

OPENING BATTLES

Greg Stolz

GROCERY giants Coles and Woolworths have been accused of trying to expand their domination and crush small shopkeepers with a bid to trade from 6am until midnight seven days a week.

The National Retail Association, which represents the two supermarket titans, has applied to the Queensland Industrial Commission for the

Supermarket push to extend hours

radically extended trading hours. It would be the biggest change to retail hours since Sunday trading reforms in 2002. The NRA wants it in place before Christmas.

The application only relates to the Gold Coast tourist strip but indepen-

dent retailers fear it would spark a renewed push for extended trading across the state. "These applications are hardly ever based on real need — they are purely based on the greed of the major retailers," said Retailers Association executive director Scott

Driscoll, whose organisation represents small and independent retailers.

But NRA boss Gary Black said tourists to the Gold Coast were not being properly serviced by existing trading hours and the application related only to a "limited area" east of the Gold

Coast Highway, from The Spit to Coolangatta. Supermarkets in major centres such as Pacific Fair and Australia Fair are not covered by the application.

Mr Black said the current trading regime, which allows supermarkets to trade from 8am until 9pm Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.30pm on Saturdays and 9am to 6pm on Sundays, forced tourists to use convenience stores with smaller ranges and higher prices.

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Supermarkets in push on hours

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"This is all about servicing the needs of visitors to the Gold Coast," Mr Black said.

The Retailers Association is strongly opposing the application, describing it as "another grab by the major supermarket chains".

"This is an absolute ambit push by the Coles-Woolworths duopoly to further expand their 80 per cent share of the grocery market in Australia," Mr Driscoll said.

Surfers Paradise IGA supermarket owner Rick Joubbran, pictured, said that extended



Woolworths Surfers Paradise and opens from 6am to midnight to cash in on after-hours trade.

"This will kill us and many of the other convenience stores if it gets up because Coles and Woolies are just too big for us — we only survive

trading hours now on their crumbs," he said. would be a disaster for his and other small businesses. His store is only about 100m from

Surfers Paradise and opens from 6am to midnight to cash in on after-hours trade.

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now on their crumbs," he said. Queensland Council of Unions general secretary Ron Monaghan said 6am to midnight trading would impact heavily on workers' lives. "The big retailers won't stop until they've got 6am to 6am trading," he said.

Deregulated trading, allowing retailers to remain open until 9pm and on Sundays, was introduced in Queensland in 1994.

The industrial commission hearing on the NRA's application has been set down for November 25 to 27.