



A submission for the extension of National Parks on Stradbroke Island

In this Submission

- > Stating the case 1, 2
- > Stradbroke Island needs more National Parks 3
- > Urgent reasons to declare National Parks 4
- > Correspondence requesting National Park extensions 7, 8

SIMO AGM 2007 guest speaker John Bristow, President of National Parks Association Queensland, noted the many submissions that had been made between 1962 and 1992 requesting National Parks on Stradbroke Island. In the event, only one National Park was declared, Blue Lake and Tortoise Lagoon. Based on the declaration of Fraser, Moreton and Peel as National Parks, the current Native Title claim would seem not to be an impediment to declaration of additional parks on Stradbroke.



SIMO was formed in 1978 to stop a bridge from the mainland. Since then, SIMO members have fought many campaigns to protect Stradbroke Island's special environment and to lobby for conservation, sustainability and wise development.

Stating the case: It is widely acknowledged that Stradbroke Island's extent of National Park needs to be increased from 512 ha of the island's total area of 27,500 ha. Government agencies and local community groups have spoken with a single voice on the matter.

Following 30 years of requests for additional park, in 1992 a major National Park of 16,000 ha was due to be gazetted. Here are extracts from the briefing notes prepared in 1992 by the Minister's department:

'BRIEFING NOTES PREPARED FOR THE HONOURABLE PAT COMBEN MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE
'...NORTH STRADBROKE ISLAND – NATIONAL PARK GAZETTAL
'Approximately 16 000 ha of North Stradbroke Island will be gazetted as National Park within the next 12 months.

'The park will include wetlands of the Eighteen Mile Swamp, the high dune heathland associated with Mt Vane and the complex of perched lakes at the southern end of the island.

'A management plan will be drafted balancing the preservation of the biological system with the demand for recreational opportunities. Provision will be made for beach camping, bush walking and four wheel driving. A fire management plan will be included. Monitoring programs addressing rare and endangered species and assessing water quality of the fresh water lakes will be implemented.

'1.1 Delays in Gazettal Process – Issues that Require Resolution
Cancellation of Crown Reserves

'Negotiations are under way with the Redland Shire Council regarding the cancellation of several Crown Reserves currently under the Council's trusteeship. The inclusion of these reserves within the park area is crucial to the successful management of the national park. [This was resolved.]

...'Agreement on ACI Mines Lease Exchange

"Gazettal of the southern half of the park may proceed prior to the northern section if agreement of the land exchange with ACI Mines is not resolved. [This was resolved.]

...'Exchange of ACI's Mining Lease ML1059 for an Area Adjacent to its Lease Near Myora

'...The proposed exchange will provide a "core" area within the northern section of the proposed national park and a continuous park along the length of the island...' [The exchange was agreed.]

But the National Park did not eventuate. What happened? Why did the government not go ahead with this gazettal? SIMO was not informed. Now, another 15 years on, we want to know when the gazettal of these significant areas will finally occur.

This is drawn from a map on display in the offices of CRL in the early 1990s. It shows the mining company's interpretation of the proposed 16,000 ha of National Park (in green): an unbroken environmental corridor from Flinders Beach in the north to Swan Bay in the south, weaving between the various mining sites.

Today, 15 years on, in revisiting the decision to allocate areas of the island for National Park, it will be necessary to reassess the proposal of 1992 (as indicated here) in light of current mining operations and any possible changes in significance to some areas.

It is critical to retain intact the north-south corridor; this may mean incorporating some previously mined areas.

Also, it will be necessary to factor in the imminent threat posed to the mainland koala population, and the imperative now to secure Stradbroke Island as a bastion for what is likely to become soon the sole remaining koala population left in South-East Queensland.

Another issue of concern not apparent in 1992 is protection of the aquifer, which can no longer be thought of as an inexhaustible resource. Global warming has significant implications: the aquifer on which all the island's ecosystems depend is replenished only by rainfall.

