



Fraser Island Defenders Organisation

FIDO — The Watchdog of Fraser Island

ABN: 56 009 969 135

1/32 Weston Street, COORPAROO QLD 4151

Phone: John Sinclair: (07) 3397 5889 or 0418 650 535 (Mob)

Web: www.fido.org.au — Email: john@fido.org.au

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

Media Release

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Fraser Island fens excite scientists

International scientists on Fraser Island to study the fens were all excited at the uniqueness of the combination of water, peat and sand that combined to create them.

The International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) is having a regional field symposium in New South Wales and Tasmania from 1 to 12 December 2013. FIDO used this opportunity to invite the IMCG to form part of a research initiative to explore the many unanswered questions about the Fraser Island Mires.

On the first day of a 12-day study on Fraser Island the group from the International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) prodded and probed the Moon Point *fens in an attempt to understand what forces created and shaped these unusual features giving some a fascinating reticulated pattern. **(Fens are peatlands receiving water from runoff, precipitation and ground water. A peatland is a wetland type accumulating organic material, peat).*

The IMCG comprises ecologists, vegetation scientists, hydrologists, soil chemists and other specialists whose main area of expertise is in the study of mires and peat on all continents.—Prof Ab Grootjans from the Netherlands brought along a two-meter special probe to test the temperature and electric conductivity of the water moving through peat to establish the source of the water, which is believed to come from underground aquifers.

Other scientists measured the depth of the peat and took cores for further analyses. They determined that more than two meters of peat lay above the sand substrate.

Some assessed the pools within the peat (known as “flarks”) that held fairly acidic water and were pock-marked throughout the area of peat being studied.

Already after the first two days of investigations the chairman of the International Mire Conservation Group (IMCG) Mr Piet-Louis Grundling from South Africa said that Fraser Island's fens were very special and deserve the to be included as part of the Fraser Island World Heritage area.

Mr Grundling expressed some concern at the impact of the roads and associated drains crossing the fen systems, saying that they are having some impact on the whole mire complex (mires are active peatlands) impeding flow and by draining them. The global significance of the Fraser mires is that it shows that the “Cinderella syndrome” is still a matter of concern in wetland management and conservation. The “Cinderella syndrome” was firstly brought under the attention of the contracting parties of the Ramsar convention when this convention was hosted by Australia in Brisbane in 1996.

Mr Grundling said that the “Cinderella syndrome” is well demonstrated when the Fraser island fens are considered: “If we are overlooking wetlands of this nature, calibre and type in a developed country such as Australia how many other mires are being overlooked globally? And 17 years after Ramsar 1996 we still have no comprehensive

understanding of these mires, and that is why the IMCG has embarked with FIDO on this research initiative”.

He continued to emphasise that Fraser Island shows how little is known or understood about mires outside the Northern Hemisphere; especially in tropical and subtropical climates: “Place like these are of special interest to the global community and should therefore deserve the highest conservation status such as under the Ramsar or World Heritage Conventions”.

FIDO will provide logistics for the IMCG research group with support from the Burnett Mary Regional Group, the Norman Wettenhall Foundation, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the Kingfisher group.

For further information contact John Sinclair: contact details above

Read more on the IMCG at: www.imcg.net

