

# Whose Island?

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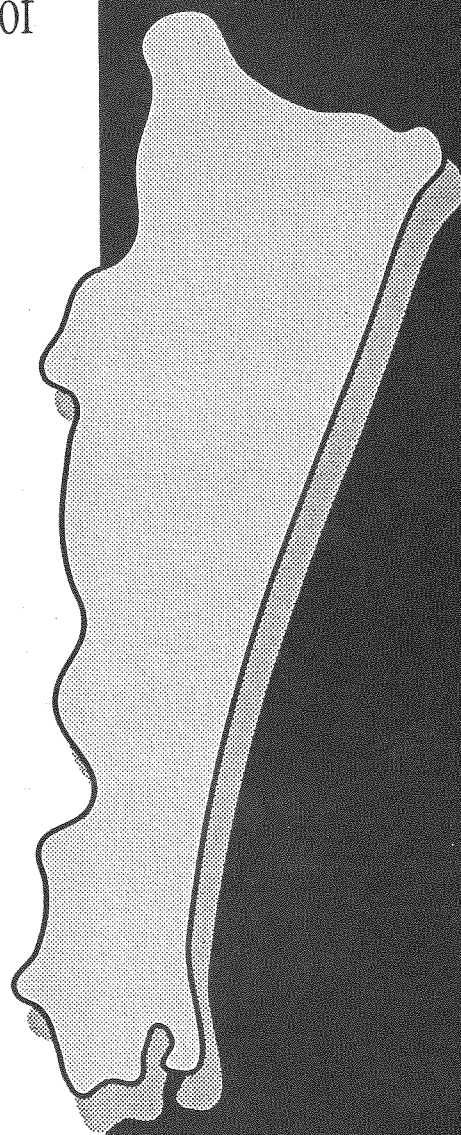
The Past and Future of  
North Stradbroke

Edited by  
Regina Ganter

Queensland Studies Centre

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# Whose Island? The Past and Future of North Stradbroke

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## Introduction: Land Use Conflicts in Perspective

*Regina Ganter*

In September 1992 the Queensland Studies Centre hosted a public seminar on land use conflicts at Stradbroke Island. Land use conflicts are the contestation of diverse interests over the use of a particular area of land. They go to the heart of the presumed social consensus on development, by raising divisive questions about what kind of development is appropriate and desirable, about lifestyle issues and about who should be included in the decision-making process. Agreement on these issues is rarely achieved, and the differences of opinion tend to reflect very strongly held, vital interests in the land under contestation. The marginalisation of sections of the community in decision-making invites resentment. In order to avert harmful divisions in a community, the decision-making process needs to be open to the representations of these various interests.

Conflicts over development are taking place at Brisbane's doorstep, on North Stradbroke Island. This island is a microcosm of the economic changes taking place in Queensland. Its mining industry is increasingly overshadowed by its tourist potential, which has a more direct impact on the resident population. In the early 1980s a public campaign against the plan to link the island by bridge to the mainland found great resonance in south-east Queensland. The 'Leave Straddie Unabridged' campaign brought the concern over the future of this low-key, laid-back island into popular consciousness. The bridge plan has since been shelved, but conflict and concern over the island's development continue.

The future of Stradbroke Island is almost certainly one of more intense recreational use. For more than a decade tourism has been Queensland's most significant growth industry, actively supported and promoted by Federal and State governments and intergovernmental bodies. This sector promises foreign exchange earnings, employment, and regional development, without the massive environmental impact of mining, the place of which tourism is now taking in the Queensland economy. These, at least, are the prospects held up by the tourism industry.<sup>1</sup> Tourism contributes about 5% to Queensland's Gross

State Product, accounting for \$4 billion in expenditure and almost 10% of jobs. In 1991, south-east Queensland attracted 840,000 international tourists and 5.3 million domestic tourists who expended \$1.5 million. The Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation has targeted 3.7 million international and 9 million domestic tourists to south-east Queensland by 2001.<sup>2</sup> Stradbroke Island is one of the sites which have attracted strong interest from developers.

However, the public as well as the planners are well aware of the 'downside' of fast, large developments. A closer look at Queensland tourism reveals that nearly 80% of it consists of domestic tourism — which brings no foreign exchange earnings.<sup>3</sup> The experience of large-scale resort tourism, which does cater for international visitors, suggests that much of the labour force is imported, and that the employment opportunities offered for local residents are of a seasonal, unskilled, and part-time nature.<sup>4</sup> Tourism has great potential for development, but it is not an unmitigated blessing.

Just as familiar as the Sunshine State selling itself as a tourist destination, is the vigorous resistance from local residents, who fear the adverse effects of large-scale tourist enterprises. While mass tourism undoubtedly brings regional development, for local residents this often means that they are displaced by that development. From Cairns to Yeppoon to Noosa, fierce battles have been waged over the type and scale of tourist enterprise to be permitted. Frustration over the closure of the decision-making process often damaged the trust of residents in their governments.

An example of serious disaffection was the bombing of the Iwasaki tourist resort near Yeppoon in 1980. Clouded by oblique negotiations and anonymous land purchases, this project resulted in an uncharacteristic act of violence and destruction. The resort had been envisaged as the 'world's biggest mainland resort', generating a daily one-way traffic between Rockhampton and Yeppoon of 75 buses and 882 cars, and receiving 1,744 air passengers each day.<sup>5</sup> Superimposed on a population of 9,400 at Yeppoon, the proposal was staggering. The local fisherman who was acquitted from charges of the bombing, expressed the sentiments of many Capricorn Coast residents when he said 'As soon as a thing like that starts, old-timers like us get wiped out, like at the Gold Coast. They get rated out'.<sup>6</sup> As the local council and real estate community prepared for this development, real estate prices spiralled, and to finance infrastructure to service the resort, rates in the Livingstone Shire, rose to among the highest in Central Queensland.<sup>7</sup> Unequipped to deal with such a large proposal, and caught in the crossfire of a community

divided between support for and resistance to the project, the shire council lost credibility both with its electorate and with the Queensland government which consistently sidestepped the planning involvement of the local council.<sup>8</sup>

Closure of decision-making process to public input, and steep increases in rates have also been a feature of development on Stradbroke Island, and as in Yeppoon, the community is divided. The Queensland Studies Centre invited island residents and academics to address these issues. The island residents represented (although not in a formal sense) three types of residential interests in the island — the Aboriginal community, the long-time permanent residents, and the more recent home-owners who use the island as a holiday and weekend retreat. Each of these groups has a particular kind of interest in the island, and the pressures of development have precipitated disquiet over trends in land use. These speakers give an insight into the various ways in which particular types of development conflict with their own needs, and into the divisive effects of land use conflict on a local community. The academics placed the problems on Stradbroke into the wider frameworks of their disciplines (history, policy analysis, ecology) to remind us that, although the set of circumstances on Stradbroke has its own particular composition, there is nothing inherently unique in the way the conflict emerges there, and that we can draw on a wider range of experiences and knowledges to understand and address the conflict on Stradbroke.

Ellie Durbidge is a long-time permanent resident of the island who has been active in community groups to protect the island from ill-considered development. As one of the instigators of the Stradbroke Island Management Organisation (SIMO) she has been involved in many public forums and in the most comprehensive publication to date about the island.<sup>9</sup> From her intimate knowledge of the island Durbidge related the environmental pressures on the island to the human ones. She referred to the institutional difficulties of effective representation of the island in the decision-making process, and noted with regret that despite the common interest which bound the residents together, fissures have appeared in the island community as a result of the strain of development, for example between the black and white island residents.

Unlike most Aboriginal groups in Queensland, Stradbroke Islanders were never fully displaced from their homeland. By a quirk of fate, they were granted an informal right to occupy a part of the island and have remained in continuous occupation. Though without secure rights of tenure, they continue

to see themselves as the rightful custodians of their island. Donna Ruska from the Quandamooka Lands Council likened the displacement of Stradbroke Island Aborigines from the decision-making process over the island, to a continuation of genocide.

By emphasizing that there was more than one clan on Stradbroke Island, Ruska drew attention to a problem of representation of Aboriginal interests. The traditional political forms of indigenous Australia were effectively self-governing clans and moieties, where one group could not purport to speak for, or represent, another. Decision-making, conflict resolution, and daily life were arbitrated by reference to a complex set of moral, ethical, spiritual, and social norms of tradition, commonly referred to as 'the law', rather than with reference to the interests of any party, which meant that rather than measuring conduct against values such as fairness or equity (which presuppose the interest of an individual or a group of individuals and set them against the interest of others), any conduct or decision had to be measured against 'the law' (which presupposes the harmony between people and the land). Donna Ruska explained that the laws protected the land and the people — it did not distinguish between economic, social or ethical goals. The interaction between clans and moieties was therefore governed by the law, rather than by persons, and the representational mandate was an alien political structure for Australian Aborigines. Consequently Donna Ruska reiterated that rather than delivering 'the Aboriginal viewpoint' in a representative way, she was speaking from inside of an Aboriginal community. The problem of representativeness and of differences between Aboriginal groups has been central to the interaction between Aborigines and the state. The state is premised on interest representation which violates the ethics of Aboriginal tradition whenever the presumption is made that negotiations with one group represent the interests of a larger group vis à vis the state. This is nowhere as evident as in land-rights cases, where traditional law and its boundaries are extremely important. Donna Ruska reports how a new gulf of divisive pressures on the Aboriginal community of Stradbroke Island has opened up with land-rights claims.

To contextualize this claim to land, Ray Evans reconstructed the first encounters between the Aborigines of the region and whites. He underlined that the judicial concept of *terra nullius* (unoccupied land), which had been used to defy land rights claims until it was overturned by a High Court ruling on 3 June 1992, did not hold up to the historical record. This concept presumed that Aborigines did not possess or reside on the land, and were unable to stimulate production of the fruits of the land. The earliest reports about

Aborigines of the area clearly contradict these tenets, describing densely populated areas with substantial dwellings, even organized in settlements, and the use of dolphins to herd in fish. Evans also questioned that Aborigines did not assert ownership rights by repelling incursion. Whites were assigned the status of returned spirits, rather than treated as a group with homogeneous intentions, so that their acceptance, or resistance to their presence, depended on the nature of specific interactions. In the 1830s, however, conflict between indigenous Stradbroke Islanders and the invading settlers escalated into a full scale war, the earliest recorded land use conflict on the island.

Donna Ruska indicated that tourism was less at odds with the Aboriginal presence on the island than mining which had a far greater capacity to destroy traditional sites and resources. Ellie Durbidge shared this perspective. She specified that the type of tourism most suited to Stradbroke was low-key family-orientated tourism, and Tiiti Gill further qualified this scenario.

Speaking with a professional background in town planning, and as a homeowner on the island, Tiiti Gill provided a close analysis of the town plan for Point Lookout, which actively encouraged tourist growth by making provision for high rise development and resort style facilities. According to this plan, the township of Point Lookout — despite its National Trust listing — may be extended to 14 times its present size. Tiiti Gill observed that growth on the island had not taken place as rapidly as expected by planning consultants. There was a considerable shortfall in demand for vacant lots, so that the town plan's liberal growth provisions were not, in fact, a response to growth pressures, but one of their sources. Contrasting three possible 'futures' for the island, she argued that development options raised issues of class and equity of access, and that the most desirable strategy was one of 'revised continuity' which permitted the widest possible range of people to enjoy the island, while protecting its natural and social charms. With this strategy, Stradbroke would become neither an exclusive playground for the rich nor an off-shore suburb of Brisbane.

Already Stradbroke is changing. Tourism (and recreation) now rival mining as the major economic activity. Policy analyst Jennifer Craik argued that the island's natural attractions disposed it towards eco-tourism while there was also a capacity for heritage tourism and 'sun, sand and sea' tourism. The current visitor demand is for low-cost nature-oriented tourism. A recent study commissioned by the Redland Shire Council, and based on community consultation, emphasized the need for conservation management, and proposed

'recreation opportunity zones' as a means of managing and providing various types of nature experiences through a range of camping facilities, from very primitive (and numerically restricted) to a high level of amenity provision at points which are easy to access by car. Although highly developed tourist facilities may be easier to manage from a conservation point of view, Jennifer Craik cautioned that any strategy must accommodate the needs of residents as well as visitors, possibly under the theme of Stradbroke as 'the natural resort'.

With an ecologist's perspective, Michael Liddle exploded these boundaries of the debate. He started with a reminder about global population growth to contextualize the growth pressures on the island, and then challenged the commonly held view of nature as static and unchanging. His point was that both world population growth and ecological change were inevitable, but trade-offs between use of and damage to the environment must be made. Liddle emphasised the political cross-currents in which ecological decisions are made, pointing out that whereas politics is geared towards short-term agendas, environmental decisions and management strategies must adopt a long-term perspective — not just considering the next generation but subsequent generations as well. The large sand islands off the south Queensland coast are unique, and their existence is threatened by developmental pressures. Liddle insisted that planning must be done with an aim in mind, and this aim must clarify where in a spectrum between total wilderness and built environment Stradbroke Island is to be located in the future.

The speakers canvassed a range of issues from a variety of perspectives, though ultimately reaching similar conclusions. They recognized that the natural attractiveness of Stradbroke Island was its key asset and should form the centrepiece of development and management strategies. In terms of future visions, the pace of change and scale of development must accord with the special features of the island, acknowledging its historical and cultural heritage, instituting environmental management strategies and enshrining the escapist, low-key way of life. Its difference from tourist areas like the Gold Coast and satellite suburban sprawl like parts of Redland Bay, can only be maintained by establishing limits to growth, sensitive town planning comprehensive land use management, and, above all, acknowledgement and incorporation of its diverse communities in designing a blueprint for the future of Stradbroke Island.

