



Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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**NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABILITY AND
OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL; NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND
PROTECTION AND SUSTAINABILITY (RENEWAL OF MINING LEASES)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (9.18 pm): I rise tonight as a member of the Finance and Administration Committee to make my contribution to the North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2015. This government bill was introduced into the parliament by the Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, the Hon. Dr Stephen Miles, after a private member's bill was introduced by the member for Dalrymple, Shane Knuth, the North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability (Renewal of Mining Leases) Amendment Bill 2015. Both of these bills seek to overturn the sensible and considered changes made by the LNP to facilitate the transition of the economy of North Stradbroke Island from a reliance on sandmining to a sustainable future. The current LNP legislation provides for an opportunity for a renewable mining lease to be extended until 2035 with a non-winning condition until 2040.

This time frame is essential to avoid what would otherwise be a disastrous impact on the economy of North Stradbroke Island, as is evidenced in the report tabled by the Finance and Administration Committee. It became obvious in the early stages of the inquiry how contentious and controversial the impact sandmining is having on the island, with those both for and against the industry. With this in mind, the committee held a number of public and private meetings on North Stradbroke Island, in Cleveland and here at Parliament House. One factor immediately became apparent at these forums, which was the lack of consultation across the community by both the government and the member for Dalrymple in the formation of the respective bills.

In the initial stages of the inquiry the committee was only to investigate which of the proposed dates for an end to sandmining was the most acceptable with no consideration to be given to the economic impact on the island or any scrutiny of the proposed transition strategy. The non-government members soon became aware that the draft economic strategy was an integral part of any deliberation of the future of the economy of North Stradbroke Island and was of vital importance to the affected mineworkers. On 17 March 2016 the House extended the scope of the committee's inquiry to include consideration of the draft economic transition strategy and the North Stradbroke Island Sand Mining Workers Assistance Scheme.

While sandmining is not the only industry on North Stradbroke Island, it was evident to the non-government members that many sections of the island's business community are reliant on the economic benefits that flow from Sibelco's activity on the island. Sibelco advised that sandmining on the island directly employed 114 full-time-equivalent positions on North Stradbroke Island and 41 full-time-equivalent positions at the Pinkenba loading facility. A recent survey conducted by the Straddie Chamber of Commerce estimated that the total number of jobs lost as a result of the closure of the sand

mine by 2019 would be 300, both directly and indirectly. Deloitte Access Economics was commissioned by the Department of State Development in April 2015 to report on the likely economic and employment impacts of closing sandmining in 2019 as opposed to 2035. The findings of that report predicted a direct annual loss of economic activity on North Stradbroke Island of between \$55 million and \$86 million. In addition to this, over the 16-year difference between closing down in 2019 versus 2035 there would be losses of between \$563 million and \$880 million.

These figures were reinforced by the Straddie Chamber of Commerce survey of their business membership, which showed 82 per cent of their members indicated at least 30 per cent of their business is directly or indirectly derived from the sandmining industry on North Stradbroke Island. A further survey conducted in February 2016 reported that more than 50 per cent of businesses attributed one to five of the staff members they employed directly or indirectly to mining activity on the island. Stradbroke Ferries submitted that at least a quarter of their revenue is directly invoiced to Sibelco and they have estimated that approximately 40 per cent of their income is associated with mining related business. They raised concern that a loss of revenue of up to 40 per cent may directly impact on their ability to maintain current employment levels of 120 full-time and part-time staff, noting that 40 per cent of that number would mean a loss of up to 48 jobs. David Thomson, the General Manager of Stradbroke Ferries, stated that the ferry service is the umbilical cord between the mainland and Stradbroke Island. All transport to and from the island must travel on the ferry. He stated—

Take a quarter of our revenue out of our business and we cannot provide the same service we do today.

The fact that the economy of North Stradbroke Island will be severely affected was not shared by all submitters to the committee. Cameron Costello, the CEO of the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation, known as QYAC, believes that sandmining should end immediately. In QYAC's submissions on the economic future of the island they spoke of some projects that were already happening with room to expand, for instance, Straddie Camping and rangers working in partnership with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, some of the proposed projects such as the knowledge and cultural centre to share the history of the island's first inhabitants, whale watching, aquatic farming and tourism.

The Quandamooka hold native title rights over 54,408 hectares of land and water on and surrounding North Stradbroke Island and believe that the existence of the mining lease impinges on their rights to access some of the land covered by that mining lease. These ideas were largely supported by organisations such as Friends of Stradbroke Island, Stradbroke Island Management Organisation and the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland. These groups also expressed concern about the impact mining has upon the vegetation and wildlife of the island.

Sibelco dispute the long-term impact that mining is having on the island. They have a team that is solely assigned to the task of rehabilitation of the landscape and vegetation. The committee was taken on a tour to inspect the rehabilitation sites that were completed some 20 years ago and some sites where revegetation has only just begun close to the mine site. This work is being undertaken by highly qualified experts in the field of mine rehabilitation and revegetation. The people we spoke to were very proud of the work they were doing and the progress they were making. There is a large nursery on site which propagates the local native plants and trees to be planted to bring the area back as close as possible to its native state. Some of the submitters we spoke to stated that this successful rehabilitation was not always the case, with some past mine owners having a poor record of management practices which has created a negative reputation for the mine. This is not a situation that is unique to North Stradbroke Island as there have been many examples of poor rehabilitation practices across many Queensland mines prior to best management practices being introduced to the resource and gas industries.

