

Nine years of risk, delay to extractive workers

Bernie Napp - Tue, 15 Mar 2022

Quarry and alluvial mine workers have faced nine years of risk through delays in new Government regulations, extractives safety advocate MinEx says.

“There are signals the new regulations will soon emerge and that will be very welcome but the time taken is completely unacceptable,” MinEx chief executive Wayne Scott says.

“These regulations were prompted by the tragedy at the Pike River mine in 2010. Even after the deaths of the 29 miners it took three years for the then Key Government to bring in new health and safety regulations but these were aimed at underground mines.”

Chronology of inactivity

Scott says government quickly acknowledged that opencast mines, quarries and alluvial mines needed fit-for-purpose regulations and made a promise in 2013 to revise them.

Successive ministers each made promises to advance the new regulations since the time of National’s Michael Woodhouse in 2014.

“Four years later, in my first meeting with new Workplace Relations and Safety Minister, Iain Lees-Galloway, he wanted to see the new regulations in the place by that Christmas – 2018,” Scott says.

Cabinet approved the new regulations to be developed in late 2019.

Scott says in 2020 the case was put to the new Minister for Workplace Relations and Safety, Michael Wood, to make the new regulations an urgent priority.

“We noted that Cabinet, in confirming the regulations a year earlier, had learned the quarry and alluvial gold sectors would benefit from greater health and safety management – and we wanted to see them in place.”

Sheeting regulations home

Scott says it’s not Minister Wood nor his WorkSafe department who are responsible for the current delays, rather the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.

“I sometimes wonder if ministers and MBIE officials actually understand workplace health and safety, and the role that fit-for-purpose regulations play in improving it.

“We are told Covid regulations now take precedence but what about the earlier six years?”

The Health and Safety at Work (Mining Regulations and Quarry Operations) Regulations 2016 amended the 2013 regulations only for consistency with the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.

Scott expects the new regulations will finally emerge in the next few weeks, and hopes they can be rapidly communicated to quarries and mines and put in place without further delay.

MinEx would then support WorkSafe in holding workshops on the new regulations by providing guidance materials on how to implement the regulations at workplaces.

