

A Single Authority for Fraser Island

In February 2001 Queensland Premier Peter Beattie promised that if he was re-elected his new government would *(bring) Fraser Island under the planning control of a single government agency. This was part of a series of great promises to better protect all of Queensland's World Heritage area. This Backgrounder explains why "Fraser Island under the planning control of a single government agency" is critical to improving the management of this World Heritage island.*

Currently although the bulk of the responsibility for the management of Fraser Island is placed with Queensland's Environmental Protection Agency, a plethora of other government agencies and authorities also have responsibilities for the management of Fraser Island. While at first glance these do not appear to be very large, the strategic placement and the cumulative effect of these responsibilities and the uncoordinated way with which they are exercised is seriously impeding the overall management.

Land and Sea Divide:

First there is the divide between the terrestrial and marine jurisdictions. The Fraser Island World Heritage Area extends 500 metres to sea all the way around and this is proposed to be extended when Fraser Island is re-nominated as is currently being proposed. In the marine area there are three different Queensland Government Departments which have some jurisdiction. The Environmental Protection Agency is responsible for marine conservation and the management of marine Parks and the protection of endangered species such as whales, dugong, turtles and dolphins. However the agency responsible for the management of the fishery (both commercial and recreational) is the Department of Primary Industries (DPI). However even here the responsibilities are very fuzzy with the DPI includes the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol. This service overlaps the work of the Marine Parks Division of the EPA. DPI also responsible for the surveillance and enforcement of the Dugong Protection Area within Great Sandy Strait.

The Queensland Fisheries Management Authority (QFMA) is charged with managing an ecologically sustainable fishing industry. However, it has failed to monitor the impact of the Fraser Island Fishing Expo. Despite producing a Discussion Paper in 1996, which should have resulted in a Management Plan for the inshore fishery including Fraser Island, it has yet to produce a plan which will result in a sustainable fishery.

Intertidal Areas. There is a problem defining which Queensland Government department has jurisdiction of the land between the high and the low water mark which seems to be a no persons land. This is a major problem on Fraser Island because the beach is a main highway as well as being an aircraft landing strip and an important recreation area. This doesn't apply to land

Public lands

All public land on Fraser Island doesn't fall under one Department. In addition to the land which is National Park, there is Vacant Public land within the townships of Eurong and Happy Valley. While this is the responsibility of the Queensland Government, it doesn't become the responsibility of the EPA. Instead the responsibility rests with the Department of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy. (NRME). This department is also responsible for implementing a policy for managing pest species of flora and

fauna but has so far failed to deliver a Pest management Plan for the two township areas it is responsible for on Fraser Island required under the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002 which it is responsible for administering. It is also responsible for jointly administering the Recreation Areas Management Act 1988 with the Environment Minister and the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2003 and the Forestry Act which also overlaps the work of the EPA. NRME has control of a number of leases on the island from airstrips to Cathedral Beach

Other Queensland Government Departments

The **Police Service** has now an established a permanent presence on Fraser Island. Two officers are based at Eurong.

State Emergency Services has no presence on the island but plays a large role in bush fire services, ambulance, and emergency evacuations. Despite the small resident population, an average of 3000 people spend each night on Fraser Island. There is no resident doctor or nurse and pharmacy.

The **Local Government Department** has a role in monitoring activities of two local authorities and for the administering the Integrated Resort Act under which the Kingfisher Resort operates.

Census: Because of the confused jurisdiction over Fraser Island (and the lack of resources) no Queensland Government Department even has the statistics gathered in the last census such as how many permanent residents are there and how many visitors spent the census night there.

Local Government

Since 1974, as a result of the direct and personal interference of the then Minister for Local Government, Russ Hinze, Fraser Island is now split between two local authorities — Hervey Bay and Maryborough. It was previously all part of the former Burrum Shire. Local authorities are responsible only for alienated land which is a small part of Fraser Island in percentage terms. However this small aggregate area spread between Dilli Village, Eurong, Happy Valley Orchid Beach, Kingfisher Resort, Moon Point and a few other small parcels is responsible for a huge part of Fraser Island's management problems including weeds, dingo management, waste management, planning, potential pest introductions and fire. Neither Council has been proactive in addressing these critical issues. Indeed because it is difficult to service and the means of servicing has to be duplicated both Councils have deliberately neglected their obligations on Fraser Island.

Revenue Milking Cow: While both Councils receive larger government grants based on the extra area Fraser Island adds to their jurisdiction, both Councils divert much of the revenue collected from and because of Fraser Island to subsidize their mainland activities. They have consistently shown a deliberate neglect of Fraser Island. In the 1996 the of Local Government Commissioner reviewed the district's local government boundaries. He said that the Maryborough City Council had

"an estimated net excess revenue of \$78,000 for its portion of Fraser Island" (even after allowing 10% contribution to general administration). The Hervey Bay City Council had a net excess revenue from Fraser Island of \$122,000.

