



Wayne Scott: Bringing together ‘us’ and ‘them’

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The Mining Extractives Health and Safety Council's (MinEx) new chief executive Wayne Scott says he's a realist when it comes to industry safety compliance. **Richard Silcock** talks to him about current safety issues, the outlook for the future and what he will bring to the job.

Wayne Scott was appointed to the position at the beginning of July, having moved from Australia where he was an inspector of mines for the Queensland Department of Natural Resources and Mines – a position he held for eight and a half years.

A New Zealander, he grew up in Pukekohe and moved to Australia in the mid-80s working initially in civil construction as an accountant (he is a qualified chartered accountant). He got into extractives in the early 90s and prior to his inspectorate role spent some 20 years

Wayne says he and his wife have come back here, not only for the job, but because “NZ is a far better

in various positions associated with quarrying (he is a certified practising quarry manager who holds Australian qualifications in extractives and risk management). He was also on the board of the AQA for nine years and president for two.

A people person, he says he is a realist and that his strengths lie in people management and development, safety procedures and training, and financial management.

“Over the past six weeks since starting this job I have been travelling around the country, meeting with key players in the industry and getting a grip on their respective health and safety (H&S) issues and challenges,” he says.

That sounds like a good way to start and as you say it has given you an understanding of what challenges lie ahead. However, before we get onto that could you briefly describe your new role and what you hope to achieve?

Essentially my mission, and that of MinEx, is to be an effective voice for the mining, tunnelling and quarrying sector on H&S issues and to drive improvement in safety across the industry.

I am here to help managers and staff to recognise the importance of operating in a safe and competent manner and to assist them in setting up H&S management systems that are compliant with the new legislation.

In these travels what do you see as the most pressing H&S issues and are these any different to those in Queensland?

There are obviously some very large mines and quarries in Queensland, but fundamentally I have found there is very little difference between Queensland and New Zealand when it comes to H&S issues – particularly with the smaller operators.

While it is early days, I believe the biggest hurdle will be to convince some that H&S is an important component of their everyday business and both managers and staff need to take it seriously.

While the new H&S legislation may not have been well ‘marketed’ to the sector when government introduced it and is perhaps aimed more at underground mining, there have been some ‘knockers’ who see the extent of the regulations as unnecessary or over-the-top for quarrying.

The fact remains however, there have been fatalities in the workplace and there’s been no improvement since 2001 so we need to change the mindset of ‘she’ll be right’ and get greater compliance across the sector.

New Zealand is fortunate in that the new legislation reflects the best of what other countries have put in place,

place to live these days. It has retained a lovely innocence and lifestyle which we both enjoy.”

In his spare time Wayne blows a ‘mean’ alto-saxophone and says one of his favourite tunes is the classic ‘Us and Them’ from the Pink Floyd album, Dark Side of the Moon.

“Both mining and quarrying are similar in that they both extract material from the ground, so rather than having the ‘light side’ and a ‘dark side’ we need to end this mentality of ‘us and them’ and operate as one entity going forward sharing common issues and challenges.”

and I believe because the regulations are 'risk based' we now have a far better model.

How do you propose changing the 'industry' mindset and what will you bring to the role that will convince operators that compliance with the H&S legislation is important, given there is some apathy out there?

Well, first we need to focus on the potentially fatal and serious injury hazards and better engage with the whole industry. I want to get people thinking as one entity, with none of this 'us and them' mentality that appears to exist between mining and quarrying people.

After all, both extract material from the ground and as most mining in this country is now above ground there is a greater commonality.

As an industry we need to find a new and better way forward. I don't propose to throw H&S manuals at workers and expect them to read them.

That's okay for the bigger players with H&S people on-staff who can mentor employees, but for the small operator with, say, less than 10 staff I am coming up with ways to support them by providing a more favourable hands-on training approach.

For example, by holding informal presentations in their 'smoko' room, by pointing out the basics and reasons for maintaining a safe workplace, encouraging people to look out for each other, and by encouraging two-way conversation and listening to ideas.

It's about engaging with people, getting 'buy-in' with a softly-softly approach, not about ramming legislation into their heads. It is in the small mines and quarries that most incidents happen – many of which go unreported, so they will be my main target.

Would you like to see more emphasis being given to compliance certification?

I would certainly like to see more people gaining their Certificate of Competence (CoC). Of the roughly 2000 sites in the industry here, only some 400 are compliant with the CoC unit standard requirement, which in this type of industry is not good enough.

Perhaps there is a case for changing how this is run by moving to a more performance-based scenario.

How do you respond to the statement: 'Quarries are happy to have fit-for-purpose legislation but not what is being pushed by ex-Solid Energy consultants?'

I suspect we are back to the 'us and them' mentality and I acknowledge there are some difficulties around this and some issues to deal with – however, I don't really see it as a problem. We need to be looking to the future, not the past. We need to be prepared to share commonalities.

While I understand things may not have been always perfect in the past, as we move forward with the new legislation I will be encouraging operators and staff to discuss any problems with me or the team here at MinEx

so that we can work together in identifying and resolving them.

Remember, I am here to assist and support the sector in making improvements to H&S safety management systems, making them more effective, relevant and supportive for all owners, managers and staff working in the sector.

I may not have all the answers in the short term but I can assure you I will do my best to understand the issue and provide guidance in complying with the legislation.

I am also here to assist government ensure our workplaces are safe places and to act as a conduit between the sector and the relevant government agencies so that they better understand our industry and our concerns. It is about being on the front foot.

There have been some concerns raised about quarry operators not being fairly represented on some boards, for example EIAG and within WorkSafe. MinEx itself has been criticised as not being particularly effective in relation to quarrying.

I have heard that and I will be working to bring about changes in representation where appropriate. I am after all a quarry man at heart.

In moving around the country I found that in some areas people were unaware of MinEx, or were unsure of what we do, so I will be working to change that also, particularly targeting the small quarry operator and the alluvial gold mining fraternity and getting them on board.

There has been a review and some discussions around Straterra, MinEx, AQA and IOQNZ merging into one entity. Can you comment on that and do you think it would be a good idea?

Yes, there has been some discussion around this following the review earlier this year and I think it would probably be a good thing.

I would not see it as a merger though, more the setting up of a new entity encompassing the roles of some of these organisations.

From a personal perspective, I operate out of the Straterra office in Wellington and share their administrative staff so would see a transition as a sensible move.

I don't hold any aspirations of heading such an organisation though and believe there are others better suited to that role.

The big question is, however, can the extractives sector as a whole agree to work together through a single entity. I would like to think they can.

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