

# Rowland.

Achieving social, environmental and economic progress in an island community: sand mining and its benefits on North Stradbroke Island

CATEGORY | PUBLIC AFFAIRS

# Achieving social, environmental and economic progress in an island community: sand mining and its benefits on North Stradbroke Island

## Executive Summary

Rowland was engaged by Sibelco Australia to develop and implement a public affairs strategy to influence opinion and political decision-making around the continuation of its sand mining operations on Queensland's North Stradbroke Island (NSI). This brief came after the then Premier Anna Bligh announced an accelerated timetable for the shut-down of sand mining by 2019, jeopardising the livelihood of a vibrant community and local economy underpinned by the industry for more than 45 years.

The strategy's goal was to ensure the continuation of sand mining until at least the original agreed 2027 timeframe. Key objectives included demonstrating Sibelco's contribution to the Island's social, environmental and economic fabric, and long-term investment in sustainably managing its operations to secure NSI's future.

Based on an extensive research program, Rowland's strategy focused on partnering with the local community – from creating a shared vision for NSI's future through to a grassroots awareness campaign communicating 'the Straddie Story' throughout south-east Queensland.

The strategy was extremely successful and the overall goal exceeded. The newly-elected government committed to extending sand mining operations to 2035, allowing ample time for Sibelco to complete its operations and for the NSI community to transition to alternate economic drivers.

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## **Situation Analysis**

Since the 1950s, sand mining has underpinned Queensland's North Stradbroke Island (NSI) community and economy, providing direct and indirect employment opportunities, essential services, and support for community infrastructure, business and social enterprise.

In June 2010, Premier Anna Bligh announced plans to convert more than half of NSI to national park by 2011, and the complete phase-out of sand mining by 2027. This created considerable uncertainty for sand mining operator, Sibelco Australia, and the community.

Sibelco began negotiations with government, proposing a staged end to mining by 2027. However, in a surprise announcement in March 2011, the Premier declared an accelerated shutdown timetable by 2019.

Rowland was engaged to develop and implement a public affairs strategy to influence public opinion and political decision-making, to ensure the continuation of sand mining until at least 2027. Several key challenges were involved in this task:

- Potential loss of hundreds of millions of dollars in company profits and related investment and royalties
- Potential detrimental impact on a local economy underpinned by sand mining operations
- Uncertainty created for 650 mine workers and over 2,000 residents whose livelihoods were at stake
- Confusion and debate in the general community about sand mining's environmental and social impacts
- Divergent views about the appropriate balance between socio-economic and environmental sustainability
- Political uncertainty in the lead-up to Queensland's election on 24 March 2012.

## Goals and Objectives

The strategy's overall goal was to ensure continuation of sand mining on NSI until at least 2027.

**Objectives** were to:

1. Achieve pre-election community consensus on NSI's future direction, and a collaborative approach to influencing the Liberal National Party's (LNP) position in favour of continued sand mining operations
2. Demonstrate to the LNP Sibelco's tangible investment in the sustainable management of NSI's sand mining operations and track record of success
3. Increase awareness of sand mining's contribution to the social, environmental and economic fabric of NSI, to further support Sibelco's government relations platform
4. Achieve public endorsement by the then Queensland Opposition Leader, Campbell Newman, for the continuation of Sibelco's NSI operations until 2027.



## Research

A qualitative and quantitative research program was commissioned to identify key issues and community attitudes towards sand mining among:

- NSI residents
- Key mainland suburbs.

This program included:

- Desk research
- Interviews with Sibelco's community relations personnel who interface with local opinion leaders
- Six focus groups with individuals who were 'affected', 'semi-affected' and 'unaffected' by NSI's sand mining operations
- A random poll of 1,000 individuals 'affected', semi-affected' and 'unaffected' by NSI's sand mining operations
- Economic modelling of the impacts of early closure
- Continual monitoring of the LNP's position on the issue.