Both Maryborough and Hervey Bay are major beneficiaries of the \$277 million which Fraser Island contributes to the economy yet neither Council is willing to help preserve its World Heritage values preferring to be takers not givers. The attendance of Council representatives at Fraser Island Management Committee meetings is just one indication of how little value either Council places on Fraser Island management.

The Hervey Bay City Council controls all local authority functions north of Yidney Rocks including Happy Valley, Orchid Beach and a large near Moon Point. This council has failed to monitor the implementation of zoning laws on Fraser Island and refused to accept the Development Control Plan prepared to give effect to the Great Sandy Region Management Plan. As a consequence Orchid Beach has become a planning shambles with a blind eye being deliberately turned to the non-conforming uses in practice there.

Unsatisfactory Arrangements: There are too many authorities with responsibilities for Fraser Island and most are not meeting their obligations, either statutory or moral to help manage it to protect and present its World Heritage values. These are just a few examples of clearly these do not all share the same priority for managing the island.

Without a single authority to manage the island the existing authorities can continue to pursue their own policies by just failing to act just as the Hervey Bay Council currently fails to act to ensure that all buildings at Orchid Beach conform even with its own lax Residential A zoning.

A Single Authority

FIDO believes that it is urgent to create a single authority to provide coordinated leadership and management for the island. What FIDO is advocating is the creation of an autonomous Fraser Island Authority (FIA).

While the EPA/QPWS has competent managers, it is handicapped by its bureaucratic structure. Because talented managers are usually promoted they move away from Fraser Island. In 2004 all EPA officers with significant management responsibilities for Fraser Island had any less than five years experience with the island. There has resulted in a lack of corporate memory.

Lord Howe Island- A Model for Fraser Island

FIDO advocates a model to administer Fraser Island based on the Lord Howe Island Board. This Board was established by an Act of the New South Wales Parliament in 1983. It is charged with the overall management of Lord Howe Island. It provides a great precedence and it has been viable and worked well for a small World Heritage island.

It is a statutory board with wide ranging powers to administer to the needs of a resident population of about 360 and about 13,000 visitors annually. Its 2001-02 budget includes \$6.5 million expenditure. As well as managing the Lord Howe Island Permanent Park Preserve which is the equivalent of National Park status and the Lord Howe Island Marine Park

and several other land titles including recreation reserves etc, the Board is responsible for all of the normal functions of local government and more.

The Board is responsible for the operation of the island hospital. As well it operates a nursery enterprise with a turnover of about \$1 million and which is the island's second largest industry after tourism. Another enterprise is operate a liquor store which turns in a profit of over \$250,000. A further enterprise involves generation and distribution of all of the island's electricity. It manages the island's airstrip and undertakes all of the stevedoring for freight arriving on the island all on a profitable basis. It also is responsible for regulating the tourist traffic which it attempts by enforcing a ceiling on the number of "tourist beds".

The Lord Howe Island Board is the only planning authority on the island and oversees all subdivisions, rezonings, building approvals and even approvals to import motor vehicles on to the island. It is responsible for all waste management and has developed a world class waste management system. It works in close collaboration with various other NSW State Government agencies which have a special role on the island including the Police Service, SES and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Officers from the latter are seconded to work for the Board. The board is the largest employer on the island. Its large bureaucracy is headed by a CEO.

The board is composed of 7 members. Four are elected by the island residents for a three-year term. Three, including the Chair, are appointed by the New South Wales Government. It meets quarterly in the island and has the capacity for meeting by telephone conference.

	Lord Howe Island	Fraser Island
Area	1,455 ha	168,000 ha
Number of residents	353	>200
Visitors 1999-2000	12,900	330,000
Budget	\$6.5 million	\$4.5 million

Some compelling reasons to establish a statutory Fraser Island authority similar to the Lord Howe Island model:

- # Fraser Island isn't suited to being managed by the traditional Queensland local authority model because visitors outnumber residents by 1,500 to one and visitors are major stakeholders and need representation in island management. This justifies an authority not elected exclusively by the handful of residents.
- # Few people concerned with Fraser Island's future are represented the existing local authorities or in the existing management structure. About 90% of the rate notices for properties on Fraser Island are sent to mainland addresses outside the Maryborough and Hervey Bay local authority areas. Fewer than 10% of all island visitors come from Hervey Bay or Maryborough. 180,000 people on commercial tour operations come from outside the region.
- # About 40,000 free and independent travellers (FITs) are international backpackers. A majority of the remaining 95,000 FITs were from southern Queensland (outside the region) or interstate.
- # Fraser Island needs to have a strong corporate memory to keep the World Heritage values in a longer term focus.

The fairest way to cater for the bulk of Fraser Island users is to create a separate Fraser Island Authority based on the Lord Howe Island Model.