Also since 1992, the Point Lookout Reserve has been declared a heritage site, for environmental and cultural reasons. New National Park areas would ideally extend east to the area immediately south of the township in order to connect up with the Heritage-listed Reserve.

And since 1992, demand for places for natural recreation has increased considerably. Stradbroke Island, traditional natural playground for the region, warrants all the safeguards of National Park recognition and protection.





Bushland near Blue Lake



Path through cyprus pines in Blue Lake National Park



Eighteen Mile Swamp at the Causeway



View from the escarpment across Eighteen Mile Swamp to Main Beach

Stradbroke Island needs more National Parks

Extension to Blue Lake National Park The present area of Blue Lake is only 512 ha. This should be extended to protect the whole Blue Lake catchment. At present most of the lake's catchment valleys are outside the National Park. The valleys support magnificent plant communities, some of the best remaining on Stradbroke Island, and largely free of introduced weeds.

We have only recently learned how unusual Blue Lake is. In a talk to the island community in November 2007, Dr Jon Marshall and Dr Glenn McGregor, NRW ecologists, described some of many interesting discoveries coming to light concerning this unique lake. Bore data from the bottom of the lake show no traces of post-European signature, something the scientists have not seen in any other of the 200-odd Australian lakes they have studied. 17,300 megalitres per day flow out of Blue Lake into Eighteen Mile Swamp; and the entire volume of the lake is recharged every 29 days. Yet the water quality and lake level have been stable for the past 7400 years. The lake's fauna and flora are heavily dependent on this stability. So the supply of water to the lake must be safeguarded.

The extensions to Blue Lake also need to include Eighteen Mile Swamp and the creek running between these two water bodies.

Eighteen Mile Swamp The largest water body on Stradbroke Island, a Ramsar-listed site, immeasurably important as a habitat for fauna and flora, and as a feeder into Swan Bay, Eighteen Mile Swamp is an outstanding natural feature. It is the largest coastal swamp in southern Queensland and considered unique. The swamp plays a critical role in draining surface and groundwater from the central high dunes to the protected marine habitat of Swan Bay. 'Eighteen Mile Swamp and the southern mangroves are important habitats for migratory and indigenous waterfowl.' (*Australian Heritage Database for North Stradbroke Island* (southern section), [www.environment.gov.au/cgi-](http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail&place_id=8445)

[bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail&place_id=8445](http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl?mode=place_detail&place_id=8445)

Although some vegetation changes have occurred in the vicinity of Palm Lagoon and Herring Lagoon pump stations, most of Eighteen Mile Swamp is in good condition. Given its biological significance and great aesthetic values, it would benefit from National Park status. This also would further protect the Swamp into the future, and help forestall the possible threat of saltwater intrusion should the water table be lowered as a result of additional water extraction.

Isolated populations differentiate, and many aquatic species on the island have developed highly significant genetic structuring from species on the mainland and other islands. Within Stradbroke there is a sharp genetic break between the eastern and western sides, implying isolation over millions of years. This has resulted in some species in Eighteen Mile Swamp becoming differentiated from the same species in the western side of the island. This genetic cleavage is a puzzle for the scientists. It is a further compelling argument for preserving Stradbroke Island for future scientific research.

A scientific footnote: In June 1974, the Royal Society of Queensland held a Stradbroke Island Symposium at Point Lookout. Proceedings were published in Proc. R. Soc. Qld 86 (March 1975). Every paper included a plea to preserve the immense variety and diversity of flora and fauna on the island. The presidential address (by GW Saunders) warned that one of the greatest threats to life on earth is the danger of monoculture. In 2007, scientists are still discovering new, unknown species on Stradbroke Island; and it is now even more urgent to preserve and protect the rich biodiversity for the future.



Scribbly gum



Swallow Lagoon is thought to be the most elevated water body in the Queensland sand mass system.

