

# planning & environmental newsletter

Newsletter of Irish Concrete Federation



## Local Authorities need to maximise economic potential of aggregate resources

The important role of local authorities in maximising the potential of Ireland's aggregate resources for future economic growth was highlighted at a recent conference, 'Planning for Aggregates' held in Enfield, Co. Meath. During the conference, Dr Padraic Larkin, Deputy Director General of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) launched the Agency's 'Environmental Guidelines for the Extractive Industry'. In addition the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Noel Dempsey, highlighted Government recognition of the importance of an adequate supply of aggregates to ensure that Ireland's infrastructure is upgraded to match its European counterparts.

### National Plan

Organised by the Irish Concrete Federation (ICF), the conference called upon the Government to develop a National Aggregates Plan for the identification, mapping and safeguarding of legitimate reserves of raw materials for use by the construction industry.



Pictured at the Irish Concrete Federation's seminar on Planning for Aggregates, were from left: The Chief Executive Irish Concrete Federation, Mr John Maguire; The Minister for Communications Marine and Natural Resources, Mr Noel Dempsey; The Director of Geological Survey of Ireland, Dr. Peadar McArdle, and The President ICF, Mr Declan McCartney.

The ICF said that Ireland is one of the few European countries without a national policy in place to identify and protect vital raw materials such as rock, gravel and sand essential for the country's construction, housing and infrastructural development needs.

Mr Declan McCartney, ICF President, said that there was a need to provide the necessary resources to local authorities to undertake an accelerated programme of Aggregate Potential Mapping to identify viable reserves of aggregates.

### Safeguarding of raw materials

"To date, only four counties, Meath, Wicklow, Cavan and Donegal have completed a mapping programme for aggregates. Reserves of raw material are being sterilised at an alarming rate due to a number of factors including a lack of resources and understanding in local authorities of the need to identify and protect raw materials reserves, and through the granting of inappropriate planning permissions for housing on or near potential reserves sites."

"The quarrying and concrete industry is concerned at the decline throughout the country in the number of commercially viable sites containing raw material reserves. Currently, the aggregates industry involvement in the protection of raw material reserves is primarily through the review, every six years, of each local authority's County Development Plan, which has proven to be a difficult process. There is an urgent need for the Government to take responsibility and provide the resources to allow for the mapping and protection of raw material sites."

"In the UK for example, known mineral deposits are protected and areas are often identified on plans with the presumption that mineral extraction will take place. A similar process is required here. The aggregates industry had increased production from 36 million tonnes in 1993 to 134 million tonnes in 2005 to meet the national demand for housing, industrial development, large-scale road building and other infrastructure projects. It is estimated that demand for aggregate materials will rise to 140 million tonnes per annum within the next few years."

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“While the industry is currently in a position to deliver on these increases in the short to medium term, unless a National Aggregates Plan is quickly put in place, which identifies the location of possible raw material reserves and protects the sites for future planned development, we may end up in a situation where we are simply unable to access the raw materials required,” said Mr. McCartney.

### **Environmental Guidelines**

Responding to the launch of the EPA’s ‘Environmental Guidelines for the Extractive Industry’, Mr McCartney welcomed the Guidelines and said that the legitimate quarrying sector was very

mindful of its environmental responsibilities.

“The legitimate quarrying industry takes its environmental and legal responsibilities seriously and we endeavour to operate at all times in a safe and environmentally responsible manner. Last year, the ICF published the second edition of an Environmental Code, which resulted in over 300 quarries adopting measures aimed at reducing the level of impact on the environment.

The voluntary code set out a number of measures to minimise the level of noise, ground vibration, visual impacts and dust levels at the country’s quarries and

addresses issues such as land restoration, water management ecology and archaeology. The industry also organises an Environmental Awards competition recognising, at a national and European level, the positive contribution of members to environmental best practice.”

