



SAND STORM: Unimin's mining on North Stradbroke Island is under attack with plans to create a national park favoured.

Picture: Jeff Camden

Straddie miner lodges last-ditch leasing offer

Brian Williams
ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

CONTROVERSIAL sand miner Unimin has offered to reduce its North Stradbroke Island mining leases from 44 per cent to 15 per cent in an effort to keep operating.

Unimin is under intense pressure from island action groups after being found guilty of illegally selling sand to the building industry and faces more court action next month.

It may have to meet penalties of up to \$800,000 as well as compensation.

The offer to wind back operations is the company's formal response to the State Government, which is investigating

long-term proposals to turn most of the island off Brisbane into national park.

Unimin sustainability manager Paul Smith said yesterday that the company could mine sustainably until 2027.

"Under this plan, Unimin will be able to retain the bulk of our workforce until 2027, maintain our support of local services and businesses, provide economic opportunities for the Quandamooka people and provide time for structural adjustment to new industries," he said.

Unimin proposed to surrender 23 per cent of its mining lease area by 2011 and 65 per cent by 2015. This represented a significant reduction in mining.

Mr Smith said the plan would see the lease on the Vance silica mine, which traversed land of high ecological value, cut short nine years from the renewal date of 2024 to 2015.

This would allow all mining on the north of the island to cease by 2015.

"Post 2015, mining activity on Straddie will be limited to less than 3 per cent of the island with all mining occurring on disturbed land or areas of low ecological value," he said.

Stradbroke Island Management Organisation spokeswoman Jan Aldenhoven said she could not properly respond until she saw the detail of what was proposed.

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Paul Smith

But if it meant the continuation of Unimin's Enterprise and Yarraman mines, the company's arguments were flawed.

"The miner has a right to apply for (lease) renewal but has no automatic rights," Ms Aldenhoven said.

"This isn't about horse trading. We want to see due process followed and the Government to assess if it is in the public interest to mine and what are appropriate uses for that country."

The Government has proposed converting 80 per cent of the island to national park, with 50 per cent declared within 18 months. Thirty leases will be phased out by 2027 but Unimin's Enterprise mine will be renewed.