Brown Lake (right) is in need of protection. A sacred lake, it has suffered in the past from the impacts of motorised water craft. Boat launching has eroded the edges of the lake and destroyed littoral vegetation; fuel spills have left poly-aromatic carbons in the sediments of the lake; and 4WDs have trampled the terrain. Fortunately motorised craft are now banned. The popular lake reverts to its characteristic serenity when the holidaymakers go home.

Urgent reasons to declare National Parks

To date, only one park has been gazetted on Stradbroke Island: Blue Lake National Park, incorporating Tortoise Lagoon. But the park is only a tiny fragment of the whole island, and it is in need of enlargement.

The three major sand islands of the Cooloola system – Fraser, Moreton and Stradbroke – should be treated as a unit. Stradbroke Island is the sole remaining yet to receive any significant measure of environmental protection. While Fraser and Moreton became National Parks, Stradbroke was sacrificed to mining. It has suffered from exploitation and the laissez faire management of many environmental assets, from the aquifer to the Reserves to the lakes and beaches. It is time to redress the history of damage and neglect and give Stradbroke Island the same attention as Moreton and Fraser.

There are compelling reasons why National Park status is an urgent matter: environmental, cultural, scientific, aesthetic and economic – and simply because responsibility for preserving Stradbroke’s outstanding qualities for future generations can no longer be evaded.

The population explosion in South-East Queensland makes every scrap of wilderness increasingly precious and under threat as people seek out natural areas for recreation. Much of Stradbroke remains pristine. It is a haven for recreational visitors as much as for scientists and educationalists.

We are witnessing the final era of the mainland koala population on the ‘Koala Coast’. Habitat is being bulldozed for housing at an alarming rate. Redland Council shows no likelihood of either curbing development or allocating viable habitat corridors; and consequently Stradbroke Island is destined very soon to become a Noah’s Ark for the remnant population in the region. However, the island’s koala population is under pressure also, from widespread destruction of habitat and feeding corridors. Mining has pushed koalas into the northern part of the island, and sightings are often made near Amity, Dunwich and Point Lookout. Proximity to the townships makes the koalas vulnerable to dog attacks. Although Professor Carrick finds the island’s koala population to be healthy; chlamydia will break out as an expression of stress should there be further loss of habitat and tucker trees, rendering the population unable to breed. We need to act immediately to preserve existing koala habitat and extend their territory to ensure the healthy future of the remaining animals.





Paperbarks, Flinders swamp



Peat swamp: peat builds up over thousands of years.



Revegetation, undertaken in 1989: a monoculture with no understorey or wildlife



Premine landscape: complexity, richness, life

Each swamp, lake and lagoon has its own characteristics and should be protected as National Park. Ramsar-listed wetlands cover much of Stradbroke Island. The island's wetlands include Blue Lake, Brown Lake, Freshwater Creek, Myora Springs, Cooroon Cooroonpah Creek, Capembah Creek, Aranarawai Creek, Amity Swamp, Wallen Swamp, Flinders Beach wetlands, Eighteen Mile Swamp, Shag Lagoon, Swallow Lagoon, Horseshoe Swamp, Native Companion Lagoon, South Lagoon and Swan Bay. Some, like Lake Kounpee and Blakesley Lagoon, have been permanently damaged by sandmining operations.

The waterbodies are significant breeding and resting grounds for migratory birds. Twenty per cent of the island's flora is in ground-water-dependent ecosystems; these contain most of the rare and endangered plant species and provide habitat for rare and endangered animals, including the water mouse, wallum froglet and koala, which inhabit the paperbark swamps.

Most of the swamplands on the island are peat swamps. 'Peatlands are the top long-term carbon store in the terrestrial biosphere – storing up to 10 times more carbon/hectare than other ecosystems in the same region and twice as much carbon as the biomass of the world's forests.' 'Assessment on peatlands, biodiversity and climate change', Wetlands International report presented at UN Climate Conference in Bali, December 2007

Everything that occurs in Moreton Bay affects the island. With the upgrading of Moreton Bay Marine Park, more green zones are being established. But not all the sea meadow grass areas are included. Stretches of meadow grass from Dunwich to Amity and from Amity to Day's Gutter at Karingle are an important food source for dugongs, rays, turtles and sharks. Turtles also feed on mangrove fruits. With climate change, more turtles are expected to nest on the island, and so it is important to maintain the integrity of the beaches and mudflats.