## Footnotes

- 1 Cf., e.g. Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation *Vision 2000: Tourism Marketing Targets for Queensland to the Year 2000* Brisbane: Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation 1992; Bureau of Tourism Research *Domestic Tourism Monitor 1992* Canberra: BTR 1992; Queensland State Government *Queensland Leading State: State Economic Development Policy* Brisbane: Queensland Government Printer 1992; Queensland Treasury Department *Issues Impacting on Domestic and Foreign Funding for New Tourism Projects in Queensland* Brisbane: QTD 1991. Industries Assistance Commission *Travel and Tourism* Report No. 423 Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service 1989.
- 2 Infrastructure Working Group 'Industry Location and Tourism. A Position Paper of the SEQ 2001 Project' Brisbane: Regional Planning Advisory Group, *SEQ 2001*, 1992.
- 3 In 1981, 65% of Queensland tourism was domestic (QTTC 1981), but by 1992, 77% of nights spent in commercial accommodation was by domestic visitors. QTTC *Queensland Tourism Bulletin* March 1992.
- 4 Jani McMillen and George Lafferty 'The Tourism Workforce: Service or Servility?' in P. Carroll et al. *Tourism in Australia* Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1991 pp. 82-96.
- 5 UDPA Planners Queensland *Farnborough Resort, Iwasaki Sangyo Co (Aust) Pty Ltd. Draft Environmental Impact Study* Brisbane: UDPA 1978.
- 6 Interview with Eric Geissman, Yeppoon, 2 February 1985.
- 7 Interview with Jim Anderson, President of the Livingstone Shire Ratepayers' Association, Yeppoon, 30 January 1985.
- 8 Interview with C. M. Tennent, Deputy Chairman of Livingstone Shire Council, Yeppoon, 29.1.1985. Cf. also: Nancy Viviani and Jim Selby *The Iwasaki Tourist Development at Yeppoon* Brisbane: Griffith University 1980; John McCabe 'The Iwasaki Resort Proposal - Some Background on a Resource Conflict' *Habitat 2* (1) 1979 pp. 16-17; Derek Kemp 'Policies, Politics and Public Participation: The Issues in the Iwasaki \$100m International Tourist Resort Complex in Central Queensland' *Proceedings of the 49th ANZAAS Congress 1979*; Tor Hundloe 'Sales and Sell-Out at Yeppoon, as Governments Parody EIS Procedure' *Royal Australian Planning Institute Journal* May 1979 pp. 146-49; Jennifer Craik *Resorting to Tourism* Sydney: Allen and Unwin 1991 pp. 199-205.
- 9 Roger Coleman, Jeanette Covacevich, Peter Davie (eds) *Focus on Stradbroke, New Information on North Stradbroke Island and Surrounding Areas, 1974-1984*, Stradbroke Island Management Organisation (SIMO), Brisbane: Boolarong Publication 1984. Ellie Durbidge 'Introduction to the Island' *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Queensland* 86 (1) 1975 pp. 1-2.

# The Changing Face of Stradbroke

*Ellie Durbidge*

## *Introduction*

Stradbroke is part of the Cooloola System that takes in the other great sand masses of Moreton and Fraser Islands. The islands were formed by longshore currents depositing sand that originated in the mountains of northern New South Wales. Strong south-east winds formed the sand into the islands' dune systems, some of which, in geological time, are ancient, and some not so ancient. Apart from the rocky outcrops of Dunwich and Point Lookout, Stradbroke is one great sand mass shaped and reshaped by wind and sea. Specialised salt-tolerant low-growing matted vegetation stabilises the eastern exposed dunes, while mangrove communities cover the western sheltered shores.

## *Isolation — Specialised Flora and Fauna*

Because Stradbroke is an island, an area isolated from the mainland, some unique fauna and flora evolved. Others, escaping destructive mainland pressures have survived to become relic populations. Stradbroke was once part of the mainland. If the sea level were to drop 28 metres, Stradbroke would again be joined to the mainland.

Island isolation of the Swamp Wallaby (*Wallabia bicolor*), common on the mainland, has produced a golden form, The Red Stradbroke Wallaby.

Isolation has also been responsible for a relic population of the Agile Wallaby (*Macropus agilis*), now not found south of Rockhampton, except for the populations found on Stradbroke and Peel Islands. Fossil remains indicate that the Agile Wallaby was once common in south-eastern Queensland. Away from mainland pressures, in an island situation, the wallaby has survived until now, when some of those pressures, such as road kills and domestic dogs hunting in packs, have reached Stradbroke. It is now feared that there are no surviving Agiles on Stradbroke.



The rare form of Australia's largest ground orchid, the Swamp Orchid (*Phaius bernaysii*), still survives in the island's coastal swamps. The orchid's island habitat is being reduced progressively by mining operations. The Water Loving Daisy (*Olearia hygrophila*) found nowhere else in the world is also under threat.

### *Man's First Impact on Stradbroke*

Man's first impact on Stradbroke dates back possibly 40,000 years to the island's first inhabitants, the Aborigines, who in the main, lived on the western shores of the island. To gather the mollusc, *eugarie*, the Aborigines followed three ancient walking trails across the island to the ocean beach. Discarded *eugarie* shells from past feasts formed huge middens. The mineral sand dredges working the ocean beach, cut their way through the middens, destroying totally a cultural heritage of significance to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

### *20th Century Man on Stradbroke*

The Aborigines' impact on Stradbroke was minimal. It is non-Aboriginal man who must answer for the changing face of the island. Lack of planning, management, and an understanding of a fragile sand island, coupled with the ever hot pursuit of the dollar, have been responsible for the progressive destruction and deterioration of a valuable natural resource.

### *Assessment of the Island*

First impressions can be that the island is unspoiled, a natural beach and bush retreat. If such comparisons are drawn between Stradbroke today and the developed resorts of the Gold Coast or the North Coast, the assessment is correct. However, if the comparison is based on Stradbroke as it was ten or 20 years earlier, the assessment is incorrect. The disturbing factor is that each successive generation is prepared to accept a further degraded environment and landscape. The biggest problems for Stradbroke's environment are sandmining and people.

### *Sandmining Industry*

The sandmining industry has been responsible for dramatic landscape and environmental changes. The 30-odd kilometre uninterrupted sweep of ocean

beach extending from Point Lookout to Jumpinpin, has in some areas been mined twice. Because of the low content of mineral, which can be even below 1%, if the mineral is too concentrated the dredges rerun the area to pick up the minerals that go out in the tailings. The natural dune systems have been reshaped into a monotonous dune landscape. On the western shores, the island's topography is undergoing dramatic changes. The twin peaks of Mt Hutton, which were used by the early Gold Coast surveyors as a trig point, have been shifted. The mining dredge swallowed up the high dune and deposited the tailings in a mound further to the east. Wetlands have been buried under mining tailings and spills. Lake Koumpee, a perched lake has been drained. The draining of the lake happened a number of years ago when the company mined too close to the lake, and perched lakes are fragile. They tried cleaning the bottom of the lakes with manganite and it hasn't been successful, so now we have a lake with about a foot of water, and trees, and weeds and foreign vegetation.

### *Water Extraction*

Redland Shire Council anticipates pumping 60 millilitres a day from Stradbroke to the mainland. Experience has demonstrated, with the mining company's operations, that little is known about the complexities of the water tables, and one of those instances, of course, is Lake Koumpee. There is concern that, with a drop of water levels in dry times in the 18 Mile Swamp, the associated water dependent vegetation will be irreversibly affected.

### *Tourism*

The permanent population of a little over 2,000 is spread over the island's three settlements of Amity, Dunwich and Point Lookout. The holiday influx is in the vicinity of 30,000 people. This places tremendous strain on the island's resources. (The residents feel strongly about the island and they do have a joke saying when they leave the island they are going to Australia, so they do consider themselves islanders, and a lot of them are 'individuals' — not pointing the finger at anyone.)

### *Residential Interests*

Redland Shire Council recently commissioned consultants, Loder and Bayly to undertake an Open Space, Recreation, Conservation and Tourism Strategy (ORCATS) within the shire. The people of Stradbroke, at a number of public

meetings and with written submissions, made it quite clear that future planning should ensure that the character and outstanding landscape features of the island be retained, and that Stradbroke should be developed as a low-key family orientated tourist facility.

### *Stradbroke Island Management Organisation (SIMO)*

There are a number of organisations on the island that have their various interests and battles. I am the secretary of the Stradbroke Island Management Organisation Inc. (SIMO). It was formed at a public meeting in 1978 at Point Lookout to fight the proposal to construct a bridge to North Stradbroke. There followed a period of concentrated lobbying and demonstrations until the issue was dropped as an uneconomic proposition. SIMO is still an active body fighting to retain the charm of Stradbroke through sensitive planning and management of an irreplaceable natural resource. One of the arguments we used in the bridge battle was that the barge was a place to relax, to anticipate Stradbroke, or just look over the edge at the jellyfish or the seabirds. It is sort of the break between the mainland and the island.

### *Management*

The island has a history of piecemeal development. Stradbroke is subjected to whatever the other two great sand islands of Fraser and Moreton don't want — be it anything from mining to the cutting of Koala Fern (*Caustis*) for export to Japan. The government has shown little understanding of management of a sand island or of Stradbroke's potential as a unique recreational and educational resource. The schools of south-east Queensland use Stradbroke for field trips and camping experiences, and it really is a resource of importance, and I think most times this isn't recognised.

On an island that promotes tourism, of its 27,500 hectares only 500 hectares are protected under National Park status. That area is Blue Lake Park. The foreshores of the lake are being degraded by heavy usage. It has been loved to death, but to give National Parks their due, they have put walking trails in to the lake, trying to discourage people from driving in because unfortunately there is a dedicated road in to Blue Lake. There is continual lobbying for extension of the parks and we have been to four ministers; I believe it is underway this time, but our experience suggests that we treat promises with caution.

Redland Shire Council degrades beaches with storm water drainage. The visual amenity of the foreshores is being reduced by the construction of buildings the height of which exceed the tree line and do not fit into the landscape. Illegal clearing of trees is common. Foot traffic and four-wheel drive vehicles destroy the dune vegetation and cause erosion. Feral animals, domestic dogs hunting in packs, cane toads and salvinia in the swamps are problems. Last year a researcher investigating the nesting of shearwaters observed a colony on the dune rocks headlands, but the foxes killed every young in the burrow.

Stradbroke lost its councillor on the Redland Shire Council when the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission ruled that the island population did not warrant individual representation. We are represented by a councillor who resides on the island, but her hands are full with mainland problems and Stradbroke is virtually out in the cold.

### *Aboriginal Presence*

Dunwich State School is classified as multi-cultural. Until recently, anyone who lived on Stradbroke Island qualified as a Stradbroke Islander. There was no distinction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. There was one island community.

Now there is something new to Stradbroke. A bitterness, emanating from some sections of the Aboriginal community is creeping in. Contentious issues must be discussed and resolved to ensure that the island community remains as one.

## More Than One Clan

*Donna Ruska*

Where do I begin? My name is Donna Ruska and I am a member of both the Nunukul and Coobenpil clans from this island. My grandparents reared me and my grandfather was the son of the last people called 'full-blooded' from here. He died in 1949 and I was born in 1950 so I missed out on a lot of that, but fortunately my other grandparents passed on much to us.

I feel sad when I hear academics and everyone refer to one clan from this island. As I said earlier I am Coobenpil and I believe it is in the books written several different ways, but my grandparents said it with an 'r' sound — 'Gurenphul' or 'Kurenphul'.

I took this opportunity to speak because we do want to make it known to everyone in Australia and the world that there is more than one clan on this island. There is evidence of it from the research that each family has done here. One of you told me this morning that this was no longer a peaceful happy place because of conflict. I don't know whether you meant among different clans here or not but it is my goal, and many others in my family, to let everyone know that there is more than one clan. If there are any anthropologists among you, or people who know something about it, you will know that in an area like this it would not have been just one clan, there would have been all sorts of exchanges, like bartering, marriage, trade.

Let me tell you about the Quandamuka Land Council. Quandamuka is the spirit for the Moreton Bay region. This Land Council was formed in 1990 because of the ACI proposal to build a conveyor belt at Myora. Apart from the local Aboriginal housing co-operative society, there was the One Mile Aboriginal Corporation. One Mile is a little place about one mile outside Dunwich. It is quite unique in south-east Queensland in that no-one has ever known what to do with the title. My people have resided there for thousands of years and used the fresh water creeks and all this along the west coast at Myora or Moongalba as it is known. After people were moved from Moongalba, the last family moved in 1942, most of the people moved in as far as One Mile, and earlier they moved to One Mile or Dunwich. So the people of One Mile formed a corporation for the purpose of land management

and site protection. In 1990 they decided to try to stop this ACI proposal and form the Land Council hoping to do what land councils in other parts of Australia have done.

*Q: Can you tell us what the Land Council is doing?*

In 1990, the Goss Government set up a State Legislative Review Committee to review Aboriginal legislations. We immediately made a submission and they came over and listened to us. We supported the Stradbroke Island Management Organisation and lodged objections ourselves to the proposals by ACI plus other proposed developments on the island. We consulted with the Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs and they gave us the money to get Peter Whalley's report together as anthropological evidence to try and halt the proposal by ACI. So that report with all that information is resulting from the actions from the elders on the Land Council. There is so much that the Land Council has done. They have submitted to Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and Environment and Heritage. We've been working with Environment and Heritage towards land management and things for about ten years or more.

*Q: Can you give us an impression from the Quandamooka Land Council as to how you are affected by tourism development?*

Most of my elders would prefer to see a tourism industry here rather than mining, too many sites and food resources have been destroyed and denied to future generations because of haphazard development. Like the high school for example, that was all wetlands that were wiped out; it was abundant with ferns and trees and flora. It was just a beautiful, wonderful walk that was wiped out to build the high school. Yet something like \$4 million was involved in it — we noticed a lot of earthmoving work going on there before, in the clearing of the land. A lot of the peat and things were taken away. A lot of the trees where thousands of parrots used to feed every year were knocked down. All kinds of marsupials which were part of our food supply were wiped out, and so naturally as an Aboriginal, it seems that we have an obligation to protect the environment for our future generations, for the inhabitants and future generations. We have been denied this obligation, this cultural heritage, and to me that is almost as significant and reminiscent of genocide where we can't go and hunt and gather in these areas. There are no resources that we can use any more.

*Q: I wanted to know whether you see a sharpening of conflict. If massive up-market developments go ahead like the one proposed for Clynder Beach, would you say that this would affect you as an Aboriginal community on the island? Do you have a particular interest in reducing the rate of tourism on the island? Do you have an interest in that as an Aboriginal community?*

No, not at this stage, they know that they need the employment and the economics and that will go with it and it is preferable to mining, though I don't know how people feel about future development and on their sacred sites, I am sure they would object to a lot of things, a lot of areas.

*Q: You mentioned, the loading bay at Myora. What are your concerns about that?*

Well, for starters they are revoking a fish habitat reserve and it seems ridiculous in this day and age that they could do something like that, deprive so many future generations of food supply. There are oysters and shellfish, to this day we still go out and and gather there, it is one of the easiest places to get to through the Myora Springs. The shell fish banks closer to Dunwich and One Mile are getting more and more destroyed by the boats out in the harbour. They are getting covered by sludge or something, they are not growing, maybe they are all used up. On top of that, that place always held such a high spiritual significance to the Aboriginal people there, most of that area there. As children we were always taken down there and shown things and taught about them so much. We actually took the children to those areas. This is a big island and as it is, I think that mining has taken up about 70% of it.

It would appear that my people in the early colonial history would have been hospitable and very helpful to the whites who did come here, but regardless of that we have ended up with Moongalba and a little area of land out at One Mile there. There is a freshwater creek there and it has become rainforest in the last couple of decades and we have got no services out there but we would like to see it stay as it is and try to protect it from all the damage and destruction we have seen on other parts of the island, so that seems like very little parcels of land that the Aboriginal communities here, Coobenpil and Nunukul have been able to hold for themselves. Most of the people from here — most of the descendants from those two clans have had to move for many reasons — they were taken away by the police and sent to other areas for all sorts of reasons. I myself as a child at One Mile have seen people

crying. I heard all sorts of screams going on one day, and saw the police car drive out and they were taking a whole family to Cherbourg. Another teenage brother in that family was taken, he went to Cleveland shopping, and was taken to Woorabinda because he had a few too many beers at Cleveland. They didn't let anyone know, they just took him to jail and sent him to Woorabinda. And everyone was out here crying and wondering what had happened to him. But in spite of us only having such small areas of land the spirituality still exists within us to want to protect and look after these other areas.

