



The Friends of Stradbroke Island Association Inc.

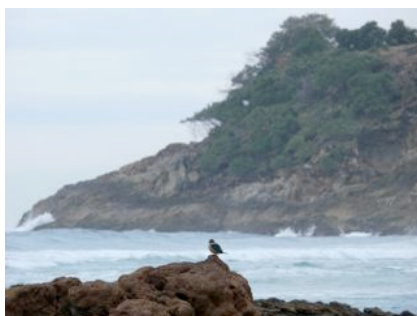
Newsletter No. 60 July 2011

FOSI, est. 1988, is dedicated to the protection of the natural environment of North Stradbroke Island and its surrounding waters. FOSI also works to ensure that urban and economic development of the island is founded upon the principles of environmental protection and preservation of the unique urban characteristics of its townships.

MEMBERSHIP RATES, 2011: Individual \$15.00 Family \$20.00 Concession \$5.00

The postal address of FOSI is PO Box 167, Point Lookout Qld 4183.

Island life. . .



Sacred Kingfisher



Striated Heron

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HIGH COURT VICTORY

In the High Court of Australia in Canberra on June 9 the mining company's final attempt to prolong the mining industry on Stradbroke for another 100 years was rejected. This brings to an end the company's plan to remove and sell large quantities of island sand for construction purposes. The new NSI legislation at least prevents any future application for Council approval.

FOSI, SIMO, native title owners, other conservationists and members of the local community waged a lengthy legal battle and were rewarded with a significant victory.

This proposal involved noisy and polluting trucks roaring through the streets of Dunwich and clogging up the ferry terminal entry point, at a rate of one every three minutes. It also would have meant continued domination of the island by the mining industry long after extractable minerals had run out.

All this impact on safety and peace of islanders and tourists was for the sake of ten jobs! (This figure was contained in the company's application for planning permission to the Redland City Council)



Sand heaps now need revegetation

NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND HIGH COURT DECISION MEANS MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

The recent High Court decision (9.6.11) rejecting sand mining company Sibelco's attempt to cling on to its construction sand business proposal exposes the deception in both the miner's and the government's public statements about the potential future of mining on Stradbroke. Some background is necessary. Sibelco is a privately owned Belgian company which owns all three sand mines on the island. It has owned the smaller Vance silica mine since 2001. In mid-2009 it bought the two mineral sand mines (extracting zircon, rutile and ilmenite) from Consolidated Rutile Limited, then a public company. This was Sibelco's first mineral sand mining venture.

Prior to selling out, CRL had duties to report honestly to its shareholders and the Stock Exchange. It revealed¹ that mineral sand mining on Stradbroke Island would end by 2027 – perhaps as early as 2020 – assuming expired leases were renewed. CRL announced that, to prolong company profits via mining interests on the Island, it had a proposal to sell non-mineral sand to the construction industry. It commenced stockpiling sand, ignoring rehabilitation obligations. The Government turned a blind eye, and continues to ignore these huge stockpiles which can be seen from the mainland.

In late 2007 CRL lodged an application with the Redland City Council for planning permission to remove and sell 500,000 tonnes of sand per year. Based on the size of its stockpile, CRL could have had a continuing business for another 100 + years. To enhance the company's value, CRL made no secret of this future plan.

Although the local council rejected the proposal in August 2008, the company appealed, maintaining it was confident the council decision would be overturned in the Courts. CRL nevertheless decided that it was time to sell out to Sibelco – before the appeals were heard.

The High Court decision exposes the Government to ridicule. In April 2011 the Government, led by Anna Bligh and Kate Jones, the then Environment minister, rushed through the *North Stradbroke*

Island Protection and Sustainability Act. It is a misnomer. It neither protects nor sustains the Island, rather it sidestepped existing laws to renew critical expired leases to enable destructive mineral sand mining to continue until 31 December, 2019. The so-called Enterprise 'restricted mine path' within the Act, used to sell the plan to some environmentalists, has recently been doubled in size by the Environment minister, reducing the amount of area 'saved' by 62%. Unfortunately this increase was predictable – see the FOSI/SIMO submission² to all MP's prior to the Bill being passed without amendment. The Act also extended other key expired leases to allow the Vance silica mine to continue until 2025, despite the Court of Appeal's findings relating to unlawful mining and unresolved criminal charges relating to that mine.