Sandmining is the major hindrance to rational, holistic consideration in designating National Parks on the island.

The sandmining companies, CRL, ACI and Unimin, have been the elephant in the room that no one has been confident to mention in previous requests for further National Parks. But today, in 2007, sandmining is no longer in the ascendant on the island. It is a dying industry, with leases nearing expiry, companies struggling with the high dollar, and much of the island's mineral resource already mined. The largest company, CRL, is re-mining areas it has previously mined; it has downsized the workforce, most of which now commutes from the mainland; it has sold the workers' housing in Dunwich. And as CRL has cut corners economically, the island has been progressively exposed to unacceptable environmental risk.

CRL no longer pursues a viable vegetation rehabilitation program: The cleared area (open sand) at both the mine sites now totals 800 ha, over twice that permitted under the Environmental Authority; this sand is blown into the bay and sea and onto adjoining vegetation by the frequent strong winds, and eroded and swept away by storms. Stockpiled topsoil is left to degrade for years on end, and nearly all timber cleared from mine paths is burned. CRL has conducted virtually no revegetation on postmine landform for years. .

It is striking that even in areas revegetated 15 years ago, there is no bird chorus. Mining results in significant loss of habitat for the island's creatures, as well as loss of biodiversity.

Mining also results in the loss of significant natural assets. Lake Kounpee has been dry for 16 years following breaching of its perching layer by CRL's mining operations.

The company's most audacious and egregious environmental



The extent and scale of the open areas can be gauged from views of Stradbroke from the mainland.



Bushwalkers take in the view



Bushwalking through the heart of the island



Kangaroos on the dunes

infracrion is construction of a huge 'dune' across a valley, boxing in Mungaree Lagoon and creating a totally foreign sand formation angled NE/SW in opposition to the island's dominant SE/NW-oriented transgressive dunes. Unfortunately, this large injury to the island's geomorphology is not intended to be an isolated instance. CRL plans to construct several more disoriented 'dunes' at Enterprise, with inevitable but still uncalculated impacts to the surface and ground-water flow into Eighteen Mile Swamp and Swan Bay, and much else.

Tailings water from stacked landforms next to the escarpment and Eighteen Mile Swamp has flooded the toe of the escarpment and the fragile edge of the swamp where the *Phaius* orchid lives. Enterprise – dredging immediately behind the escarpment holding the swamp – will continue to impact on this water body for the next few years.

The Enterprise mine is destroying the last remaining ancient parabolic transgressive dunes and the ancient forest behind the escarpment. Since EPA does not require CRL to return the premine landforms, this escarpment and dunal system will be destroyed forever.

In extracting minerals, mining also removes the intricate layers of sand formed over thousands of years, replacing this diversity with an homogenous sand mass that performs very differently in regard to water infiltration, with implications both below and above ground.

Mining leases cover a third of Stradbroke Island and mining is the greatest user of water, but the impacts on the aquifer of moving around very large amounts of water are not fully understood.

With water now the prime issue confronting governments of the 21st century, there are powerful reasons to place the interests of island's the aquifer before those of its declining mining industry.

And it is also time perhaps to even consider truncating the existing mining leases before any further damage is wrought on the island's environment or any further risk is posed in sensitive, unique areas like Eighteen Mile Swamp, and arrange for the orderly handover of leases to the state.

Rehabilitation will take decades to undertake and centuries to mature. It is important to put a halt the exploitation of Stradbroke Island and make a start on the essential work of remediating the landscape sooner rather than later.