Key findings informed the strategy's development and implementation:

Key findings	Influence on strategy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Top issues for residents:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Future uncertainty</li> <li>○ Cost of living</li> <li>○ Future employment</li> <li>○ Economic uncertainty for small business if NSI had to rely solely on tourism</li> <li>○ Lack of government consultation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed a community forum giving residents the opportunity to share their thoughts on a community vision</li> <li>• Established a shared platform with the NSI community for a wider communication campaign across south-east Queensland</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While the strong majority of NSI residents (84%) 'totally supported' continuing sand mining to 2027, only a slight majority shared this view in 'semi-affected' mainland suburbs</li> <li>• South-east Queenslanders were unaware of Sibelco's role in supporting the community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shaped awareness-raising efforts within key mainland suburbs, creating a mandate for the LNP to support Sibelco's position</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although NSI residents had high awareness of Sibelco's community contribution, their priority was sustaining their way of life rather than the foreign-owned mining operator's business</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centred on key community issues with less emphasis on Sibelco's corporate brand. Key tactical elements such as the 'Straddie Stories' campaign and community benefit fund were given their own local identities</li> </ul>

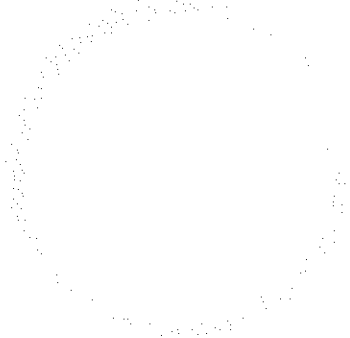
### Key findings

- Research revealed key reasons why the 2027 timeframe was favoured:
  - Jobs
  - Community support
- Environmental impacts were a key reason for supporting an early shut-down
- Economic modelling revealed:
  - Mining supports almost half of the NSI economy
  - More than 650 jobs rely on NSI's sand mining  
Without sand mining, there would be 'heavy job losses' of around 30% on NSI

### Influence on strategy

- Campaign themes and messages focused on:
  - Economic consequences
  - Sand mining's contribution to employment and NSI's economy
  - Countering the negative perception of environmental impacts by highlighting Sibelco's award-winning rehabilitation





## Target Publics

### Primary Audiences

Audience	Attributes	Rationale
<b>NSI residents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Majority support for continuing sand mining</li> <li>Deep appreciation of Sibelco's community input</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Directly impacted by decision</li> <li>Sand mining advocates</li> <li>Critical to strategy's success and future community partnerships/initiatives</li> </ul>
<b>LNP</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Campbell Newman</li> <li>Key members/candidates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seen as credible leader and alternate Premier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Published polling indicated likelihood of an election win (therefore LNP's support needed to overturn decision)</li> </ul>
<b>Broader south-east Queensland community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SEQ residents shared similar concerns to NSI community (e.g. cost of living and financial pressures)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Awareness of sand mining's contribution to NSI needed to further support Sibelco's government relations platform</li> </ul>
<b>Females across mainland south-east Queensland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20-35 year-old females unconvinced about sand mining's benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research revealed this demographic was most uninformed on sand mining's contribution</li> </ul>

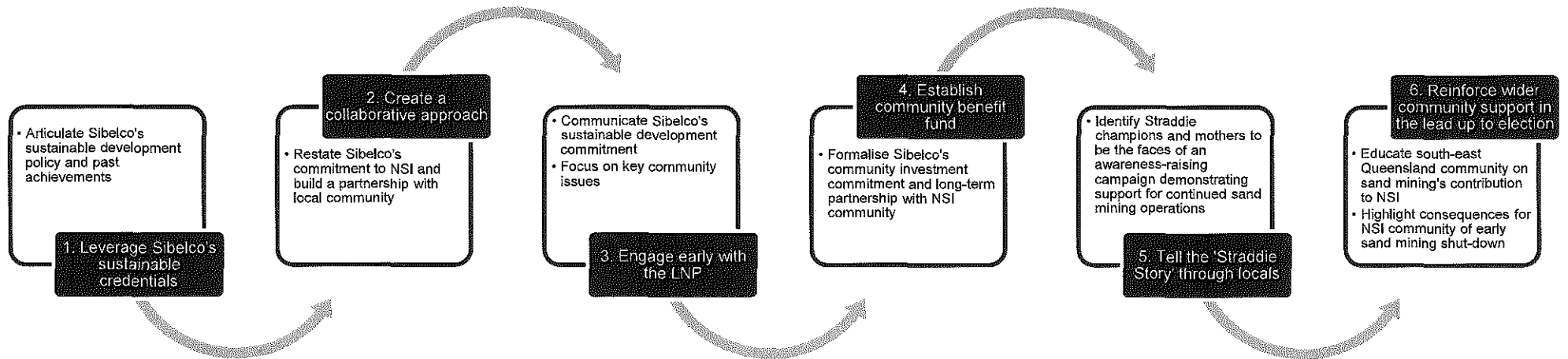
### Intermediary Audiences

The following audiences were crucial in influencing the wider south-east community:

Audience	Attributes	Rationale
<b>Straddie mothers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NSI mothers who support sand mining and have community connections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very vocal in community forum</li> <li>Post-forum feedback indicated ability to influence similar mainland demographic</li> </ul>
<b>Straddie champions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diverse group of residents comprising non-indigenous and indigenous people, female indigenous elders, mine workers and their families, and local business owners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Could establish an emotional connection with broader south-east Queensland</li> </ul>

## Communication Strategy

A six-stage strategy was developed to achieve the goal and objectives:



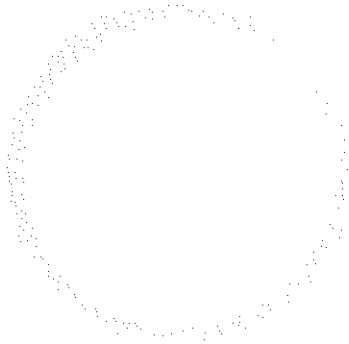
Rowland designed the strategy to ensure it focused on:

- Building community partnerships early to ensure a shared vision and position on the Island's future and continued community support
- Engaging early with the LNP (consistently held commanding leads in published pre-election polls), to demonstrate Sibelco's commitment to sustainable mining operations and a sustainable future for the community
- Making a tangible and long-term investment in the community through a community-controlled fund ensuring ongoing collaboration on projects and initiatives
- Telling the 'Straddie Story' through locals' eyes and establishing an emotional connection between NSI residents and the mainland, to raise awareness of sand mining's contribution and build support for continued operations.

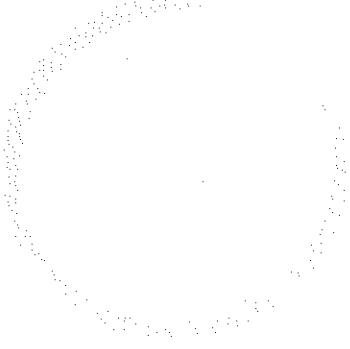


## Implementation

Strategy stage	Tactics	Relevance to objectives
1	<b>Internal visioning workshop</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and visioning workshop with Sibelco's executive team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared research findings and recommended strategy, and agreed on approach</li> </ul>
	<b>Sustainable development key messages</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensured materials demonstrated Sibelco's commitment to sustainable development principles and sand mining's contribution to NSI</li> </ul>
2	<b>Public rally on NSI</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signs, T-shirts, bumper stickers</li> <li>• Speeches</li> <li>• Media release</li> <li>• Media attendance</li> </ul> <b>Mail-out to NSI residents</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letter reinforcing Sibelco's commitment to NSI (Appendix B1)</li> </ul> <b>Straddie Community Forum</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forum brand</li> <li>• Invitation to residents (Appendix B2)</li> <li>• Calls to secure attendance</li> <li>• Facilitator's agenda and presentation (Appendix B3)</li> <li>• Facilitation</li> <li>• Report and mail-out to NSI community presenting ideas and vision (Appendix B4-5)</li> </ul> <b>Community newsletter</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distributed to all NSI mailboxes, local businesses and government stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforced Sibelco's community commitment and raise awareness among south-east Queenslanders and key government representatives through public attendance and media coverage</li> <li>• Critical in working towards community consensus on the Island's future direction and establishing a collaborative approach for subsequent tactics</li> </ul>
3	<b>Government relations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Briefings, meetings and site-visits with LNP representatives</li> <li>• Briefing notes</li> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Visioning documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensured vision was presented to key LNP representatives and supported through written material.</li> <li>• Provided opportunities for LNP to first-hand Sibelco's community contribution</li> </ul>
4	<b>Straddie Sand Mining Community Fund Launch</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community newsletter articles               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Advertising in local newspapers showcasing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing a community benefit fund was critical to demonstrating Sibelco's long-term commitment to sustainable development</li> <li>• By ensuring the fund was run by residents, for</li> </ul>