The government has portrayed itself as protecting Straddie's environment. Prior to the High Court decision it may have convinced some people that allowing destructive sand mining to continue for another 14 years was reasonable when measured against a 100+ year mining related future, deceptively referred to by the Bligh government in various attempts in the media and parliament to justify its actions. But now that the High Court has finally stripped that future away, the real measuring stick becomes Fraser Island. In 1976, sand mining was stopped on Fraser in just 6 weeks, despite the same scaremongering about economic doom as we have seen from Sibelco. No one regrets ending mining on Fraser Island. It's Stradbroke's turn to be protected in fact, rather than fiction.



View from the ferry

¹ Go to www.savestraddie.com to view the CRL disclosures and 'fact sheets' – under the library-resources tab.

² See library-resources tab at www.savestraddie.com for copy of submission

THE EIGHTEEN MILE SWAMP



Swamps fringe the Northern, Eastern and Southern shores of North Stradbroke Island. The Eighteen Mile Swamp, a great trough in the sand lying seaward of the huge dunes of the main sand mass is kept full of fresh water by seepage from the sand mass rather than surface run off. Straddie is the southernmost high dune sand mass in Australia and the second-largest sand island in the world after the World Heritage Listed Fraser Island. This swamp teems with life and interest and is so special that it is included within the Moreton Bay RAMSAR site, recognised as one of the world's premier wetlands. It is in fact the longest wetland of its type in the world.

It is only this year that it has finally been given the highest form of regulatory protection available in Queensland by being declared National Park. The park has been named NAREE BUDJONG DJARA by indigenous people on the island who are engaged in its joint management with the state. This level of protection has been a long time coming - the last National Park was declared on the island in the 1960's at Blue Lake. The tally of areas on the island under high protection is now 20%. The promised 80% National Park by 2026 is still a promise and is not enshrined in any legislation.

Extending from about 3.5 km south of Point Lookout to Swan Bay this great area of dense vegetation looks inviting from afar. Closer contact, however, reveals an environment challenging for human contact. Since its formation about 6,000 years ago it remains relatively untouched by mining and disturbance to the peat forming process. This occurs below the surface mat of tea-tree, reeds, ghania (a tall razor-sharp grass) and ferns as the sea level in this locality was up to 7 metres below the present level approximately 8,000 years ago and up to 1 to 1.5 metres above 6,000-6,500 years ago.

It has been determined that this back barrier swamp formed during a less than 1 metre fall in the sea level since. This allowed a new beach to form eastwards and thus prevented the westward movement of sea water. The swamp, which receives its water from the island dunes, contains Freshwater Creek which is barely discernible in much of the Northern section. It is surprisingly deep where it enters the sea water conditions of the mangrove and palm swamp adjacent to the shallow sea of Swan Bay.

In the last sixty years there has been a noticeable increase in tea-tree and weeds (groundsel, etc) in lieu of reeds in the southern and mid sections of the swamp. This may be caused by an increase in

salt-water ingress from Swan Bay with a slight increase in sea level or the extraction of fresh water for the mainland. The peat in the fresh water area is about 10 metres deep and consists of 4 metres of fibrous peat overlying 6 metres of an older gel-like material of embryonic coal. Hydrogen sulphide gas is evident in the anaerobic decomposition of the peat. This gas is also more noticeable where sea-water enters in the southern area.