### **Unlicensed operators**

“However, it is disappointing to see unlicensed operators, with little respect for the environment and the public operating with virtual impunity throughout the country. We call upon the Local Authorities to take the necessary enforcement actions and refer such matters to the courts,” concluded Declan McCartney.

## **New green Guidelines for Extractive Industry**

New guidelines on Environmental Management in the Extractive Industry were launched by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) at the ICF seminar on Aggregates Planning in October. Dr. Padraic Larkin, Deputy Director General EPA, said that the Guidelines were intended to compliment existing guidance and be of assistance to operators, regulatory authorities and the general public.

He also complemented the ICF on its excellent guidance for its members on matters of environmental performance for quarry and pit activities, including the ICF Environmental Code.

Dr. Larkin said the EPA guidelines reflect the views of a wide group of stakeholders following an extensive consultation process (NGO’s, industry, planning authorities government departments, practitioners etc) and should therefore be well balanced and achievable. The guidelines will also be complimented by a sister EPA publication ‘Environmental

Management in the Extractive industry – Guidelines for Regulators’.

This latter document provides standard wording and structure for planning conditions for mineral extraction operations.

“It is hoped that these guidance documents will also assist in the implementation of the statutory requirements under Section 261 of the Planning Act as well as lead to a harmonised regulatory approach to the authorisation and supervision for activities.”

EPA believes that these Environmental Best Practice Guidelines will contribute to a more sustainable quarry and pit sector, greater protection for the environment and human health, and, thereby, a greater public confidence in such operations.



**Dr Padraic Larkin, Deputy Director General, Environmental Protection Agency, announced the agency’s new green guidelines for extractive industry at the ICF conference of aggregates.**

## **Good planning vital for long-term investment**

The importance of the industry having the capacity to invest in raw material was highlighted by John Maguire, Chief Executive, Irish Concrete Federation. He said that long-term planning was required to protect supplies of aggregate for the next 20 years and this would necessitate an acceleration of the Mapping programme. Furthermore extraction needed to be undertaken in a planned and

controlled way while planning permissions need to be extended for longer periods in order to enable investment.

“Unfortunately Section 261 of the Planning Act has not been achieving the initial aims and local authorities are still being inconsistent and selective in their application of the Planning laws.

Furthermore stronger enforcement of the Act needs to be applied to unauthorised sites,” Mr Maguire said.

He also suggested that one of the ways of addressing the inconsistent treatment of quarries in different regions, may well be the introduction of a national EPA Licensing system whereby a licence would be granted subject to planning compliance.

# Minister highlights planners' key role in ensuring aggregate supply

The importance of ensuring a sustainable supply of aggregates in order to underpin the upgrading of Ireland's infrastructure was highlighted by the Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Noel Dempsey TD, when speaking at the Planning for Aggregates conference hosted recently by the Irish Concrete Federation.

## One-off housing

"Because of the increased demand, reducing reserves and competing land uses, it is important to ensure that there is a supply of aggregates available on a sustainable basis. It is important that areas with aggregate potential are not sterilised or made inaccessible by competing land use developments for example one-off housing," Minister Dempsey said.

"Last year it is estimated that 130 million tonnes of aggregates were produced to feed our construction needs. Our per capita consumption is among the highest in Europe reflecting the boom in our construction industry. The increased demand for aggregates has been met but resources are now coming under pressure particularly along the eastern seaboard."