*Q: Do you find that there is a lot of interest now in Aboriginal culture, with the cultural centre open, white people can now learn a little bit about it, and they are taking school parties through it?*

Yes, and it seems to be increasing. I have been active in land-rights causes since the late sixties, since after the referendum and have been involved in the tent embassy in Canberra. I have always supported compulsory Aboriginal cultural studies in schools, and that is now increasing and it is good to see. I believe that it is evident that for 40,000 years of Aboriginal land management in this country, and many others in this world, they did it harmoniously with the environment and the land, and looked after it and that way it was able to provide for the people, for all those centuries. And then suddenly 200 years ago the place gets invaded and people assume superiority as the Cell Death Commissioner said, come over here and take over and nearly wreck the whole place in such a short time. So I do believe that in order to realistically manage this country, and others, that the traditional law of the people in those areas should be considered, respected and incorporated in the Westminster laws, or whatever laws of those countries. Until that is done, and Aborigines throughout the world have an active role in land management and protection I can't see too much reparation to halt this destruction. I believe through my grandfather and other elders' teachings, not only do we need land but also we need the law and particularly some land management laws. These laws are made to protect sites as well as the people. Most of these sites have not only spiritual value but also, as I said earlier, they are a food resource, so these laws were made to protect the land and the people.

I can't understand how people can go to universities and so much money is paid out for them to go and get educated, but when the government decides to do something and calls for these expert reports, they don't always adhere

to the reports, they don't give them the proper consideration. I know that some reports are ignored, particularly this ACI thing, regardless of all the evidence and all the protests about it, the government just went ahead and did it anyway.

*Q: Has the formation of the Land Council given you some hope that you will be heard now, that maybe some of these things won't happen so easily because of the voice of the Land Council?*

Since the formation of the Land Council, I must admit that the government, well this new Goss Labor government has listened and sort of considered some things. I think that it can only improve. Unfortunately since the new land act, the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Act that was proclaimed in 1991, there has been a little division within the community especially because some people, some Aborigines and others, think that there is only one clan here, and the other clan is determined to be known. We had a workshop here in July and an anthropologist from the Department of Environment and Heritage came over and told us to be aware that most Aboriginal land legislations do create division and disharmony in Aboriginal communities. He is from the Territory and has seen what it has done up there and warned us not to become victims of it. But I suppose other anthropologists say that is part of land claims anyway, people proclaim who they are and that group goes for its land and there is often some dispute about boundaries etc. But yes, the governments, state and federal, have been lending us a more open ear.

*Q: Traditionally, have there been boundaries for fishing and food gathering. Were resources divided for use?*

Yes, I think it was always shared. They would have moved around and used it. I believe that some of the dwellings here were permanent, but that they shared not only with the clans here but also with mainland clans. Mainland clans used to walk from the south end and canoe over to Bribie I think, and Moreton as well as here, I know that a lot of mainland clans used to come here in the sea mullet season and the Coobenpil/Nunukul peoples used to go to the bunya festivals up there in the Bunya Mountains.

*Q: The land that you are on now, is it land you were told you could keep in perpetuity or land that you will want?*

No, there has never been anything formal. We never know what to do about it. My grandfather and his family was one of the last that moved in from Myora in 1942 and it was supposed to be on a temporary basis until the war ended and then they could move back out. When they moved to One Mile, even when I was born, for the first ten years of my life, they used to want to move back to Myora or Moongalba. He used to say that as long as that creek ran at One Mile they were told they could stay there. As long as the creek was there, which in their minds was forever. Because there was a rescue, Aborigines helped some survivors from the *Sovereign*, and he told us that as a result of that the Queen Victoria gave them Myora and some place in South Australia in La Perouse. John Eufong and others have written away to England but England told them that it was signed but never sealed, to take it up with the Queensland government. But there has always been someone staying there, like my grandparents, most of the old people moved out of there in the early 70s. The Department [of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs] built homes in here [Dunwich] and in spite of their repeated requests to have their new homes or additional homes built out at One Mile they wouldn't, because there was no secure tenure. They built the homes in here and they moved in here. My paternal grandmother has lived out there for 82 years. For a while she would have been the only elder there, and the unmarried ones there looked after her for about five or six years.

In 1990 they offered to give it to us as Aboriginal reserve but there were objections to that. A lot of people wanted it under unalienable freehold because of their knowledge of what happened on Aboriginal reserves on the mainland, they wouldn't settle for a Deed of Grant in Trust. Their knowledge of these Aboriginal legislations in the past has stopped them from considering even Myora, or Moongalba. Until Oodgeroo got it in 1972 for a cultural museum centre. I think it got leased out but they didn't want to get it under that Act. Most of that group were exempted from the Act, some of them who were under the Act, got exempted from it in the 1940s. They refused getting it under Aboriginal legislation.

*Q: So you haven't really got any land you can hold on to?*

No, legally, in Australian law, we haven't yet, but there are about ten families and we have always been there and as far as we are concerned we own it, and we may die for it if necessary.

*Q: What sorts of things will the Land Council do with that land if it is successfully claimed?*

As I said earlier, there are a lot of people who have left or have been forced to leave in pursuit of employment. A lot of them want to come back. In Africa they have had home movements and things like that, and that will happen here as well I would say. Different people have different ideas for that land use, but at this stage a lot of people just want to come back here and live.

*'What do you want? Do you wish to kill me?'*  
**Early Racial Contact and Conflict on  
Stradbroke Island**

*Raymond Evans*

The Nunukul and Coobenpil (or Goenpul) of Minjerriba — as Stradbroke was called until 1827 — have had the longest continuous history of contact with Europeans of any of the Murri peoples of what is now Queensland. They would have sighted Cook's and Flinders' vessels as these explorers passed northward in May 1770 and July 1799 respectively, renaming Mooloomba as Point Lookout and Mulgumpin as Moreton Island in the process. They extended traditional hospitality to Flinders' crew on the *Hope* in September 1803, when 20 or so of the 'Indians' — as Flinders called the Nunukul males who met his sailors on the beach — showed the whites where to provision themselves with fresh water, and performed a kangaroo coroborree for their edification and entertainment. In return they were handed small trinkets by these weirdly costumed, pale strangers.<sup>1</sup>

The strangers were called 'Duggai' and were interpreted as returning spiritual ancestors, who had reassumed a corporeal shape in order to revisit the living for some doubtlessly auspicious reason. As reincarnated spirits, who looked and behaved, and indeed smelled so strangely, they had to be recognized for who they were — possible ancestral friends or enemies — and handled with all due caution: 'The dead, after all, did not always have the best interests of the living at heart'.<sup>2</sup>

Between Flinders' visit in 1803 and another reconnoitring expedition by W. L. Edwardson on the *Snapper* in 1822 — a period of two decades — we have no precise records of further contacts. But we do know that American and other Pacific whalers were fishing along this coastline and that during the 1820s, the discovery of the wreckage of several unknown vessels was commented upon.<sup>3</sup> We might also infer that these contacts were not always peaceful ones. When the hopelessly lost and beached ticket-of-leave timbergetters, Pamphlett, Finnegan and Parsons first encountered a startled Ngugi adult male on Mulgumpin, or Moreton Island in April 1823, he in turn startled and astonished them with the distinct words: 'What do you want? Do you wish to kill me?', spoken in communicable English. (Although John

Steele explains this first recorded statement from an indigenous local to an incomer as an hallucination, it is difficult to explain how the three Europeans could have been sharing the same hallucination at once!) The Ngugi man's questions, however, seem to tell us two things — that contact had already been occurring on a scale substantial enough for an intimate knowledge of language to be imparted (the Ngugi man perhaps may have even worked for a time aboard a whaler) — and that such contact was also considered to be potentially dangerous and perhaps bloody. By the same token, Edwardson in 1822, who had landed upon Stradbroke among other places, also reported that the 'natives' were not only very numerous but with a tendency to be 'hostile' towards the appearance of his schooner.<sup>4</sup>

The three hapless cedar-getters, wandering exhausted and semi-naked along the Moreton Island seafront, however, were well-treated. On 27 April 1823, they were carried across to Stradbroke by Nunukul males in large canoes and would spend some 39 days enjoying the hospitality of these people as they were nursed back to health, plied with as much fish and 'bungwall' (a staple 'bread' made from a widely available swamp fern) as they could eat, and instructed how to construct a canoe for themselves which would carry them across to the mainland.

After they were found by John Oxley and returned to Sydney, these castaways carried back vital information about the coastal Aborigines of Moreton Bay which, if received objectively at the time, *should* have disabused the New South Wales colonial authorities of any notion that the northern territories, such as Stradbroke Island, were a *terra nullius*, there for the taking by the incursive whites, without any concern for the proprietary rights of the indigenous inhabitants. For the three gave rich descriptions of sojourning in one of the most densely populated regions of black Australia. They spoke of attending bora gatherings and of witnessing ceremonial, celebratory and gladiatorial events where many hundreds — and probably thousands — of Murri people were present. In November 1823 at the Redcliffe 'Kippa-ring' — one of at least 120 bora grounds identified in the region — Peter Finnigan commented that the habitations erected were 'so numerous I could scarcely count them' — each clan occupying its own designated, residential area. Moreover, these men spoke of being lodged, while on Stradbroke, in 'very large, well built huts' which were constructed like small fishing settlements, each several miles apart, along the coastline of the island. As Finnigan told religious leaders and government officials in Sydney, 'at Moreton Bay the blacks were in thousands ... they were far more advanced in civilized life than

the Aborigines about Sydney ... [and] they dwelt in regular built huts, forming a sort of village'.<sup>5</sup>

When Allen Cunningham landed at Amity Point (or Pu-lan) on 28 September 1824, he gave a similar description of these dwellings:

*... the strength and capacity of a number of their huts on the sands above the beach, which being grouped together, and for the time being unoccupied', he wrote, 'had all the air of a deserted village ... One of these habitations within which I had entered by a low doorway, presented a capacious area, nearly 50' across, amply sufficient to afford shelter and accommodation to 40 persons ...*

Such habitations, often constructed by women, were apparently common across the major Moreton Bay islands where the extremely rich marine resources, augmented by an enormous variety of flora and fauna, allowed for the material wants of 24 hours to be attended to in only two and, hence, for a form of semi-sedentary living to exist which the Europeans, under the current definitions of International Law, should have immediately identified with occupancy and ownership.<sup>6</sup> Some years later, on Bribie Island, a visiting naturalist called Dr Strange would similarly describe the Ningy-Ningy people 'dwelling in little villages of six or seven huts in a cluster'. Some of these dwellings, he wrote:

*... are of great length, extending upward of eighty feet, and covering a considerable space of ground ... One of them was in the form of a passage, with two apartments at the end. The arches were beautifully turned, and executed with a degree of skill which would not have disgraced an [sic] European architect ...'*<sup>7</sup>

Dome-like huts of such dimensions — and smaller ones to accommodate eight or nine persons — were constructed from ti-tree, honey myrtle and melaleuca, with their paperbark roofs so tightly imbricated as to make them impervious to gale-force rains. These, and numerous other physical evidences of a highly developed environmental presence, adaptation and exploitation, such as Aboriginal pathways, tool sites and quarries, stone ovens, 'dense shell midden complexes', ritual centres, beacon fires, fish traps and dams, all gave the lie to the then common European rationalization that Aborigines merely 'ranged over' territory, rather than 'possessing' or 'residing upon' it, according to western terms of reference. In fact, the Nunukul and Coobenpil had 'possessed' this particular territory for countless longer than 20,000 years and had



established across it 'relatively stable, evenly distributed camp sites', presenting to the unbiased eye, as anthropologist Peter Whalley has recently concluded, 'a picture of stable and well-developed coastal settlement, predating European contact'.<sup>8</sup>

Yet another factor involved in possessing territory, it was argued in 1837, was evidence of 'acts of enjoyment of the land itself'. This did not simply mean tilling the soil, but rather 'possession of that character by which the thing is capable'. From the earliest contacts, Europeans would have observed the Nunukul and others fishing along the coastline of these islands in great numbers. James Campbell, the Darling Downs squatter, saw hundreds of indigenes fishing for mullet (*undakal*) and other marine products along the Stradbroke sands in the 1840s — using their large hand-held 'tow rows' or nets; or dugong and turtle hunting with larger nets and spears in the Bay. In 1836, Captain Foster Fyans, the Penal Commandant at Moreton Bay and James Backhouse, the Quaker missionary were the first to write about the Stradbroke Islanders using the sea bottle-nosed dolphins (or talobilla) to drive in shoals of fish towards the waiting nets at Amity — and this marvel was commented upon by a host of observers thereafter, including Tom Petrie, James Campbell, the naturalist Macgillivray on board HMS *Rattlesnake*, and the pastoralist historian H. S. Russell in the 1840s, as well as the Rev. H. Berkeley Jones in the 1850s and Archibald Meston, the self-proclaimed Aboriginal 'expert' in the 1870s.<sup>9</sup>

Such evidence in itself was dramatic proof of the Islanders enjoying the land and its resources and intelligently extracting for themselves what they required of its bounty. Yet the doctrine of *terra nullius* and the peremptory rights of European seizure remained unimpeachable. A third test of possession involved displaying the will or desire to have the land, by attempting to alienate or repel others from it. To what extent did the Stradbroke Island people assert their ownership in this way and attempt to resist European incursion?<sup>10</sup>

Ongoing colonial occupation of the island began around September 1824, when, Neil Gunson records, some convicts from the new Redcliffe penal station were placed on Stradbroke, probably in relation to the sounding of South Passage by Robert Hoddle and Charles Penson. The following September, Major Lockyer noted that two or three soldiers were occupying a 'large bark hut' at Amity Point; and, as the Bay was further surveyed — and buoys laid — and more and more convict and supply ships passed through

South Passage, going to and from the Moreton Bay penal settlement, a permanent pilot station was established at Amity, with four buildings — first manned by two soldiers and a crew of five sailors and then by seven convicts and three guards. This was done early in 1827 and followed in July that year by the building of a storage depot at Goompee, renamed 'Dunwich'. A four-room building was constructed adjoining a large store house, and a causeway built by convicts out into the Bay. Soon afterwards, a cotton plantation was commenced in the vicinity of Moongalba to the north.<sup>11</sup>

It is difficult to determine when conflict commenced over these geographical fingers of white intrusion. As penal commandants were instructed to exist 'in amity' with indigenes, these officials were inclined to censor or under-report incidents of inter-racial violence. In reading the early Moreton Bay correspondence, one is continually struck by the spectacle of reports saying as little as possible about conflict incidents, even when these are acknowledged to have occurred. Lockyer noted in September 1825 that the Nunukul at Amity seemed to be tolerating the presence of the two or three soldiers, offering traditional hospitality by bringing them a catch of fresh fish daily and by not helping themselves to the various implements and utensils left lying about. Probably they were attempting to keep these visiting 'Duggai' placated and wondering how long their sojourn would last.<sup>12</sup>

