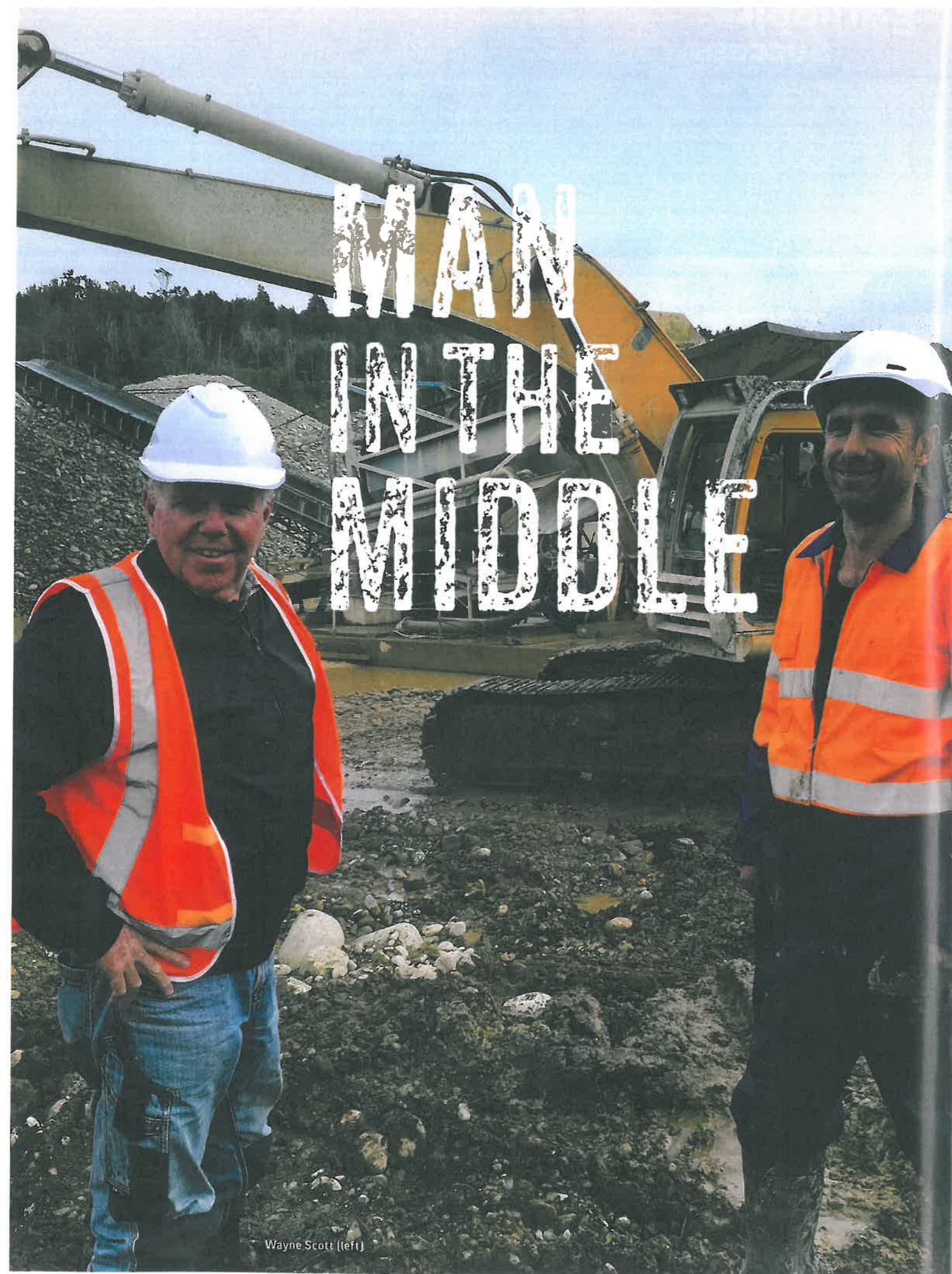


# MAN IN THE MIDDLE



Wayne Scott (left)

The Mining Extractives Health and Safety Council's (MinEx) chief executive Wayne Scott says he's a realist when it comes to industry safety compliance. When he first took over the job this year, RICHARD SILCOCK talked to him about current safety issues and the outlook for the future.

WAYNE SCOTT was appointed to the position back in 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 1990s and, prior to his inspectorate role, spent 20 years 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.

He says he is a realist at heart and his strengths lie in people management and development, safety procedures and training, and financial management. In the initial six weeks after starting his job, Wayne travelled 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.

"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," he says.

"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."

He adds that he has found very little difference between Queensland and New Zealand when it comes to H&S issues – particularly concerning smaller operators.

The biggest hurdle for MinEx, he says, is convincing some businesses 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."

We are fortunate in that the new legislation reflects the best of what other countries have already put in place, he says.

The initial focus is on the potentially fatal and serious injury

hazards and better engagement with the whole industry, he says.

"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."

He adds that he doesn't propose throwing 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."

Referring to complaints from the quarry industry that 'mining' regulations are being pushed upon them by 'mining consultants', Wayne says it reflects an old '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."

Moving forward with the new legislation he says he will be encouraging operators and staff to discuss any problems with him or the team at MinEx.

"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."

He also understands that there are concerns about quarry operators not being fairly represented on some boards, for example EIAG and within WorkSafe, and 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."

As for discussions around Straterra, MinEx, and the AQA merging into one entity, Wayne thinks it's a good idea.

"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."

He adds that he has no aspirations of heading such an organisation and believes 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." **Q&M**