Ecotourism will be important to the island's economy in the future. The wetlands, lakes and diverse terrestrial habitats have great potential for ecotourism. Presently, bushwalking is very underrated, and hardly anyone gets to see the interior of the island.

With boardwalks and sensitive track development, the swamplands, heathlands and forests add other attractions for the island's visitors, most of whom are still only aware of the coastal gorges and whale watching opportunities. Many visitors will be delighted by the great diversity of plant communities and water features to be found in close proximity to each other. There is also a whole variety of magnificent views on many walks. One might be gazing out across Moreton Bay with Mount Warning in the distance, or looking up the spine of Moreton Island across a myriad of sandbanks and channels, or down the full length of Main Beach to the Gold Coast, or across to Brisbane and the faraway Glasshouse Mountains.

On a single walk you can cross wonderful bonsai heathland, take in a view across Eighteen Mile Swamp to the line of breakers on Main Beach, drop into scribbly gum forest and watch rare glossy black cockatoos feeding on casuarina seeds, walk into Blue Lake and enjoy its tranquillity, track back along the fringes of Eighteen Mile Swamp and hear a wallaby thump down the bank and finally walk out onto Main Beach and see kangaroos on the sand dunes in the evening light. And there are many other fine nature walks to be had.



Blue Lake, or Karboora



Old growth forest



Banksia candle



Mt Hardgrave

Correspondence requesting National Park extensions

26 March 1962 From AR Fletcher, Minister for Lands, to Mr Harrison MLA re declaration of Stradbroke National Park: Blue Lake.

24 September 1969 From North Stradbroke Island Executive Council to National Parks Section of Forestry Department, request for extension of Blue Lake National Park to include Tortoise Lagoon and lake outlet creek adjacent to Eighteen Mile Swamp.

1970 From Redland Shire Council, a formal request for declaration as National Park:

a) the beach and swamp behind Flinders Beach

b) Welsby Lagoons area

1971 From National Parks Association of Queensland, formally requesting the areas surrounding and including Ibis Lagoon, Horseshoe Swamp, Tea Tree Lagoon, Native Companion Lagoon and the Mt Scott area to be declared National Park.

21 September 1971 From North Stradbroke Island Executive Council to Hon RE Camm, Minister for Mines, a request for part of ML931 to be excised from mining lease for extension of Blue Lake National Park.

1972 Co-ordinator General's Department, Queensland, *Survey of Major Islands of Moreton Bay, 1972*, p7, 2.11 recommendations:

1 Extension of Blue Lake-Tortoise Lagoon National Park

2 Almost any available area of sufficient size is likely to have National Park potential

3 The Eighteen Mile Swamp

1975 Challoner MC, *Redland Shire Council Proposed Strategic Plan for North Stradbroke Island*, Proceedings of Royal Society Queensland 86 (19): 121-3 (1975): National Park areas proposed as in Fig 1, p122 (scheme approved, 4 July 1974)

1975 JS McEvoy, Department of Primary Industries, Brisbane, *A Plan for the Preservation of Habitat for the Mammalian and Avian Fauna of North Stradbroke Island*, areas suggested as Environmental Park or National Park, Proceedings of Royal Society of Queensland 8b (13) 77-9 (1975)

1975 Co-ordinator General's Department of Queensland, *Coastal Management Queensland-New South Wales Border to Northern Boundary to Noosa Shire*, Gutteridge Haskins and Davey, 1975, pp74-80: Areas Recommended for Declaration as National Park – six North Stradbroke Island sites listed

1976 Co-ordinator General's Department Queensland, *Moreton Bay Region Growth Strategy Investigations*, Non Urban Land Use and Physical Constraints, Task 5

1 May 1979 From SIMO to Dr G Saunders, National Parks and Wildlife Services, again requesting extension of Blue Lake National Park to include the Eighteen Mile Swamp.