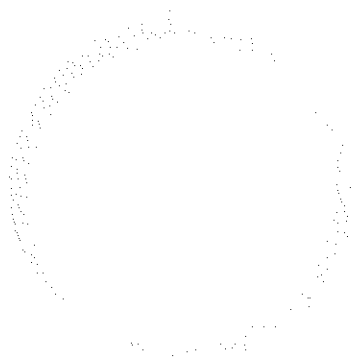


Strategy stage	Tactics	Relevance to objectives
	<p>shared vision (Appendix B6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Website updates – (<a href="http://www.sustainablestradbroke.com.au">www.sustainablestradbroke.com.au</a>)</li> </ul> <p><b>Fund roll-out</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Brand (Appendix B7)</li> <li>● Collateral (e.g. Board nominations posters, postcards, sunscreen; Appendix B8;10)</li> <li>● Fund website (<a href="http://www.straddiefund.com.au">www.straddiefund.com.au</a>; Appendix B9)</li> <li>● Letters to residents</li> </ul>	<p>residents, Sibelco provided a tangible way to continue a working partnership with locals</p>
5/6	<p><b>'Straddie Stories' campaign</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Brand</li> <li>● Campaign website (<a href="http://www.straddiestories.com.au">www.straddiestories.com.au</a>; Appendix B13)</li> <li>● Video vignettes for website and YouTube</li> <li>● Television/cinema commercials (Appendix D1)</li> <li>● Print, radio, online and Facebook advertisements (Appendix B11-12; D2)</li> <li>● Community newsletter articles (Appendix B14)</li> </ul> <p><b>'Straddie Mothers' campaign</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Personalised letters (Appendix C2)</li> <li>● Letter-box drop to mainland suburbs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increased awareness of sand mining's contribution to NSI through an emotive, grassroots campaign</li> <li>● Used local stories to humanise key issues and appeal to mainland target audiences</li> </ul>