Yet it is possible to speculate that with the establishment of Dunwich and the Moongalba cotton plantation, a different mood began to develop. As Peter Whalley notes, '... the land at Moongalba was a favoured camping place and the whole area between Dunwich and Amity was of especial ritual and economic significance'. To have the Moongalba area stripped and cleared, and alien flora planted there, must have been a serious affront. We have no written evidence of a clash, but we find that, while some 30 Europeans were employed on the plantation in early February 1828, by July, some five months later, the site had been inexplicably abandoned and the crop had become overgrown. Some unusual features also attended the building of the Dunwich storage site at this time. The warehouse was completed in May 1828 with 'an underground passage' connecting it with the living quarters; and a 13 foot high brick wall was constructed around the entire plant, indicating that a degree of siege was either being anticipated or actually experienced. At some point in this period, too, a soldier was speared and killed by the Nunukul; and a grand plan of moving the entire penal establishment from the Brisbane region to Dunwich (first suggested in June 1827) was rapidly abandoned. Significantly, no explanation was offered in official reports to the Colonial Secretary in Sydney

for any of these developments — the abandonment of the plantation and the move to Dunwich, the unusual Dunwich architecture and the killing of the soldier.<sup>13</sup>

Then, on 10 July 1831, a convict named James Wood was speared and killed while at work in the garden at Dunwich, during a visit to the station by the Penal Commandant himself. It was later disclosed to Thomas Welsby by black informants that 'a portion of the tribe of Noon Nuckles [sic] residing at Moongoolba [sic]' had conducted this killing. At the time it was said to have occurred because of undisclosed 'injuries suffered from Europeans', but Welsby was told that the specific reason was unwelcomed sexual advances having been made upon Nunukul women.<sup>14</sup>

Although certain researchers have emphasized traditional Aboriginal liberality and cordiality in the bestowal of female sexual favours, it seems clear that the Aborigines of Stradbroke attempted, from the earliest inter-racial encounters, to avoid such contacts.<sup>15</sup> For, even though Aboriginal women may have been offered (or offered themselves) under certain rules of reciprocity to visiting strangers, perhaps an inhibiting consideration here was 'Could the living, with impunity, conduct sexual congress with Duggai — the spirits of the dead?'. Thomas Pamphlet had noted in 1823 that although the Nunukul were extremely kind and generous:

*they would not ... suffer us to approach the huts in which their women were, for the first five or six days; and at night five or six of the younger men would sleep in front of our hut ...*

Even after that initial period, the three castaways were not allowed any physical familiarity with the women. As Richard Parsons admitted, the only time he had felt himself in any danger during the several months he stayed at Moreton Bay was when:

*A female brought him some fresh fish and he attempted a little familiarity with her, when on a sudden [sic] a number of natives started up, and in a menacing attitude called out to him to let her alone.*

A year or so later, when Governor Brisbane's party met with the Nunukul on the Amity beach, it was noted of the latter, 'No women were seen amongst them'.<sup>16</sup>

Despite such precautions, however, white male interference with Aboriginal women became common — as the spectacle of 'naked female flesh in the open landscape' aroused the lust of men — both soldiers and convicts — enduring an extended absence from white female company. The Aboriginal people at Moreton Bay were described in admiring tones by early white observers as being extremely tall, lithe and graceful, with the kind of muscularity we would associate today with Olympic athletes — and, as John Oxley recorded,

*The women that I saw were far superior in personal beauty to the men, or indeed of any native of any country whom I have yet seen.*

Such women were invariably seen as 'fair game' for the conquering, colonizing white male. In February 1832, Allen Cunningham told the British House of Commons that 'a general hostility on the part of the natives towards Moreton Bay convicts' had been induced specifically by 'liberties having been taken with the women'.<sup>17</sup>

Thus the spearing of James Wood at Dunwich in July 1831 was part of a series of killings of convicts which had been occurring in the Moreton Bay region since early 1825, due either to territorial encroachment or sexual exploitation. It marked the beginning of a spiral of inter-racial violence on Stradbroke and Moreton Island which represents the most prolonged escalation of conflict during the local convict era — and therefore warrants our close attention. Details of these clashes have been rather murky, because of the paucity and terseness of contemporary reports as well as contradictions in the stories told by those recollecting the conflict some time later. But I have found that by attending to the issues upon which these recollections concur, and by then checking these against the known evidence of dates and the names of convicts and soldiers killed and injured by Aborigines, a tentatively continuous narrative can be suggested.<sup>18</sup>

It would seem that some time after the death of the unnamed soldier and James Wood at Dunwich (after which this settlement was ordered to be closed) white personnel at the Amity Pilot Station killed a Nunukul elder — or 'turrwan' — after inducing him to go in a fishing boat with them. A convict hutkeeper, William Reardon, whom the Nunukul called 'Chooroong', afterwards decapitated the old man. Consequently, Nunukul males attacked the Pilot Station on two separate occasions. As Captain Clunie, the Penal Commandant reported the matter in January 1833:

*... some time ago the ... tribe wantonly attacked the guard at the Pilot's quarters, when they wounded two soldiers and one prisoner severely, and probably would have done more, had not a detachment [of troops] which happened to be on board ship [nearby] landed and come to their assistance ...*

The two soldiers severely injured were Corporal Robert Cain and Private William Wright, both of the 17th Regiment; the convict was Thomas Kinchella. The Commandant then personally interceded with the Nunukul 'warning them of the severe measures which would follow any act of aggression on their part'.<sup>19</sup>

Soon afterwards, however, a second Nunukul assault was launched. As Clunie wrote,

*... the first time after when the natives observed the boats crew absent, and only the guard remaining, they again attacked them, and being obliged to fire to save their lives, one native was killed and one wounded.*

Clunie thereupon ordered further retaliatory action against the Nunukul. Commandant Cotton later alluded to this in 1837 when he recalled, 'Captain Clunie of the 17th Regiment was compelled to send out armed parties to punish them summarily and a number of natives were killed'. In one such assault, conducted at dawn, soldiers surrounded a camp of Ngugi people on the banks of a fresh water lagoon near the southern end of Moreton Island, killing up to twenty of them. George Watkins recorded:

*... nearly all were shot down. My informant, a young boy at the time escaped with a few others by hiding in a clump of bushes. Affairs of a similar kind took place on Stradbroke [sic], one in the neighbourhood of Point Lookout and another farther to the south. A genuine stand-up fight came off west of the Big Hill on Stradbroke, where the blacks were badly beaten.<sup>20</sup>*

Such violence therefore continued to flare on Stradbroke, partially because 'pay back' killing took on its own momentum; but also because the Nunukul were intent upon avenging the death of their decapitated elder by killing 'Choorong'. Ultimately, William Reardon was ambushed some 18 metres

from his hut and waddied to death on 25 November 1832. According to Thomas Welsby's informant, Nunukul men camped upon Pyrrnn-Pyrrnn-Pa (the little sandhill at Amity), observing Reardon's movements, 'stole up behind him' and secured him with their 'tow-rows' (fishing nets), before killing him. Consequently, white soldiery and Nunukul fighters again clashed north of Dunwich in a swampy area near the mouth of Coorooing-Coorooing-Pa Creek. Some Aborigines were wounded by musket balls and soldiers struck down by waddy or spear. No-one, however, was killed it would seem, the soldiers being hampered in their manoeuvres by the 'quagmire of black mud' into which the Nunukul had led them. There are certain suggestions that soldiers and Aboriginal warriors called a truce at the end of a long and weary day's struggle and sat down afterwards to a feast together — but, even if this is correct, such a truce did not mark the end of hostilities.<sup>21</sup>

The following month, Chief Constable McIntosh, returning by ship from Port Macquarie with a party of constables sent there to secure Moreton Bay convict runaways, was also attacked on the beach by Nunukuls, south of Amity. McIntosh was wounded and two other men with him — a convict constable named Charles Holdsworth and a convict bolter named James O'Regan — were seized. Captain Clunie once more ordered out a reprisal party 'to try to recover the men and if possible to take prisoner some of the natives most implicated in the proceedings'. The slain corpses of the two kidnapped men were discovered on 20 December 1832 and McIntosh, aided by constables and soldiers, once more clashed with the Nunukul. Clunie claimed, 'the natives having attacked the party with their spears, they were obliged to fire at them in self-defence, when some of the natives were killed and wounded ...'.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, in a zig-zagging escalation of conflict in the early 1830s, embodying a probable dozen or more violent incidents, five Europeans had been killed and at least four others wounded. Possibly between 30 and 40 Ngugi and Nunukul people had similarly been wounded or slain in these military encounters. The scale of violence can best be appreciated when it is remembered that, normally, only a dozen or so whites were stationed upon the island at this time, though that number had seemingly been reinforced by other troops and constables in order to conduct reprisals.

These Stradbroke and Moreton Island clashes of 1831-32, along with the killing of Penal Commandant Patrick Logan by the Dungibara in the upper Brisbane River district in October 1830, mark the highest point in inter-racial

violence during the Moreton Bay penal era. Knowledge of such events calls into serious question Maurice French's recent assertion in *Conflict on the Condamine* (1989) that 'a period of truce existed among indigenes and invaders at Moreton Bay between 1830 and 1840'; as well as Helen Horton's conclusion in *Islands of Moreton Bay* (1983) that:

*There was, in all, very little trouble between the European newcomers and the Aboriginal natives of Stradbroke.*<sup>23</sup>

What I have encapsulated here in the time at our disposal is only a small portion of the early history of black-white relations, which, as it unfolded, would also include significant patterns of collaboration and accommodation, ongoing incidents of violence, sexual force and cooperation, as well as longer term developments, such as a high disease mortality rate for the Nunukul, Coobenpil and Ngugi, and severe 'resource raiding' by Europeans, which would eventually seriously deplete the marine bounty of this region.

Very early in this contact process, in October 1825, Major Edmund Lockyer observed of the healthy, exuberant and superbly proportioned Stradbroke Island people:

*Stories told of their cannibalism are fabulous and absurd. They are a quiet, inoffensive, good-natured, lively set of people ...*

Twenty years later, in 1845, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, John Bede Polding, after visiting his church's ailing mission to the Aborigines on Stradbroke Island, stated:

*... the want of success [by our missionaries] must be attributed to the bad feeling ... naturally caused by the mode in which possession has been taken of their country: occupation by force, accompanied by murders, ill-treatment, ravishment of their women, in a word, to the conviction of their mind that the white man has come for his own advantage, without any regard for their rights.*

*... Alas! it is shocking to think of what has, in fact, been done. With very little, with short-lived exception [sic], injustice, neglect, cruelty and, a million times worse, the actual teaching of vice, have branded the annals of white men. The stain of blood is upon us —*

*blood had been shed far otherwise than in self-defence — blood, in needless and wanton cruelty. It is said, even now, that as Europeans progress northwards, blood is so shed. Shall we not protest against this?*<sup>24</sup>

## Footnotes

- 1 H. Horton *Islands of Moreton Bay* Brisbane: Boolarong 1983 pp. 1-2; E. Durbidge and J. Covacevich *North Stradbroke Island* SIMO 1981, p. 67 and pp. 71-72; G. Roderick McLeod 'The South Passage and the Amity Point Penal Station' in R.J. Coleman et al. (eds) *Focus on Stradbroke* Brisbane: Boolarong 1984 p. 100.
- 2 P. Whalley 'An Introduction to the Aboriginal Social History of Moreton Bay, South East Queensland from 1799 to 1880', BA (Hons) thesis, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, The University of Queensland 1987 p. 69; B. Connolly and R. Anderson *First Contact: New Guinea Highlanders Encounter the World* Penguin 1987 p. 38.
- 3 J. Steele *The Explorers of Moreton Bay 1770-1830* St Lucia: University of Queensland Press 1972 p. 39 and p. 104; Whalley 1987 p. 53.
- 4 Steele 1972 p. 61.
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## Point Lookout — Planning Failure, Market Victory

*Tiiti Gill*

*North Stradbroke is a very valuable place. Its minerals are worth millions of dollars; it already has a tourist industry which can only expand; its residential blocks are priced beyond the reach of most; and it supports important 'minor' fishing, oystering, and timber industries. Stradbroke is also 'valuable' in non-financial terms. It is an extensive and very accessible, fairly natural wallun area close to the southeastern Queensland population mass; its fauna and flora are diverse and scientifically significant; it has unequalled educational potential ...<sup>1</sup>*

This was written about North Stradbroke Island a decade ago. The value of the place remains both in money and qualitative terms and has arguably been accentuated as 'development' has occurred on the island and on the mainland; what remains of 'natural' environments becomes more precious as they become more scarce. Orthodox town planning has recognised the financial value of the island but failed to protect its preciousness. As such town planning provisions have invited the very 'market forces' which now threaten the character of Stradbroke. The destruction of the character of the island is already evident and may not be fully reversible. Even so, the remains of both the natural and social environments could be protected by a change in the town planning provisions.

This paper comments specifically on the town plan for Point Lookout and reflects on concomitant changes. Planning failure and market victory are seen as connected; the town plan is market-driven and has little regard for maintaining the area as a low key, relatively low-cost residential and holiday location. The town plan legitimates both extension and intensification of urban development. The impact of such a policy is not confined to the natural and built environments but also transforms socio-economic features of island residents and visitors.

It is emphasised that such outcomes are the result of 'planning', not of its absence. Planning acts as a deliberate inducement to open up more land for

building, alter the character of the existing built areas, and encourage 'upgraded' and new tourist accommodation and resorts. Put another way, existing town planning provisions fail to acknowledge features of the island which have been valued by residents and regular visitors. Hence, unless the town plan is revised, the special characteristics which have been appreciated will disappear as the natural and social environments are altered.

The paper outlines briefly provisions of the town plan for Point Lookout and presents three alternative scenarios for future development. The scenarios are also applicable to other parts of the island.

### *The Town Plan*

The town plans of local authorities are gazetted legal documents concerning land use in particular areas, approved by the State Government. Town plans have also been called 'speculators' guides'.<sup>2</sup> It is possible to appeal against a council decision to approve or reject an application for a particular 'development' proposal. Such appeals are heard in the Local Government Court with the court decision usually based on what is provided in the town plan, not whether the planned provision is desirable or in the public interest. The Redland Shire 1988 town plan makes specific provisions for Point Lookout. In summary, these relate to two aspects of land use: increased density of settlement, and extended area of settlement, with accommodation for large scale 'comprehensive development' resorts.

