

## QLD: Surfers unite in protest to bring back Kirra

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By Crystal Ja

GOLD COAST, Jan 26 AAP - Australia's top surfers, past and present, have hit the waves at Queensland's iconic Kirra Point beach to protest its transformation from popular surf spot to lifeless desert.

Protesters hope the symbolic paddle-out involving more than 1,500 people will convince the government to return Kirra to its former glory as one of the world's best breaks.

Surfing champions Stephanie Gilmore and Mick Fanning joined local legend Wayne "Rabbit" Bartholomew, who was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in Monday's Australia Day honours, and hundreds of others to form a 100m-wide human map of Australia to raise the profile of their cause.

Hundreds more watched the spectacle from the shore, providing flashes of Kirra in its heyday as one of Australia's most popular beachfronts.

Kirra has been the focus of protesters since 2002, when a sand-pumping project set up jointly by the NSW and Queensland governments changed its terrain.

Originally designed to stop Kirra beach eroding, it has done the reverse - dumping more than 10 million cubic metres of sand and creating what the locals consider the "Great Southern Desert".

Protesters believe Kirra's once world-famous barrels have disappeared, along with a nearby coral reef which has been literally buried in sand.

"The message is quite clear ... the NSW and Queensland governments need to really get down to Kirra and see the devastation for themselves," event organiser Andrew McKinnon said.

"They need to work together with this community to get things changed."

He said the event was an omen of what Kirra could be if the state governments got their acts together.

"In the end, there were about 3,000 total people who turned up, and that's the atmosphere we used to have at Kirra - the free surfing, people just enjoying the beach," he said.

"People are passionate about Kirra - it's history is just unlike any other - it's where surfers like (Gold Coast legend) Michael Petersen carved out their reputations."

Fanning, the 2007 world surfing champion, said he and fellow pro surfers Dean Morrison and Joel Parkinson, had grown up at Kirra.

"I've surfed lots of waves around the world ... but none more memorable than the tubes at Kirra," he told the crowd.

"Kirra was it - it was the best barrel ride on earth and more people deserve to have seen it."

Environmentalist Bob Moffat said it was a disgrace the government had not responded to calls to fix Kirra, which has also suffered from millions of dollars lost in tourism.

The sand-pumping project is part of a 25-year agreement to maintain Gold Coast beaches, including Kirra, which weathered massive erosion problems in the 1960s.

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