

Sand miner digs deep for defence

Brian Williams
ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

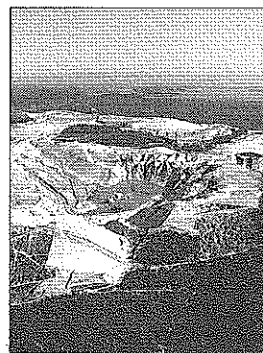
A MULTINATIONAL sand-mining company charged with illegally taking sand from North Stradbroke Island is fighting back, arguing that it received explicit ministerial approval for the action.

Unimin Australia yesterday produced documents showing its actions were approved by the Mines Department.

Unimin Australia managing director Campbell Jones said documents had been filed in the Cleveland Magistrates Court seeking charges on the illegal sale of sand to be struck out.

Unimin had been charged by the Environment Department for selling building sand from the silica sand mining process on North Stradbroke Island off Brisbane. It faces penalties of up to \$800,000 and could be pursued for compensation.

The action prompted island activists to call on the State Government not to renew the company's mining leases. The Government is expected to



TORN APART: Mining on North Stradbroke.

announce within days that extensive areas of the island will become a national park.

Mr Jones said Unimin and its predecessors had always sought to operate within the law.

"From the very beginning Unimin has maintained it sold this building sand with the knowledge and authority of the State Government, and paid mineral royalties on that basis," he said.

"Through a Right to Information request, we have uncovered direct approval by the Minister for Minerals and Energy in 1995 for

the building sand product being categorised as a mineral, and subjected to a mineral royalty payment."

An Environment Department spokesman said no comment would be made because the matter was before the court but legal action would continue.

Mr Jones said Government officials acknowledged the company considered the need for an extractive industries permit but was advised this would not be necessary.

The department document says in part: "It is considered ... the product (be) categorised as a mineral in this instance."

Mr Jones said: "Sand is considered a mineral if it is used for its chemical properties, and the department indicated that the high silica content of the building material delivered chemical properties which were sought by end users.

"This ministerial memorandum and other correspondence since that time demonstrates that the charges laid against Unimin have been fundamentally flawed," Mr Jones said.

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