

Local government should say rock on in 2008

By James Boyce, President, Aggregate and Quarry Association

With a year ending which saw local authority elections and a general election year now approaching, let's consider some policies for New Zealand's future.

What politician from central or local government would disagree with the wise use of resources. The importance to New Zealand of better infrastructure is now also acknowledged by almost everyone.

Our aggregate industry is committed to sustainability. It was the theme this year for our annual conference and we chose it before any hint that government would make sustainability central to its policies.

We believe aggregates are essential for a sustainable society. You can't build houses or commercial buildings or roads without the gravel, shingle, limestone and rock that our industry produces.

There is a huge investment going on at the moment in Auckland and around the country to improve our roads. Every new kilometre of highway requires thousands of tonnes of base metal, chip and gravel.

Planning for future access to resources in close proximity to where they will be used is a demonstration of good stewardship by District and Regional Councils. This year has seen considerable change in membership of many local authorities. It is especially important that new mayors and councillors are aware of some of the issues facing the aggregate industry.

Quarries and/or shingle crushing plants are present in virtually every TLA in the country. An Auckland MP was reminded at our conference that there are two quarries in his urban electorate.

Unfortunately, the aggregate industry can still be subject to ill-informed concerns from local residents and others. Today's quarries are well-managed plants, minimising noise, dust and water issues. Our industry wins awards for environmental management which leaves land better than when quarrying began.

It is not in anyone's interests if quarrying is pushed further and further away from the urban centres that fundamentally require our products for economic and social progress. Already Auckland is importing a quarter of its aggregate needs from Northland, Waikato and beyond. Other regions are seeing similar trends. Already, more fuel is used in delivering quarry products than in producing them. The decisions made by local authorities about where to allow quarries to operate have a profound effect on the environment and on the cost of roading, housing and development.

As we head into 2008, I urge those of you who work in the local government sector to consider how all communities need convenient access to the rock and stone resources which will keep New Zealand growing - sustainably. Little can be built without it.

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