Periodic fires have influenced the swamp environment but the indigenous people may have used this as a hunting device. The swamp wallaby, which may have been hunted, is a fine red-golden coloured animal unique to the island. In dry periods fire can reduce the swamp to ash in a matter of days. The recovery of the vegetation, however, indicates that fire adaptation is a characteristic of the present dense vegetation. Fire may also have been used by the original inhabitants to allow easier access to the beach from the inland. There are middens within the swamp on isolated and rare sand-rises which indicate old aboriginal pathways. Mosquitoes are abundant, especially at night in the southern section, in spite of the presence of fish in all areas which feed on their larvae. This, as well as the disease inherent in the anaerobic bacteria, is another deterrent to human ingress.

Sand dunes indicate past severe south-east wind gales. These dunes intrude into the swamp and are only stabilized by the growth of vegetation. The steep sand escarpment west of the swamp was thought by many to be signs of a relatively recent incursion when the sea beat upon the base of these hills. Research recently, however, has determined that this was at a time before the swamp was formed about 6,500 years ago. In fact, the swamp is the historically most recent formation on the island.

The swamp also contains a mystery ship-wreck described by Fred Campbell of Amity in a manuscript handed to Tom Welsby before he died in 1898. He thought that it was the wreck of Pamphlett and Finnegan's ship, positioned he described as 4 miles north of Swan Bay and a mile in from the sea. This is, of course, well into the swamp. All fire-blackened remains above water-level have disappeared since 1954. Enough descriptions exist to describe this ship as heavily built, oak-framed, sheathed in Muntz metal and containing copper and iron bolts and rivets. It has been described as 30 yards long, aligned as a bee-

line north south with the bow facing north. The use of Muntz metal and copper defines a possible time of its construction. Another time bracket is that it was an apparently unknown wreck after Moreton Bay was settled. Fred Campbell gained knowledge of it from the tribal elders of Moongalba and Amity and wrote that the first white men the aborigines had ever seen were Pamphlett and Finnegan, the discoverers of the Brisbane River. Later, it was Welsby himself who researched this and wrote that they, with Parsons, had been wrecked on Moreton Island.

This suggests that the mystery ship was abandoned further south by its crew at sea and may have been a drifting wreck washed ashore onto the beach to await an intense cyclonic storm or a tsunami to carry it into the swamp. Of the over 6,000 known Australian ship-wrecks only one appears to satisfy these conditions.



After the Second World War a timber causeway of two heavy hardwood planks supported by cross-beams on driven hardwood posts provided access to the Blue Lake from the beach. A small rowing boat was also provided at a deep section, presumably Freshwater Creek, too wide to span by the planks. It was thought that the army had constructed this for either recreation or defence. Alas, it is no more.

The sand mining company in the late 1950's had a dredge working the lease covering the beach sand dunes. To convey the concentrate to the large facilities at Dunwich a high moving aerial ropeway with moving hoppers led directly across the swamp to the present sand-loading facility. Steel towers to support the pulleys feeding the steel cables were erected across the island at intervals including three in the dredged swamp. Remains of these may still exist in the water where they were collapsed when the whole affair became obsolete. The swamp under the ropeway was dredged and cleared as access for a small motorised barge. At the northern end of the swamp the Keyholes are clear freshwater lakes, delightful for canoeing, but

are now close to the Yarraman mine and, therefore, not accessible to the public as it is a prohibited mining area.

As with most complex natural systems there is insufficient information on the hydrology (movement, distribution and quality of water) regarding the 18 Mile Swamp and much of Straddie's groundwater systems. The groundwater is difficult to monitor because of the dynamic character of salt and freshwater interfaces. It has not yet been properly determined how either groundwater extraction or the potential subsequent saltwater intrusion will directly affect the swamp ecosystem and indirectly affect the quality of the water in the surrounding connected ecosystems and the major body of the aquifer. For this reason all groups considering the swamp as a resource (mining and the Redland City Council) have been running the gauntlet over the years. The mining process requires large amounts of water. This water has been obtained from the swamp and its connecting groundwater systems. The miners use spears to monitor water levels around the mines but with the deep dredge mining depths below the water table, draining and flooding have occurred in areas surrounding mines on a number of occasions. The drained Lake Kounpee to the West of the Island is an example. The 18 Mile Swamp could still experience negative effects with deep dredge mining continuing close by at Enterprise. The Redland water supply has also depended on extraction from the swamp for many years. The risks of water extraction are ongoing. The precautionary principle really needs to come into play in the care of this new National Park.



