

The case for a peak industry body

Bernie Napp - Fri, 21 Sep 2018

Having thought about this for some years, the mining and quarrying sectors should join forces on advocacy and policy. Sure, quarrying is not associated in the public mind with mining gold and coal, being things that can attract negative attention, though for different reasons.

But a hole in the ground is a hole in the ground – making the distinction is like calling a spade a shovel.

That said, I can understand the reticence on the part of quarry companies to team up with the minerals explorers and miners. Attending the QuarryNZ conference this year for the first time made me aware of the very strong tradition held within the quarry sector.

Certainly, the industry would like to see this maintained, as non-negotiable. But no one is challenging the Institute of Quarrying NZ, and its role as the guardian of this tradition.

Rather than focus on the barriers – whatever they may be – let's consider the positives of working together, and sharing resources.

I am talking about the Aggregate and Quarry Association, which is currently [recruiting a CEO](#), and its minerals and mining counterpart, [Straterra](#), and what they actually do.

Both have concerns about government policy direction, including access to resources, climate change policy, air and water quality, Resource Management Act planning, workplace health and safety, biodiversity management.

Straterra is active in these debates. The AQA is represented on the Straterra Board, so is aware of its work, and could and does draw from it. Both fund MinEx, the extractives industry's national health and safety council.

The last 11 months as editor of *Inside Resources* have demonstrated to me that the two sectors are very similar in how resources are extracted, and sites are managed.

Personally, I don't see much difference between the Drury and Brookby hard rock quarries, and the Macraes gold mine. Or between an alluvial goldmining operation, and gravel extraction from rivers.

The principles applying to engagement between the mining sector and iwi are the same as for aggregates and industrial minerals. In their tradition, [Maori used to quarry rock](#), or, perhaps, they were they mining; it's unlikely a distinction can be made.

Curiously, there is a distinction between mines and quarries in at least two other languages: Bergbau and Steinbruch in German, and "mina" and "cantera" in Spanish. My feeling is that this distinction is semantic – to do with words, not substance. That goes also for the English language, I suggest.

The present Government has questioned the validity of mining of certain commodities, and in certain situations. It also recognises the importance of minerals for the economy and society, without drawing a logical connection between one train of thought and another.

It's the job of industry organisations to connect the dots, and they need to be resourced to do that. If all the different organisations are doing their own thing, an important opportunity for advocacy to this Government is potentially being lost, or not taken advantage of.

Other industry bodies

One might ask whether other industry organisations should be working together.

For example, there were several different organisations to do with cement and concrete. These are being folded into a single body, Concrete New Zealand. CEO Rob Gaimster is expected to speak further on this process at the Concrete NZ conference in Hamilton on October 11-13.

Arguably, there is a case for closer co-operation between the AQA and Concrete NZ; both are concerned with the production, processing and application of aggregate and industrial minerals. Issues with truck driver shortages, and traffic management are common to both industries.

On the other hand, that's where the similarity ends. No one in New Zealand could protest credibly against concrete. But it's another story for the placing of new quarries into communities, evidenced by litigation on projects in Auckland and Canterbury.

Minerals West Coast has a long-standing tradition of advocacy in this important mining region of New Zealand. Perhaps, it could join forces with Straterra and the AQA.

As matters stand, Straterra joins MWC Board meetings, and has supported conferences on the West Coast that MWC has convened. In this way, both work as complementary organisations, the latter also working with the West Coast Commercial Gold Miners' Association.

So, there is no easy answer on that one, except to say: tempting though it is to "fly under the radar" and get on with the job, mines and quarries are being increasingly exposed to public and political scrutiny.

[MWC and Straterra](#) are currently working hard in the communications space ahead of the Government implementing the ban on new mines and quarries on conservation land. A small window of time remains available with consultation on a discussion document being delayed from this month until [late October](#).

I look forward to what the mining and quarrying industries have to say as the consultation unfolds. If this leads to the sectors working more closely together, that can only be a good outcome.