

Company optimistic sand mining on Fiji's Sigatoka River will be approved



Sigatoka River, Fiji. Photo: RNZI / Johnny Blades

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An Australian mining company says it's very optimistic it will get the green light to mine sand along Fiji's Sigatoka River.

Dome Gold Mines is seeking a mining lease from the government for the ironsands project.

It's rejecting concerns the mining could pose a threat to the environment or the nearby Sand Dune National Park, which contains an important Lapita archaeological site.

The company's chief executive Jack McCarthy said the project could bring a hundred jobs and environmental benefits.

"The river itself being so choked would benefit by being deepened, and the Government of Fiji I believe is interested in that happening and that would be for flood mitigation purposes," he said.

"But in addition to that it would open the river up for commercial and pleasure craft that currently can not enter the river because it's too shallow."

Jack McCarthy said it would be two years before mining would get underway after the project is approved.

Sand mining in Fiji promises environmental and economy benefits

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An Australian mining company is dismissing concerns about its proposal to mine sand along the Sigatoka River in Fiji.

Dome Gold Mines says it's waiting for the government to approve a mining lease for the Ironsands Project.

Concerns have been raised about the effect it could have on the environment and the nearby Sand Dunes National Park, which contains an important Lapita archaeological site.

But the company's chief executive Jack McCarthy told Jo O'Brien that rather than causing harm, the project will bring economic and environmental benefits

JACK MCCARTHY: The sand deposits formed over thousands of years and one of the minerals it contains is magnetite which is used for iron ore production. But during the development of the project we realised that the river itself being so choked would benefit by being deepened and the Government of Fiji I believe is interested in that happening and that would be for flood mitigation purposes but in addition to that it would open the river up for commercial and pleasure craft that currently can not enter the river because it's too shallow, and possibly open the river for the transport of goods from the Sigatoka River Valley. Our project would result in production of excess sand and excess gravel and magnetite as a concentrate, which is used in the steel-making process, and also a non-magnetic heavy mineral product which we would like to look to market. It would not involve the use of any chemicals. It's basically a situation where you dig the material up using a dredge and that's pumped through a processing plant and only is water is used in the processing plant.

JO O'BRIEN: What benefits would you see this project bringing for the local people and the local economy?

JMC: Aside from the things I mentioned with regard to the river, which would improve water quality and fish stocks there would be quite a number of jobs created locally, and clearly that would have a commercial impact in the local community and the local economy.

JOB: Would you have an idea of how many jobs?

JMC: About 100 permanent jobs created.

JOB: You mentioned water quality, there have been some concerns about the environmental impact of the project. Are there any issues there for people to be concerned about?

JMC: No I think the concerns are probably based on a lack of understanding. Our feedback with the community is that the river itself presents a danger to them for flooding. But no there wouldn't be any negative environmental impact, if there is any environmental impact it's going to be positive. I mean deepening the river provides a much larger volume of water in which fish stocks can live. It will improve the water quality itself in that tidal area because the water flow will be able to get in and out of the river more easily. It should improve and allow access to fishing.

JOB: And you mentioned the Sand Dunes National Park, there have been some fears about the impact it could have on that area, a heritage area. What's your response to that?

JMC: There's no impact whatsoever. The park boundary is well established. Our operations are well outside the park boundary.

JOB: So there's no danger to the sand dunes or the archaeological site there?

JMC: No those dunes are not remotely connected to what we are trying to do.