



Q&As - Stockton Report

What is the purpose of this report?

This report is focused on the regulatory regime around mining. There are over 100 mining licences that have weak and unenforceable environmental conditions. They were granted decades ago but are still current – in some cases for many years to come.

What does the report hope to achieve?

The Commissioner hopes the Government takes notice and moves to investigate and carry out the recommendations in the report. The recommendations are doable and practical.

What action are you hoping the Government will take?

I make a total of six recommendations to Ministers for a number of things. Included in these is an amendment to the RMA and to carefully review the environmental protection in the old mining licences.

What does the report cover?

Part A – Stockton re-visited: The first part of the report covers the improvement in environmental management at the Stockton Mine. Improvements have been voluntary under the old rules under which Stockton operates.

Part B – The regulatory minefield: The second part covers the weak environmental conditions of those old mining licences granted under the pre-RMA regime.

Which does the report NOT cover?

The report does not analyse the actual environmental performance of any mine other than recent improvements at Stockton. Nor does it cover seabed mining or petroleum mining. The report also does not consider the environmental impact of coal mining in general, though this is more fully explored in our upcoming report on lignite.

What does this report say about mining in National Parks?

Mining on DoC land is very much the issue of the moment. But this report is focused on the regulatory regime around mining. We looked to see if any contain DoC land and found that at least half do. None of it is Schedule 4 land. I am asking the Minister of Conservation ensure these licences have adequate conservation protection.

How many open cast mines are there in NZ and are any operating under these old licenses?

There are 17 opencast coal mining operations in New Zealand that have old licences. There at least two opencast gold mines with old licences. Macraes Flat in Otago – licence expires next year. Martha mine in Waikato (Hauraki) – licence expires 2017.

Why are you commending Solid Energy for coal mining?

The environmental management of the Stockton mine is far better than it was 4 years ago. And that is what I have judged – the improvement. It is too early to judge the rehabilitation of soil and vegetation – Solid Energy is doing some pioneering work here but only a small area has been rehabilitated so far.

You commend Solid Energy for doing a great job at Stockton, so why should we be worried about the other mines operating under the old licences?

There is an environmental risk associated with those weaker conditions. Improving environmental management costs money, and without sound environmental conditions on licenses some operators may be incentivised to ignore environmental risk.