### *Increased density*

The town plan states that 'most of the older developed residential areas of Point Lookout have been designated Residential B to encourage the provision of holiday accommodation'.<sup>3</sup> Although Residential B zoning in the Shire is not limited to Point Lookout, this is the only area where virtually the entire township is given the highest density designation. In addition, 'there might also be a few sites at Point Lookout for high rise development'.<sup>4</sup> Such provisions mean that flats, units, town houses and other forms of multiple dwellings are permitted in all of Point Lookout adjacent to the headland. This includes the Point proper where presently most houses are single dwellings, and where some of the earliest houses built on this part of the island are located. The significance of the area in its present form is recognised by the National

Trust.<sup>5</sup> Notably, the much more recently (really only since the very late 1980s) 'developed' Tramican Street area is zoned Residential A (detached houses) with a lower density than the 'old' Point Lookout.

### *Extended Area*

As well as intensifying settlement in the older township the town plan provides extension of 'development' to hitherto unbuilt areas. Point Lookout is expanded by designating for residential uses a land area some 14 times greater than the established township. In addition to the recently 'developed' Tramican Street area, land for new urban uses is set aside around George Nothling Drive. The town plan envisages an extension to this sub-arterial road and designates substantial areas, currently natural bush, for 'development'. An area of approximately 3.2 square kilometres is for urban land use; about three-quarters of this area is for unspecified 'residential' plus open space, with the remainder shown as sewage treatment and quarry reserve. Another site of nearly one square kilometre towards the ocean from George Nothling Drive is marked for 'Comprehensive Development'. The town plan provides no details of the latter other than a short statement in the supporting information

*An area of Crown land immediately to the south of Point Lookout township and readily accessible to the ocean beaches has also been designated [as comprehensive development]. It is seen to have potential for a resort style development.<sup>6</sup>*

The important issue here is the provision for a large resort 'development' on unbuilt Crown land. This would alienate bushland, and privatise the area for money making from those who can afford to pay for resort holidays.

In addition to extending settlement inland and providing for a resort in a 'new' area near ocean beach, the town plan zones almost all the land at Point Lookout on the beach side of the main road as 'tourist, business and residential'. This includes large areas such as the quarry which is 'under consideration for a resort style development'<sup>7</sup> and the land between the Hotel and the Thankful Rest Council campsite.<sup>8</sup> Both these areas are currently unbuilt and regarded as public space; the latter is a 'wetland park' with paper bark trees, creepers and ferns on the northern tip of the beach fringing 'marshy' water reserves on the west side of the island.

### *The Future of Point Lookout*

As indicated above the town plan for Point Lookout provides for a very large extension of the residential area, establishment of tourist facilities and high density housing. No actual population target is set in the planning documents for the Point but a 'capacity' of 80,000+ is given for the Bay Islands as a whole.<sup>9</sup> No specific basis for this figure is provided; according to other sources this could include 32,000 people at Point Lookout.<sup>10</sup> The capacity population is a long-term figure and the total population of all the Bay Islands is estimated to reach 8,000 between 1994 and 1999 by which time the Shire population will have reached 100,000. A caveat is included in the planning documents to the extent that the population of the islands is 'difficult to predict because of uncertainty in relation to North Stradbroke Island road link and Land Administration Commission proposals'.<sup>11</sup> No further reference is made to the Land Administration Commission which handles the release of Crown land although this covers most of the island. In relation to the road link, the Council position is stated as follows:

*For many years the Council has been pressing for the State Government to provide a road link to North Stradbroke Island ... From a planning standpoint, the provision of such a road link is considered desirable because of the increased accessibility to the island's outstanding recreational facilities which a road link would provide for the population of the metropolitan area and also because of the increased accessibility to the mainland which it would provide for the island's residents.*<sup>12</sup>

The documentation recognises that 'the State Government has discontinued action to provide a road link at this point in time [but] it is understood that such provision has not been ruled out in the longer term'.<sup>13</sup> These statements suggest that the Council in 1988 continued to support a bridge to North Stradbroke. Now it can be argued that consciously inviting further 'development' by planning for both extended and intensified settlement might well in the future be used to argue again for a road link. Irrespective of how the present Council views the desirability of a bridge, the town plan is framed for growth.

Three futures for Point Lookout and North Stradbroke Island are discussed here; in order of discussion they have been titled 'assimilation', 'exclusivity'

and 'revised continuity'. The futures differ on four main elements; population, tourism, character and environment.

A summary of the characteristics of the assimilation future is shown in figure 1.

**Figure 1**

#### **The Assimilation Future**

##### *Population*

Considerable increase in permanent population serving tourist industry and commuting to mainland jobs; expanded residential land area.

##### *Tourism*

Expansion of both resort-style facilities and self-catering accommodation with consequent additional shopping and commercial activity.

##### *Character*

Increased retired population who can afford higher land and home prices and replace existing younger and older non-waged. Tourists likely to be generally middle to high income groups.

##### *Environment*

Considerable increase in traffic, units and town-houses on beach fringe, expansion of suburban estates elsewhere; considerable reduction in flora and fauna habitats and loss of views.

The essence of the assimilation future is that the island is not seen as something distinct and different but merely an extension of the Shire mainland area. The special features of the island and its townships are accorded little intrinsic value except to the extent that they permit a tourist industry to be established. In these circumstances Dunwich is likely to become a suburb of a shire which is already a dormitory for Brisbane. Point Lookout is likely to develop as a combination of a tourist-retirement area and a commuter zone. As such it will follow the pattern of Caloundra and Bribie Island.



Under this model, the application of the same planning intentions as for the mainland would incorporate the island into the mainland physical form. This is already being imposed by the 'brick covenant' placed on construction on the island. Point Lookout will be enlarged with new suburban estates and construction of three storey unit blocks to cater for tourists and retirees in the current residential areas. While the population will become proportionately older, the main change will be the displacement of the heterogeneous collection of people who currently live there because of the beach, surf, fishing or want of reason to go anywhere else. Many of these people are non-waged and in rental accommodation. The displacement of these kinds of people will be part of making Point Lookout neat, tidy and pretty and fitting in with mainland standards. It will have street lights, sewerage, a school, library and fire brigade and all the beaches will be patrolled and have properly constructed access and car-parks. However, habitats for birds, marsupials and reptiles will be reduced and their life chances constrained by traffic and domestic pets. Moreover, the island's social and aesthetic character will have been changed in very perceptible ways.

The exclusivity future is summarised in figure 2.

In essence, the exclusivity future opens Point Lookout as a holiday retreat to high income groups. This is most easily done by the high cost of property and accommodation. It could be achieved by restricting the extent of residential development, confining tourist sites to a few of clear investment opportunity and controlling land releases to ensure high prices. A combination of high land prices and imposition of building requirements should lay the basis whereby emulation would virtually ensure the creation of a place for the rich. Noosa is one model of how an exclusive holiday location can be developed; a journalist describes the latest strata of residents as 'a beaverish affiliation of southern commuting yuppies and image conscious professionals... ambitious and well-versed in the nuances of power and politics...'.<sup>14</sup> While the manifestations and background of the rich might change, the significant aspect noted in this quotation is their knowledge of power and politics. The key feature of an exclusive development is the ability of those involved there to keep out the hoi polloi whether by economics or planning.

**Figure 2**

### **The Exclusivity Future**

#### *Population*

Static or falling permanent population but some increase in regular visitors; little expansion in developed land area.

#### *Tourism*

High-price resort and luxury self-catering accommodation taking the best sites with related shopping and commercial activity.

#### *Character*

In-filling and replacement of current residential sites with substantial holiday homes; displacement of existing residents by visitors.

#### *Environment*

Flora and fauna generally maintained at existing levels; major changes to social character.

Some elements of the exclusivity future for Point Lookout are already present. A significant number of substantial private holiday homes have been built on the Tramcan land division; many are architecture 'pieces'. There is also a new resort (The Palms) which is marketed in the financial press and the proposed development for Cylinder Beach is explicitly and unashamedly marketed as 'Brisbane's best kept secret' on the grounds of luxury, uniqueness and the absence of crowds.<sup>15</sup> A confidential study on Moreton Bay Tourism prepared for the Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation in 1989 advocates an emphasis on the restricted development of sophisticated tourism at Point Lookout. Significantly, the study is reported as stating that the opportunities for this kind of tourism are enhanced by the lack of a road link to the mainland.<sup>16</sup>

In an exclusivity future there will be little expansion of the residential area at Point Lookout but some replacement of dwellings in the older established parts in a process akin to gentrification of inner city areas. This will lead to the displacement of existing residents as either they sell their properties, or low rental accommodation is cleared. In contrast with the assimilation future, these people will not be replaced by other permanent residents since much of

the new property would be for weekends and holiday periods. The physical and environmental changes will also be less pronounced than with the assimilation future. Traffic will not increase and it is more likely that the well-off will preserve views, beaches and natural habitats if only to protect their investments. Nonetheless, as with gentrification, the social character will change, albeit only at weekends and holiday periods. If patterns which have occurred elsewhere are followed, there will also be pressure placed on the Redland Council to close or reduce the scale of the camp sites which provide the basis of cheap holidays at Point Lookout.

The future of revised continuity is summarised in figure 3.

### Figure 3

#### The Revised Continuity Future

##### *Population*

Little increase in permanent population or in built area and some increase in visitors.

##### *Tourism*

Emphasis on affordable holidays; some increase in low cost accommodation and camping places with related low-level shopping and food places.

##### *Character*

Reasonable property prices and rates maintain mixed social composition among residents and frequent visitors; low profile and density of the built environment minimise visual interference.

##### *Environment*

Beaches and public places are managed and stabilised and damage to natural habitats is minimised.

The essence of the revised continuity future can be best described as equitable conservation. The approach rests on maintaining access to Point Lookout for as wide a spectrum of people as possible without damaging what are perceived as its special features and intrinsic values. The major ones are that it is an island and a comparatively undeveloped place despite its proximity to Brisbane. This is recognised in the Cameron McNamara Strategy which states that 'For

both residents and visitors, the absence of developed urban features is as important to the perceived character of the island as the presence of particular "island" features.'<sup>17</sup> Moreover, because the report noted the importance of 'island character' solely on the basis of discussions, rather than as a result of any systematic survey, the absence of developed urban features as an integral part of the island's attractiveness is likely to have been understated. Indeed the report states that such 'observations are not inconsistent with the findings of a sample survey carried out on North Stradbroke Island as a Queensland University student project'.<sup>18</sup> Such corroboration indicates a widespread appreciation of the island as an island, and its existing characteristics.

Equitable conservation requires the retention of the natural and non-urban character of Point Lookout and maintenance of social and economic accessibility. Beaches, beachfront and other locations will be preserved as public areas to be conserved and maintained. They will be protected from speculative ventures and efforts to treat the island as a resource to be exploited for private gain. Further crown land release would be checked on the grounds that 'public' beaches, and 'natural', non-urban location relatively close to a metropolitan area are of greater collective value.

It is little use preserving public facilities unless some actions are taken so that the widest possible range of people have access to these. This could be achieved by ensuring the continued availability of low cost accommodation and camping places. Indeed, this is already a feature of Point Lookout with public camp sites located at some of the most pleasant and naturally attractive places at the Point, Cylinder Beach and Adder Rock. These camp sites can be managed so as to minimise environmental damage whilst ensuring the widest access to 'prime' locations. The provision of camping grounds can be augmented by more permanent but still reasonably priced accommodation designed to have a low visual profile and impact on the physical environment. Forms of such accommodation currently exist in the refurbished cabins at Headland Chalet and the Backpackers Hostel. Thus, low cost accommodation and camping grounds represent a continuation of past practices. Indeed, if this future is adopted it will ensure the preservation of 'Claytons' which was the first such accommodation at Point Lookout and which is scheduled to be replaced by a luxury and exclusive apartment block fronting Cylinder Beach.

None of the three futures outlined above can be considered more 'right' than any other. The assimilation future would open up the island and Point Lookout

to more people. This can be justified philosophically in a market economy with a principle of freedom of choice. Land shortages would also be a practical justification for opening the island. But the major disadvantage of this future is that it irreversibly destroys the existing natural character of the area. The exclusivity future would probably do the most to protect the natural environment at Point Lookout. However, the disadvantage is that effective access is denied to a large part of the population. The revised continuity future overcomes these social inequities and maintains the low-key character of Point Lookout. The drawback is that a high level of public management of the area is required. In the next part of this section, the trajectory of the current Town Plan is considered against these three futures.

While the three futures outlined above are not the only possible ones, it is argued that they cover the most likely range of what will eventuate and what various groups would like to eventuate. Discussion of the futures has also provided two grounds, beyond personal preference, to assess the desirability of particular eventualities. These grounds are the extent of the public interest in land development, and conservation. There are social equity considerations embedded in both of these. While the 'public interest' is notoriously difficult to define, there are conventional political ways in which it is expressed. These include elections, party and pressure group activities. Moreover, one of the consequences of the emergence of concern about conservation and the environment is that public interest is now taken to encompass future generations. Indeed, the interests of future generations usually inform decisions not to develop or exploit resources at the present time.

There is no doubt that some people have an interest in developing land at Point Lookout whether to make profits or for their own residential and recreational purposes. But this is not the same as a general or public interest. In broad terms, the public interest will rest on the aggregate need for land for tourism and residential purposes. These are both essentially empirical questions of whether shortages of suitable space exist; the matter of tourist and recreational land is considered first as it is relatively straightforward. The Gold and Sunshine Coasts are the major holiday and recreation regions for Brisbane residents; both also cater, to varying degrees for intra-, inter-state and international tourism. There are no reasons for considering that either area has reached such a saturation point that Point Lookout and North Stradbroke Island need to be developed to provide more of the same kind of facilities.

The issue of residential land is more complicated and both demand and supply aspects on the island and in the general region must be examined. Part B of the Redland Plan omits any reference to grounds on which to expect population increase on North Stradbroke Island generally or particularly at Point Lookout.<sup>19</sup> The 1983 Cameron McNamara report is more diligent in establishing substantiation for its preferred strategy. After extensively reviewing development influences, including demographic factors, the Cameron McNamara report is at pains to point out that marked population growth on the island is very conditional if not wishful thinking altogether.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, this has turned out to be the case as is shown by population figures. The total island population of 1667 in 1986<sup>21</sup> is less than half of 3,400, the lowest estimate of Cameron McNamara projections.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, a comparison of the census figures for 1981 and 1996 shows an overall reduction and a reduction in each of the areas of the island.<sup>23</sup> In comparison, the population increased on each of the Bay Islands with an increase of 69 per cent in the Bay Islands as a whole. The population in the mainland parts of Redland Shire increased by 47 per cent between the two census dates. The population fell on North Stradbroke Island in spite of crown land having been released for sub-division, and Council policies to encourage population growth by further urban services, rezoning and planned provision for future urban growth.

