

# FIDO's K'Gari E-News No 7 (20<sup>th</sup> June, 2016)

*A further interim update by the Fraser Island Defenders Organisation between MOONBI 133 and 134*

**The last two months have been very eventful for both Fraser Island (K'Gari) and FIDO and all of this while a drawn out Federal Election campaign with serious implications for Fraser Island is being played out.**

**A way forward:** FIDO and QPWS have worked our way around some differences. FIDO has moved from its plans to fund an independent study into the feasibility of a light rail between Kingfisher Resort, Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) Central Station and Eurong. FIDO is now committed to undertaking a study on sustainable transport options for Fraser Island. It will look at all options and of course by looking at sustainability, it will have a very heavy environmental focus.

**The Barbara Winkley Scholarship:** FIDO has begun discussions with the University of the Sunshine Coast to use some of the funding from the bequest to FIDO to establish a Barbara Winkley Scholarship. This will support a PhD student over three years. The study will use the 2002 GHD Environmental Assessment Working study that had been commissioned by the QPWS as a baseline document to help identify the scale of the problem of sustainable transport on the island. The Scholarship title has provisionally been named *"Sustainable Transport Options for Fraser Island"*.

**PhD Study:** The University is seeking a candidate for this three year study to start in early 2017. The main focus of the study will be to use the baseline data from the 2002 GHD Environmental Assessment Working Paper, April 2002 as a starting point. The QPWS will be cooperating with this study into what FIDO believes is a serious environmental problem on World Heritage K'Gari.

**Expansion to a larger project:** The USC is seeking funding to treble FIDO's contribution and enable the University to engage a whole team to work beside the PhD student to provide a more comprehensive review of the sustainable transport options. The USC already has a significant track record in that area with several studies since 2008 identifying the environmental impact of 4WD traffic on K'Gari's beaches. A Background paper summarizing these research papers has been prepared for inclusion with MOONBI 134.



**This 2 metre deep gash on the Woralie track extends for 300 metres. It has been eroded by rain and is so deep that one can't see the surrounding rainforest. It developed in less than 40 years.**

**The Problem — Serious erosion of roads:** FIDO's last K'Gari E News reported on the extent of degradation to the road network on the island in 2002. We decided to make an assessment using 3.2 kilometres of the two-way road leading out of Kingfisher Resort on a relatively level slope (2%). We found that since that section of road began being used after the completion of the resort in 1991 more than 10m<sup>3</sup> had been eroded away. That amounts to 15,000 tonnes of sand shifted in just 25 years and the cuttings, some already 2 metres deep are continuing to erode ever deeper. This erosion needs to be urgently addressed or else this damage will degrade Fraser Island's World Heritage status ever further, irreparably impacting on aesthetics and vegetation and geomorphology. More details will be in MOONBI 134.



**This is part of the infamous 3.2 kilometre section of Cornwalls Break. Roads through open sclerophyll forests erode faster than roads through rainforest and the canyons tend to be wider. There is very little slope along this section of to explain this degree of scouring.**

**Stopping Consultation:** Most Australians may be less than excited by the longest election campaign in 50 years. One implication for Fraser Island is that it has now extended the paralysis in the processes of consultation over Fraser Island for at least 12 months. The last meetings of the Fraser Island World Heritage advisory committees were in August last year. The term of Advisory Committee Members expired on 31 December last year. There was a call for applications for new appointments to the committee late last year and the Queensland Government had sent recommendations to the Federal Environment Minister Greg Hunt soon after he was presented with the inaugural award as the World's Best Environment Minister at a World Government Summit, in Dubai in February. Alas he waited too long to sign off and although there was plenty of time before the Federal Government went into caretaker mode on 8<sup>th</sup> May, once it was in caretaker mode no new appointments could be made until a new Government is sworn in after 2<sup>nd</sup> July. That means that it now won't be possible for any formal consultation over Fraser Island until at least August and possibly later if the proposed appointments are further stalled. In the meantime important decisions affecting Fraser Island are being made without the opportunity for critical issues to be discussed constructively with all key stakeholders at the same table.

## The Beach to Birrabeen BioBlitz

### A reality from 28 November to 4 December

The other really big FIDO initiative is the progress being made on the BioBlitz. As of today the details of the proposed BioBlitz are on FIDO's web site and FIDO is investing heavily in it. However to make it work we need experts from many areas of biology to volunteer to help identify the full range of species in our study area that runs from Dilli Village to Lake Birrabeen taking in a large range of ecosystems.

