



Stars join paddle protest to save surf

GOLD COAST: Surfing champions Mick Fanning, Stephanie Gilmore and Joel Parkinson are set to head a protest hoping to breathe new life into one of Australia's most threatened surfing breaks.

The Gold Coast surfers, plus former world No.1 Mark Occhilupo, are part of a star line-up that will launch a symbolic paddle-out at the world famous Kirra Point break.

They'll join hundreds of other activists expected on Australia Day, forming a 100m-wide map of Australia on their surfboards, to protest against the destruction of the surf spot many top riders used to consider among the world's best.

A 2001 sand-pumping operation put in place by the NSW and Queensland governments has dumped millions of cubic metres of immovable sand at Kirra.

But the plan, originally designed to guard against erosion, has backfired.

Kirra's epic waves have since dwindled and a nearby marine reef has been destroyed.

More recently, the beach itself has been dubbed the "Great Southern Desert". Sand build-up means visitors have to walk 400m across hot sand to get to the water, a prospect that has cut tourism and weakened local business, event organisers say.

Coastal Alliance's Phil Arnott said the cost to the local community was in the millions each year.

"Kirra, may it rest in peace, was once one of the most epic waves on the planet," he said.

"Now the beach is getting wider, there's no surf, it's just a barren, desolate island. Kirra is dead and we need to get it back."

He said the paddle-out was about sending a message to the NSW and Queensland governments to get their act together.

Organisers are hopeful of attracting up to 800 surfers to take part in the paddle-out.

— AAP



Beachgoers on Kirra Beach in 1963. Inset: A diagram showing how the paddlers intend to form a map of Australia.

AP Photo