

FRIENDS OF STRADBROKE ISLAND



Established in 1988, FOSI is dedicated to the protection of the natural environment of North Stradbroke Island and its surrounding waters. FOSI also works to ensure that urban and economic development of the island is founded upon the principles of environmental protection and preservation of the unique urban characteristics of its townships.

MEMBERSHIP RATES, 2013: Individual \$15.00 Family \$20.00 Concession \$5.00
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Winter seabirds arriving at Straddie

On a wet and windy Sunday in June, Colin Reid and three fellow seabird aficionados had a great bird watching session at Point Lookout. Seabirds, which breed over summer on sub-Antarctic Islands in Bass strait and off southern Australia, are starting to arrive at Straddie to forage over winter.

A great variety of birds were spotted, including:

- 3 Black-browed Albatross
- 2 Northern Giant Petrels
- 14 Great-winged Petrels
- 2 White-headed Petrels (very rare for Stradbroke)
- 1 Kermadec Petrel (another rarity for NSI)
- 2 Prion sp (most likely Fairy)
- 1 Brown Booby
- 80 Common Noddies
- ~100 Australian Gannets (60% juveniles)
- 10 Fluttering/Hutton's type Shearwaters and – in the water – **10 Humpbacks!**



Australian Gannets, Bruce Martin



Satellite image of Enterprise Mine on North Stradbroke Island overlaid with Moreton Bay Ramsar Wetland boundaries in red

Vance criminal prosecution saga continues

The long running prosecution of Sibelco for unlawful extraction continues on 24 July, this time in the Brisbane Supreme Court in George Street.

The Supreme Court already held, more than 3 years ago, that Sibelco's mining rights only allow it to take minerals and that the non-mineral sand is to be used in rehabilitation of mined land, unless it has the required permits to remove it. But Sibelco's criminal liability is yet to be decided.

On 24 July Sibelco is making yet another challenge against the prosecution, based on a technicality.

The company wants the Supreme Court to overrule the Magistrate's decision in March this year that it has a case to answer on the charge under the Environmental Protection Act, that it unlawfully extracted large quantities of non-mineral sand over several years without a permit.

Meanwhile, efforts to have the charges upgraded to stealing and

fraud continue. If this occurred, the multi-million dollar profits it made could be recovered upon conviction.

As members know, FOSI has a legal opinion from senior counsel that there is a prima facie case of stealing and fraud against Sibelco, but despite our efforts and those of the island's indigenous owners, consecutive State governments have ignored it. Members are encouraged to attend the court. It sends the message that there is public interest in the outcome.

Letter to Editor Straddie Island News Winter 2013 issue

Friends of Stradbroke Island disagrees with Bill Giles' assertions in his letter in Easter SIN. It is a matter of hard fact, science and just commonsense that sand mining is causing serious, permanent environmental damage to the island. Tourism is and will remain the mainstay of the Stradbroke economy.

It doesn't make any sense to continue sand mining when it is damaging future business prospects and employment. For people with talent and vision, there are many opportunities in nature-based recreation, tourism, education and health and this will create employment for other people who wish to live and work on the island.

This long term approach triumphed in the 70's and 80's

when sand mining was stopped everywhere else on the populated East Coast of Australia. These communities have generally flourished. Sand mining on North Stradbroke Island is out of step and has been for decades.

Preserving the natural beauty of the island is the only sensible approach.

Obviously tourism and over development can be destructive too if not controlled and local environment groups have always played a role in minimizing the impacts. FOSI works to build an ethos of caring for the environment. If people show concern for nature then the future can be protected. We just can't look the other way while sand mining keeps eating away at the Island's environmental assets.

Friends of Stradbroke Island believes that whether you look at this from an economic perspective or an environmental perspective, you come up with the same answer – sand mining should end. Enough damage has been done. Future prosperity depends upon it ending soon.

