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Friday, August 18, 2006

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Depth of despair

Company's new bid to mine seabed

RICHARD NOONE

MILLIONS of tonnes of sand could be extracted from seabeds off the Central Coast if a mining plan goes ahead.

Sydney Marine Sand has applied for a licence to explore 180sq km of the seabed between Gosford and Norah Head.

The company made a similar application for the same area in 2000 but it was rejected by then NSW Premier Bob Carr.

It met opposition again in 2003 when an exploration licence for an area off Sydney's northern beaches was refused.

The current application for the coast is three times the size of the northern beaches proposal and would be carried out in water between 50m and 100m deep.

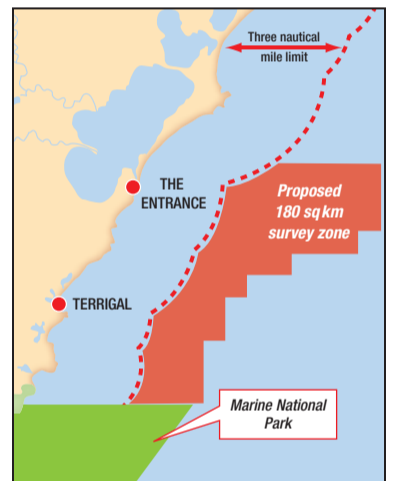
The area is beyond the three nautical mile limit (5.5km) over which the State Government has control, so the Federal Government will have the final say on the application.

The company hopes to find sand suitable for the Sydney building industry, which is facing sand shortages as quarries at Kurnell and Penrith run out.



■ To Page 4 Gosford councillor Terri Latella at Terrigal Beach.

Picture: PETER CLARK



Latella to seek council support

GOSFORD councillor Terri Latella will try to enlist council support to block a sand exploration licence off the Central Coast.

Cr Latella said she hoped fellow councillors would support her and lobby the Government to scrap the application.

"There are a lot of alternatives to using sand in construction, which need to be investigated before we even considered exploring for a mine," she said. Ms Latella said the coast had several precious marine species that needed protection and she would contact environmental experts to assess the full impacts.

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Trawler owner: commercial fishing would be decimated

RICHARD NOONE

COMMERCIAL fishing on the Central Coast could be decimated by seabed exploration.

The Hawkesbury Trawl Association said the sonar used in sand exploration disrupted fish migratory paths - particularly affecting commercial species.

Chairman and prawn trawler Graeme Hillyard, of Blackwall, said lobsters, prawns and popular school fish travelled the corridor earmarked for exploration and would "disappear".

"From the evidence we've been shown that's the case," he said.

"If it leads to sand mining it would be catastrophic for commercial and recreational fishermen."

The association will ask Ocean Watch - the environmental science organisation sponsored by commercial fishing - to evaluate the possible effects of the technology outlined in Sydney Marine Sand's exploration application.

Mr Hillyard said there were also grave concerns for whales and dolphins. "It would depend on what time of year [exploration] was done because whales also travel this path," he said.



Prawn trawler Graeme Hillyard said sand mining would be catastrophic for fishermen.

Asquith: exploration presentations unconvincing

COMMUNITY Environment Network chairman John Asquith said presentations he had seen on offshore sand mine exploration were "unconvincing".

"They're really yet to qualify the environmental impacts of the equipment and technology used in

the exploration of sand," he said. The underwater sand dunes, the focus of this exploration, stretch along the east coast and are largely deposited by the current.

Mr Asquith questioned why the Central Coast had to be Sydney's sand pit when there were similar

supplies near the city.

"It is being put up as an alternative to what's pulled out of Somersby," he said. "But because it's coming out of saltwater it would have to be washed and no one has large volumes of cheap freshwater."

Company's new bid to mine seabed

■ From Page 1

Sydney Marine Sand director Darren Skene said the application was for "exploration only" and was subject to very strict environmental constraints.

Much of it will be done using imaging and geophysical mapping of the sea floor, which uses frequencies deemed safe for sea-life and, in particular, whales. Further exploration of the seabed would involve taking 3kg samples from up to 6m deep, he said.

"We would hope it would be considered on its merits," Mr Skene said. "Marine sand represents a possible and potentially environmentally acceptable alternative to current construction sand sources, an alternative which remains largely unexplored and ignored."

Latella to seek council support

■ From Page 1

Mayor Laurie Maher agreed. He said council would be "very worried" about a licence to explore the seabed as a potential sand mine.

"There is no way in the world we would ever give serious consideration for mining," he said.

Meanwhile, a Wyong Council spokeswoman said they first heard about the application when they were contacted by the *Express Advocate*.

She said the council would wait until it was "officially notified" by NSW Primary Industries before it responded.

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