

Submission from the AQA to the Environment Committee on the Fast-track Approvals Bill

April 2024

Introduction

The Aggregate and Quarry Association (AQA) is the industry body representing quarrying companies which produce 45 million tonnes of aggregate and quarried materials consumed in New Zealand each year.

Funded by its members, the AQA has a mandate to increase New Zealanders' understanding of the need for aggregates, improve our industry and users' technical knowledge of aggregates and assist in developing a highly skilled workforce within a safe and sustainable work environment.

We would like to thank the Environment Committee for the opportunity to submit on the Fast-track Approvals Bill (the Bill).

Key points

The Environment Committee should consider the following:

- We support the Bill but believe it could be enhanced by changes recommended in this submission.
- Aggregate resources (including sand) are in short supply in many parts of New Zealand and robust and consistent planning processes are crucial to ensuring access to potential aggregate resources are not prevented. The Bill should explicitly provide for approval of quarries and aggregate resources needed to support nationally and regionally significant projects considered under the Bill.
- The eligibility criteria for projects in Clause 17 contain terms that need clarification and/or definition. We support the use of existing recognised definitions along with greater clarity that quarries and other aggregate extraction activities required to supply aggregate for nationally and regionally significant infrastructure projects are eligible under the Bill.
- Consideration be given to include use of the environmental effects hierarchy to ensure environmental effects are adequately managed.
- Given the potential for a large number of projects to be referred to the expert panel, it is important that the panel is adequately resourced, including the ability to attract the necessary expertise to provide strong economic and environmental analysis within the timeframes required under the Bill.

Aggregate demand in New Zealand

The Bill should provide for approval of quarries and aggregate extraction activities necessary for the delivery of aggregates (including sand) to nationally and regionally significant projects, including those approved under this Bill.

Accessing, extracting, processing and transporting aggregate (crushed rock, gravel and sand) is required for the construction of infrastructure in New Zealand. Aggregates form the foundation of every road and building, either directly or as part of materials such as concrete. There will be increased demand for aggregate to build infrastructure and housing to meet population projections, and to address the nation’s infrastructure deficit.

Additionally, as catastrophic events in recent years have highlighted, the impacts of climate change, including rising sea levels, will put added pressure on rock supply for sea walls, riverbank protection and restoration, and other climate adaptation solutions.

It is therefore more vital than ever that local aggregate (rock and sand) resources throughout the country are identified, protected and effectively managed to build resilient new infrastructure and homes.

Eligibility Criteria for Projects Clause 17

The Bill needs to clearly provide for approval of quarries and aggregate extraction activities needed to support nationally and regionally significant projects, including those considered under the Bill, and use legislatively established and recognised terms and definitions.

Under clause 17(3)(e) the joint Ministers may consider whether a project “will support primary industries, including aquaculture”. Primary industries are not defined however the National Planning Standards 2019 do define Primary Production in the following table, and we believe Primary Industries should be replaced with Primary Production as this recognised term includes mining, quarrying and aquaculture.

<p>Primary Production</p>	<p>means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) any aquaculture, agricultural, pastoral, horticultural, mining, quarrying or forestry activities; and b) includes initial processing, as an ancillary activity, of commodities that result from the listed activities in a). c) includes any land and buildings used for the production of the commodities from a) and used for the initial processing of the commodities in b); but d) excludes further processing of those commodities into a different product.
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While the Bill allows for a number of projects to be fast-tracked, it will be important that the suppliers of required goods, such as aggregates and sand, are able to deliver these in a timely manner. We therefore believe that Clause 17 should include explicit reference to the importance of the supply chain, and in particular quarried materials in delivery of economic projects and significant infrastructure.

Quarrying and the environment

Quarries fully expect to meet environmental and resource management requirements for new or renewed consents. We support use of the effects management hierarchy i.e. avoid, mitigate, offset or compensate, as it provides for improved environmental outcomes from activities like quarrying.

Given the potential for some projects to have significant environmental benefits and/or effects, we support the requirements of Schedule 4 in relation to information to be considered by the Panel on environmental effects associated with the project.

Resourcing of Expert Panels

We experienced resourcing issues with establishment of expert panels under the COVID-19 Fast-Track Consenting Bill. It is important that the Bill contains provisions for the adequate resourcing of the expert panel to enable their duties to be undertaken appropriately including full assessment of the economic and social benefits of projects, and adequately accounting for any adverse impacts on the environment.

It is essential that suitably qualified and experienced panel members can be engaged to undertake strong economic and environmental analysis.

I wish to speak to this submission in hearings conducted by the Environment Select Committee on the Fast-track Approvals Bill.

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