The island population figures quoted above do not indicate any need for more residential sub-division or for a higher density settlement; if anything the contrary would seem to be the case. Demand from outside the island for dwellings on North Stradbroke is similarly a dubious argument to justify further development. In 1984 there were 1572 vacant residential allotments on the island. Apart from the Bay Islands this is a larger number than in any other area of the Shire.<sup>24</sup> Comparison of 1986 census figures of resident population and 1984 vacant lot information shows that on North Stradbroke Island there is nearly one (0.94) vacant allotment per resident; in Cleveland, where the Raby Bay canal estate is not yet fully settled, the ratio is 0.8. In Redland Bay the ratio of vacant residential allotments per resident is 0.2, and in Capalaba 0.1. On the Bay Islands there are 12 vacant residential allotments per resident.<sup>25</sup> Leaving the Bay Islands aside, these comparisons show that in proportion to resident population, even without further sub-divisions, there are more vacant lots on North Stradbroke than in other areas of the shire. Thus even before further development invited by the Town Plan is realised in practice, there is a considerable supply of lots without buildings. Moreover, whereas the population has been growing in the other areas (including the Bay Islands) on Stradbroke there has been a decline.

Figures from early 1980s<sup>26</sup> show there are more vacant residential allotments at Point Lookout than anywhere else on the island. In 1982, 78 per cent of the 500 vacant lots on North Stradbroke Island were at Point Lookout. Comparison with 1981 census population figures show the ratio of population to vacant lots is 1.9; this is nearly two residents per one vacant lot.<sup>27</sup> Part B of the Redland Shire Plan includes a table showing 1,572 vacant allotments on North Stradbroke Island in 1984 but does not provide a breakdown by townships. While the Tramican sub-division was released between 1982 and 1984, this hardly seems sufficient to account for the difference between the two sets of quoted figures. Nonetheless, it is reasonable on this fragmentary evidence to presume that the ratio of vacant lots to population on the island has increased, and probably increased most at Point Lookout.

A more recent trend at Point Lookout is for the number of houses to increase.<sup>28</sup> Figures from Redland Shire Council for 1989 and 1990 (30 June) on the number of dwellings show virtually no change in Dunwich and Amity Point but record an increase from 439 to 518 for Point Lookout.<sup>29</sup> Because population figures are not available it is not possible to say whether these are for permanent residence or for holiday accommodation. However, impressionistically it seems there has been an increase in the number of houses which are not permanently occupied, both newly built and existing. This would also be in line with the previous trend of decreasing population. The evidence given above indicates that there is no urgent demand for residential land at Point Lookout. Indeed, on the island as a whole there is already nearly one vacant allotment for each of the current permanent residents. The bulk of these allotments are at Point Lookout where it also seems that the number of temporarily occupied holiday homes is increasing. The persistence of a large number of vacant allotments indicates that there is no urgent demand to build homes on the island. Further, since land prices at Crown Land auctions continue to be high and there is active trade in land this suggests that at least some of the land has been bought for speculation. The level of building on existing allotments would be expected to be higher if there were shortages of housing in the wider region. Indeed, it is generally accepted that there is no absolute shortage of suburban or other residential land in the metropolitan Brisbane area. On the other hand, it is generally accepted that there is a need for housing which people can afford, and there is also a need to control urban sprawl.<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

The above discussion and evidence about tourism and housing make it evident that there is no general interest or empirical imperative for increased residential or tourist development at Point Lookout. On the other hand, it is generally accepted that there is a wide public interest in conservation, and governments and political parties have responded to this. The Queensland Labor Government, for example, was elected on a platform which included among other conservation matters, more national parks, heritage legislation and control of coastal development. Conservationist concerns have also been manifest about Point Lookout and North Stradbroke. The strength of the conservation sentiment does not need to be very strong for conservation to be preferred over development for which there is no demonstrated urgent need. On this basis, it must be concluded that a plan for extensive and rapid change and development at Point Lookout can not be shown to be in the public interest. Since development is irreversible, the benefit of any doubt should go against development. This suggests that current Redland Shire Plan for North Stradbroke Island and Point Lookout is inappropriate.

## Footnotes

- 1 Ellie Durbidge and Jeannette Covacevich *North Stradbroke Island* SIMO 1981 p. 7.
- 2 Leonie Sandercock 'Educating Planners: from physical determinism to economic crisis', in L. Sandercock and M. Berry *Urban Political Economy* Sydney: Allen & Unwin 1983 p. 38. The argument is substantiated in Sandercock *Cities for Sale* Melbourne: Melbourne University Press 1975.
- 3 The Redland Shire Town Plan, Part B, p. 155. The document explains: 'A maximum density of 150 persons per hectare has been prescribed for most of the area.' This is higher than the 'normal' density in Redlands. The stated town planning objective for the Shire as a whole is to 'maintain and enhance the semi-rural character of Redlands.' This is achieved by a preference for single family dwellings with some areas with town houses and densities of 75 to 100 persons per hectare (Part B, p. 142).
- 4 Part B, p. 143, section 7.19; this is stated with reference to safeguarding the character of the area. High rise is discouraged elsewhere in the Shire.
- 5 Point Lookout is listed by the National Trust. The landscape and townscape in the listing specifically includes the township of Point Lookout. See 'Recent listings', *National Trust Journal* August 1989 p. 15.
- 6 Part B, p. 163. The location is generally the same as that proposed for a resort in the Cameron McNamara Consultants *North Stradbroke Island Development*

- Strategy (February 1983) prepared for the Queensland Government in anticipation of a bridge between the mainland and the island. According to a news report the Land Administration Commission chairman is reported to have confirmed joint State Government - Redland Shire plans for a project which 'would require about 48 ha for a golf course and 12 ha for the resort' (*Courier Mail*, 19 December 1986).
- 7 Part B, p. 152.
- 8 Recently this seems to have been converted into a caravan park with very few if any tent sites.
- 9 Table 10, attachment to Part B; it is stated that this is based on 'Strategic Plan and assuming fairly low population densities' (Part B, p. 145).
- 10 Former Councillor representing North Stradbroke Island (Division 4 of the Redland Shire electorate). Since the re-drawing of boundaries for the 1990 local authority elections the island no longer has separate representation; it is now part of a Division which also includes an area of mainland Redland.
- 11 Note to Table 10 Part B.
- 12 Part B, p. 138.
- 13 Part B, p. 138 (addition in parenthesis); on page 147 it is said that the road link could be 'reviewed in the future'.
- 14 F. Robson 'Nasty Times in Noosa' *The Australian Magazine* 8/9 December 1991.
- 15 A marketing brochure with *Financial Review*, 1990.
- 16 Moreton Bay Tourism Strategy prepared for Queensland Tourist and Travel Corporation, authors unknown. The preparation of the Report is mentioned in the QTTC Annual Report 1988/89 but the Corporation indicated it was confidential. The indication of its contents comes from a *Courier-Mail* article, May 1989.
- 17 Cameron McNamara report 1983 p. 2-32.
- 18 This is not referenced in the report; however, the study referred to could be the 1982 post-graduate planning exercise by University of Queensland town planning students. This is outlined by J. Kozlowski and S. McGowan 'North Stradbroke Island — the case for rational environmental planning', in R. J. Coleman, J. Covacevich and P. Davie (eds) *Focus on Stradbroke* Brisbane: Boolarong Publications 1984 pp. 392-405. The volume contains papers prepared for the Royal Society of Queensland Symposium held at Point Lookout, North Stradbroke Island, 11-12 August 1974.
- 19 Part B, p. 145, Section 8 Population outlines the situation for the Shire but does not mention North Stradbroke Island.
- 20 See section 3 of the report.
- 21 The 1986 census figures are the latest population information available; the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not prepare inter-censal figures for North Stradbroke Island.

- 22 Cameron McNamara report 1983 section 3.3.2 p. 3-21. This figure is presented as an interesting comparison and a reminder about the difficulties of making accurate projections, as well as the dubious value of projections as guides for policy. The Cameron McNamara projections underline the importance of the assumptions underlying such projections. In this case the projections (high, medium and low) were imputed on Surf Coast share population growth, that is 'the proportion of Gold Coast growth allocated to North Stradbroke Island for each projection...' Such a methodology is questionable to say the least.
- 23 Census material for North Stradbroke Island is not readily available. The quoted figures from the 1981 and 1986 census were generously provided by the Redland Shire Town Planning Department. The figures for the two years seem to be on a different basis since the 1981 Census did not identify 'regular' residents; however, these figures are relied upon by Redland Shire. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Brisbane office declined to give any information without a search fee, not even total population figures which were readily told over the counter last year.
- 24 Redland Shire Council, Part B, supporting information for Strategic Plan, p. 142.
- 25 This ratio is the result of sub-dividing and selling land not totally above the high water mark, or as Part B puts it, with a drainage problem.
- 26 Cameron McNamara present vacant lot information, see F 7-14. These figures are for 1982. Current vacant lot information for North Stradbroke Island is not available.
- 27 This figure under-estimates the ratio, since the 1981 Census figure included non-residents.
- 28 The 'normal' ABS seven-page summaries for local areas are not readily available for North Stradbroke Island. These summaries contain information of numbers and types of dwellings and comparison between census dates can reveal changes. Alternative material in the form of information about number of rate payers and changes in rateable values on the island was sought but was not readily available.
- 29 This information was made available and prepared by the Redland Shire Town Planning Department.
- | Number of dwellings |      |      |
|---------------------|------|------|
| Township            | 1989 | 1990 |
| Dunwich             | 352  | 353  |
| Amity Point         | 258  | 261  |
| Point Lookout       | 439  | 518  |
- 30 Lately several seminars and conferences have addressed how to manage urban sprawl. A major current Queensland undertaking is the State Government's *South East Queensland 2001* project which was initiated in December 1990. Subsequently a Regional Planning Advisory Group (RPAG), with community and interest representation, was established and continues to work towards developing growth management policies.

## Natural Tourism! Options for North Stradbroke Island

*Jennifer Craik*

*Tourism is the future for this magic island and as long as sensitivity and sensibility prevail what numerous opportunities there are!<sup>1</sup>*

Tourism can be an opportunity or a threat. Many communities embrace tourism when other industries decline. It seems like an easy option: encourage visitors to come and share the special features of the destination. The prospects for Stradbroke tourism have been recognised for a long time. Just 38 kilometres off the Queensland coast, it is the closest island to Brisbane and has thus been a traditional recreational destination of mainlanders. Yet, it has remained relatively undeveloped until now. As population pressures in the south-east corner of Queensland increase, the development potential of Stradbroke looks ever more attractive.

For an island like Stradbroke which offers a 'natural habitat of environmental reserves, mysterious inland lakes, flora, fauna and beautiful beaches'.<sup>2</sup> visitors and tourists are mainly nature lovers sympathetic to the environment. Yet there are signs of conflict about the levels and types of existing and mooted tourist development on the island.

Some residents and house owners (weekenders) want the island to remain as it is; others (including residents, developers and some within local government) want to encourage some degree of development. It seems clear that Stradbroke will change: new housing estates will be built on the island, tourism opportunities will expand as the island becomes more accessible. The question is not whether development is desirable, but how best can it be planned and managed to accommodate the needs of residents and visitors alike.

### *Stradbroke's Attractions*

Stradbroke is often described as offering bay and bush attractions. The island's

natural features are its main attraction. Recreational opportunities include surfing, fishing, boating, bushwalking, picnicking, exploring, swimming, nature watching, and whale watching. Not only could more be made of these as attractions, but the unique geological, biological and environmental features of the island — and relevant scientific work — could themselves become attractions. In other words, Stradbroke offers opportunities for environmental recreation and tourism, or eco-tourism, as well as activities associated with sun, sea and sand. Above all, it is a contrast to the glitz and glamour of the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast.

In addition, its industries and institutions past and present (dugong hunting, whaling, fishing, mining, mission, quarantine station, benevolent asylum) also have tourist potential which is only beginning to be 'packaged', for example, by displays in the newly opened museum.<sup>3</sup>

Stradbroke also offers a different set of attractions based on its history and culture, primarily histories of the indigenous peoples and colonisation. One of the dominant features of Stradbroke Island has been its Aboriginal heritage and culture and yet it is marginalised in the presentation of the island's attractions. This is partly because of the decimation of indigenous people after white settlement.<sup>4</sup> From the hundreds of inhabitants before settlement, one study suggests that numbers declined rapidly between 1843 and 1934 from an estimated 400 to 160.<sup>5</sup> Despite a reasonable degree of cooperation between the locals and the settlers, Aboriginal ways of life were sublimated to the values of cultural improvement held by the colonisers.

This legacy is still evident. For example, the historical trail of Stradbroke includes just two Aboriginal sites (Polka Point midden and Myora Springs) in its 19 points of interest. The rest are remnants of colonising influences (penal facilities, early buildings, church and cemetery, historical structures). In contrast, a recent study by Loder and Bayly has identified 22 significant historical sites including five Aboriginal middens, a bora ring and two traditional sites. This revised list presents a more integrated sense of history by relating reminders of recent Stradbroke history to the traditional and contact histories of Aboriginal groups. In other words, there are a range of histories waiting to be told and cultural imprints available to be represented.

In sum, Stradbroke offers a rich source of cultural tourism within its bay and bush attractions and facilities. The most intensive activity is confined to the northern end of the island between Amity Point and Point Lookout. The southern

part of the island includes the Blue Lake National Park and habitat reserve with more areas to be gazetted soon. Since this part of the island is only accessible to four-wheel drive vehicles, tourist activity has been of a much lower level than were it traversed by roads. For example, had the mooted bridge between Stradbroke and the mainland gone ahead, five resorts, two marinas, two golf courses, five additional camping/caravan parks and more extensive road links were planned.<sup>6</sup>

### *Current Tourist Patterns*

It is difficult to obtain figures on visitation to Stradbroke, due to the difficulty of distinguishing commuters, weekenders, day trippers, intermittent residents, and tourists. Stradbroke Ferries may have a good idea of those numbers since they are the main entry point, however they seem reluctant to divulge such information possibly because a new competitor is planning to enter the market. Activity seems to have increased significantly. There are currently 12 vehicular ferries daily with additional services on weekends and holidays as well as a water taxis offering luxury high speed catamaran services 11 times daily.

Australian Bureau of Statistics data is published on a regional basis (Redland Shire) and confined to hotels and motels, units, and caravans. This makes it difficult to extract figures pertaining only to Stradbroke. Moreover, many campers and house sharers are excluded from these figures. Broadly, there has been a huge increase in visitation. In 1975, Ellie Durbidge<sup>7</sup> estimated that the population was about 2,000 and swelled by 4,000 visitors. By 1986, the population had fallen to 1,888 while the number of tourists had grown to 30,000.<sup>8</sup>

The 1991 population was 2,242 and is currently estimated to be 2,320 and is projected to grow to 2,662 by 1996.<sup>9</sup> There are now estimated to be between 30,000 and 40,000 in the peak seasons of Christmas and Easter, although the Redland Shire Council Tourism Department estimates 50,000 tourists in peak season.<sup>10</sup> population and number of visitors may be a problem. Conflicts over land use are liable to increase, while the capacity of the environment to sustain a large influx will diminish.

Eighty percent of visitors come from Brisbane, 15% from south-east Queensland, 5% from other states, with very few from overseas (mostly Japan).<sup>11</sup> The vast majority of visitors are campers since there are only about 2,000 beds in houses, flats, units and resorts. Estimates of the number of



visitors is further complicated by the number of people staying with friends, or camping at their houses. The tourist profile is predominantly local with an emphasis on low cost holidays and nature-oriented activities.