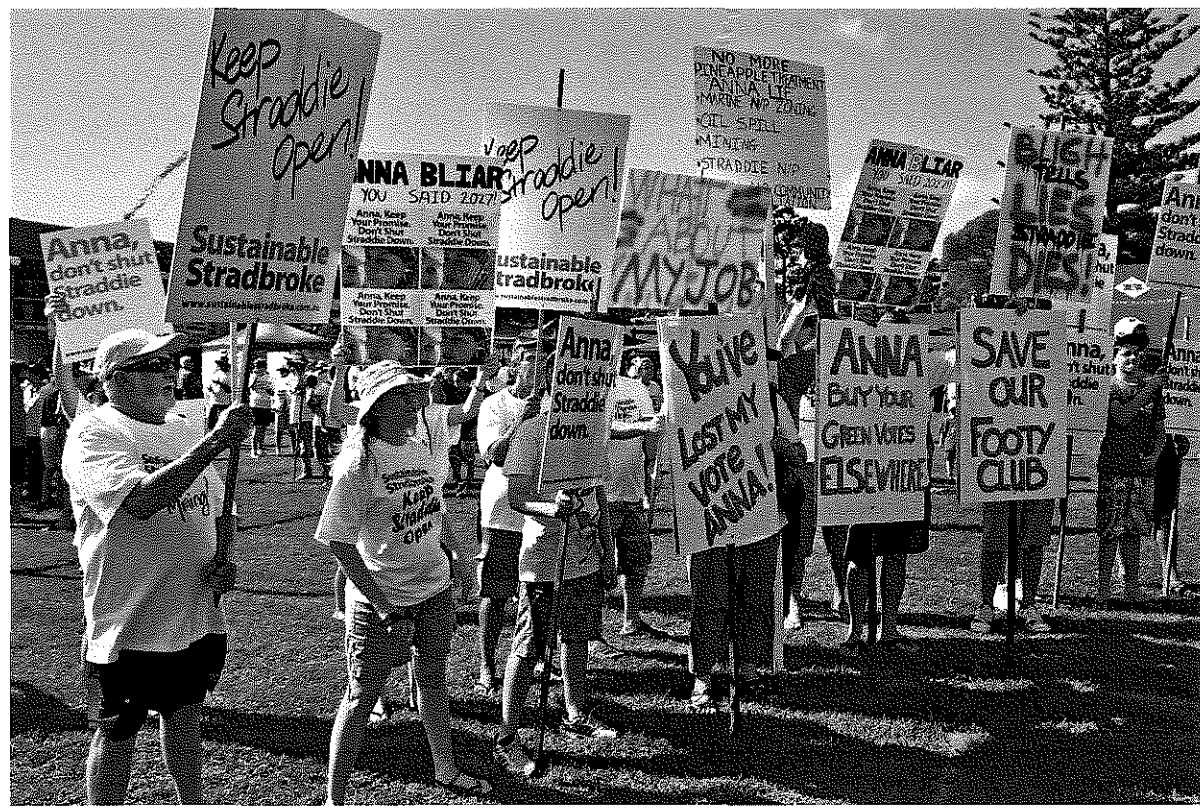


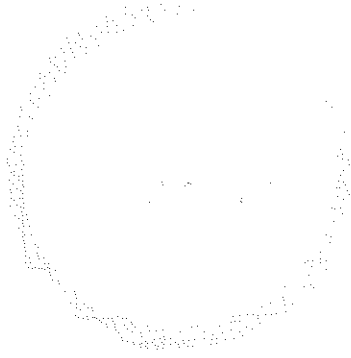
## Results

Outputs	Results
<b>Public rally</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 700 people attended</li> <li>• 36 pieces of media coverage across national, metropolitan and local print, radio, online and broadcast media</li> <li>• 2,000 letters mailed to NSI residents</li> </ul>
<b>Community Forum</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representative sample of approximately 60 residents attended and contributed to community vision</li> <li>• More than 100 ideas proposed for future investment</li> <li>• Positive written feedback and endorsement from residents</li> <li>• 2,500 Community Forum Reports distributed to NSI residents and key government stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>Government relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pre-election               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Eight formal engagements with LNP representatives (including Campbell Newman and local members)</li> <li>○ Public endorsement from Campbell Newman on ABC radio</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Post-election               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Six post-election engagements with LNP Government and departmental representatives (including Minister for Natural Resources and Mines)</li> <li>○ Establishment of government working group</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>'Straddie Stories' campaign (1 February – 31 April 2012)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 8,452 visits (3,834 directed from Facebook; 3,250 direct visitors)</li> <li>○ Peak traffic around 8 February, and from 22 February up until and immediately following election</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Print and online advertising               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 24 print and five online banner advertisements across Brisbane metropolitan and local newspapers</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Broadcast advertising               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Aired 108 times during primetime south-east Queensland television segments</li> <li>○ Aired 56 times during premium segments across key Brisbane cinemas</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Social media               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 2,758 total views across all 12 YouTube videos</li> <li>○ 7,355 clicks across Facebook advertising</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Community newsletter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8,500 copies distributed to NSI residents, businesses and key government representatives from April 2011 to April 2012</li> </ul>
<b>'Straddie Mothers' campaign</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 98,980 personalised letters distributed to key mainland suburbs between February and April 2012</li> </ul>



Outputs	Results
<b>Community benefit fund</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 778 visitors to the Fund website from 1 December 2011 to 30 April 2012 (60% new, 40% returning); spikes corresponding to Straddie Stories and Straddie Mothers campaigns</li><li>• 2,000 posters and letters distributed to NSI residents calling for nominations</li><li>• 12,500 branded sunscreens distributed on NSI</li></ul>





## Evaluation

The strategy was extremely successful with all objectives met or exceeded, and the overall goal exceeded through the government's commitment to extend sand mining operations to 2035 – eight years beyond the goal deadline.

Objective	Key outcomes	Achievement
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance at public events and the forum demonstrated the majority of NSI's community and Sibelco shared a vision for the Island's future</li> <li>• Publicising the <i>2050 Vision for a Sustainable Straddie Community</i> received significant positive feedback from residents. This resulted in numerous residents volunteering to take an active role in future awareness-raising (e.g. mothers writing their own personal letters for mail-out; unprompted verbal contributions for campaign use) to influence the LNP's position</li> </ul>	100%
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sibelco's investment in sustainably managing NSI's sand mining operations was demonstrated to the LNP through:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ Community consensus achieved at the forum for 'balance' between industry, environment and community</li> <li>◦ Support for a community benefit fund to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars into the community</li> <li>◦ Clear recognition of Sibelco's sustainable development credentials</li> </ul> </li> <li>• This objective was exceeded through Sibelco's constructive engagement with the LNP post-election, leading to an agreement to increase NSI national park areas</li> </ul>	>100%
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The forum stimulated the community to recommend a range of social, economic and environmental initiatives to be delivered through a community benefit fund. Significant word-of-mouth communication (supported by published communication vehicles) around the vision and initiatives further raised grassroots awareness. Sustainability messages were then disseminated through local's stories in a successful multi-media advertising campaign generating extensive web traffic</li> </ul>	>100%
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campbell Newman publicly endorsed continuing sand mining on ABC radio prior to the election (Appendix B15)</li> <li>• Post-election engagement with key ministers, and the government's establishment of a working group to develop new policy and legislation followed this early endorsement. Following the election, the new Minister for Mines and Natural Resources announced an extension to operations until 2035. This creates ample time for Sibelco to complete its operations and for NSI's community to transition to alternate economic drivers including an increased focus on tourism from a significant national park expansion</li> </ul>	>100%

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