

MINERAL SAND MINING ON MINJERRIBAH/NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND TO BE PHASED OUT BY 1919

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INTRODUCTION

The North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2015 to end sand mining was passed in the Queensland Parliament early on Thursday 25 May 2016.

It was a close vote in the hung Parliament. The Katters Australian Party attempted to put up a compromise of a 2024 close date. However independents Billy Gordon and Rob Pyne argued the earlier closure was better for the Quandamooka people and the environment.

Sandmining on islands off Queensland's southern coastline has been steeped in controversy since the 1960s when the Bjelke Petersen government granted mining leases to an American mining company to carry out sandmining on Fraser Island. Mining started in the 1970s, but met with strong resistance from the Fraser Island Defender Organisation (FIDO) which ran an effective campaign for the preservation of the island's environment.

The Whitlam Government established Australia's first environmental impact inquiry which recommended that mining cease. Eventually Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser canceled the company's mineral export license which halted mining on the island.

Ironically, it was Campbell Newman's father, Kevin Newman, who was the Commonwealth Environment Minister when Malcolm Fraser cancelled the license.

Fraser Island then became the first place to be included in the Australian Heritage Commission's Register of the National Estate. (source [Fraser Island](#) Wikipedia).

Mineral sand mining on Minjerribah/North Stradbroke Island ¹

[Sandmining on North Stradbroke Island](#) had been taking place since the 1940s, but became equally contentious in the late 20th century.

In 2011, the Bligh Government legislated for mining to end in 2019. The date was agreed between the Quandamooka people and the State Government as part of the settlement of native title. The intention was for 80% of the Island to become jointly managed national park. The mining company, Sibelco, and its public relations agency Rowland, mounted a very considerable 'corporate campaign' including political spending of over \$90,000 in Campbell Newman's Ashgrove electorate and funding

¹ This background is taken from Dr Howard Guille's chapter 'The Resources Curse' in the TJRyan Foundation e-book: Scott R and Guille H, [Palaszczuk's First Year: A political juggling act](#), (May 2016). Other mining projects are also discussed in Dr Guille's chapter, including the New Hope Acland Group's Acland mine and the controversial Adani Carmichael mine project in the Galilee Basin in North Queensland.

the 'Straddie Mothers' campaign.² Its explicit object was to get the (then) opposition leader to publicly endorse 'continuation of Sibelco's North Stradbroke Island operations until 2027'.

Campbell Newman did more: he delivered the necessary legislation allowing mining to continue to 2035. It is a matter of record that Sibelco provided a draft of the 2013 amendments to the Government, and the Bill itself had maps with the Sibelco logo on them. The extension of mining to 2035 was worth around \$1.5 billion in revenue to Sibelco.

Labor members voted against the 2013 amendments and made it clear that they would repeal them if the party returned to government. They clearly stated this before the 2015 election including a written commitment to the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC). In addition, the Quandamooka people took a High Court case against the State of Queensland arguing that the 2013 legislation was unconstitutional because it over-rode the Federal Court determination of Native Title and the associated Indigenous Land Use Agreement. The High Court case was stayed after the ALP Government took office.

The ALP Government acted on its commitment. A Bill to restore the 2019 closure date is before Parliament and was referred to the Finance and Administration Committee for consideration on 17 March 2016.³ The Government also reinvigorated an Economic Transition Strategy (ETS) for the Island commenced by the Bligh Government and added an adjustment fund for sand mining workers.⁴ QYAC, the Straddie Chamber of Commerce and community groups took part in the development of the ETS in 2011-12 and again in 2015-6. Sibelco had not [to January 2016] commenced a corporate campaign as extensive and as expensive as in 2011. Nonetheless, arguments from 2011 were still being used to justify mining into the 2030s. One of the least subtle came from the local Federal member for Bowman who predicted another 'Palm Island' of social instability if mining ended 'prematurely'. As with the Adani Galilee Basin project, exaggerated claims were made about the number of jobs and about the economic contribution of mining.⁵

When the Environment Minister, Dr Steven Miles, steered the legislation through the Parliament in May 2016 it was debated for five hours. Independent Rob Pyne, in his [speech](#) emphasised the importance of the Quandamooka people's native title. Government minister and Indigenous Labor MP Leanne Enoch had absented herself from Cabinet discussions on the issue because she belongs to the Quandamooka people. During the debate she spoke in the Quandamooka language in Parliament to acknowledge her ancestors and the strength of her people.

Environment Minister Dr Steven Miles' media release

Sand mining will come to an end on North Stradbroke Island by 2019, reversing a decision by the former Newman administration to extend Sibelco's lease to 2035.

The Labor Government passed the legislation early this morning with the help of two independents — Billy Gordon and Rob Pyne — in the hung parliament. Former Labor premier Anna Bligh had previously legislated to end the mining on the island, off Brisbane, by 2019, however the former Liberal National government extended the term until 2035.

North Stradbroke Island is the second-largest sand island in the world after Fraser Island, and has been mined for sand since 1949. A Bill to phase out sand mining on North Stradbroke passed in Parliament.

Environment Minister Dr Steven Miles said it was a good result for the environment and would ultimately open up new and exciting opportunities for the island community, leading to positive economic outcomes.

² See Guille H, [Politics of mining on North Stradbroke Island](#), *Redlands2030*, 2104, and '[Economics of mining on North Stradbroke Island](#)', *Redlands2030*, 2104.

³ For progress on this legislation see the [Finance and Administration Committee](#) on the Queensland Parliament website.

⁴ Queensland Government Department of State Development, [North Stradbroke Island Economic Transition Strategy](#), December 2015.

⁵ See Guille H, [Politics of mining on North Stradbroke Island](#).

“Today marks the start of a new chapter for North Stradbroke Island,” Dr Miles said. “The debate is over. Sand mining was always going to end on North Stradbroke Island. “The community, the business sector, traditional owners and new investors, supported by the Palaszczuk Government, can now move forward to transition North Stradbroke Island away from sand mining to new exciting, sustainable jobs of the future.

“Straddie, as we all know it, has the potential to be one of the state’s greatest tourism assets, so it was important we opened up the island to all Queenslanders. “It is a place of incredible conservation value and special habitats including mangroves, wetlands, endangered heathlands, old growth forests, freshwater lakes and woodlands. “These habitats are home to threatened animal and plant species including orchids, as well as a genetically distinct population of the koala. “We widely consulted on the draft Bill and are pleased to have achieved support to protect the environment and unlock positive economic change for the island,’ he said.

Dr Miles said the Queensland Government continued to engage in positive discussions with the Quandamooka people, traditional owners of North Stradbroke Island, about future use of their native title land. “The passage of the Bill is a great boost for the Quandamooka people’s vision for the future of the island as Australia’s most sustainable island community and as a global ecotourism destination,’ he said.

Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC) Chief Executive Officer Cameron Costello, said the Bill represented restoration of justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“To have the voice of Indigenous communities restored on National Sorry Day is very significant,” Mr Costello said. “The passing of the Bill sends a clear message to the nation that native title agreements are to be respected and honoured. “The current Queensland Government has restored integrity and faith in the native title system, and in our view honoured the legacy of Eddie Mabo. “Our vision is for Minjerrabah to be a global eco-cultural tourism destination, and we now look forward to getting on with business,’ he said.