Enterprise mine encroaching on swamp

Since 1988 the Centre for Coastal Management at the Southern Cross University has been conducting ongoing biological monitoring of 18 Mile Swamp for the RCC. In 2002 this included aquatic invertebrates, frogs and birds. New species of invertebrates and other forms of life were discovered that were not found on the mainland. Some life forms depend entirely on the existence of freshwater for feeding, living or breeding. If changes occur in the swamp the following could be endangered: the Oxleyean Pygmy Perch *Nannoperca oxleyana*, Water Mouse *Xeromys myoides*, 5 plant species including the Yellow Swamp Orchid *Phaius bernaysii*, the Swamp daisy *Olearis hygrophila*, and the Wallum froglet *Crinia signifera*, the little acid loving frogs that are dependent upon the reeds for their existence. The wetlands are feeding and resting grounds for many species of local and migratory birds.

The declaration of National Park under joint management is partial recognition of the traditional ownership and continuing spiritual attachment of the local indigenous people to this area. Some traditional owners point to the wiping out of the middens and many cultural places by past mining on the adjacent beaches. But the recognition of the 18 Mile Swamp as National Park at least brings public attention to its natural values and puts the onus on all to tread lightly on the delicate swamp.

Duncan McPhee & Angela McLeod

Thanks to Kathy Townsend and Emma Lewis from the UQ Marine Research Station for providing background information

Recent Research

Recent research from Griffith University indicates that the freshwater shrimp *Caridina indistincta* and a sympatric freshwater fish *Rhadinocentrus ornatus*, found only on the East coast of North Stradbroke Island, have genetic heritage dating from the Pleistocene era (~ 100-300 thousand years ago). Interestingly, this coincides with most estimates of the age of the dunal landscapes and indicates just how ancient and unique the island is.



Shearwater deaths



Tawny Frogmouth babies – too cute for words!



The Green Man at Notre Dame, Paris



The Green Man at Straddie

Marine Plastic Kills Seabirds

Sea birds which forage in the Tasman Sea are eating plastic, thinking it is food and are dying in large numbers on Lord Howe Island. Large amounts of plastic are found in the stomachs of shearwaters and one survey found more than 200 pieces in one bird alone and up to 50 in others. The plastics have very sharp edges and tear their internal organs. Toxic substances bind to this plastic, and mercury, toxic to birds at 4 parts per million, was found to be as high as 30,000ppm. 95% of nesting shearwaters on Lord Howe Island were found to have plastic in their stomachs.

It was thought that the huge N Pacific garbage patch or gyre north of Hawaii, which gathers plastics from N America and Asia, was the source of their problem but the migratory birds had none in their stomachs when they arrived in September. From Lord Howe, they forage in the Tasman Sea off the coast of NSW, Vic and Tasmania and a few months later are found to be full of plastic.

The shearwater numbers have halved since 1970 on Lord Howe and very few chicks were found this year. Recently, a giant petrel which roams from the Antarctic to the Tasman Sea, died at Lakes Entrance and it was found to have a piece of plastic lodged in its crop and Styrofoam in its stomach. Marine plastics accumulate and concentrate chemicals such as PCBs and the pesticide DDT.

To help save our seabirds why not take a bag to the beach when you go for your walk and pick up any bits of plastic that you see.