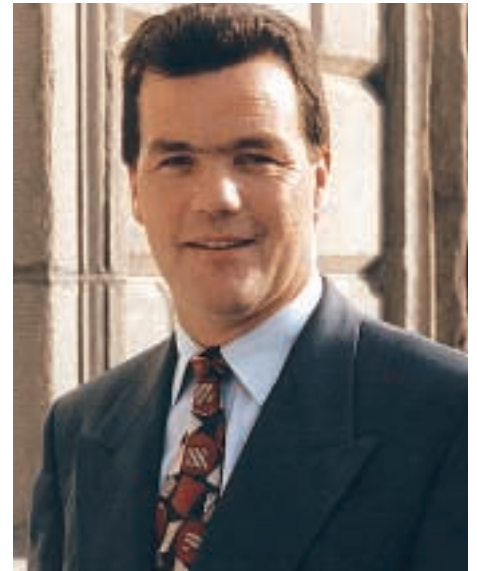
"Aggregates are integral to infrastructure and development and play a critical role in

ensuring our economic competitiveness. The 2007- 2013 National Development Plan will continue to invest in construction and infrastructure and the demand for aggregates will continue. Given the significance of construction and the scale of ongoing infrastructure development in Ireland the mapping and identification of areas with aggregate potential is of critical importance to the economy – both in terms of cost-effective aggregates and avoiding sterilisation of resources."

## Aggregate Potential Mapping

"The Geological Survey of Ireland, a division of my Departments, has developed a methodology known as Aggregate Potential Mapping which assesses the aggregate potential of a county. This is a critical tool for supporting our national infrastructure and has been carried out for four counties, Meath, Wicklow, Cavan and Donegal. Aggregate Potential Mapping allows planners to be aware of areas with aggregate potential and to take this into account in their planning decisions."

"This seminar is timely and I hope it will provide practical solutions for the future of aggregate production and subsequently for Ireland's economic growth. A key aspect of



Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, Noel Dempsey TD.

ensuring this will be the EPA's Environmental Guidelines.

I would like to thank the Irish Concrete Federation for its foresight in organising this seminar. In particular I wish to thank John Maguire, Liam Smyth and Laura McDonald for their energy and enthusiasm for the interesting programme and excellent logistics."

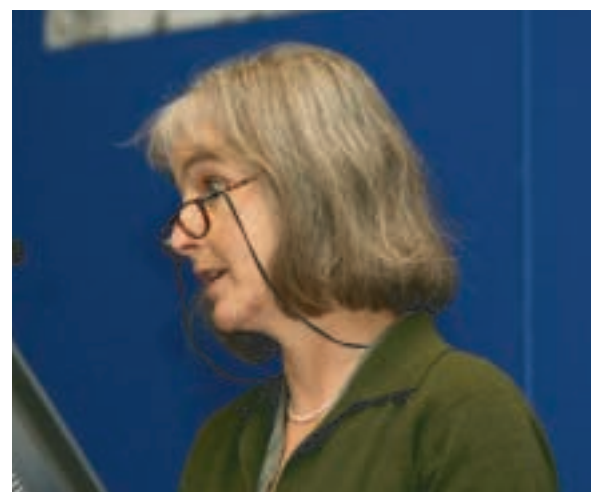
## Section 261 Quarry Registration Process

As the Quarry Registration Process proceeds towards its conclusion, it is clear that the initial objectives of the legislation will not be met. Many planning authorities have not dealt with this important process fairly or reasonably with any regard for existing legitimate industry. Instead, the result will be a likely tripling of recognised "extractive" sites, ranging from clearly agricultural lands to long abandoned small workings, as almost all planning authorities balked at tackling the important issues of abandonment and general legitimacy of large numbers of registered sites.

Furthermore enforcement action has largely been put in abeyance allowing the Section 261 to roll forward and correct clearly unauthorised operations; this is in clear conflict with the requirements of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as

the results of enforcement action takes precedence over the Section 261 process.

There is also a danger that planning authorities, following an apparent policy of An Bord Pleanála when dealing with normal Section 34 applications, may restrict excavation to above the water table, even where this practice has long been established and is required for the continued operation of the registered site. The ICF has raised this issue with An Bord Pleanála and with many planning authorities and will continue to advise members on the required method of appeal, should members' sites be so conditioned.



The Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI) has initiated a programme of Aggregate Potential Mapping in order to source aggregates close to its markets. Pictured discussing the GSI work at the ICF Seminar was Dr. Eibhlin Doyle, of the GSI.

