



Reflections on National Park for Stradbroke Announcement

On the 20 June 2010 the Premier of Queensland announced an end to mining on North Stradbroke Island by 2027. Given there is a sustainable economic resource on this island within existing leases and environmental constraints that extends well past 2027, the announcement came as a complete surprise and is now something we need to consider carefully due to the impact on jobs and the viability of our ongoing operation.

Ceasing mining earlier than the planned date affects the total viability of all operations on the island as all costs, including the cost of closure, must be accounted for while in operation.

This announcement affects not just us, but everyone who lives on, visits or is dependent on North Stradbroke Island.

We believe the North Stradbroke Island economy must be maintained to allow for any transitional employment to replace the support and income generated by mining. To simply replace our activity with a National Park will not sustain the island's economy. The Queensland Department of Environment and Resource Management website notes in Queensland direct employment for the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Service currently stands at 480 staff, with 91 staff directly employed in the management of Queensland parks and other protected areas across the whole state. This suggests work in the park will sustain only a few.

Other industries that provide direct employment and benefit for island people must be given an opportunity to grow on the island to replace the effects caused by the loss of sand mining. Current levels of tourism benefit only a few locals with many visitors bringing all that they need with them. The Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that while tourism jobs have increased, it's the relatively low wages of those jobs that, if our economy is to survive, must be replaced. Many who work in the tourism industry have to hold multiple jobs, or live in share housing to stay on the island.

Is ecotourism the sole answer to our future? It's only too obvious that current visitor levels cannot support more jobs and at current domestic tourism growth rates, it will take 18 years for visitor numbers to double and replace the \$130 million dollars mining generates annually.

No-one, local or visitor, will enjoy a more crowded Straddie, a place where the beach is crowded, the nights are filled with noise from those having a good time and where natural assets are damaged by hundreds of visitors. Visit Fraser Island and see for yourself what hundreds of thousands of visitors can do to a sand island.

So how do we achieve a balance?

Our townships, as they stand, are un-sustainable without the mining industry. Without permanent residents the towns will have no soul, no volunteers and no sense of community. To maintain permanent jobs in local businesses, kids in our day care and schools, and players in our beloved Straddie Sharks football team, residency must be permanent not transient. There must be work here or nearby. The holiday home must not replace the family home if our sense of community is to survive.

Our strong and proud Indigenous community know what it's like to have the economy suddenly change, they have lived through the huge turmoil and poverty that occurred when the benevolent asylum closed its doors. Their elders speak of that pain, wondering what the future will bring and watching their kin move away from country. It's their time to also secure their future and they will need to be consulted and properly listened to.

We call on the state government to provide security to the people of North Stradbroke Island and ensure the transition from mining to another economy is painless. The alternative economy must be given time to develop, people must be given time to adapt and clever alternatives must be proposed.

By working together, we can achieve this. The answer lies within our communities and should not come from outsiders with agendas to push, or ecotourism models from islands very different to our own. This island is not the same as Fraser or Moreton where there is no large permanent community and fewer services. It's not a Daydream or Hamilton Island of glitz and glamour, nor is it the bay islands with greater population and the services to facilitate permanent residency.

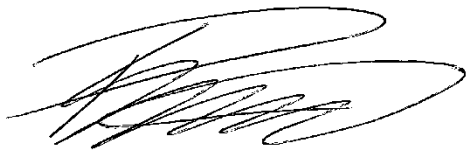
This is Stradbroke, with expectations and standards of living that have relied on mining for over 40 years. We call on all people who care for Stradbroke to get involved in its future. All too often we sit back and let the minority slowly change our future. This is not that time. We urge you to go along to an information session (there is one at 7:00pm, Tuesday 29 June 2010 but you must register your interest by visiting the DERM website www.derm.qld.gov.au/stradbroke/index or by emailing Straddie.Vision@derm.qld.gov.au) and give not just your opinion, but your ideas.

We all need to draw the lines on the maps, have a say in the timings and think big. The state government has handed us their vision for Stradbroke and shown they want to plan for its future, let's tell them what our vision can be. Whoever we are, whatever our background and whatever our beliefs, we will only get one shot at this because once the lines are finalised on the map there is no changing the outcome.

At Unimin we stand ready for the challenge that faces us and given the opportunity we can facilitate many great outcomes. We believe a rush to end mining early will lose great opportunities to leverage off the mining economy and build assets and a future that lasts long after the last grain of sand is processed.

We have asked the government not to risk complete economic collapse on the island by ending productive mines early. Over the next few months we will be negotiating in good faith what we hope is for a fair and sensible outcome for the company's return on investment, our world leading rehabilitation program and most importantly the future of our community.

Regards



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Paul and his family live on North Stradbroke Island. He has worked for the mining companies on the island for 15 years. Paul is an ecologist, a father, lieutenant at Dunwich auxiliary fire station, keen fisherman and spokesperson for Unimin Australia