

Submission from Aggregate & Quarry Association and Straterra

To the Environment Select Committee

COVID-19 Recovery (Fast-track Consenting) Bill

June 2020

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the COVID-19 Recovery (Fast-track Consenting) Bill.

This submission is made jointly on behalf of the extractives sector by the Aggregate and Quarry Association (AQA) and Straterra.

The AQA is the industry body representing construction material companies which produce aggregate and quarried materials consumed in New Zealand. Straterra is the industry association representing the New Zealand minerals and mining sector.

Given the short timeframe provided to comment on this bill, our submission is very brief.

Submission

We are generally supportive of the bill which provides temporary measures to fast track the consenting of infrastructure projects needed in the current Covid-19 environment.

We do note there are some risks in the bill around the unique ministerial powers that it provides in fast-tracking a consent or requiring it to go through the normal RMA process.

We support the programme of 'shovel-ready' infrastructure and construction projects that are intended to stimulate the domestic economy in the short term in response to the Covid-19 induced economic downturn. Sixteen of these projects are listed in the bill.

The extractive sector will play a crucial role in many of these projects by supplying construction materials such as steel, cement and aggregate.

To enable many of the projects to proceed, it will be important that the fast track provisions extend to the projects' supply chains as well as the projects themselves.

The bill needs to enable planning processes to be simplified and streamlined to ensure that quarry resources are able to be accessed to supply the projects with vital construction materials. It will be important that aggregate suppliers are able to deliver these materials in a timely manner to fast-tracked projects.

The temporary consenting of quarries, and changes to current consent conditions such as operating hours and production volumes where such consents are required to supply the projects, needs to be provided for. This will ensure the projects are not delayed through the inability to source aggregates and sand.

Peak Bodies

As representatives of the minerals and extractives sectors, which are both contributors and users of many of the types of infrastructure projects envisaged in the bill, AQA and Straterra would like to place on record their interest in being included amongst the organisations nominated to provide written submissions to the panels.

Private Sector Projects

As mentioned, the bill lists 16 specific government-led projects that the fast track provisions will apply to. We note that many of these are perhaps not as labour intensive as anticipated and therefore won't have the same job creation potential as perhaps envisaged.

We also note that many private sector projects proposed as part of the programme - which are labour intensive and therefore able to work towards the government objective of stimulating the economy without requiring government money - could and should be selected.

The Resource Management Act

The need for this bill highlights the well understood problems with the Resource Management Act (RMA) around the lengthy period it takes for projects to be consented.

We note a wider review is being undertaken by the Resource Management Review Panel, due to report back to the Minister by the end of this month.

We hope the review recognises the issues addressed in this bill and that lessons from it can be applied to the RMA. That is, there is merit in streamlining the resource management process and speeding up the consenting of projects generally.

Environment and Climate Change

In terms of the 16 infrastructure projects listed and those yet to be announced, there has been much debate about what the nature of these should be, particularly around the environment.

We agree with those groups saying projects should be future-focused. However, it is important that political agendas are not mixed when it comes to selecting projects for this recovery policy. The objective must be of job creation by bringing forward projects already scheduled to occur to stimulate the economy. The programme should not be seen as an opportunity to tilt the playing field toward pet projects and against certain sectors of the economy.

We support the bill not going further than the RMA does in terms of the treatment of projects' climate change implications. That is, the panel should consider adaptation to climate change but not mitigation of emissions.