# European dimension to supplies campaign

At European Union level the industry is also active through the European Aggregates Producers Association (UEPG) in promoting a European Mineral Resources Strategy in order to ensure sustainable and long-term access to mineral resources.

Mr. Gregoire Poisson, Public Affairs Director of UEPG based in Brussels, made a valuable presentation to the ICF seminar and outlined the common problems regarding access to mineral resources across Europe. These problems are particularly acute in Ireland as aggregate consumption per capita per annum is now running at approximately four times the European average.

Mr. Poisson welcomed the timeliness of this Seminar and outlined the ongoing communications by UEPG with the various Directorate Generals responsible for the Sector, notably that of Enterprise. He also praised the active involvement of the ICF and its members in contributing to the workings of UEPG, including its key Committees.

He told the seminar that there are 28,000 aggregate sites in Europe employing 350,000 employees in the production and sales of three billion tonnes of aggregates a year.

UEPG has formed a partnership with other major economic organisations including the Non-Energy Extractive Industries Panel (NEEIP) and the European Business Confederation which were engaged in the launch of the EU High Level Group on Competitiveness, Energy and the Environment.

In response to an increasing resistance by local communities to quarries, UEPG also aims to both improve dialogue with local communities and enhance the benefits of new extraction sites for local communities.



**Mr. Gregoire Poisson, Public Affairs Director of UEPG, the European Aggregates Producers Association, outlined the progress made at an EU level for protecting aggregate supplies.**

Through the 7th Research Framework Programme, the association is fostering mineral research and seeks to increase efficiency in resource extraction, processing and recycling.

Furthermore UEPG seeks to encourage competent authorities to manage permit applications more effectively. Its programme includes raising awareness of the key role played by non-energy minerals in the EU economy in order to achieve higher priority for non-energy minerals in land-use planning.

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## Huge investment in infrastructure planned over 15 years

Two Government officials told the aggregate seminar about the plans for major public sector investment during the next 15 years which would require a substantial supply of aggregates.

Martin Vaughan, Assistant Principal Officer involved in the PPP, Construction Policy and NDP Co-ordination Section of the Department of Environment Heritage & Local Government, said that as much as €43.5bn is expected to be invested in the period 2006 to 2010 under the Capital Envelope. Of this amount, as much as €4.81bn is being spent on Productive Infrastructure under the 2006 Public Capital Programme (PCP). It in turn is made up of: Energy €1.36bn, Transport €2.75bn, and Environmental Services €0.64bn.

Buildings will also be constructed under the €4.68bn Social Infrastructure section of the PCP which will include the following

investment: Housing €1.96bn, Education €0.66bn, Health €0.64bn, General Social buildings €1.15bn.

Maurice Treacy, of the Transport 21 Division in the Department of Transport, said that major transport infrastructural projects involving a projected cost of just over €34bn are planned during the next 15 years under the Transport 21 Programme. These include both road and public transport initiatives such as the Metro. They will also include: The Atlantic Road Corridor, Links to the border with Northern Ireland, Substantial Development of the rest of the National Primary road network and targeted improvements of National Secondary roads.

Over that period there will be a €20bn investment in transformation of the transport system in the Greater Dublin Area.

# Economic growth will boost demand for aggregates

The Irish economy should show sustained annual growth rates of at least 3% from 2008 onwards and this will produce long term continuing demand for construction output and supply of aggregate, Tony O'Brien, Director, Grant Thornton, told the ICF Aggregate Planning conference.