It is also worth remembering the words of Quandamooka leader Darren Burns' in the last issue of SIN: "... sand mining is a very destructive industry. As well as destroying the ecology it is slowly pitting people on the Island against one another. There is a sophisticated campaign going on from the mining company to tell everyone that mining is OK. But it's not".

Letter by Sue Ellen Carew, Friends of Stradbroke Island President



Local Koala, photographed by Lee Curtis

Motorized traffic severely impacts beach birds

A recent scientific study undertaken on Fraser Island found that motorized traffic is the prime agent of disturbance to birds on ocean beaches.

Below is the abstract from the paper "*Human recreation alters behaviour profiles of non-breeding birds on open-coast sandy shores*" By Schlacher, TA; Nielsen, T; Weston, MA. Published in *ESTUARINE COASTAL AND SHELF SCIENCE* (Volume: 118 Pages: 31-42 FEB 10 2013.)



Above: Beach traffic, Mary Barram

Sandy beaches are primarily valued for their amenity and property values rather than for their ecological functions and properties. Some human usage of beaches potentially conflicts with the conservation and management of wildlife, such as beach-dwelling birds, on sandy shorelines. Because responses by birds to environmental change, including disturbance by humans, often involve behaviours that carry fitness costs, we quantify behaviour profiles of birds in relation to human occurrence along 200 km of sandy shoreline in Eastern Australia, including the large conservation area of Fraser Island. Disturbance to birds on these shores was considerable: 1)

birds encountered motorized vehicles (cars, trucks, buses etc.) during 80% of focal bird observation bouts, 2) birds were flushed in over half (up to 86% in individual species) of all bouts, and 3) individuals spent, on average, one-third of their time on disturbance-related behaviours; this was particularly prevalent for Crested Terns (*Thalasseus bergii*) which were alert 42% of the time and spent 12% of their time escaping from human stimuli.

Overall, this study demonstrated that motorized traffic is the prime agent of disturbance to birds on these beaches, resulting in frequent and time-consuming escape behaviours. These findings also emphasize that management

of vehicle-based recreation on beaches needs to be re-aligned to meet conservation requirements in addition to providing leisure opportunities in National Parks and beyond; we identify some salient issue for this development: a) encouragement of social norms that promote environmentally benign beach use not involving motor vehicles, b) creation of spatial refuges for beach wildlife from traffic and other non-compatible uses, and c) investment in developing complementary management actions such as effective set-back distances.

A full copy of the paper is available from Mary Barram (mbarram@bigpond.com).



Arenaria interpres Ruddy Turnstone



Smooth-handed Ghost Crab

Fox Free Stradbroke Island?

A concerted effort to stop the ongoing spread of foxes on North Stradbroke Island must be a priority, if native species are to be protected.

One of the most loved elements of North Stradbroke Island, aside from the spectacular beaches, is the pristine environment and the native animals that inhabit it.

Unbeknownst to many, these animals are at threat, as the number of predatory red foxes continues to grow on the Island.

Michael Dickinson, a former National Parks ranger, and now a wildlife spotter and catcher, has been undertaking fox and feral animal control for the Redland City Council on its island land for the past four years. In that time Michael has trapped 118 foxes. "It's thought that foxes started appearing on NSI in the mid-1930s and their numbers have steadily grown. Just from my work here, I estimate there'd be over 1000 foxes now living on the Island." said Dickinson.

Many Island residents regularly spot foxes, and they are picked up on wildlife monitoring cameras and recorded on all the pre-mining environmental studies by scientists.

Fox predation is not a new story to Queensland, or Australia. It is an animal with a wide and varied diet, invasive nature, good breeding rate and few natural enemies. The fox's threat to the survival of native Australian fauna has seen long term control and eradication programs successfully implemented on Phillip Island in Victoria (to protect the Fairy Penguins), and recently commenced in Bundaberg (to

protect the breeding turtles), and throughout Tasmania.