25 February 1981 From SIMO to Hon JA Elliott, Minister for the Departments of National Parks and Sport, re urgent investigation for consideration of areas for National Park declaration on NSI

27 May 1986 From SIMO to Hon Peter McKechnie, Minister for Tourism, National Parks, Sports and Arts, a request for National Parks on North Stradbroke Island: of 27,520 ha there is only one small National Park of 512 ha, Blue Lake, declared in 1962.

24 February 1987 From SIMO to Hon Geoff Muntz, Minister for Tourism, National Parks and Sport, a request for extension of National Parks on the island.

22 June 1989 From EFF Finger, Director General Premier's Department advising Cr Cooke-Bramley, Redland Shire Council: 'that the Queensland Government is committed to declaring National Park status over a substantial part of the island and that resolution of



A bloodwood on the track beside the peat swamp



Tiny tree climbing orchids



Blue Lake National Park

SIMO (Stradbroke Island Management Organisation)

Post Office
Point Lookout 4183
SIMO president
Jackie Cooper
ume@umemagazine.com
3409 8944
SIMO vice-president
Jennie Truman
truman.family@bigpond.com
3409 8523

matters among involved parties to achieve this aim is progressing’.

23 January 1990 From SIMO to Hon Pat Comben, Minister for Conservation and Heritage: ‘Now that a rationale has been reached, we ask that Government move as soon as possible to give National Park status to the agreed significant island areas’.

2 March 1992 Briefing notes prepared for the Hon Pat Comben, Minister for Environment and Heritage, re Significant Environmental Issues Relevant to North Stradbroke Island (see p1)

23 July 1998 From SIMO to Hon RJ Welford, Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources, re SIMO’s ‘battle’ for national parks on the island since 1978 when SIMO was formed

14 September 1998 From Hon Rod Welford MLA: ‘it is not intended to declare as national park areas of known Aboriginal interest, including North Stradbroke and Peel Islands, without appropriate consultation...Once there is agreement on the various issues of common interest, I am confident the national park declaration will be able to be finalised.’

And there the matter has languished for another decade, with nothing apparently happening. Certainly SIMO has not been informed. It is time now to pick up the strands of this case and make what must be an inevitable decision to increase the National Parks on the island.

Concluding remarks As this submission is being prepared, celebrations are in hand for the newly declared Peel Island National Park. While we are jubilant at this good news and congratulate the Government for its decision, we are left wondering why are we not celebrating also more National Parks on Stradbroke Island?

Stradbroke Island – the second largest sand island in the world, home to what will shortly no doubt be the region’s last remnant population of koalas (world’s fourth most iconic animal) – is today still in the anomalous position of being the only significant sand barrier island off the coast of South- East Queensland not to have substantial tracts declared National Park.

While SIMO has been puzzled by the lack of progress on declaring more of the island National Park, one thing has become clear over the years: what should have been a decision taken long ago on the basis of the sheer weight of the environmental and scientific evidence and the overwhelming heritage considerations has been allowed to wallow in limbo for several decades – through indifference, lack of political will, ignorance of the island’s significance, or perhaps the elephant in the room, an irreconcilable conflict of interest over sandmining. Whatever, the decision to declare National Parks on Stradbroke is now well overdue.

Finally, SIMO would like to draw attention again to a point made both to Hon Brian Littleproud, Minister for Environment in May 1998, and repeated to Hon Rod Welford in July 1998: ‘While the proposed Park areas are subject to Native Title Claim, we note that in the case of Park declaration on Fraser Island, Native Title was not an impediment. We ask that Stradbroke be treated in the same light and that national parks be declared for North Stradbroke.’ (Nor was Native Title an impediment to declaration of Peel Island, which is included in the current Quandamooka claim.)

Eleven years later, we make this same plea once again: that Stradbroke be accorded the same value as Fraser and Peel, and more National Parks be declared on the island with no further delay.

We look forward to the positive consideration of our submission. Our sincere thanks for your attention to this matter of the greatest importance for the island’s future.

The SIMO Committee