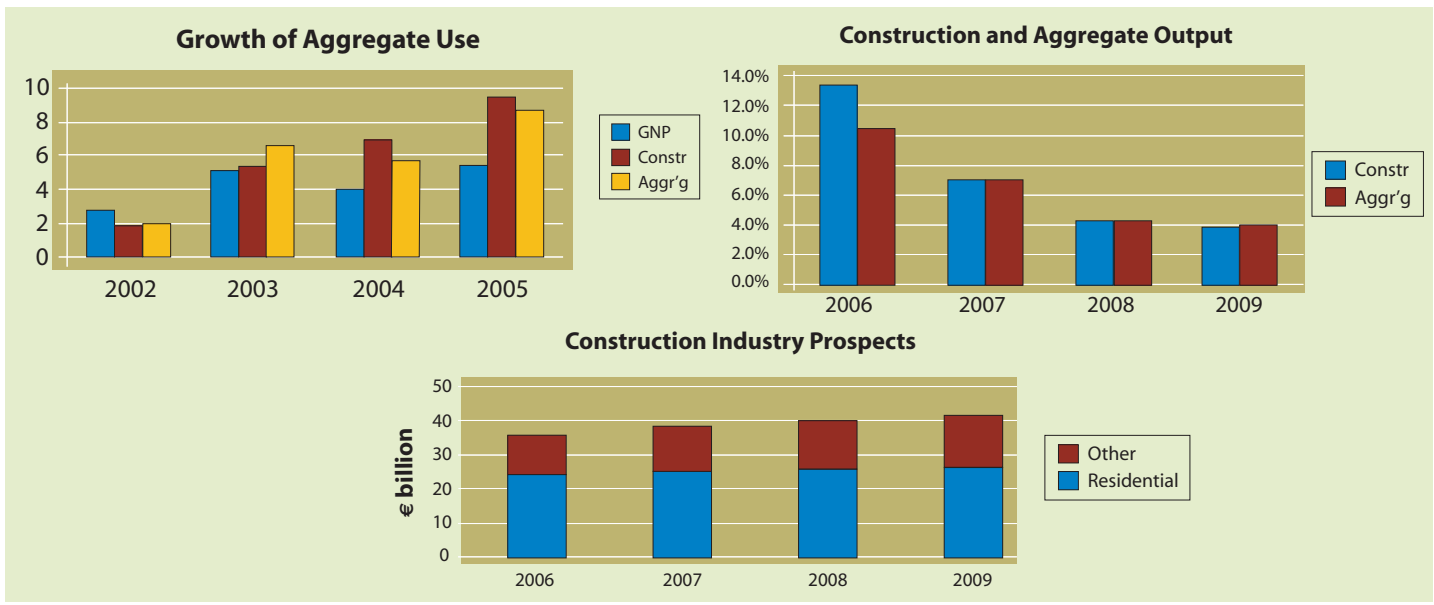
Within the construction sector there will be a shift to civil works, aimed largely at addressing Ireland's infrastructural deficit whereas housing activity is expected to see a marginal slowdown. The rate of growth in demand for aggregates and stone will slow, but continuous growth is foreseen across all parts of the country.

"In recent years growth in aggregates extracted has generally lagged growth in the construction sector as construction industry expansion has been dependent on housing, which is less aggregate dependent than, say, roads or commercial developments. A shift to civil works is likely to generate an increase in demand for aggregate," he added.

Mr. O'Brien added that timber framed housing does not alleviate the high demand for concrete or aggregates to a significant extent. "Timber framed housing needs foundations, often has brick walls and uses concrete in driveways, paths and many other areas, not to mention the access roads. Furthermore, a shift to high-rise developments would likely lead to an increase in the rate of demand for aggregates."



Tony O'Brien, Head of Business consulting, Grant Thornton.



## Potentially 9 Years to Develop Green Field Sites

Development of a greenfield quarry from inception to operation can take between five and nine years, Tim Paul, of Extractive Industry specialist consultants John Barnett & Associates Ltd., told the Aggregates Planning Seminar. Site selection can take two years, land options and acquisition one to three years, formulation of a planning application and environmental impact study one year, the planning process one to two years and the initial quarry development another year.

