



Fraser Island Defenders Organisation

FIDO — The Watchdog of Fraser Island

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Aim: *To ensure the wisest use of the natural resources of Fraser Island*

30th November, 2015

Chair,
Agriculture and Environment Committee,
Parliament House,
Brisbane Qld 4000.

aec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Committee Chair,

This organization is very supportive of the submission by the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland and does not wish to repeat in detail all of those most significant points. However we would like to add our own observations on some additional points:

- **National Park tenures:** There needs to be some classification of Queensland's National Parks protected areas. There needs to be a range of classifications appropriate for particular parks as formerly existed under the Nature Conservation Act. The concept that one size should fit all just doesn't work. Take for example, the Fraser Island World Heritage site. Its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) has been recognized by UNESCO and held in trust for all citizens and managed in the light of our global responsibility. When I received my Officer of the Order of Australia last year, the United States Ambassador personally made the point in relation to my work for Fraser Island that it was "*appreciated not only by the country in which you live, but also by the United States and the international community.*" It is this organization's submission that World Heritage sites need to be given a higher priority to manage the respective OUVs than some other national parks and that there be a greater range of natural protected areas of Queensland.
- The writer has had the rare privilege of visiting Raine Island in 1989. The attachment (Appendix A) describes this most memorable visit. It illustrates the point that some sites are so special that they warrant being treated in special categories. Nowhere else in Queensland is that more relevant than Raine Island.
- **The Cardinal Principle:** It is critical that the protection of nature should be the cardinal principle for nature conservation in Queensland. The management of national parks must make the protection of Nature its top priority. Compromising on this principle changes the whole value of national parks. Trying to make national parks "pay for themselves" inevitably involves compromising the Cardinal Principle. This organization is not averse to commercial activity within national parks as long as (a) it is sustainable and (b) it helps to improve the patterns of recreation and management of the park. For example, this organization has advocated the development of a light rail on Fraser Island since 1974 to address the critical environmental impact resulting from the use of heavy 4WD buses. FIDO is offering to fund a feasibility study for a light rail proposal but it needs a Memorandum of Understanding with the government.

- **Valuing vicarious visitation:** It is sad to see the change in the culture of National Park management since the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service abandoned its publications to promote and interpret Nature. Many people in the past enjoyed and benefitted from these insightful initiatives. Without this focus on Nature, Queensland National Parks are only managed for the visitors who turn up. Little thought is given to the vast majority of people who derive value from national parks without necessarily visiting them or without visiting them more than once or twice in a lifetime. Members of this organization regularly hear from members of the public who have never personally visited sites such as Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora) but who hold those places in special affection. One pharmacist recently remarked to me without knowing of my connection to Fraser Island that she loved the “blue lake” (Lake McKenzie) even though she had never personally seen it. As a child I treasured Lake McKenzie and other now famous Fraser Island icons from stories my parents told me of their visits on their honeymoon in 1935. It is like the appreciation of Banjo Patterson’s poetry. The public does need to need participate in a reenactment the “*Man from Snowy River*” to gain value from it. Not everyone needs to visit the Louvre in Paris or other art galleries to appreciate great works of art such as the “*Mona Lisa*”.

A public opinion survey in the 1990s showed that a remarkable 93% of auns wanted Antarctica left as an untouched wilderness (with allowances for scientific research). Not all of that 93% of Australians, (indeed only a tiny proportion) nurtured a desire to actually visit Antarctica. This helps illustrate that the value of National parks can’t be judged on the number of visitors and that we must cease managing national parks based purely on tourist demand.

That is why this organization is so concerned at the change in National Park management priorities only to recognize a responsibility to those people who visit National Parks ignoring the wishes of those who are concerned about National Parks without visiting them. Indeed many Queensland taxpayers have expressed the view that there needs to be a limit on the number of visitors to National Parks such as Fraser Island. This view needs to be respected.

