

**STRONGER  
TOGETHER**

AWUEQ  
QLD BRANCH OFFICE  
Level 12, 333 Adelaide Street  
BRISBANE, QLD 4000  
GPO Box 88, BRISBANE, QLD, 4001  
Members Hotline 1800 QLD AWU (753 298)  
T: (07) 3221 8844 F: (07) 3221 8700  
E: [secretary@awu.org.au](mailto:secretary@awu.org.au)



ABN 54942536069

26 February 2016

Mr Peter Russo MP  
Chair  
Finance and Administration Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane Qld 4000

Via email: [fac@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:fac@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Mr Russo

**Re: *Inquiry into the North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability (Renewal of Mining Leases) Amendment Bill 2015 and North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2015***

The Australian Workers' Union (AWU) represents workers employed by Sibelco within the company's sand mining operations on North Stradbroke Island.

There are many AWU members employed in south-east Queensland whose jobs are linked to the ongoing operation of sand mining activity on North Stradbroke Island, including workers in the glass manufacturing industry in Brisbane and employees of various barge and ferry operators.

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee's inquiry.

Like other affected stakeholders, the AWU also has an interest in the economic, social and environmental future of North Stradbroke Island. Our members employed on North Stradbroke Island deserve to be included in deliberations that will have a significant and lasting effect on their employment and livelihoods.

### **Cessation Date**

Both Bills before the Committee seek to set particular dates for the cessation of sand mining on North Stradbroke Island. The objective of the Bill introduced by the Member for Dalrymple seeks to sustainably end mining activities by the end of 2024 with continued access for rehabilitation until the end of 2029. The Bill introduced by the Honourable Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection has the objective of substantively phasing out sand mining by 2019.

In 2011, the Bligh Labor Government made an announcement that it was committed to ceasing mining operations on North Stradbroke Island by 2019. At the time, the Government gave itself an eight year transition period.

Secretary: Ben Swan

The Australian Workers' Union of Employees, Queensland.  
The Australian Workers' Union, Queensland Branch.

[www.qld.awu.net.au](http://www.qld.awu.net.au)

This would have recognised that in order to provide workers with the best chance of obtaining future long term employment, there needed to be a realistic, orderly and effective transition.

In fact, the previous Government in its own published material at the time acknowledged that *“to facilitate this economic transition process for the island, the Economic Transition Strategy recognises the need for early action”*.<sup>1</sup>

The Plan also indicated that the island’s economy at the time was *“comparatively fragile”* and while *“the economic issues faced by the island predate any decision about an early cessation of mining, it is recognised that its end will generate future issues that need to be addressed”*.<sup>2</sup>

In 2015, the current Labor Government has introduced legislation that seeks to cease sand mining on North Stradbroke Island within three years – a transition period that has effectively been more than halved.

There has been no clear indication from the Government as to why 2019 has been selected as the date for the cessation of sand mining apart from the assertion that it was an election commitment.

If it was an election commitment, there was no organised announcement of the fact nor did the Labor Party release any election campaign material about the cessation date.

In fact, the Government’s sole reliance is on two letters written three days before the election by retiring Deputy Leader of the Labor Party, Tim Mulherin MP. These letters to the Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC) and the Wilderness Protection Society of Queensland (WPSQ) do not specifically commit to 2019 as a cessation date.

While neither the Union nor the Parliament is privy to private discussions between individuals, it can only be assumed that commitments were verbally given as there is no written confirmation of 2019 to be found.

It would be extremely concerning if the only reason 2019 has been selected is simply to restore the commitment of the previous Blich Government, without consideration of the economic implications for such a shortened transition period.

### **Economic Transition Plan & Worker Assistance Scheme**

The AWU contends that the Government’s Bill cannot be viewed in isolation from what Minister Miles himself said is *“the first of a three-part plan the Palaszczuk government has developed to kickstart this transition”*<sup>3</sup>

The \$20 million draft Economic Transition Plan and the \$5 million Workers Assistance Scheme are intrinsically linked to the Government’s legislation – so much so, that the Minister tabled both transition documents in his introduction of the Bill into the House.

As the Committee advised at the public consultation fora, you will not be considering the government’s transition packages in your deliberations. The narrow focus of the Committee’s work which will not include scrutiny of the adequacy and appropriateness of the Government’s transition packages continues to be a concern to the AWU as per our letter of 13 February 2016 to the Chair of the Finance and Administration Committee (**Attachment 1**).