It must be noted that, whilst the directors of QYAC were openly against the continuation of mining on the island, this was not universal amongst the Quandamooka people. The committee heard from many Quandamooka who submitted and spoke to the committee under the condition that their identities were kept confidential. Many of the Quandamooka people work for Sibelco in various roles, for example, in management, mineworkers and in the area of rehabilitation. The committee noted that many of the supporters and workers of the mine were very cautious when speaking publicly.

The groups that are opposed to the continuation of sandmining on the island were passionate in their arguments. However, they could not provide a solid economic case for the immediate future of North Stradbroke Island. The non-government members of the committee were amazed at the lack of diligence around the proposed economic transition strategy and the fact that there had been no risk impact analysis done to investigate how the island's economy would survive the end of sandmining.

The committee became aware that the department had conducted a survey on the island between December 2015 and February 2016 and requested to see the findings of this research. The committee was told that the findings were cabinet in confidence and could not be released. On several

occasions the committee tried to access the findings but to no avail. The committee then invited Minister Miles and Minister Lynham to attend a hearing with the committee, but this invitation was declined. The only conclusion that the non-government members could derive from this is that the findings of the survey are so damning that there is no intention by the government for that report to ever see the light of day.

The workers assistance scheme left a lot of unanswered questions as to how many employees would be eligible, particularly any worker who had received a redundancy payment from Sibelco. Submitters argued that all employees, regardless of whether they receive a redundancy payment, should be entitled to, and be able to, access support under the scheme. The more submitters the committee spoke to, the more apparent it became that there was no workable strategy in place to transition the economy and the workforce with an imminent end to sandmining. Almost all submitters expressed their disappointment and frustration at the lack of consultation by the government in the formulation of this bill, and none more so than Ben Swan, the Secretary of the Australian Workers' Union. In submissions to the committee Ben Swan stated—

It would seem that the group most affected by the cessation date—the workers—were not given an opportunity to be consulted on the Government's actual legislation.

This should not be particularly surprising to the AWU, given that there was no consultation with the union and the workforce in 2011 when the Bligh government announced its intention to cease sandmining. Mr Swan further stated—

I just find that an appalling lack of process, and this is an era where we have been promised much about accountability and transparency. ... Consultation does not mean being told what the end result is after the decision has been made ...

He then went on to say—

It has been repeated *ad nauseum* that this government had an election mandate to introduce this legislation. This is nonsense. There was not one public statement made during the course of the 2015 election campaign about the cessation of sand mining on NSI.

The non-government members do not support either the government bill or the private member's bill. While there are many submitters critical of the lack of consultation with the government bill, it was almost impossible to find anyone who had been consulted on the private member's bill. This bill makes no mention of any transition plan or economic strategy for affected workers or businesses. This bill is so lacking in detail as to be unworkable and can only be seen as a cheap grab for a headline.

The motives for the government bill appear to be much clearer: Green votes. The lack of consultation and the withholding of information can only be seen for what it is. The decision to end sandmining was already made, and nothing and nobody would stand in the way of securing Green preferences. The Labor Party are dancing with two partners: the unions and the Greens. It is never easy, and on this occasion they can only dance with one. They have chosen the Green partner, and the blue-collar workers who are employed at the sand mine will be sacrificed at the Green altar for those Green preferences. The only jobs that those opposite are interested in saving are the jobs of the member for Mt Coot-tha and the member for South Brisbane.

The path to harvest Green preferences by the Labor Party has been plain for all to see and even more so over recent times. The sneaking through parliament of a major change to our voting system with no consultation to once again introduce compulsory preferential voting was a blatant one. While we were on North Stradbroke Island we heard from many workers from Sibelco who are fearful for their future and that of their families. There are limited employment opportunities on the island for these plant operators and tradespersons unless they go and work in a coffee shop or go to one of the resorts and make beds. Most are very concerned about the impact that a rushed end date for sandmining will have on the value of their homes.

No-one that the committee spoke to or received submissions from disputed that sandmining will and should end—all agree on that point—but it must be done in an orderly and well-managed way, otherwise the impact on the economic and social fabric of North Stradbroke Island has the potential to be devastating. The non-government members of the committee hold very real fears for the future of North Stradbroke Island should the 2019 end date be passed. We will be opposing both bills, and all members in this House should do the same.

In conclusion, Madam Deputy Speaker, there have been a number of changes to the Finance and Administration Committee of recent times, of which you were a member. You spent some time on this bill, and thank you for your contribution. Our deputy chair, Michael Crandon, has also moved on—thank you very much for all your time, Michael—and a new chair has come in amongst it. The member for Bulimba, Di Farmer, started this report, so thank you very much; the member for Sunnybank, Peter Russo, has taken over from there. How could we forget the member for Barron River? I would like to finish by acknowledging all the hard work of the research director, Amanda Honeyman. Thank you very much for all the work you have done; it is very much appreciated.