The K'Gari BioBlitz offers a unique experience through opportunities to explore this special place and to learn more together about the many species that live within it. The BioBlitz aims to be a comprehensive stocktake of the living natural resources of Fraser Island (K'Gari) with a special focus on a very representative part of the island as a whole.

Fraser Island has an unusual array of ecosystems based on sand. It is a refugia with many ancient species surviving past global climatic changes. It has some special categories of fauna such as acid frogs and sand swimmers and ancient plants among the about 1,000 species so far identified. Yet, despite Fraser Island (K'Gari's) World Heritage status, much of its distinct flora and fauna and their associations remain unknown.

UNESCO recognizes the Fraser Island World Heritage Area for representing "an outstanding example of significant ongoing biological processes. These processes, acting on a sand medium, include biological adaptation (such as unusual rainforest succession), and biological evolution (such as the development of rare and biogeographically significant species of plants and animals)"

Professor Ian Chubb AC Chief Scientist of Australia said introducing the "Australian Guide to Running a BioBlitz" wrote: *With Australia's biodiversity at risk from many pressures – such as habitat destruction, overexploitation, climate change, and introduced species – we are challenged to learn more about our ecosystems so we can better protect and manage them. We need scientists from many disciplines, but it can't just be scientists alone. We need the help of the entire community to rise to the magnitude of the task. Citizen science programs like BioBlitzes are vital connecting links.*

*"Science isn't just something scientists do. It is something in which every single one of us has a stake. Through a BioBlitz we can all have a role - working, enjoying our world, and learning about its natural wonders together. ...."*



At Eurong, the wind has exploited this disturbance in the foredune created by 4WD vehicle traffic. Here the road disturbance has created the genesis of an active sandblow and the excavated sand can be seen accumulating in the lee of this chasm.

## Making a difference

FIDO volunteers have been working on the two worst epicentres of Fraser Island weeds now for more than 20 years. With financial support from the Burnett Mary Regional Group we have been able to intensify our voluntary efforts now with seven (7) week-long working bees this year. The intense effort put in by the nine different volunteer teams to Happy Valley led by Peter Shooter over the past couple of years is bearing fruit. The teams' aim is to eliminate *Abrus precatorius* subspecies *Africanus* (Common name - Crab's Eye) using foliage spray. 1.5% Roundup (glyphosate, 360mg/litre) and seed collection

After May, Peter reported of one area "While there are still some plants in this area, the population is less than 5% of the original infestation". In another part, "I don't believe there are any mature plants left in this area. I don't expect any seed set this year." However in the area east of the Yidney Rocks Road he noted, "This area is extremely hard to work due to steep dunes and dense vegetation. Much of it is heavily infested with *Lantana* and *Cassia* which makes access even more difficult."

Meanwhile FIDO's longer established volunteer program in Eurong has also been making a difference to the presentation of the most visited site on K'Gari by replacing weeds and exotic plants with native plants and now the team is propagating plants in the QPWS for the use throughout the island

**Don't forget the Fraser Island T, T & T Conference:**

**Call for Papers  
Date Claimer**

**7<sup>th</sup> Biennial Great Sandy Conference**

**Fraser Island -**  
**Time:** 25 years since Fraser Island's World Heritage inscription  
**Tide:** Trends influencing the island and surrounding sea environments  
**Tourism:** Analysis of benefits and impacts from about 400,000 visitors annually

**Wednesday, 16th August 2017, 9.00am to 5.00pm**  
at Innovation Centre, Sippy Downs  
University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland  
(PLEASE PUT THE DATE AND VENUE IN YOUR CALENDAR NOW!)

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER:** Writer and Broadcaster, Dr Martin Buzacott

The theme allows wide scope to discuss geomorphology, the marine environment and the impacts of climate change as well as the island's biodiversity. It allows scope to discuss the natural beauty of the site which is one of the three World Heritage criteria that Fraser Island has met.

Anyone wishing to make a conference presentation should contact [conference@fido.org.au](mailto:conference@fido.org.au) to nominate their topic.

As the conference program develops details will be posted at [www.fido.org.au](http://www.fido.org.au)

Organised by: Fraser Island Defenders Organisation,  
FIDO: The Watchdog of Fraser Island  
Supported by: University of the Sunshine Coast &  
Fraser Island Natural Integrity Alliance

*The University of the Sunshine proposes holding a two day Fraser Island (K'Gari) symposium to complement the conference. Watch this space for further announcements of this exciting event supporting FIDO's objective to see greater use made of K'Gari as a natural laboratory.*

## Reviewing World Heritage Recognition

The Queensland Government is making welcome progress under Environment Minister Steven Miles who is dealing with some long overlooked or neglected issues relating to Fraser Island and Cooloola. Since 1975 it has been FIDO's objective to see Cooloola share World Heritage recognition with Fraser Island. It was most unfortunate that this wasn't done in 1992 when only Fraser Island was recognized.