There has been some success with special events as a way to attract visitors. For example, Jim Lally's Straddie Classic Fishing Competition attracted 1,000 anglers and 1,500 spectators in 1991, and 2,000 competitors plus 2,500 to 3,000 spectators in 1992.<sup>12</sup> The Accommodation Centre reports that 98% of bed accommodation has been booked for 1992 and 95% of accommodation has already been booked for 1993. Only the Backpackers' Hotel has vacancies. In other words, registered accommodation is virtually saturated in terms of demand — a stark contrast to many tourist destinations at present.

Of non-campers and caravaners, most visitors stay in reasonably priced self-contained family accommodation offered by short-let homes, holiday units, resorts and the pub. The 1985-86 development control plan zoned much of Point Lookout as 'Tourist, Business and Residential' resulting in enhanced activity in this area. The population and new buildings have increased at a much greater rate than the rest of the island. Older smaller buildings are making way for bigger units and resort developments that are increasing the occupancy rates at Point Lookout.<sup>13</sup>

### New Developments

Most of the building activity is for homes (zoning category Res. A), both individual and housing estates. In contrast to the holiday shacks and weekenders, these homes have been more substantial, suburban designs usually in the more expensive end of the market. Some have remained unoccupied to accord with the benefits of negative gearing. There have been some holiday unit developments in 'Res. B' zones, mostly at Point Lookout.<sup>14</sup>

Accompanying these developments have been improvements to services, including bitumen roads and curbing, and wheelie bins. The price of these developments has been an enormous increase in rates — over \$3,000 per annum for an average house. For home owners who are on low or fixed incomes, or who bought on Stradbroke because of its 'untouched' qualities, these changes have been unwelcome. Many fear that the Council wishes to turn Stradbroke into an exclusive bay suburb for rich residents by creating artificial demand and encouraging the inflation of property prices.<sup>15</sup>

There have also been discussions about more intense developments. Three sites have been designated as suitable for resort development: Cylinder Beach, Samarinda, and the Old Council Quarry. Recently, a 21 luxury unit development was approved for Cylinder Beach; and 'in principle' approval was granted for the construction of a \$200 million 237 room resort on Samarinda Drive at Point Lookout.<sup>16</sup>

In other words, the composition of Stradbroke Island is changing. As mining declines (50% of employees were shed in the past year), some residents are departing while new groups (such as retirees and professionals) buy in. Stradbroke real estate is being advertised in the national business pages to attract investors to this relatively undiscovered paradise. Thus although demand has fallen, the cost of land, houses and units at Point Lookout has doubled in the last five years to an average of \$105,000, \$175,000 and \$160,000 respectively.<sup>17</sup> A recent real estate review concludes that:

*Straddie's future growth will come from tourism. Point Lookout will be the focal point. Extraordinary growth has occurred in the past two difficult years particularly at the Point. With the current level of activity and projects either on the drawing board or on the back burner this trend will continue and escalate.<sup>18</sup>*

On current activity and planned development, it may be that the changing residential population (of house design and occupiers) will result in more changes to the island than tourist development. In the longer term, the requirements of new owners for services and facilities warranted by the increased rates may facilitate the infrastructural developments on which a new generation of tourist activity will depend.

### Prospects

A new phase of development and a tourism-based economy is emerging on Stradbroke. There are new developments and redevelopments occurring despite the lack of new land being released (none since 1986 at Point Lookout for example). In accordance with the revision of the Redland Town Plan, consultants Loder and Bayly<sup>19</sup> have presented background papers and recommendations concerning an Open Space, Recreation, Conservation and Tourism Strategy for the Council. Among its recommendations, the consultants have identified the need for a new Control or Development/Land Release program to 'establish limits on the amount, location, density and timing of



development on the island, which will preserve its natural qualities as well as its appeal as an alternative destination'.<sup>20</sup> With respect to tourism, they concluded that:

*North Stradbroke Island and the adjoining Bay waters are the principal tourist attractions in the Shire. With the forecast population increase in south-east Queensland, North Stradbroke will take on enormous significance as a natural water-oriented recreational outlet for this growing population. The vision for the island should be to maintain its natural qualities while at the same time contributing to the diversity of recreational opportunities and accommodation choices available in south-east Queensland.*<sup>21</sup>

Specifically, they argued that the island should 'maintain the laid back, low key relaxing qualities of North Stradbroke as a holiday destination' but broaden the image 'to include more of the historic and environmental features of the island'. In terms of infrastructure, Loder and Bayly recommended better information services, the development of boating opportunities, upgraded access facilities, and 'a mix of essentially simple tourist accommodation which is compatible with natural settings and appropriate in scale to identified target markets'. In other words, the report emphasises the alternative qualities of Stradbroke as the key element of a tourism strategy based around environmental management and the regulation of recreational opportunities to accord with that aim.

Whether increased development proceeds or not, there are concerns that the infrastructure on the island should be improved to cater for new standards in recreational and tourist provision. There are studies under way on upgrading the barge and water taxi transit centre, and port facilities at Cleveland and Dunwich. Both initiatives are complicated by the number of owners and interests involved — Commonwealth, State, local council, sea bed and mining lessees. There have also been suggestions that special events could be organised around triathlons, surfing and festivals, and also a strategy to encourage small conferences (up to 250 people) to be held on the island. All these initiatives would be accommodated in the low-key, low-cost tourist strategy.

### Problems

In assessing the tourist potential of Stradbroke, Loder and Bayly found a number of resident concerns about tourism including:

- the need to regulate entry and usage to minimise environmental impact by providing more information and education of tourists, limiting the numbers of campers and caravaners, employing more rangers, issuing permits for four-wheel drives, limiting recreational and commercial fishing, introducing user pays systems, and instituting ways to deal with pollution, crime, litter, sewerage and garbage disposal.
- conflicts were observed between those advocating the development of infrastructure and opening up of new areas to visitors against those concerned with maintaining the natural environment through national parks and reserves. There was concern about the role of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the size of the National Park.
- conflicts between the amenity value and lifestyle of residents with those of new residents, tourists and developers.

These problems have been addressed in their proposed tourist strategy by various management techniques. For example, Loder and Bayly have adapted the concept of recreation opportunity zones for Stradbroke proposed by Chenoweth.<sup>22</sup> Zoning distinguishes the amenity value of different areas and establishing appropriate forms of recreational and tourist activity for each one. Chenoweth identifies five categories of recreational opportunity — primitive, natural, natural-vehicle, semi-developed and developed; he correlates these with different tourist requirements and specifications, including activities, access, terrain, vegetation, site requirements.

Loder and Bayly show how physical, social and managerial factors vary to provide quality settings for five styles of camping.<sup>23</sup> This would enable a management plan for areas with different zonings: 'primitive' campers in small groups accessing an area by foot via informal trails; small groups of 'natural' campers walking in on designated trails with minimal pit toilets and fire rings; 'natural vehicle-based' campers in four-wheel drives serviced with toilets, fire rings, tank water, rubbish, points and amenities; 'semi-developed' campers in large groups in two-wheel drives wanting a near-by carpark, power, water and drainage; and 'developed' campers in two-wheel drive vehicles in large numbers serviced by an adjacent carpark, individual sites with power, water, sewerage and phone. Such an approach allows fine discriminations to be made between users and uses within recommended

zones. This is an example of how zoning and management plans can establish acceptable kinds and levels of activity and impact.

### *Conclusions: A Tourism Strategy for Straddie*

The future for Stradbroke will inevitably be tied to tourism as a major industry. This will result in the displacement of traditional residents who cannot afford to buy into the new economy or do not wish to be involved in the new lifestyles associated with tourist development. While access to the island remains fairly primitive and tourist infrastructure minimal, the kind of visitors and kinds of activities will be restricted accordingly. The construction of a critical mass of new style facilities and activities may generate new infrastructure and attention to detail so often lacking in Australian tourism.

A critical issue will be creating a balance between new and upgraded infrastructure with sustainable improvements in access to the natural attractions and features of the island. Already Stradbroke has witnessed massive changes to its environment with, for example, the impact of mining. The issue is not so much preserving pristine areas (except where there are exceptional qualities) as in managing areas and regulating access (as has been done on the Great Barrier Reef.<sup>24</sup>) Options and policies must also take account of the Moreton Bay Strategic Plan which includes the island bays.<sup>25</sup>

The challenge is to define an image and tourist strategy for Straddie that is broadly acceptable to locals and tourists — based around bush and bay but emphasising sustainability, environmental experiences and management, while offering tourists a distinctive but budget escape. While nature tourism might seem the most appropriate, management and impact control are easier and more effective for more highly developed types of tourism, hence a trade-off has to be made between individual adventure activities and infrastructure-dependent ones. In the long run, more controlled forms of tourist activity may be of greater benefit to the island ecology and community.

Whatever the choices, community consultation and involvement should be part of the process of establishing feasible objectives because the exclusion of local views maximises conflict between locals and tourists later on. A small community like Stradbroke cannot afford to take that risk. If Stradbroke is to become a significant tourist destination in the future, the keynote should be quality — for tourists and locals alike. A strategy focused on STRADBROKE: THE NATURAL RESORT might be appropriate.

### *Acknowledgements*

I am grateful to assistance from Frances Somers, Brett Ellard, Regina Ganter, Tiiti Gill, Rae Green, Lynn Jones, Coral McQueen, Greg McNamara, Stephen O'Connor and John Wood.

### *Footnotes*

- 1 Lynn Jones, Point Lookout Real Estate, 1972.
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- 3 Athol Fitzgibbons 'The economics of sand-mining and other island industries', *Proceedings of the Royal Society Queensland* 86 (17) 1975 pp. 105-9; M. O'Keefe 'Some aspects of the history of Stradbroke Island', *Proceedings of the Royal Society Queensland* 86 (15) 1975 pp. 85-9.
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- 5 F. S. Colliver and F. P. Woolston 'The Aborigines of Stradbroke' *Proceedings of the Royal Society Queensland*, 86 (16) 1975 pp. 91-104.
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- 9 'Shire of Redland Population Projections — Districts', Town Planning Department, Redland Shire Council, 1992.
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- 16 Point Lookout Real Estate 'North Stradbroke Island' *Qld Real Estate Market Report* Spring edition 1992.
- 17 loc. cit.
- 18 loc. cit.

- 19 Loder and Bayly 'Redland Shire Open Space, Recreation, Conservation and Tourism Strategy: Background Paper No. 5: Outcomes from the First Round of Community Discussions Regarding Tourism', prepared by Richard Bramley and John Wood, Brisbane: Loder and Bayly 1992.
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- 21 loc. cit.
- 22 A. R. F. Chenoweth 'Recreational resources of North Stradbroke Island', in R.J. Coleman et al. (eds) *Focus on Stradbroke* Brisbane: Boolarong Publications 1984 pp. 371-84.
- 23 'Redland Shire Open Space, Recreation, Conservation and Tourism Strategy: Summary of Recommendations', prepared by Richard Bramley and John Wood, Brisbane: Loder and Bayly 1992.
- 24 Jennifer Craik *Resorting to Tourism* Sydney: Allen and Unwin 1991 pp. 135-71.
- 25 A draft of the strategic plan was prepared by the National Party government in 1989 but received widespread criticism. The Labor Party resolved to redraft the plan and has recently circulated this for comment. Further action is pending until after the 1992 state election.

## Tourism and Ecology — Are Sand Islands Vulnerable?

*Michael Liddle*

### *Introduction — Two Essential Considerations*

This seminar has focused very clearly on Stradbroke Island and its short and long term inhabitants. This of course includes all the plants and animals as well as humans of all races. However, there are two facts that underline many of the points made in the previous papers but have not as yet been overtly acknowledged.

1. However we regard the recent events of the last two hundred years and for thousands of years before that the changes in human occupation have been driven essentially by the steadily increasing number of people in the world (Table 1). Ten thousand years ago there were only about five million people in the world, today there are over five *billion*, 1,000 humans now stand where one stood at that time. An Aboriginal group of 38 humans is now equivalent to 38,000 people who, if they were to hold hands in a line it would stretch from Amity Point in the north the whole way to the southern tip of the island. The present population of Stradbroke Island is equivalent to just two people 10,000 years ago. The exponential growth continues at the rate of three *extra* people in the world every second. It is inevitable that this explosive pressure will be felt wherever the world is habitable by humans and Stradbroke Island is no exception. Individually and in groups people move around the world and like the atoms of a gas in a pressure vessel wherever the concentration is low, they move into that space. If the analogy were to hold completely the distribution of people would be uniform but adjustments occur because:
  - (a) the land can only support a certain variable and limited number; and
  - (b) as a result of social structures, but humans are always limited by the ecological capacity of their environment.

**Table 1**  
**World Population Estimates<sup>1</sup>**

|         |                |
|---------|----------------|
| 8000 BC | 5 000 000      |
| 0 AD    | 13 000 000     |
| 1000    | 253 000 000    |
| 1500    | 451 000 000    |
| 1600    | 516 000 000    |
| 1750    | 791 000 000    |
| 1850    | 1 019 000 000  |
| 1900    | 1 650 000 000  |
| 1930    | 2 231 000 000  |
| 1945    | 2 350 000 000  |
| 1950    | 2 819 000 000  |
| 1960    | 3 246 000 000  |
| 1970    | 3 897 000 000  |
| 1975    | 4 312 000 000  |
| 1980    | 4 403 000 000  |
| 1987    | 5 146 000 000  |
| 1990    | 5 261 000 000  |
| 2000    | 6 000 000 000  |
| 2110    | 10 500 000 000 |

In the case of Stradbroke Island the supporting environment extends as far as the limits of the food supply system. Certainly throughout south-east Queensland but for some food extending all around the world. This means that there is the supply potential to populate the island well beyond the present level as long as the community can pay the cost of their life support systems. What does this mean for those parts of the community that are (or were) accustomed to sustaining themselves from the local resources, not just the Aborigines and early settlers but the native plants and animals as well?

Whatever we think about the values it is inevitable that there will be an increase in the number of people in the world. The pressure on Stradbroke Island will increase until such time as the ecological balancing action takes place (AIDS?) or our social structure disintegrates and the life-support system breaks down.

2. The second introductory point is that nature is dynamic. A commonly held view or response is 'That's lovely — let's preserve it, this should be kept as it is'. But the fact is that nature is constantly changing. It never stays exactly as it is. There are systems that operate for long periods of time but the location of any particular segment of the natural environment within the system may change. For example, the sand dune succession or sequence of vegetation, starts when sand is deposited on the foreshore and the first plants colonise the accreting sand.<sup>2</sup> First Spinifex grass (*Spinifex hirsutus*) and goat's foot convulvulus (*Ipomoea pes-caprae*) then we may see the shrubs and finally the trees, she-oak (*Casuarina glauca*), banksia species (*Banksia integrifolia*, *B. serrata*) and eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus signata*, *E. intermedia*).

