

VIEWPOINT

It is time for the Government to 'think globally, act locally' by protecting North Stradbroke Island from further destruction.
Sue Ellen Carew and Simon Baltais advocating decisive Bligh Government action to stop sandmining on North Stradbroke Island.

Struggle for Straddie

Mining should make way for national parks, write **Sue Ellen Carew and Simon Baltais**

IN 1990, the Goss Labor government considered it appropriate that at least half of North Stradbroke Island be declared national park. It did not happen. Less than 1 per cent of the island around Blue Lake – a national park since the 1960s – is protected.

More than 70 per cent of the island is under mining lease, with the public excluded under threat of prosecution and mining destroying a valuable natural asset.

Given greater Brisbane's need for more public open green space and the fact that about 20 of the mining leases have expired or are due to expire soon, it makes sense to bring mining to an end and declare most of the island national park without delay.

Since 1990 the population of greater Brisbane has doubled. Government policy appears to support population growth at unprecedented rates, despite infrastructure struggling to cope.

Premier Anna Bligh's website recognises the acute need for more national park and public open space – it records that greater Sydney has 49 per cent public open space, while our area is only 19 per cent.

Declaring North Stradbroke Island a national park will help redress this imbalance. An unprecedented opportunity exists – with mining leases that have expired, and more expiring soon.

Renewal of the expired leases is being considered by the Government, which can, under the Mineral Resources Act, refuse to renew with no compensation payable to the mining company – Unimin Australia Limited, which is owned by a Belgian family through a US holding company.

Two of the expired leases are very large. They comprise 6019ha. ML 1117 is the key lease. If it is renewed, ancient dunes and pristine old-growth forests in the proposed path of the mine will be destroyed.

North Stradbroke Island is a standout option for a national park because not only is it accessible to the largest concentration of Queensland's population but, importantly, the Government already owns the land so there is no cost in buying it.

There is also an opportunity to give the island's indigenous population, many of whom have a 15-year-old unresolved native title claim, an opportunity to be employed and otherwise engaged in preserving and co-managing their traditional lands, as has occurred with



DIGGING IN: Mining leases cover about 70 per cent of North Stradbroke Island.

national parks in the Northern Territory and north Queensland.

It is almost universally recognised that eco-tourism is the future – yet mining continues to destroy this.

Tourists are attracted to intact landscapes formed over many thousands of years. Some of the sand dune systems that mining completely destroys have been dated as 150,000 years old.

Similarly, the complex vegetation and other ecosystems that took thousands of years to develop and which mining destroys are unlikely to ever be replicated.

The island is known for its wonderful and diverse array of flora and fauna. It has magnificent freshwater lakes and its wetlands are internationally listed.

The island's koala population is genetically distinct from the mainland species and it is one of the only separate island populations.

In a pre-election letter to island residents, Premier Anna Bligh indicated her

Government believed that North Stradbroke Island... "should be protected and preserved for future generations".

The mining company employs about 250 workers.

Fewer than half live on the island. By 2013, when one of the three mines is scheduled to close, about half of these jobs will go. The island's mines cannot be compared to the mines of central Queensland. Those mines employ many thousands and contribute vast sums to the state's economy. Retaining mining on North Stradbroke Island makes little economic sense and the profits go overseas. The future value of North Stradbroke Island in terms of tourism and quality of lifestyle for Queenslanders – particularly those in the southeast – lies in protecting and preserving, not destruction.

Mining usually provides transitory employment. The Queensland Conservation Council and Tangalooma Resort management issued a joint media release last year

If leases are renewed... ancient dunes will be destroyed

supporting the establishment of an eco-resort adjoining national park on North Stradbroke Island.

The Tangalooma resort employs between 300 and 400 people, depending on season. A state-of-the-art eco-resort on the bay side of North Stradbroke, with guests brought by boat (as occurs at Tangalooma) could be expected to triple the employment lost by ending mining with minimal impact on the island's infrastructure. The Government must "think globally, act locally" by protecting North Stradbroke Island from further destruction and thus make a valuable contribution to the world's environmental challenges.

It's time for a national park – not mining – on North Stradbroke Island.

Information: savestraddie.com

Sue Ellen Carew is president of the Friends of Stradbroke Island. Simon Baltais is state president of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland.

The world stage

"WE mustn't look at Greece's financial crisis as a black cloud, because it also presents the country with a new opportunity. Prime Minister George Papandreou is in a position where he can make important decisions that go beyond fiscal measures and influence more than the economy. Opening closed-shop professions, trimming the red tape that keeps so many good and profitable initiatives from moving ahead, and making work regulations more flexible so that they reflect contemporary reality are some of the measures that he must implement very soon. If he waits, he will be making a big mistake, much like his predecessor Costas Karamanlis did."

Kathimerini, Greece

"CONTROVERSY surrounding the alleged cyber-attack on Google is becoming more absurd as analysts in the US continue their attempts to prove the fallacy that the Chinese Government is behind last month's hacking attacks. Instead of making groundless accusations against a country the US has vowed to build trust with, it will be far more significant if the world's superpower puts an end to this farce and works with China to bring the real perpetrators to law. Washington (must) weigh the interests of a single company against national interests in maintaining a sound relationship with the world's biggest developing country. It's a test for real statesmanship and only those with insight could pass with credit."

China Daily

Word for word



I and other union secretaries have been contacted by state MPs stating their opposition to the Bligh plans

Rail, Tram and Bus Union chief Owen Doogan in a report on the impact of privatisation



I don't think (diplomatic appointments) will be on the agenda in the next 24 months

Fiji Prime Minister Commodore Frank Bainimarama warns that unless sanctions were lifted, Fiji would not approve high commissioners from Australia and New Zealand



It is a serious problem... the commercial real estate losses and loan problems are probably the biggest threat to our smaller, regional banks

US Federal Reserve chairman Ben Bernanke warning of more bank failures in the US



We will not let the matter rest

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd vows to take action after Australian passports were used in the assassination of a Hamas leader in Dubai