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Media Release from Aggregate & Quarry Association

Wetlands decision will help Government meet own targets

The quarry industry says confirmation of changes to new regulations governing wetlands is a victory for common-sense and will help the Government meet its own infrastructure and housing programme ambitions.

Aggregate and Quarry Association CEO Wayne Scott says Ministry for the Environment officials have released revised guidelines giving quarries a consenting pathway for extensions and new developments on property previously excluded by new definitions for wetland areas.

The new regulations were part of the National Environment Standards on Freshwater released in September 2020. Some Auckland quarries said these would rope off new areas of planned development and worsen an already short supply of aggregate.

Last June, Environment Minister David Parker acknowledged the wetlands regulations had gone too far and promised changes.

Wayne Scott says the quarry sector's ability to provide the foundations of all of the country's infrastructure and housing now looks able to resume.

"We are pleased to see the Minister has delivered on his promise and his officials have accepted our recommendation to exclude damp pasture from the new modified definition of a natural wetland," says Wayne Scott.

This will apply if 50% of the pasture is covered in grass or other exotic pasture species, which MfE will define in a yet to be published list.

Wayne Scott says the consenting pathway for quarries will be discretionary, provided sites meet a gateway test.

He says the quarry industry still has some concerns about how this test will apply but it's already clear it will not apply to quarries accepting cleanfill or other approved fill materials.

"Our AQA Planning Committee is meeting later this month and these issues will be on the agenda."

"I am also currently assisting with the cost benefit analysis for these proposals for submission which need to be with MfE by the end of the month," says Wayne Scott. "This indicates that we still may be on track for these changes to be legislated and in place by August."

He says the sooner the consenting pathway is in place, the better as quarries in Auckland and around the country needed to gear up production to meet the Government's \$60b+ infrastructure programme and the booming new home market.

"Quarries want to work with their councils on these issues. Often they enhance or create wetlands as part of their developments, so getting access to aggregate can be a positive for environmental outcomes."

MfE officials reviewing submissions on the NES on Freshwater said they considered the provision of consent pathways for the proposed activities and the protection of natural inland wetlands from further loss 'need not be mutually exclusive.'

"We consider that there is a clear need for specified infrastructure, quarries and mines to locate and operate in particular environments."

The officials rejected submissions opposing a consent pathway for quarries. They said councils could exercise discretion in deciding whether to grant a resource consent which could include considering the significance of the natural inland wetland and impacts on surrounding land use.

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