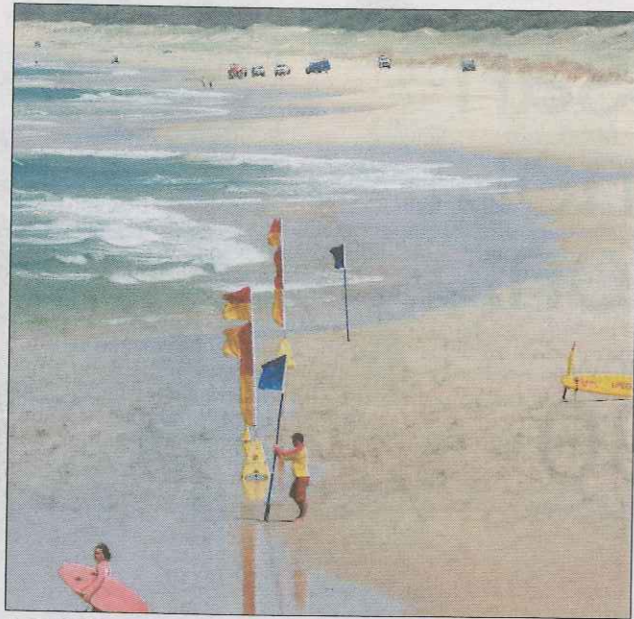


Labor's North Stradbroke ploy



PARADISE LOST: The time to act against mining is now.

Mike O'Connor

MONDAY VIEW

IT REMAINS one of the city's veiled charms, its kilometres of broad surf beaches and quiet coves unseen and unnoticed by local and tourist alike.

Visitors from Sydney and Melbourne gaze, momentarily, at the jutting outcrop of Point Lookout and the peculiar moonscape of the island as it slides beneath their aircraft's wings and then, in a moment, disappears from sight and just as quickly from their consciousness.

Brisbane people know, vaguely, that it's there, but as there is no road link they look instead to the highways that

carry them to the Gold or Sunshine coasts.

It is, of course, North Stradbroke Island, accessible only by barge, a 50-minute journey across Moreton Bay which transports you into a quiet, secluded seascape of blues, whites and greens backed by a soundtrack of the blue Pacific breaking over rocks and on to sand.

There is, however, a darker side to this idyll, one which is rooted in the dazzling white sands which are so much a part of its charms: silica mining.

For decades, the sand mining companies have been steadily ripping the guts out of North Stradbroke, their round-the-clock operations stripping away the minerals and gradually devouring the island, mining 50 million tonnes of sand a year.

Some areas have been

a cynical attempt to sell our heritage

revegetated, but once the dunes have been mined the damage has been done, and large tracts of the island have been comprehensively trashed.

Like a lawnmower lent to a neighbour, once they have been mined the rolling dunes are never the same.

That an industry banned from Fraser Island in the 1970s by then prime minister Malcolm Fraser's Liberal-National Party government and then from Moreton Island, Cooloola and Shelburne Bay in north Queensland has been allowed to quietly continue on North Stradbroke is one of the more peculiar aspects of the State Labor Government's conservation policies.

Still, the mining royalty payments kept pouring in to the Treasury, and visitors to the island who don't venture off the bitumen roads aren't even

For decades, the sand mining companies have been steadily ripping the guts out of North Stradbroke

aware that mining carries on, so it is a case of business as usual.

Recently, however, the Bligh Government has stirred, and in an attempt to garner some kudos from an increasingly hostile electorate announced that sand mining will cease.

The hosannas which greeted this announcement were somewhat muted when it became apparent that what it really meant was it would end all sand mining eventually at about the time that all the minerals had been extracted.

If the Queensland Government is, to borrow Tony Abbott's well-worn expression, fair dinkum about the North Stradbroke environment, it should end all sand mining within the next 12 months.

The Government, instead, plans to renew the giant Enterprise mine's lease on the fanci-

ful grounds that its application for renewal was lodged before plans to phase out mining were announced.

This flimsy reasoning fails to disguise the fact that the Government wants to have it both ways - to be seen to be doing something by declaring half the island a national park, while sanctioning the continuation of mining for another 17 years.

There is already evidence of a cosy relationship between the Government and Belgian corporate giant Unimin, which operates the sand mines on the island.

Last month, the Court of Appeal dismissed an appeal by Unimin against a Supreme Court ruling that the company had illegally mined "non-mineral" sand from the island and sold it to landscaping and construction companies.

It has been suggested that up to 100,000 tonnes of sand valued at more than \$80 million could have been involved.

One would have thought that such a blatant disregard for the terms of its lease would have caused the Government, in a fit of righteous indignation, to tear up Unimin's leases, but it has maintained a deafening silence.

The time to save the island from further degradation is now, not 2027. If the Greens gain control of the Senate in the forthcoming election, they have said they will move to revoke Unimin's export licence for the sand, effectively ending sand mining.

There is still time for the State Government to act in the interests of all Queenslanders and pre-empt them.

oconnorm@gnp.news1td.com.au