

# TalkBack

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Executive officer of the UK's British Aggregates Association (BAA) Richard Bird airs his views on WRAP and the Recycling Fund failure.

It can have come of little surprise to many *MQR* readers that the WRAP Recycling Fund project is being wound up after incurring heavy losses in such a short space of time. All this following on from the May/June edition when *MQR* announced that a recent DEFRA report had recommended the cessation of the WRAP-administered Capital Grants Scheme.

Is it not time that the complete aggregate department within WRAP was shut down before it wastes any more aggregates levy money on daft schemes and filling the pockets of even more consultants?

It is unfortunate that WRAP has never really grasped just what this industry is about. Recycling of C&D waste is not about the aggregates levy or grants for crushing plants. It is a sector of the aggregates industry that has grown dramatically in the last 10 years because of the introduction of the Landfill Tax, the advent of cheap tracked crushers and the simple fact that in city centres like London and Manchester there are not too many quarries.

It is commercially driven and makes good business sense. It does not need grants for crushers or consultants to predict just how much recycling will take place. As long as new buildings replace demolished ones, then there will always be a market for recycled aggregates. If the aggregate levy ceased tomorrow, it is unlikely that this would have any marked affect on the amount of tonnage of recycled aggregate sold.

Instead of throwing good money at bad, WRAP could have supported those primary producers who have invested millions of pounds of their own money in plant to upgrade by-products such as scalplings and surplus crushed fines. As long as this short-sighted policy of not giving grants to primary producers continues, then the aggregate levy will not meet any of its objectives.

It is nothing short of obscene when a quarry operator in Maidstone has to spend a fortune on a plant to turn a waste by-product like Kentish Hassock into a marketable sand product so as not to sterilise future reserves, and yet not be entitled to a penny from WRAP; whilst a recycling contractor down the road is entitled to a considerable grant towards the purchase of new plant.

The quarrying industry does not need advice from WRAP-funded consultants like Ciria (Page 3 of Sept/Oct edition) on how

to run its business. We know there is an imbalance of products and it has nothing to do with whether we call ourselves "quarriers" or "aggregate producers".

Life would be ideal if a quarry could produce a tonne of 10mm, 14mm and 20mm aggregate without producing at the same time a tonne of scalplings and crushed fines. Specifications for road surfacing and quality concrete demand good clean cubical shaped aggregate and that can mean 3 or 4 stages of crushing. This in turn can lead to 35% of crushed fines being inevitably produced which, when added to the 10% or 15% of scalplings, means that there is a production ratio of one tonne of primary quality aggregate to one tonne of primary by-product. That is why the aggregate levy will never meet its objective in reducing the tonnage of primary rock that is extracted from the ground.

It would help if WRAP could find a way of supporting quarrymen – and I make no apologies for the terminology – by providing grants to support investment in plants to upgrade primary by-products. That way we may be able to reduce the extraction rate. Alternatively, remove the levy from these by-products.

To solve this imbalance I note that John Barrit of

WRAP is calling for "innovation" (page 27 Sept/Oct edition) from crusher manufacturers to reduce the amount of fines produced when crushing rock. (Now that would be a first). Maybe we could all stick the fines particles back together, call it recycled, which is levy free, and claim a grant from WRAP at the same time. Now that's what I call innovation. Or maybe it's just another daft scheme!

Please let us have no more predictions from consultants on how much more recycled aggregate is going to take the place of primary aggregates. We have been listening to this old chestnut for the last three years. The UK leads Europe when it comes to the amount of recycled aggregate that is put onto the market. As I mentioned above, if it makes commercial sense then it will succeed, not simply because some consultant is constantly talking it up to justify their fee.

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