Thanks to Andrew Darby whose original article appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald

Turtle dies from 317 Pieces of Plastic

A dead green sea turtle with more than 317 pieces of plastic in its digestive system, was recently found washed up on a Ballina beach. Rochelle Ferris from the Australian Seabird Rescue said it was the most shocking case she had seen in 15 years and there was no doubt that the plastic killed the animal: "The governments must take charge of stormwater drainage that goes into our rivers and waterways, which is just feeding a constant stream of this garbage into our marine environment"



Holiday House Letting Code

Continuing complaints from residents at Point Lookout about noisy behaviour from neighboring holiday tenants have caused the Redland Council to consider regulation of letting in residential areas. At the moment the Voluntary Code of Practice applying to agents is mostly effective but partying tenants in some houses, let by one agent, have frequently come to the attention of police. At the last round table discussion called by Mayor Melva Hobson residents, including FOSI representatives, voiced their concerns.

Big Contributor to Straddie

Council figures on the major part tourism plays in the Stradbroke economy reveal that visitors to holiday houses have an expenditure on Stradbroke per year of at least \$ 20 million. With rentals down due to the weather and the economy it's no wonder island businesses are reporting lower takings.



Lawn Grazing Grey Kangaroo

EROSION

Early this year, with the wild weather, dramatic erosion occurred once again at Amity and Point Lookout. In January a large chunk of the Amity foreshore fell into the Rainbow Channel, causing a worrying time for residents, while at Point Lookout all beaches were left denuded of sand and with a number of the fringing casuarinas undermined and collapsed. Erosion does seem to be gaining in intensity and needs to be taken seriously by the powers that be.

Amity has a long history of drastic erosion with the settlement now 100 metres or so inland from where it was first established. On this occasion it was halted by the dumping of about 300 tonnes of rock along the shores. But there are varying views on the long-term prospects and possible remedies and concern about Council consideration of a "planned strategic retreat" strategy.

The Redland City Council is currently developing a Shoreline Erosion Management Plan for Amity.

There is no such plan for the Point but Councillor Craig Ogilvie says "Council is doing some updated modelling on sea level rises and how that might impact on the coastline."



Deadman's Beach at its worst

SAND MINING STOPPED ON FRASER ISLAND IN 6 WEEKS



WHY DOES THIS GOVERNMENT NEED 14 YEARS ?

In 1976 the Fraser government stopped sand mining in just 6 weeks after banning exports of mineral sand from the island. In contrast, the Bligh Government have enacted laws to extend mining on Stradbroke for 14 more years, sidestepping future use provisions of the Mineral Resources Act, which applies to every other mine in Queensland.

There were cries of gloom and doom and loss of jobs in 1976 just as we are hearing now at Stradbroke. But what happened at Fraser Island? A successful eco-tourism industry was developed, attracting people from all over the world to the World Heritage listed largest sand island in the world. The Fraser Coast has become a thriving residential and tourism area on the back of the island's fame. No one, I'm sure, has ever looked back wistfully saying 'if only sand mining had been allowed to continue our lives would have been better'.

Stradbroke Island will prosper once sand mining ends. Once the island is unlocked from the iron grip of the wealthy and politically powerful sand mining company, it will be far more appealing for tourists and potential residents. The notes to the NSI Act state categorically "Creating a mine-free NSI will greatly assist the development and growth of businesses and employment opportunities in ecologically sustainable tourism and other like activities". Sand mining company Sibelco has run, through its influential Public Relations company, an hysterical and highly exaggerated campaign about the economic impact of stopping mining on the island.

Actually Sibelco planned to wind down and shed jobs anyway, since mineral sands would have been exhausted by 2027 at the latest. The company has a "gradual employment downsizing" policy and can only retain half of the current workforce after the Yarraman mine closes down in about 2014.

Increasingly, mine employees are commuting to the island from the mainland and thereby contributing very little to the island's economy.

So change is already happening. North Stradbroke Island is an increasingly diverse economy with more houses being built, more visitors all through the year, more varied business opportunities, more commuting, all due to societal, technological and population changes. (The popularity of internet grocery deliveries from the mainland indicates modern social reorganization - although it doesn't say much for the commitment of some locals to the island economy!)