On Cooloola after some 30-50,000 years rainforest develops and after perhaps 100,000 years this degenerates to heathland and the nutrients have been leached from the sand.<sup>3</sup> This is a continual process of change but with a time scale that is in considerable excess of a political term of office, a civil servant's career, the life span of a commercial company, a monetary system or even a civilisation. Humans are thought to have arrived on Stradbroke a mere 6,000 years ago.<sup>4</sup>

When we are considering tourists, commercial and residential impacts we are looking at changing forces which have a very powerful and often very destructive impact on a changing subject. We can take steps to change the force but we can only affect the subject processes by destroying them, temporarily limiting them, or allowing them to proceed. In the short term we may think we have controlled nature but this is usually an illusion which can only be maintained for a few lifetimes. This then is the dynamic nature of the ecological environment that I am discussing in this paper.

#### *Environmental Response — The Disturbance Corridor and Recovery*

There is a considerable body of research examining the ecological changes caused by recreation. These are summarised in Figure 1.



Figure 2

Loss of vegetation biomass as a result of experimental trampling in a variety of habitats expressed as percentage of the original biomass or (e only) of the adjacent biomass.

- (a) and (b) Alpine habitat, Olympic National Park, Washington, USA.  
 (c) and (d) Spruce forest floor near Helsinki, Finland.  
 (e) Subtropical rain forest clearing, Brisbane Forest Park, Queensland, Australia.

(See Liddle 1988 for sources of data).<sup>6</sup>

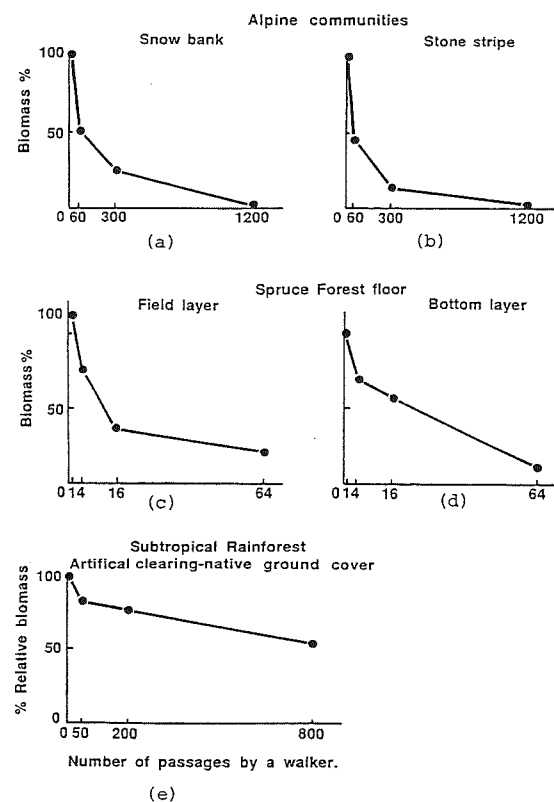


Figure 3

The relationship between the number of walking passages that reduce cover or biomass by 50%, and primary productivity.

Note both axes are logged. (See Liddle 1988 for sources of data).<sup>7</sup>

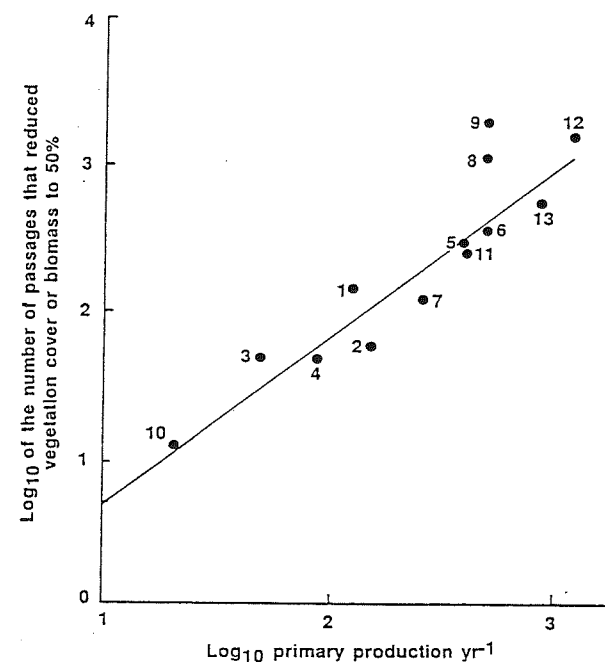
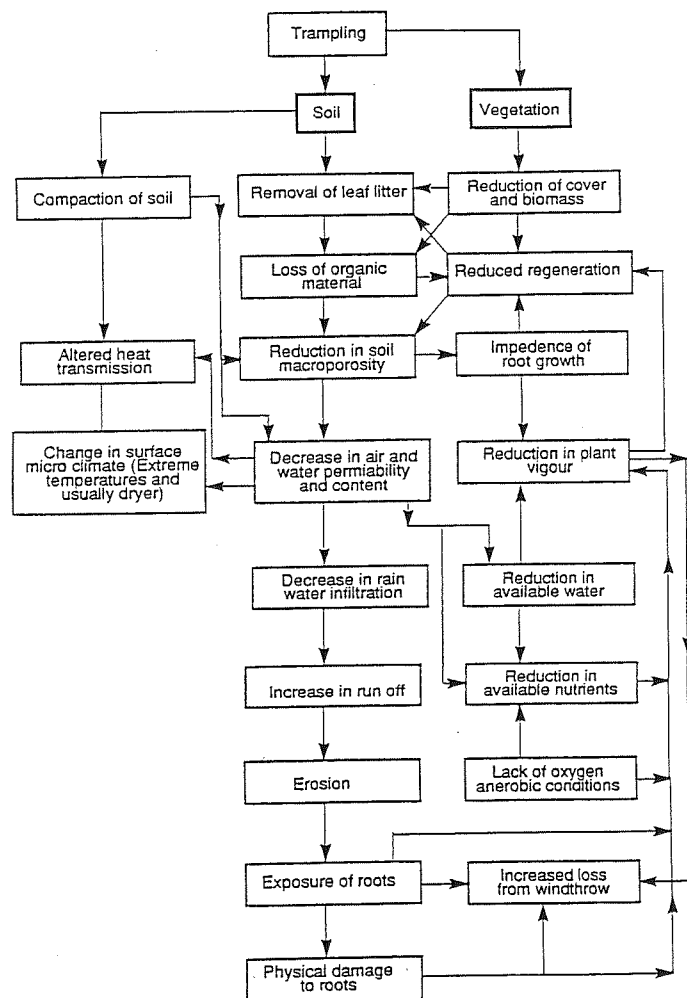


Figure 4

Changes in soil and vegetation which result from trampling.<sup>8</sup>

If a decision is taken to allow tourist access to a particular place then the actual size of the disturbance corridor should be considered for all the kinds of animals that inhabit it.

As shown by the work at Cooloola there is a gradual increase in biomass of the vegetation over the first 30-50,000 years. This increase may continue as long as the nutrients contained in the sesquioxides tightly bound to the sand grains are gradually being released. This supply is however gradually exhausted and then the nutrients are all contained in the soil and vegetation. If the vegetation is removed and the soil damaged then nutrients have to be restored either by the addition of fertiliser or the growth of legumes with nitrogen-fixing bacteria attached to their roots. These supplies need to be carefully balanced, probably over a period of hundreds of years if the original vegetation is to be restored. It certainly takes a period of two or three generations of the longest living plants in the system before the term 'natural' can really be applied to such a habitat. How old is the oldest *Banksia aemula* or *Eucalyptus polanchoniana* for example? Multiply this by two or three to estimate the return time of the Stradbroke Island vegetation and even then look at the pattern of the vegetation, for example, lines or squares or some other artificial configuration.

However, if a site is to be used for walking, camping or other forms of recreation then it can be strengthened by the addition of non-native pasture grasses and fertilised. This may be the preferred choice but it needs to be done in a cautious way with the knowledge that some species may be able to out-compete the native vegetation, for example Noogoora burr<sup>9</sup> (*Xanthium spp*) and many others.

The morale is that we have a very powerful technology and with power comes responsibility. In fact we have the ultimate in technical power that can destroy the planet and therefore we have the ultimate in responsibility for all our actions that affect any form of life on the earth.

### Recreation Demands and Supply

As indicated above there is a considerable body of knowledge about the ecological impacts of recreation. But how does this relate to users and management perceptions? One attempt to forge a link was made by Clark and Stanky in 1979.<sup>10</sup> They postulated a recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) which places environments on a perceptual axis which runs from built

environments to total wilderness. They then describe a range of attributes which correspond with certain places on that axis (modern to primitive). This was used by Kay and Liddle to place the tourist's expectations of the Great Barrier Reef in a user context (Figure 5).<sup>11</sup> Stradbroke Island probably fits into a similar place on the spectrum with a bit more built environment at one or two delimited locations. I doubt however if any visitors come to Stradbroke for the 'city plaza' except perhaps from Peel Island!

The consensus of this seminar seems to be that visitors come for their low-key, (reasonably-priced) and relatively wild experience, though few would expect to find total isolation in an undisturbed wilderness (the right-hand end of the axis). This interpretation indicates that the ecological considerations discussed above should take precedence over any other form of land use. In other words the supply is limited and over-use will destroy the very environment for which Stradbroke and the other sand islands are valued world wide.

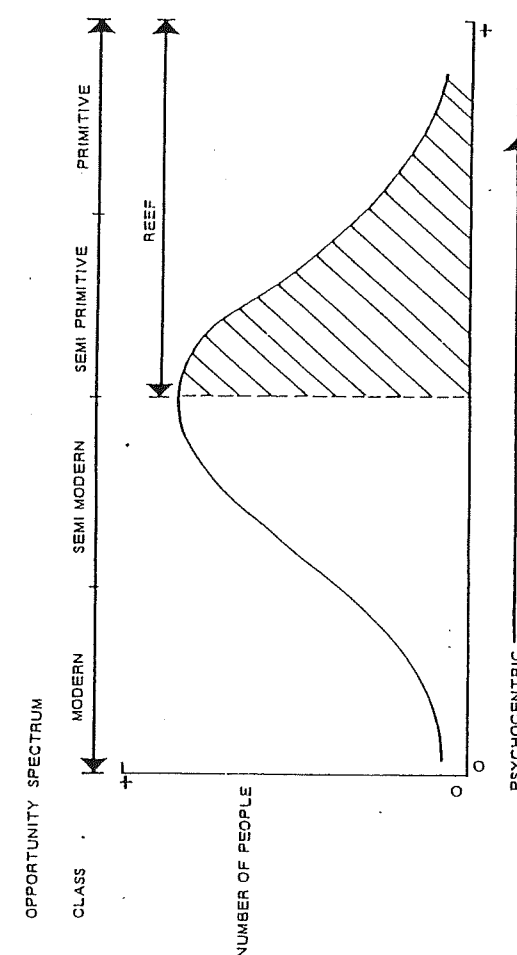
The major problem seems to be that the social or political time scales are so different from 'ecological time'. In fact the two scales are so different that we seem to be unable to consider them together or to take account of the long time frame while working within the limited short-term human life span, let alone a political lifetime.

However, environmental awareness *is* increased, especially as the recent climatic changes start to affect our monetary system through the insurance companies. The large sand islands off the coast of south-east Queensland are unique and of world importance. Judgements about appropriate actions, limitations or non-actions must now be ones that are appropriate for the next generation and the ones to follow.

Planners have an unenviable task of making decisions that may only win the support of the minority today if they are not to be condemned by the majority of the future. 'Hands off' and 'leave well alone' are in my opinion the best choices we can possibly make. 'There is wide agreement among scientists that the future of planet earth is at risk. Environmental problems resulting from human activities threaten the sustainability of global life-support systems.'<sup>13</sup> We may have already changed our planet to the point that the human race rapidly becomes extinct but if, as I hope, we have not, then we as a whole will be judged by what we leave for those who follow. The chaos of destruction or the stochastic processes of the natural environment?

Figure 5

**Relationship between visitor type and The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum.** Hatched area represents potential visitors to the Great Barrier Reef and Stradbroke Island. (Allocentric persons are defined as being self-confident, successful, high earners and frequent travellers who prefer uncrowded destinations. Psychocentric persons are, in contrast, unsure of themselves, low earners and infrequent travellers who seek the security of tours and familiar destinations).<sup>12</sup>





Footnotes

- 1 Estimates based on data in: A. K. Bates *Climate in Crisis. The Greenhouse Effect and What We Can Do* Summertown, Tennessee: The Book Publishing Co. 1990. S. Elsworth *A Dictionary of the Environment. A Practical Guide to Today's Most Important Environmental Issues* London: Grafton Books 1990. A. Goudie *The Human Impact. Man's Role in Environmental Change* Oxford: Blackwell 1981. E. McGraw *Population Today* London: Kay and Ward 1979. United Nations *Global Outlook 2000. An Economic, Social and Environmental Perspective* New York: United Nations Publications 1990.
- 2 M.T. Clifford and R.L. Specht 'The Vegetation of North Stradbroke Island, Queensland', St Lucia: University of Queensland Press 1979.
- 3 J. Walker, H. Thompson, I.F. Fergus and B.R. Tunstall 'Plant Succession and Soil Development in Coastal Sand Dunes of Subtropical Eastern Australia' in D. C. West, H. Shugart and D. B. Botkin (eds) *Forest Succession: Concepts and Application* New York: Springer Verlag 1981.
- 4 Gillian Alfredson 'The Aboriginal Use of St Helena Island, Moreton Bay — The Archaeological Evidence' in J. Covacevich et al. (eds) *Focus on Stradbroke* Brisbane: Boolarong 1981.
- 5 From M. J. Liddle 'Recreation and the Environment: The Ecology of Recreational Impacts, Section 2. Vegetation and Wear' Division of Australian Environmental Studies, Griffith University Working Paper 1/88, 1988.
- 6 loc. cit.
- 7 loc. cit.
- 8 From M. J. Liddle 'Recreation and the Environment: The Ecology of Recreational Impacts, Section 3. 'Soils and Wear' Division of Australian Environmental Studies, Griffith University Working Paper 1/89, 1989.
- 9 M. J. Liddle 'Noogoorabarr — a successful suite of Weeds' in R. L. Kitching *The Ecology of Exotic Animals and Plants* Brisbane: Jacaranda-Wiley 1986.
- 10 R. N. Clark and G. H. Stanky 'The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum: A Framework for Planning, Management and Research' *USDA. Forest Service General Technical Report PNW-98* Portland Oregon 1979.
- 11 A. M. Kay and M. J. Liddle *Tourist Impact on Reef Corals Report to Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority*. School of Australian Environmental Studies, Griffith University 1984.
- 12 Brian Huntley and 18 other scientists 'A Sustainable Biosphere: The Global Imperative', *British Ecological Society Bulletin* 23 (1) 1992.
- 13 A. M. Kay and M. J. Liddle 'Tourist Impact on Reef Corals 1984'. Report to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. School of Australian Environmental Studies, Griffith University 1984.

# Whose Island?

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