FIDO advocates re-establishing the publicity and interpretation role of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to cater for the vicarious users of National Parks

FIDO also believes that the Nature Conservation Act should be administered by a single department/agency. The greatest obstacle to the integrated management of the Fraser Island World Heritage site is a result of the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection being responsible for the protection of World Heritage Outstanding Universal Value while the management is left in the hands of that part of the QPWS which is in a different Department. As a result the QPWS does not always bother attending all of the meetings of the Advisory Committees and the QPWS rarely provides relevant written reports management of the island’s natural resources to help the committees fulfill their roles.

FIDO is happy to provide more background to the issues raised if required.

Yours sincerely

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of John Sinclair.

John Sinclair,
Honorary Secretary and Honorary Project Officer.

Appendix A

Raine Island

Raine island 240 kms south east of Cape York and just on the edge of the Australian continental shelf is probably the most biologically rich 21 hectares in the world. As such it is so special that it has a special act of Parliament to protect this special scientific area and that makes it inaccessible to the public. For weeks and right up to when we set out our group had tried in vain to get access for the cruise members to visit Raine Island. We had given up and instead opted to explore Great Detached Reef outside the Great Barrier Reef where we watched in awe as we snorkeled over the pristine coral reef to the a vertical wall that rises a thousand metres from the ocean bed. It was an awesome sight as we could see great sharks swimming below us prowling along this stunning wall in the midst of the ocean. It was while we were anchored there and watching a tropical storm brewing over the out of sight mainland that a small ship sailed up and anchored beside us. It was a charter ship taking researcher up to the nearby Raine Island. We told them of our frustration at not being able to visit Raine Island. Because of Isabel Bennett's formidable reputation and my standing as a conservationist we were given permission to join the research vessel to spend the next day with the researchers on Raine Island on the condition that the "Buxton" would pick us in the late afternoon

Raine Island is a shelf of flat coral rubble less than three metres above sea level yet it has an amazing array of seabirds nesting on above and below the ground in the sparse waist high vegetation that grew out of the coral rubble. The surface nesters include Terns, Masked and Brown Boobies, Common and Black Noddies, and Red-tailed Tropicbirds. It is amazing that such large populations can squeeze into such tight spaces. Mutton-birds (shearwaters) and petrels tunnel below the surface to nest and are never seen above land in daylight hours. The sinister looking Frigate-birds make their nests on stunted vegetation that seem inadequate to support such large birds. Because it was the turtle nesting season in late November when I was there the hundreds of Night Herons had taken up residence ready to feast on any hatchling turtles as they rushed to the sea. The most surprising and unexpected observation though was a Rufous Fantail that was at least 150 kms out to sea from the nearest rainforest on Cape York Peninsula

But the most staggering of the riches was Raine island's amazing turtle population probably the group. Probably the greatest aggregation of nesting sea turtles anywhere in the world. My task to assist the researchers was to walk around the island to count the turtle walk around the island to count the number of mature turtles fatalities that never made it back to sea. There were many that fell on to their back and unable to upright themselves baked to death in the sun. Others fell from a coral rock-shelf and broke their necks.

When looked across the lagoon in the lee of the island there were as many so many turtles rafting and packed so tightly together that I reckon that if I was a lightweight I could have skipped from across the lagoon from carapace to

carapace without getting my feet wet. They were all female green turtles gravid with eggs that they were waiting to deposit into their flipper built solar nests that evening

As Isabel and I left Raine Island in to rejoin our 30 companions on the “*MV Noel Buxton*” and circumnavigate the island witnessed an unforgettable amphibious invasion as countless turtles emerged from the . as the tide was nearing full, they just marched right up the beach to carry out their ancient nesting ritual on this tiny island to get in. To get a nesting site by clambered over other turtles they dug up other nests all in the compulsive desire to reproduce. They each laid clutches of about 100 eggs into the solar-powered nests. However the casualties to other nests heavily discounted the number of eggs that could hatch. Later in the safari we met the researchers in Thursday Island. They advised us that over, 2,000 turtles come ashore on Raine Island that night.