

Mining defies sands of time

Greg Stolz

THE Bligh Government has been accused of ignoring the law by allowing sand mining to continue on a long-expired mining lease on North Stradbroke Island.

Despite the Government's recent pledge to phase out sand mining and turn most of the island into national park, it is allowing mining to continue on a lease that expired almost three years ago.

The lease, which houses the giant Enterprise mine, will continue to be mined until 2027 if it is renewed.

But a coalition of green groups this week wrote to Natural Resources Minister Stephen Robertson calling on him to cancel the lease held by Belgian mining giant Unimin "without further delay".

"Enterprise is the deepest and most destructive mine that has existed on the island - 100m deep and hundreds of metres wide," Queensland Conservation Council executive director Toby Hutcheon said.

"It operates 24/7, slowly moving north, destroying complex original vegetation and ancient sand dunes in its path."

Mr Hutcheon said Unimin

had no right to an extension of an expired lease. In fact, Cabinet had no power to renew the lease unless Mr Robertson was satisfied of 10 factors under the Mineral Resources Act.

"If he is not satisfied of even one, there is no legal power to renew," Mr Hutcheon said.

Friends of Stradbroke Island president Sue Ellen Carew said that under the Act, Mr Robertson had to be satisfied that continued mining of land earmarked for national park would be appropriate.

"No responsible minister genuinely could be satisfied of that," Ms Carew said.

The Wildlife Preservation Society's Simon Baltais said Unimin was "on a daily basis, destroying old growth forests and sand dunes formed over hundreds of thousand of years because of a legal loophole".

"The Act allows mining to continue until a decision is made," he said.

"But parliament clearly never intended a massive delay like this. It makes a mockery of the law and of parliament itself."

Unimin and pro-mining North Stradbroke residents say ending mining early would cost dozens of jobs and millions of dollars in economic benefits.



DIGGING IN: North Stradbroke's Enterprise mine is still working although the lease expired almost three years ago.