Elaborating on the timescale for the planning process, he said the period for third party submissions is five weeks, an initial Planning Authority decision can be expected by week 8; a Request for Further Information (RFI) can extend the process to between 16 and 24 weeks and a planning authority decision can be expected by week 24 - 32.

If there is an Appeal to An Bord Pleanala, as is practically certain these days, this could extend the process to between 28 and 36

weeks. However if there is an Oral Hearing the whole Appeal Procedure could take between 12 and 18 months.

Mr Paul said that an analysis of 48 decisions of An Bord Pleanala for hard rock quarry developments in the three years to November 2005 showed permission was granted for 24 existing quarries or extensions while nine were refused, and of the new green field applications, seven were granted and eight refused.

Explaining the period for which planning permissions may last, he referred to the Department of the Environment Guidelines which state: "Where the expected life of the proposed quarry exceeds 5 years it will normally be appropriate to grant permission for a longer period (such as 10 - 20 years), particularly where major capital investment is required at the outset, planning authorities should have regard to the expected life of the reserves within the site".

# Need for County Minerals Development Policies

The need for Minerals Development Policies at county level was highlighted by Mr. Barry Kehoe, Director of Planning Services, Westmeath County Council. He pointed out that from a Local Authority perspective, the Extractive Industry is a critical industry for economic growth, infrastructural development, housing and employment.

Among the policy issues he felt ought to be addressed are those such as locating the facilities, as well as mapping and quantifying them. "On the other hand, we need to identify where the material is needed and this should be addressed through the National Spatial Strategy, Transport 2020 and the National Development Plan."

Each County needs a Minerals Development Policy in order to balance anticipated demand with environmental sustainability. Such policies must take account of wider issues such as: Special

Areas of Conservation, NHA's, the Habitats Directive, Biodiversity, High Amenity Areas, Eskers etc. These policies also need to address reinstatement and aftercare including the potential for recreational use, e.g. golf courses, water sports, rock climbing etc.

Aggregate mapping needs to include deposits under worked bogs, rather than just green field sites or eskers. Derrynagreenagh bog on the Offaly/Westmeath border contains 22m tonnes of aggregate.

Mr. Kehoe pointed out that while millions of tonnes of material are now available from authorised and registered facilities, many of these are a burden on local authorities and do not contribute to local road maintenance.

Consequently the overall current situation is imperfect and the current regulatory environment is difficult.



Some of the speakers and delegates at the ICF Aggregates seminar were from left: Dr. Ben Dhonau, Dept. of Communications, Marine & Natural Resources; Dr. Pat O'Connor, Assistant Director, GSI; Gerry Stanley, GSI; Tim Paul, John Barnett & Associates; Sean Finlay, Tobin Consulting Engineers.

## New seminar will help address issues with planning statements

To help improve the standard of geological and hydro-geological reporting in Environmental Impact Statements and other planning submissions, the Irish Concrete Federation will host an important, perhaps landmark, environmental seminar on 21 February 2007 at the Johnstown Marriott Hotel, Enfield, Co. Meath.

The entire morning session will be devoted to these important issues and the Institute of Geologists of Ireland will provide four eminent professional geologists to make presentations. It is hoped that An Bord Pleanála will also attend and clearly identify their areas of concern.

The afternoon session will address aspects of heritage, including biological and geological diversity as well as archaeology. Given the growing importance of the need for beneficial use of the extraction

site after operations cease, there are many options available to operators to promote biodiversity on some, or all, of the exhausted site as part of a well designed restoration plan. The needs and methodologies for archaeological and geological conservation both during and after extractive operations will be examined and clarified.

We urge all operators, consultants, planning and heritage officials in local authorities and government departments to attend and participate in this important seminar. Full details will issue in early January 2007. Early booking is essential as places are limited.

To book contact Liam Smyth, Irish Concrete Federation. Email: [liam.smyth@irishconcrete.ie](mailto:liam.smyth@irishconcrete.ie) Tel: 01 464 0082