutiny of various Aboriginal operations. Although FIDO made a very substantial contribution for the camping ground several years ago we have not been kept informed of developments. There have been four different Directors in a little over a year as a result of various coupes. Communications for agencies who support greater Aboriginal participation in Fraser Island management are difficult in the circumstances.

Rangers sacked: The expiration of $38 million for Fraser Island growth and development which guaranteed displaced timber workers 3.5-year employment from January 1991 was exhausted over a year ago. Many workers were retained for a further 12 months but that has created a major financial crisis. The Borbidge Government has now terminated the services of temporary nine remaining Great Sandy National Park staff. It was inevitable.

Weeds: A number of plants introduced into Australia since European settlement are now termed environmental weeds. Several native plants such as Umbrella Trees (Schefflera actinophylla) and Cadagi (Eucalyptus torelliana) have also become environmental weeds after being introduced outside their natural range. Environmental weeds are defined as plants that invade and thrive in environments in which they do not naturally occur. Fraser Island is fortunate to have relatively few serious weed problems. Of 768 recorded species, only 57 (7%) are introduced. The DoE are now actively encouraging Fraser Island landholders to grow natives and to cull their gardens and precincts of weeds which may escape into the wild. (Keith Twyford).

Names in the Never - Never Basket

In 1978 the Queensland Place Names Board established a Sub-committee to review the various place names on Fraser Island. Both FIDO and the Queensland Forestry Service were represented on this committee. It was a remarkable example of cooperative working despite opposing positions on logging and the political environment in Queensland at the time which aimed at isolating FIDO and John Sinclair.

However, due to an oversight the agreed place names for most of the sandblows were not recorded in the minutes and subsequently when the names were officially gazetted, the official record remained silent on the names of the sandblows when it was FIDO's naming of some sandblows in the first place which was the reason for the establishment of the committee.

However, the Forestry Map of Fraser Island shows that a Government Agency published the names of the sandblows was even though they were not sanctioned.

So far all attempts to remedy this oversight have been resisted and when John Sinclair sought clarification of the name of the sandblow immediately north of Orchid Beach he was threatened by the bureaucracy with prosecution if any names not sanctioned by the Place Names Board were published.

We have one proposal for a name. It has been belated revealed by long-time prospector and island explorer, Nick Schultz of Hervey Bay. that the late Ike Owens a well known Butchalla who knew Fraser Island better than most Aborigines of the last few decades that Ocean Lake was known as "Goomboor". This means "moor hen" or "swamp hen". It is unfortunate that this name was not known before as it could have been more properly applied to the Lake. However, since the sandblow which almost spills into the lake is the only one without a name at least indicated for it FIDO proposes that the sandblow should be named "Goomboor". After all it was largely as a result of Ike Owen's eloquent plea that so many Aboriginal names were restored where they appropriately could be on Fraser Island.

A Quarter of a Century of FIDO and MOONBI

In late January FIDO reached a very significant milestone. We marked the Silver Jubilee of our formation in Hervey Bay in 1971. There was no celebration; no popping of champagne corks; not even a quiet drink to mark the occasion. We just kept plodding along as we have for the previous 25 years.

Anyone who has studied the archival records of MOONBI would appreciate that FIDO has been through many changes in that time. FIDO has been regarded as everything from a pariah to a Messiah. However, we have won reluctant respect from our many critics and enemies for our dogged persistence and the astuteness of our observations. This issue of MOONBI reports on the confirmation of our position on Fraser Island dingos, the impact of free-range camping and the increasing possibilities of a light rail people mover. While it is taking some more than 20 years to recognize the validity of FIDO's advocacy, our track record shows that our positions are almost invariably backed up by inquiries, research and monitoring.

Fraser Island Defenders Organization Limited

Notice of Meeting

NOTICE is hereby given that the Twentieth Annual General Meeting of the Fraser Island Defenders Organization Limited will be held at the Australian Services Union Building, 32 Peel Street, South Brisbane, 7.30 pm, Wednesday, 28 August, 1996.

BUSINESS:

1. To receive the Profit and Loss Statement, Balance Sheets and Reports of the Directors and Auditors
2. To elect Directors for the ensuing term in accordance with the Articles of Association.
3. General Business.

BY THE ORDER OF THE BOARD

Billie A Watts, Honorary Secretary

DATED this first day of July, 1996

PROXY FORM

Twentieth Annual General Meeting

I, ...
(please print in BLOCK letters)

of ..... being a financial member of the Fraser Island Defenders Organization Limited do hereby appoint

..... or failing him/her ..... as my proxy, to vote on my behalf at the Nineteenth Annual General Meeting, to be held at the Australian Services Union Building, 32 Peel Street, South Brisbane, 7.30 pm, Wednesday, 28 August, 1996, at 7.30 pm. and at any adjournment thereof.

Signed this ..... day of ....., 1996

NOTE: In the event of members desiring to vote for or against any resolution they should instruct their Proxy accordingly because unless otherwise instructed the proxy may vote as they think fit.

URGENT

This form or a copy of it should be completed and posted to reach Secretary, FIDO, PO Box 70, BALD HILLS QLD 4036, by 28 August, 1996 to be valid under Article 31 of the constitution. Please photocopy this form and return it promptly.

Section 248 of the Companies (Queensland) Code provides that all members be given 21 days' notice of any meeting (including A.G.M.s) at which they are entitled to vote. It is important that as many proxies as possible are received. The Proxy Form is also taken as your apology for non attendance.