

QM Bulletin January 16th, 2008 - Brussels votes for common sense on soil

THE quarrying industry celebrated an early success in 2008 with welcome news that the Draft Soils Directive had been rejected by the EU Environment Council of Ministers in a vote in Brussels. The Draft Directive had classified quarrying operations as 'potentially soil-polluting activities', paving the way for expensive industry regulation that would have effectively duplicated existing UK regimes.

If passed, the Directive would have created onerous requirements for every extraction site past, present and future, with an immediate and costly requirement for 'competent authorities' to measure concentration levels of dangerous substances at all quarry sites, despite the extremely remote possibility of any such substances being found.

The Environment Council's rejection of the Soils Directive followed extensive campaigning by the Quarry Products Association, the British Aggregates Association and other industry bodies for common sense on the proposals. With no apparent risk basis for the positioning of quarrying as a 'potentially soil-polluting activity', the trade bodies had argued that the UK's planning, landfill and groundwater regimes, and the imminent Mining Waste Directive, already provided suitable means for addressing industry operations' potential impacts on soil.

Welcoming the result of the vote in Brussels, the QPA said it would avoid the increasingly familiar burden of double regulation. The Association's director general, Simon van der Byl, commented: 'The UK quarrying industry is breathing a collective sigh of relief following the welcome outcome of the vote on the Draft Soils Directive. The Directive posed unreasonable and unnecessary regulatory burden on the industry and it is pleasing that neighbouring countries expressed similar alarm in advance of the vote in Brussels.'

Peter Huxtable of the British Aggregates Association said some sanity had been restored as the UK – under strong lobbying from the BAA and other industry groups – along with Germany, France, Austria and the Netherlands blocked the agreement. 'Hopefully this ill-judged proposal will not reappear,' he commented.