If mining continues after Yarraman closes, this local economy will be in limbo for more than 10 years. Things will limp along with some people employed in mining but most looking for other opportunities, which will only be curtailed by mining domination and destruction of the landscape.

Stradbroke does not have the isolation issues of a remote mining town and it is in a far better position to develop a diverse economy than Fraser Island was in 1976.

It is irresponsible for a government to allow minerals to be gouged out of the island's fragile environment for short term profit, when the future of this place so obviously relies on its beauty. Tourists do not appreciate the ugly industrial landscapes, nor do most people who live here. The sight of encroaching bare sand patches is a depressing vista from the Gorge Walk and for local residents and visitors who are reminded of the destruction whenever they look out their windows or travel over the bay.

The only basis of a long term economy is diversity, anchored to the fact that North Stradbroke Island is a very special natural place with an intact indigenous heritage, just 30 minutes to a conurbated city of 3 or 4 million people. It is this that will keep people

in jobs, not a decaying and destructive industrial dinosaur.

The destroyed landscapes will never be equal to the original complex bushland. People travel great distances to see natural wonders. Fraser may be the largest sand island in the world, but Stradbroke is the second largest. Let's finally have some foresight and demand this government ends mining destruction without any more delay.

Nikki Parker



Mining advancing into the bushland

Bay Health

The January floods have sparked serious concern over the impact of sediment plume on seagrasses, turtles and dugongs in Moreton Bay. With the Port of Brisbane reporting an additional 1 million m³ washed down the river as a result of the flood, there has been a need to check the effect this has had on the bay inhabitants. Green Sea Turtles and Dugongs feed on the seagrasses that thrive in the shallow sand banks and there is a fear that the flood plume may have reduced their food source significantly. Fortunately, according to Healthy Waterways, initial observations have proven positive and the existing dugong and turtle populations appear to be in good condition. Find more information at www.healthywaterways.com.au

North Stradbroke Island Protection & Sustainability Act 2011

As members are well aware, FOSI (and SIMO) have campaigned for the application of the Mineral Resources Act to the expired mining leases, especially the Enterprise Mining Lease 1117 which expired in 2007. With this new NSI Act, the government has bypassed the existing law to extend expired leases. All other expired mining leases in Queensland remain subject to the Mineral Resources Act. The provisions of the MRA, if applied, would not allow more mining to take place on land earmarked for National Park (i.e. at Enterprise Mine and Vance Mine where expired leases were also extended by the Act). The government claims the NSI Act will bring certainty to the ending of mining but it only extended mining onto land it intends to make National Park after it is environmentally devalued. Our two legal opinions can be read on the save straddie website, again under the library-resources tab. FOSI calls on the Queensland Government to amend the relevant sections (Section 11 and Schedule 1) of the NSI Act so that mining can be phased out much more quickly. There should be a halt to destruction at Enterprise and a phase out of 2-3 years, happening anyway when Yarraman Mine runs out of minerals around 2014. See article published in the latest Straddie Island News (SIN), with FOSI and SIMO's publically stated position (on sale now in island shops).