Former Environment Minister Kate Jones began the process to advance the World Heritage renomination of the Great Sandy Region and published the map of the proposed area. FIDO had commented on the map because FIDO believes that the marine areas are of such special significance that they need recognition because the movement of sand in the littoral zone is integral to the on-going geomorphological process for which Fraser Island has already been recognized. However the whole process came to an abrupt halt during the term of the Newman Government.

FIDO congratulates Minister Miles for taking the issue up again. We were encouraged to see that the 2016-17 State budget allocated \$209,000 for the Great Sandy World Heritage wilderness nomination. This process involved consultation with traditional owners, the public and the Australian Government and should be done by the start of 2018. K'Gari has been compared favourably with Lake Mungo and its cultural values need recognition.



## New Management Plan on the Way

World Heritage requires management to preserve the integrity of the Outstanding Universal Value of the inscribed property. It is therefore particularly encouraging to see that the Queensland Government is currently working on developing a new Management Plan for the Great Sandy Region that will not only cover Fraser Island (K'Gari) and Cooloola Sections of the Great Sandy National Park but also the Great Sandy Marine Park.

**Statutory:** Until a draft document is developed there has been no opportunity for public input or comment. However it is assumed that the Management Plan prepared in 1994 will provide the basis for the new plan. Also of greater significance, the new Management Plan will have statutory basis and not prove to be as rubbery as the old plan which was compromised by a number of *ad hoc* political decisions particularly on traffic access. FIDO believes most of these were bad decisions that are now difficult to reverse.

**Included:** Another positive for the new Management Plan is that it is reported to incorporate the Fire Management and Camping Management strategies that are currently subsidiary documents and as such have been neglected.

**Fire Management:** FIDO is of the view that fire management has long needed to be given greater priority as it impacts the whole ecosystem. The three major contributors to biological changes on Fraser Island are climate change, the fire regime and the introduction of exotic plants (weeds) and pest fauna. FIDO looks forward to assessing the new Management Plan with eager anticipation.

## K'Gari's Healthy Dingoes and their Diet

### A dog's breakfast

A recent published paper by Wildlife ecologist Ben Allen and discussed in "The Conversation" has revealed some interesting data on Fraser Island (K'Gari)'s dingoes. Based on the latest research, they are healthy and consume one of the widest size ranges of prey in the animal kingdom.

Dingoes are a national and international icon of great public and conservation interest. As Australia's largest terrestrial predator, they enjoy similar popularity to other top predators such as lions, bears and wolves.

About 100-200 dingoes, representing about 19 packs, live on the island at any one time. They are the most widely studied dingoes in the world.

Given how healthy the overall population is by most measures, researchers have still been scrutinizing their eating habits.

**Analysis:** Based on 2,196 dingo scats, 144 stomach samples and more than 30,000 camera trap records, researchers found that Fraser Island dingoes eat prey ranging from tiny insects to giant dead whales washed ashore – and everything in between. The most frequently occurring food items in scats were northern brown bandicoots (47.9%), followed by fish (26.8%) and large skinks (11.5%).

**Prey:** Eastern grey kangaroos, feral pigs and even feral horses showed up, along with threatened long-nosed potoroos and eastern chestnut mice, confirming the continued presence of these animals on the island.

**Foreign items:** Amongst the anomalous items revealed were plastic food wrappers, tin foil, human faeces, underwear, hats, a variety of different shoes, fish hooks, iPods, beer and soft drink cans, alcohol bladders, steel wool and plastic containers also made an appearance.

### Dingo body weight and condition

Ben Allen noted, "Given the wide range of food items going down the hatch, it should come as no surprise that Fraser Island dingo body weight and condition are doing remarkably well.

"From 455 weight records (the largest known sample of dingo weights ever reported), Fraser Island dingoes over 12 months of age weigh in at 16.6 kg on average, compared to mainland dingoes' typical weight of only 15.7 kg.

"And when it comes to body condition scores (ranging from 1 for skinny dingoes to 5 for grossly obese animals), nearly 75% of dingoes scored 4 or 5. Only 5.6% had a score of 2.5 or less.

"Parasite loads were also low and comparable to other dingo populations."