With insufficient controls in place on NSI, the increasing number of foxes will bring disastrous ecological consequences to the island. Evidence from across Australia shows that fox predation is a major threat to the survival of native Australian fauna. Terrestrial animals at the greatest risk are those that weigh between 35 and 5500 grams - on NSI these animals include the young of the island's Agile Wallabies and Northern Brown Bandicoot which are rarely seen now, the rare and endangered Water Mouse, Common Planigale (marsupial mouse), lizards, Sugar Gliders and frogs. These animals are at particular threat as their numbers are unable to be boosted due to the Island's natural quarantine border of water. Ground-nesting and feeding birds such as the Island's Beach Stone Curlew, Rainbow Bee Eaters, plovers, ducks and shorebirds are also prey.

Given the extent of their impact on biodiversity, predation by the European red fox has ensured its listing by the World Conservation Union as one of the 100 worst invasive species in the world. The Australian Government lists fox predation as a key threatening process under the Commonwealth's Environment



Michael Dickinson with Koda his new fox detection dog who will work on NSI when her training is completed.

Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act).

Many of us who have kept chickens will know of the devastating 'thrill kill' or 'multiple killing' behaviour of the fox where it kills more animals than it needs for food. Unfortunately foxes on NSI exhibit this behaviour as Dickinson reports when foxes regularly attack the beach nests of the endangered Loggerhead Turtles. "The foxes monitor the nests and, with their excellent hearing and sense of smell, dig up and attack the nests killing all the newly hatched turtles," Dickinson said. Older island residents still recall the terrible events of 1991 when a fox killed 300 Wedge-tailed Shearwaters in a single night on Camel Rock, destroying a small nesting colony which has never been able to re-establish.

Eradicating these feral animals involves a range of strategies. One of newest is the use of specially trained sniffer dogs to find fox

dens. Dickinson himself has recently recruited a fox detector dog ‘Koda’ to his team who will be working on the island when her training is completed. As feral cats are also a problem on the island (Michael alone has caught nine of the notoriously difficult to catch feral cats) and their numbers could increase if foxes are removed, it’s crucial that an effective feral predator management strategy target both foxes and feral cats.

Because NSI is an island it is possible - with the long term commitment and support of all the island land managers - to eradicate foxes.

The Phillip Island program, after several decades of general fox

control work, finally took 5 years using an island-wide, properly resourced, concentrated program to achieve a 90% reduction in fox numbers and hopes to be declared fox-free soon.



Fox photographed in the early morning light on Main Beach.

NSI is bigger and with a greater fox load but we could have the same success using a long term strategy over 10 to 20 years involving all stakeholders – Redland City Council, Quandamooka Native Title Holders, National Parks managers, SEQ Water, SEQ Catchments and Sibelco - along with community groups, residents and visitors to the island.

For the sake of the island’s wildlife let’s aim to make Straddie fox-free once again.

Article, as previously published in the Autumn edition of *Straddie Island News*, by Mary Barram.

References listed below and photos courtesy of Michael Dickinson.

References

Interview with Michael Dickinson 12 Feb 13

Background document for the threat abatement plan for predation by the European red fox 2008, Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, Commonwealth of Australia 2008 <http://www.feral.org.au/pestsmart-foxes-on-phillip-island>

Fox predation is considered the greatest land-based threat to the long-term viability of the penguin colonies on Phillip Island, one of Victoria’s leading tourist attractions. Regular fox control for 20 years up to 2006 had reduced the fox population, but penguins continued to be preyed upon. It was decided that an eradication program should be put in place, before penguin losses and escalating costs of fox control threatened the tourism industry and its benefits to the local and state economy. The eradication program began in 2006.

Case study on the current attempt to eradicate foxes from Phillip Island off the Victorian coast. Produced by the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre as part of the PestSmart series.

