

Straddie draws

Locals fight mining push

SPECIAL REPORT

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THERE'S trouble in paradise.

A showdown is looming on North Stradbroke Island, one of the world's most beautiful natural wonderlands.

In one corner are conservationists and concerned locals, and in the other, a Belgium-owned resources giant, Unimin, keen to expand its sand-mining operations.

Veteran eco-campaigner John Sinclair, central in halting sand mining on Fraser Island, is the latest to join the battle.

"There is just no question about it: sand mining destroys the landscape," he said. "Most of the people going to Stradbroke Island would prefer there was no more mining."

But Unimin has hit back with a campaign pushing its green

credentials and the millions of dollars it injects into the local economy.

Environmentalists and pockets of residents of Stradbroke Island say the campaign has reached a critical point, with 20 expired mining leases hanging in the balance of a State Government decision. The leases cover 8000ha of land – about 30 per cent of the island. Some expired years ago, but mining firms can continue on the land pending a government decision.

Green groups have ramped up pressure on the Government to refuse to renew the mining leases. They want the land converted to national park.

North Stradbroke Island was last month named as home to one of the world's top 10 beaches. But Ecotourism Australia chief Kym Cheatham warned mining activity could quickly kill its eco-reputation.



A GRAND CANYON: Residents say mining is destroying the island's natural appeal.

Three separate court battles over sand mining on the island are in progress, with one of those set to determine whether Queensland Construction Materials, a subsidiary of Unimin, can sell up to 500,000 tonnes of sand a year.

Resident groups are also pushing for the Government to refuse to renew the contro-

versial ML1117 Enterprise mining lease, saying it would devastate some of the island's most prized habitats. Unimin, which has launched an advertising blitz, has confirmed expansion plans on the site.

Residents watchdog group, the Stradbroke Island Management Organisation, said ecotourism could create more

jobs than mining and offer a more sustainable future for the island.

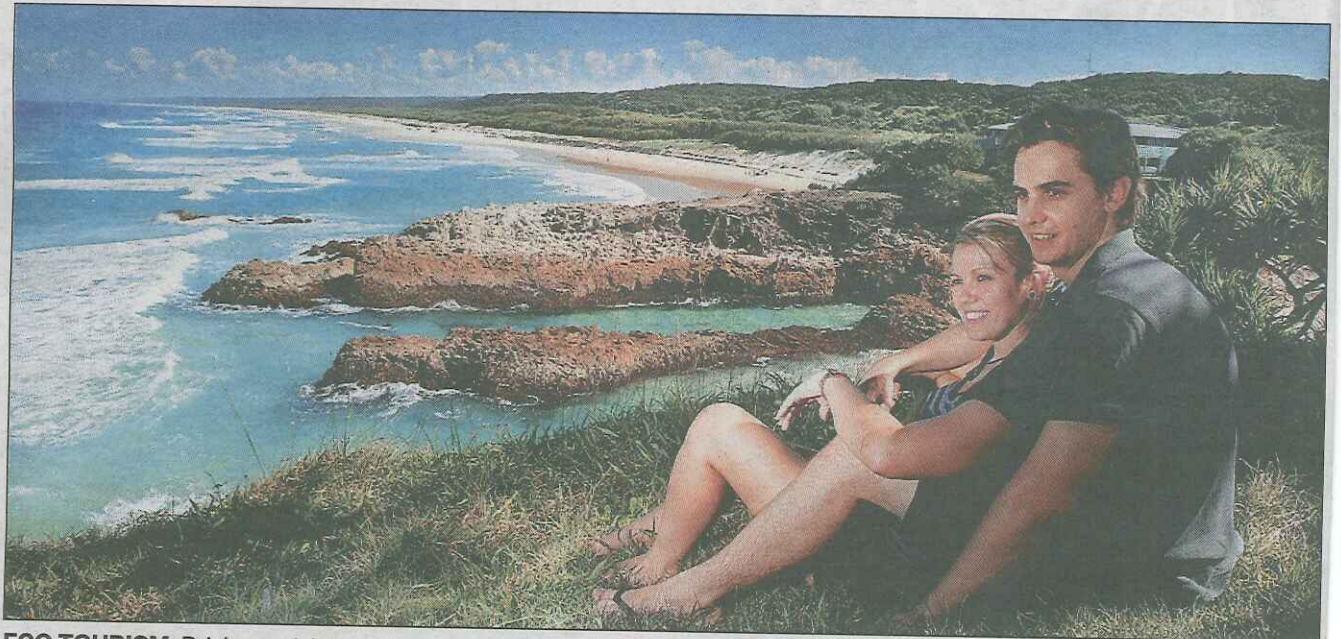
But SIMO member Dr Jan Aldenhoven said that was impossible while 90 per cent of the island was off-limits to the public. About half of the island is under mining lease, while another 40 per cent is unallocated state land.

line in the sand

INDUSTRY ISLAND



- Sand mining began on North Stradbroke Island in the 1950s.
- North Stradbroke is the only sand island off the southeast coast where sand mining is allowed.
- Mining leases cover about half of the island.
- 46 per cent of mining leases are controlled by Belgium-owned mining firm Unimin.
- 20 mining leases are being considered for renewal.
- Mediation with indigenous residents is continuing after a Native Title Claim over the island.



ECO TOURISM: Brisbane visitors Rebecca and Mitchell Christensen, both 25, on Stradbroke Island. Pictures: Luke Marsden

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures suggest up to 80 per cent of the island's more than 900-strong resident workforce worked in industries other than mining. Unimin employs 270 staff, of which 145 live on the island.

Climate Change and Sustainability Minister Kate Jones said the Government was

working on options for the future of Stradbroke Island, with mining being one consideration.

"For the first time, tourism and hospitality jobs have outstripped jobs from mining," she said. "Not only should there be expanded national park but a more strategic approach to planning and allocating future

land use for development and the community."

Straddie Bakery manager Pam Borey has lived on the island for 39 years and is married to a miner. She said miners made up 30 per cent of her customers.

"I have no doubt if the mining wasn't here we would not survive," Mrs Borey said.

Unimin sustainability manager Paul Smith said one in five permanent residents were miners, injecting wages of \$9 million into the island.

He said mining added \$70 million a year to the Redlands region, including rates, fees, wages, grants and mining royalties.

"The support we give is the

economic base-load for the island outside of holiday periods," he said.

Unimin said it supported the staged expansion to national park, including exhausted mining areas.

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