

US giant 'steals' sand

Greg Stolz

AMERICAN minerals giant Unimin has been charged with illegal sand mining on North Stradbroke Island.

The State Government filed the charges, which carry penalties of almost \$800,000, in Cleveland Magistrates Court yesterday.

The move comes after Unimin this week lost a Supreme Court fight with the Government over the legality of some of its lucrative sand-mining operations on North Stradbroke.

Unimin had been under investigation by the Government for 12 months for allegedly removing sand from the island against the law.

Its Queensland offices were raided last December by Environmental Protection Agency officials who seized items including computers and files.

In August, *The Courier-Mail* revealed the company had been issued with "show cause" notices following "detailed investigations" by the Department of Environment and Natural



GOOD AS GOLD: Sand mining on North Stradbroke Island is lucrative, but carries heavy penalties for illegal sand extractions.

Resources into mining activities on North Stradbroke.

The expose showed how large parts of the eco-sensitive island resembled a barren moonscape after a tripling of land clearing for sand mining.

Unimin then launched Supreme Court action challenging the Government's ruling that it was illegal to sell low-grade silica sand, which in its purest form is used to make glass, to the construction industry.

But in a judgment handed down this week, the court ruled the so-called

waste sand was not a mineral under the Mineral Resources Act and Unimin was not entitled to sell it.

Conservationists this week wrote to Premier Anna Bligh demanding Unimin be prosecuted for "stealing" sand from the island.

Yesterday, the Department of Environment and Resource Management charged the company with carrying out sand mining without an effective permit and with breaching the Environmental Protection Act.

Climate Change and Sustainability

Minister Kate Jones said the Government had "resolved to take action against Unimin for illegal sand extractions".

"The State Government takes its environmental responsibilities very seriously and will take action against anyone not meeting their environmental and legal obligations," she said.

"We also continue progressing our commitment to convert more of North Stradbroke Island to national park and to ensure rehabilitation of previously mined areas."

Friends of Stradbroke Island president Sue Ellen Carew said Unimin should be charged with stealing under the Criminal Code "to reflect the severity of the crimes".

"Unimin has shown that it is not a fit and proper company to hold mining leases on North Stradbroke Island," she said.

"The Government should now do the right thing and decline to renew expired mining leases and end sand mining on the island to enable nation-

al park to be declared for the benefit of all Queenslanders."

Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland president Simon Baltais applauded the decision to prosecute Unimin but said the Government should "throw the book at them".

"They have been taking a public resource, flogging it off and making a quid out of it," he said.

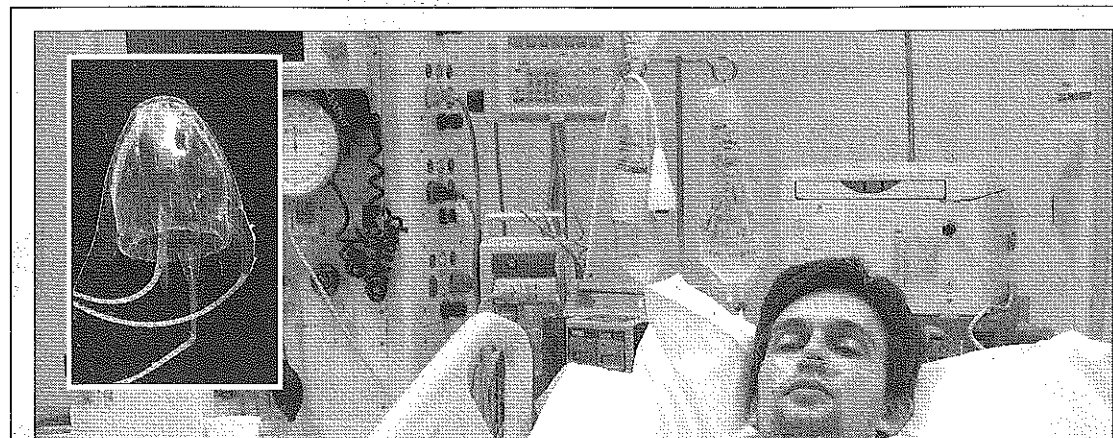
"The public needs to be duly compensated and Unimin should be sent a very strong message."

A Unimin Australia Ltd spokesman said the company was "surprised" at the decision to prosecute it.

"UAL will carefully consider today's events and respond in due course," he said.

The charges are the latest setback for Unimin after subsidiary Consolidated Rutile was last year refused permission by Redlands Shire Council to remove and sell up to 500,000 tonnes of tailing sand from North Stradbroke Island.

CRL is fighting the decision.



Slip, slop, slap as temps set to rise

IT WILL be a mostly fine weekend in the southeast with hot conditions to return mid-week.

Temperatures should rise to 31C in Brisbane today and tomorrow but be hovering in the mid 30s by Wednesday.

The Gold Coast and Ipswich might get a thunderstorm today and tomorrow.

Rain is developing over Cape York as a

weak low crosses the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Seqwater spokesman Alex McDowell said recent scattered showers had failed to boost Brisbane's Wivenhoe, Somersett or North Pine dams, with combined levels at 71.9 per cent. Baroon Pocket Dam on the Sunshine Coast was at 83.5 per cent capacity, while the Gold Coast's Hinze Dam was at 87.1 per cent.

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