Cristescu, R., Smith, P. et al, North Stradbroke Island: An Island Ark For Queensland’s Koala Population?, A Place of Sandhills: Ecology, Hydrogeomorphology and Management of Queensland’s Dune Islands (2011), Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland, Volume 117.p 326 –

Feral and unrestrained dogs, as well as foxes, are now widespread on the island and increasing in numbers (Cristescu, 2011). Feral predator control seems to be critically needed on NSI, and control measures need to be applied to the whole island to be fully effective. Some feral predator control actions have been undertaken by CRL (now Sibelco) between 2002 and 2004 (Smith, P., personal communication) and by the RCC in 2009.”

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-11-09/sniffer-dogs-unleashed-in-fox-fight/4363144?section=qld> (Fox control in Bundaberg area)

http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail;place_id=8445

Register of the National Estate (Non-statutory archive), North Stradbroke Island (southern section), Tazi Rd, Dunwich, QLD, Australia (agile Wallabies)

<http://www.penguins.org.au/assets/Conservation/Education/PDF/Nature-Notes/0382PNP2-Nature-Notes-Perils-of-Ferals-v3.pdf>

Stop sand mining and save the natural beauty of Stradbroke Island.



Australia's best loved national icons – cockatoos, gliders and koalas – all live on Stradbroke Island, finding shelter and food in the Island's old forests, tree hollows and eucalypt trees.

But the continuous clearing of forest to accommodate extensive sand mining, has put the Island's unique biodiversity under increasing pressure. Mining activity is destroying precious old eucalypt forest – forests which provide food and shelter for our native species.

Large tracts of woodland with mature forest trees are being cut down as part of the sand mining activity. The hollows that form in these trees take hundreds of years to develop, and provide essential habitat and breeding grounds for many of the island's birds, mammals and reptiles. The lengthy process for trees to mature means that no naturally occurring hollows will form on any mined land until the year 2090; put simply, revegetation is not an option. The risk just isn't worth it.

Stop sand mining on Stradbroke Island.

Visit www.savestraddie.com for more information about the need to protect the wilderness of Stradbroke Island.



Dugongs in Moreton Bay

A shy creature, distantly related to the elephant, which communicates by chirps, whistles and barks – the dugong may be one of Moreton Bay's least seen and most fascinating inhabitants.

Approximately 1000 dugongs live in the warm waters of the sheltered and shallow bay. Globally, however, there are serious threats to this gentle animal's survival. The World Conservation Union lists the dugong as vulnerable to extinction.

The name dugong derives from a Malay word meaning Lady of the Sea, yet elsewhere they are less-flatteringly referred to as Sea Cows, due to their diet of seagrass.

They are the only marine herbivorous sea mammals in the world and have been observed to



suckle their young for up to five years, even though calves start eating seagrass at three months old.

Solitary animals, they travel alone or in pairs for most of their 70-year lifespan, although they have been seen in herds of 10 to 300.

Their distant relationship to the elephant goes some way to explaining the dugongs' large and thick-skinned bodies, which grow up to three metres in length and weigh more than 600 kilograms at maturity. In the warmer waters of the bay dugongs grow slowly and

tend to be a larger size than those found elsewhere.

Dugong bones are dense and solid with no marrow, acting as ballast and enabling the dugong to stay suspended just below the surface of the water.

Their bodies are streamlined, fast when swimming over short distances propelled by a dolphin like tail, and fully adapted to a marine pelagic lifestyle. They can manage six minutes without breathing but generally surface every two-and-a-half. They have been known to travel 20 kilometres from shore and dive to depths of 20 metres.

Dugongs have poor vision but acute hearing and communicate with one another by chirps, whistles and barks. Tusks are present in males and some older females, and all dugongs have scars on their skin, males from warding off other males, and females from mating.

Dugongs feed on a species of low fibre seagrass in both shallow and deep water, eating up to 30kg per day and leaving long, visible trails in the grass in their wake. They cannot digest high fibre seagrass and their preferred type is prolific only in the eastern parts of Moreton Bay, making it an ideal habitat for the mammal. When in muddy waters, dugongs feel for the plants with sensitive hairs near their lips, and use their flexible muscular upper lip to dig up the plants.