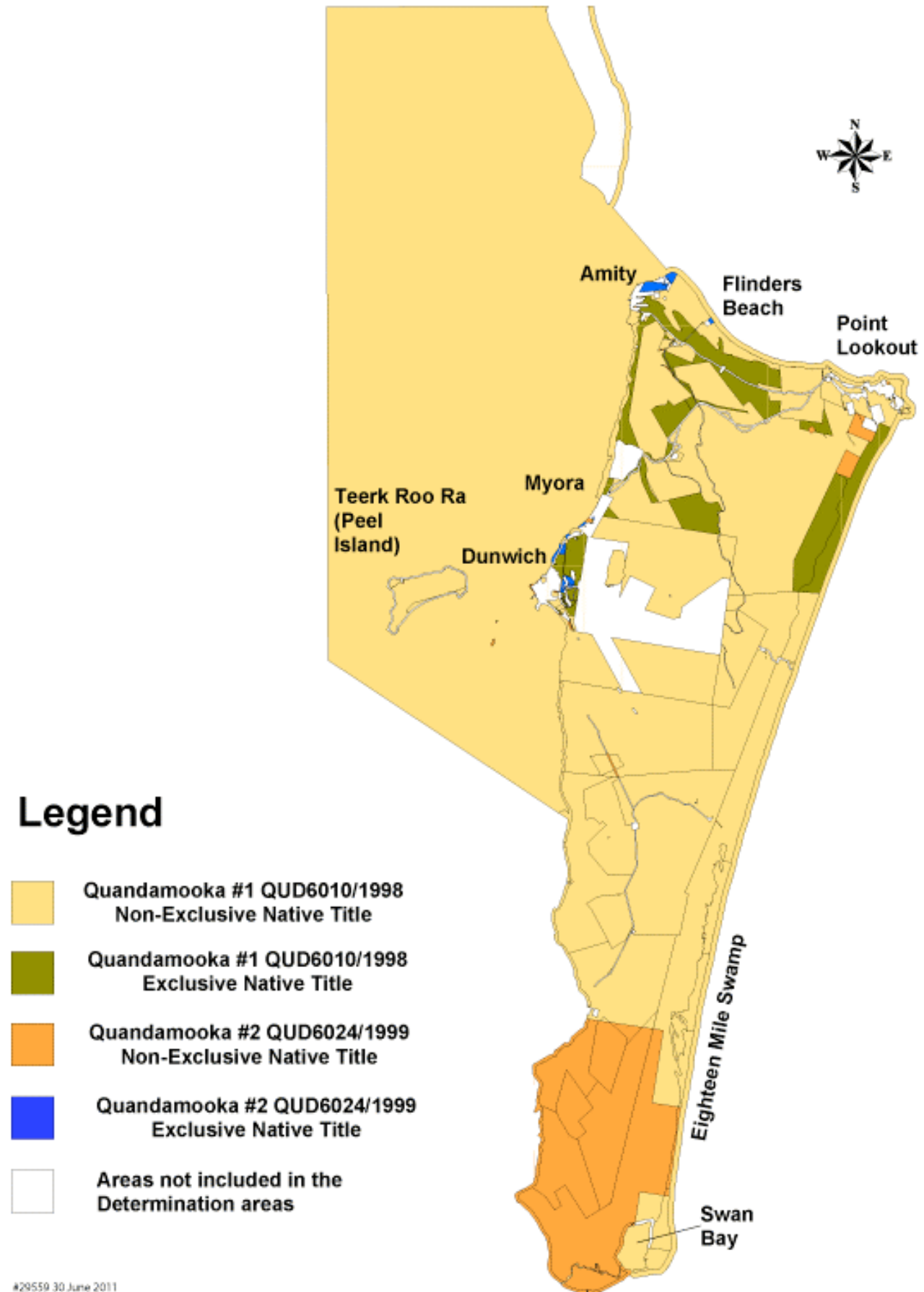
Criminal charges against Sibelco adjourned again

The company was charged in December 2009 with three summary offences alleging it did not have permits authorising it to remove and sell large quantities of non-mineral sand for landscaping and other purposes. The Court of Appeal has already confirmed that the actions were unlawful. However the company's criminal responsibility has not been determined. Last month Unimin/Sibelco was back in the Brisbane Magistrates court for 2 days, this time arguing that the prosecution against it is an abuse of process. The argument continues on November 7, with 3 more days set aside. It will then be almost 3 years since evidence was seized in a raid on Unimin's premises by the defunct EPA and two years since the charges were laid, an unusual delay in the initial hearing of summary charges in the Magistrates Court. Meanwhile, the government still refuses to send all of the evidence to the DPP for assessment of more serious charges, despite senior counsel opinion that there is a prima facie case of stealing and fraud against the miner.



Orchids blooming for winter - White Caladenia, *Caladenia catenata*

Native Title Determination Areas



#20559 30 June 2011

National Park Declaration Map

