

# Friends of South Solitary Island Lighthouse



## NEWSLETTER

June 2020

Photo: courtesy Precision Helicopters

**The Friends of South Solitary Island Lighthouse (FOSSIL), in cooperation with the Coffs Harbour Regional Museum, hosted a pop-up exhibition of historical artefacts, artworks and images at Coffs Central Shopping Centre in March 2020.**

The exhibition titled 'Lighting the Way for 140 Years' was part of the lighthouse's 140<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations which was celebrated on 15 March. It included a number of original artworks representing the island and lighthouse and photographs, both amateur and professional, some of which were taken by members of FOSSIL when they visited the island to undertake voluntary maintenance activities in recent years.

The Coffs Harbour Regional Museum provided several items of historical significance for display, including the first automated light from South Solitary Island lighthouse and a heliograph used for communication over long distances such as island to shore.

"Besides being a great way to learn more about the maritime history of Coffs Harbour, this was a unique opportunity to see images and artworks on display for the first time ever," said FOSSIL President, Rob Trezise.

"Only through the generosity of Gowings and Coffs Central was this all made possible – we are very grateful for their support" Rob continued.



**Above:** the spectacular 'Lighthouse' cake created by Sweet Love Cake Couture not only looked good, it tasted great!

*Photo: Ian Clifford*



**Left:** FOSSIL President Rob Trezise shared his stories along with another former resident; Heather Dunn (nee McKinnon), pictured here at the exhibition launch on Friday 13 March attended by over fifty members and special guests.

*Photo: Evol Coutman*

The exhibition opened with a memorable 'Welcome to Country' from National Parks Discovery Ranger, Uncle Mark Flanders. Uncle Mark is a local Gumbaynggirr elder and shared stories of his people and their connection with land and water. Mark recalled his youth as a time when the offshore light was always a constant.

The Member for Coffs Harbour, Gurmesh Singh MP (pictured below), also gave an address; recognising FOSSIL members for their efforts to help maintain the maritime history which is so significant to the area.



There was plenty of information available from former residents as well as current authorities that manage the island and the light, including the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA).



The President of Lighthouses of Australia (LOA), Ian Clifford, travelled some distance to attend, as did renowned author and exhibition contributor John Ibbotson. Pictured above is John presenting a collection of his books to the lucky door prize winner on the night.



Gowings and Coffs Central Shopping Centre generously provided the exhibition space for the duration. Unfortunately, after the first week of opening the exhibition was forced to close in compliance with public health orders related to the COVID pandemic.

The delicious catering for the opening night (pictured below) was prepared by FOSSIL member Elise Currey. Attendees were delighted by the range of local produce available.



Precision Helicopters, in cooperation with FOSSIL and NPWS, provided information about tours to the island that will hopefully still be running sometime later this year. The island is only open to visitors on two weekends a year, typically in early August. Members and friends will be notified as soon as new dates are determined.



**Above:** a celebration underway at South Solitary Island in days gone by  
*Photo: courtesy Coffs Harbour Regional Museum*



FOSSIL member **David Yager** created a beautiful replica of the head keepers' quarters on South Solitary Island to assist with the collection of donations during the exhibition (pictured below).



**Exhibitors included Artist in Residence for FOSSIL, Elizabeth Tinker.**

**Above:** 'Cloudscape'

Elizabeth lives and works in Moonee Beach, NSW. "For many years my work has explored the natural light and reflected patterns found within the lakes, oceans and waterways of the Mid North Coast; life beneath the surface has been of great interest to me."

"Recent works of cloudscape explores the sensory experiences that are felt when we look up at the sky and feel the power of nature, as seeing and feeling the sublime can be an everyday encounter."

"Paintings are a self-reflection and a ponderous look at light and life. The physical act of walking and observing the landscape has produced a sensory experience and a body of work in oil paint that changes styles from realism to expressionism."

"The experience of being on South Solitary Island will stay with me for a long time... and I would love to return. It is a special place for all Australians to appreciate the harshness yet the beauty of the island and to gain a better understanding of the light housekeeper and their families that resided there."

Other exhibitors included artists Laurie Mossuto, Lizzie Connor, Karen Banff, Paige Sinclair and Trish Fox.

**Another Artist in Residence for FOSSIL was Jane Wilson. Jane's representation of 'Lydia's Ghost' (below) is haunting.**

"While I have dabbled in landscapes and still life, I have always been drawn to the figurative and love to capture something of the inner life of the subject. I'm inspired by a lifetime of reading and observation: watching and being interested in people and how they react and interact. I feel that the varied disciplines of my formal art training and my work in graphic design have informed my work."

Thanks to Coffs Harbour Marine  
Rescue and the Bunker Cartoon  
Gallery for their valuable  
contributions to the exhibition



## Birthday Cruise

A flotilla of yachts and power boats participated in a sail out to South Solitary Island and return to Coffs International Marina on Sunday, 22 March.

FOSSIL members were lucky enough to get the opportunity to participate with a special offer thanks to Chris Bramley and Whale Watch Experience who offered a significant discount on the cost of the tour. They also donated a generous portion of the proceeds from tour fees to FOSSIL.

Participants and spectators enjoyed the birthday celebrations afterwards with a barbecue, drinks and the cutting of the spectacular birthday cake at the Coffs Harbour Yacht Club. Many thanks to Commodore John Wait and Elise Currey from Coffs Harbour International Marina for organising the event.



**Above:** Rob enjoying a cruise to the Island with Whale Watch Experience.

## Optic Tours

South Solitary Island hosted lighthouse keepers and their families from 1880 until 1975 when the light was automated. In preparation for solar conversion, the first order lantern and optic were removed and relocated to the former site of the Coffs Harbour Regional Museum on the mainland.

Tours to inspect the original optic were planned to be conducted by the Coffs Harbour Regional Museum in March but were unfortunately delayed due to closure as a result of the COVID pandemic. It is hoped the tours will be offered again sometime later this year. Information and bookings will be made available on the Museum's Facebook page via Eventbrite or at the Museum; 215 Harbour Drive, Coffs Harbour.



**Above:** the lighthouse surrounded by scaffolding in preparation for painting and other maintenance works. *Photo: Josh Cooper*

## AMSA Maintenance

Lighthouses are an integral part of the fabric of Australia's maritime history – for more than two centuries their beacons have guided seafarers to safety.

The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) is the custodian of about 500 aids to navigation, including more than 60 heritage listed lighthouses across Australia's coastline. **South Solitary Island Lighthouse is one of those.**

Lighthouses were built to stand the test of time, but like all infrastructure, they require ongoing maintenance.

Every year, AMSA conducts periodic routine inspections and maintenance work across their vast lighthouse network.

The South Solitary Island Lighthouse works project involves a range of improvements including internal and external repainting, repairs to cracking to concrete, improved waterproofing and replacing doors.

An upgraded electrical system will also be installed on completion of the paint works. That will include some safety improvements such as moving batteries to the ground floor and installing enclosures to house equipment, as this site is open to tourists.

It's a challenging but rewarding logistical exercise and one that is paramount for maritime safety and the preservation of these important historical sites.



## Thank You

Thank you to all the contributors and FOSSIL members who were involved in the lighthouse birthday celebrations this year.

***Working bees with the National Parks and Wildlife Service have been postponed until further notice. We will notify our members as soon as volunteer activity is programmed to occur.***

## MORE INFORMATION & Membership Enquiries

### Friends of South Solitary Island Lighthouse

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