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<sup>1</sup> North Stradbroke Island, Planning for Action (Draft) – a sustainable economic future for North Stradbroke Island 2011

<sup>2</sup> North Stradbroke Island, An Economic Transition for North Stradbroke Island 2011

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/2015/2015\\_12\\_03\\_WEEKLY.pdf](https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/hansard/2015/2015_12_03_WEEKLY.pdf)

We will continue to argue that \$20 million for the transition of an entire island economy is manifestly inadequate, particularly in light of the condensed timeframes for this transition.

There is a considerable history of long term, well-paid and sustainable employment for generations of North Stradbroke Island and Bayside residents through these sand-mining operations.

We are gravely concerned that the industries identified within the draft Economic Transition Plan, namely tourism, will not be able to sustain the economy in the long-term.

We also believe that better and further work should have been undertaken on the Workers Assistance Scheme before its release. Whilst the AWU did have the opportunity to comment on the draft Workers Assistance Scheme, our comments and questions remain unanswered on some key issues including eligibility criteria and definitions (**Attachment 2**).

### **Consultation**

The AWU wrote to the Premier of Queensland on 3 June 2015 seeking the following:

*“We ask that in any deliberations by your Government on the future of sand mining operations on North Stradbroke Island that our members’ views, and our views as their industrial representatives, be given active, meaningful and direct consideration by those Ministers bearing responsibility for the decisions that will be made regarding future employment in this industry.*

*This means more than consultation once a decision has been made. It requires active engagement and consideration of options and alternatives before a decision is arrived at.”*

We attach a copy of this letter for the Committee’s information (**Attachment 3**).

Six months to the day, the Government’s Bill was introduced into the Parliament on the afternoon of 3 December 2015 with the AWU only being alerted that morning.

However, we note there was extensive consultation with traditional owner groups, NSI Housing, Stradbroke Island Chamber of Commerce, Straddie Camping, Stradbroke Island Ferries, and the Wilderness Protection Society prior to the legislation’s introduction.<sup>4</sup>

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.

“Consultation” therefore seems to have been exceedingly selective and to the exclusion of workers and their unions.

Of course, this is something that is not particularly surprising to the AWU given there was no consultation with the union and workforce in 2011 when the Bligh Government announced its intention to cease sand mining, nor in 2013 under the Newman Government’s changes. The Palaszczuk Government’s lack of consultation simply cements a history of disregard for workers on this issue.

We are also concerned that the consultation that has taken place has not necessarily fairly represented the many views on the island. As an example, our union represents a number of traditional owners and elders, some fourth generation islanders, who have spoken directly with the Premier about the fact that QYAC does not represent their views or the views of the indigenous workforce on the island generally.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.cabinet.qld.gov.au/ministers/diaries.aspx](http://www.cabinet.qld.gov.au/ministers/diaries.aspx)

The AWU was given an unrealistically short time frame to review the Workers Assistance Scheme, however our union's informed feedback was ignored and the document released largely unchanged. We did our best with the little time provided and the issues we raised were significant and go to the core of how the Scheme would actually work at a practical level.

In relation to the Economic Transition Strategy, the first opportunity that we had to see the document was when the union was called to a meeting at 9:30am on Thursday 3 December 2015 – the Economic Transition Strategy was subsequently publicly released at 4:30pm that same afternoon.

Given the Palaszczuk Government's commitment and promise to genuine consultation with the Queensland community, we are gravely concerned that in relation to this particular legislation, the feedback from workers was not welcomed and indeed deliberately not undertaken.

In conclusion, the AWU maintains the view that our members are realistic about the fact that sand mining will cease at some point in the future. It has never been a question of "if" sand mining will cease, but rather a question of "when" and under what transition programs.

In fact, we have made this clear through our communication with our members who will be affected by the proposed legislation (**Attachment 4**).

As indicated in our submission, we do not believe the Government's proposed Economic Transition Plan or Worker Assistance Scheme can transform an entire island economy and community by 2019. We also maintain that the legislation cannot and should not be viewed in isolation from the Government's transition plans.

The AWU strongly believes that a moderately extended and realistic timeframe will give workers the time needed to fully consider the implications of the Government's decision to cease sand mining on North Stradbroke Island and to give people some measure of hope about their future livelihoods and the wellbeing of their families.

The AWU intends to appear before the Finance and Administration Committee in support of our submission and to give evidence during the public hearings and we look forward to receiving advice on the dates for those hearings.

If you require any further information in relation to our submission, please contact our office on phone: (07) 3221 8844 or email: [secretary@awu.org.au](mailto:secretary@awu.org.au).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ben Swan', written over a light blue circular stamp.

BEN SWAN  
**SECRETARY**