During winter months in the bay, when less seagrass is available, protein in their diet is supplemented by eating small amounts of sea squirts and marine worms.

Being slow breeders, dugongs are susceptible to a decline in population numbers. It takes 10 to 17 years for a female dugong to reach breeding maturity, after which she will give birth to one calf every five to seven years.

Historically, the Indigenous people of the bay hunted dugongs for their meat, skin and bones. After European settlement dugongs were harvested in much larger numbers for their blubber.

Janet Lanyon, researcher at the Marine Biological Sciences Department at the University of Queensland, says the most serious threat to dugongs today is loss of seagrass habitat. The major flooding events of recent years destroyed extensive seagrass meadows. Human recreation has also had an impact, with boat strikes and entanglement in fishing nets causing dugong fatalities. Traditional boat moorings also destroy large circular tracts of sea grass.

According to Ms Lanyon, there are things we can do to help reduce our impact on dugongs. Research being done by the UQ Dugong Group has identified that during winter months, most of the dugongs spend time in the Rous Channel, between North Stradbroke Island and Moreton Island, where they can easily move back and forth between the bay and the warmer waters of the ocean. At low tide there are dugong groups near the surface in waters adjacent to the banks, where they like to drift gently with the tide.

During April to August extreme care should be taken when driving boats in this region, as there could be 50 to 100 dugongs in the

channel at any time. It is best to have a spotter in the front of the boat, always follow the "go slow" instructions, and travel at a non-planing speed.

Stick to the channels and drive slowly and carefully across the sea banks. If possible, use propeller guards on your boat to reduce striking dugongs. Slow driving also reduces sedimentation, which smothers seagrass. The UQ dugong team continues to observe and research the mammals to better understand their habits and threats. To date, they have caught and tagged more than 600 dugongs in Moreton Bay using a rodeo technique, holding the dugong at the surface for five minutes while measurements, samples and photos are taken. They are then tagged and micro-chipped so that their health and movements can be monitored.

Sincere thanks to Janet Lanyon and researchers at the Marine Biological Sciences Department at UQ for their assistance and photographs.

Article by Angela McLeod

Published on the cover wrap of the current edition of Straddie Island News now on sale at newsagents and shops on Stradbroke.

Photos courtesy of Marine Vertebrate Ecology Research Group, The University of Queensland
<http://www.uq.edu.au/marinevertebrate> or

Visit the Facebook page, search "Dugong Conservation"



Todiramphus sanctus Sacred kingfisher



Breaking Dawn at Deadmans



Make a tax-free donation to help Straddie!

Donations to FOSI's environment fund are now tax-deductible. So we'd like to ask for members' help to raise some funds for our activities in 2013.

We'd like members to consider making a donation with their annual membership fee. For example for a single you could pay \$15 membership and make a \$35 donation (\$50 in all). Or for a family membership you could pay a \$20 membership and a \$80 donation (\$100 in all).

Of course, bigger donations are always welcome! We are extremely grateful to the generous souls who have donated large and small sums over the years to allow FOSI to work to keep North Stradbroke Island a special place today and in the future! Thankyou everyone!

Return to paper newsletters

That's right it's back to the future for FOSI. We've decided to start printing our newsletters again and mailing them to members. That is because members told us the newsletters were getting lost in the email junk cramming their inboxes! So help us make the most of the return to paper by putting your copy of the newsletter where as many people as possible can read it and keep up to date with what is happening on our beautiful island! If your friends and family like what they see why not encourage them to become a member of FOSI?

The printed newsletters are black and white but that really doesn't do justice to the lovely photos our dedicated members contribute. We recommend checking out the full colour PDF we will still email so you may see the photographs in all their glory!

If you aren't currently receiving the newsletter by email and would like to, please send your email address to Edith McPhee at emcphée@westnet.com.au. Thank you.



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