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Harris Superquarry campaign

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Photomontage of proposed superquarry development at Lingerbay, Isle of Harris by Redland Aggregates.

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Campaigning for Environmental Justice

Friends of the Earth's Guide to the Harris superquarry saga:

1988

Redland Aggregates begins preparing plans for a superquarry in south Harris.

1991

Mar: Redland Aggregates formally lodges planning application to establish Europe's largest coastal superquarry to extract anorthosite (hard granite-like rock) from the mountain Roineabhal, near Lingerbay on the Isle of Harris. The quarry would be within a National Scenic Area (Scotland's highest landscape protection designation)

The £70 million plan would see the removal of 10 million tonnes every year for 60 years, to be exported in bulk sea carriers to the south-east England and overseas markets for use in road and rail construction.

50 times larger than conventional UK quarries, at the end of its life the 459 hectare quarry would leave a crater 370 metres above sea level and 180 metres below it, 1km broad and 2km long. The mountain of Roineabhal would be reduced to a sea loch leaving a scar six times the height of the White Cliffs of Dover.

Harris would benefit from only 33 direct and 10 indirect jobs.

1993

Jun: Referendum (conducted by the Electoral Reform Society) finds 62% of Harris residents support the quarry.

A four-volume, 300-page planning report is prepared for the council's development services committee. Despite objections Western Isles Council votes 24-3 to grant the planning application.

October: Planning application called in by the Secretary of State for Scotland (Ian Lang).

1994

Jan 6: Ian Lang announces Public Local Inquiry (PLI) into superquarry application

Sep: The Labour Party publishes its key environmental policy document 'In Trust for Tomorrow' making it clear that a Labour Government would not accommodate the predictions in the rise in aggregates use drawn up under the previous Government. It says "Labour does not believe that such a dramatic increase in the use of aggregates is sustainable and we will take measures to reduce demand...Labour rejects development of any further coastal superquarries."

Oct 11: Public Local Inquiry begins in Stornoway, Isle of Lewis with Gillian Pain as chief Inquiry Reporter. During the inquiry Redland predict UK aggregate demand will soon rise to over 400 million tonnes per annum. As part of the Link Quarry Group Friends of the Earth Scotland gives evidence against the proposal.

1995

May 22: With an 83% turnout, a second referendum (conducted again by the Electoral Reform Society) finds 67.7% of Harris residents now oppose the quarry.

June 5: On the second last day of the inquiry, and despite having spent an estimated £500,000 supporting the proposal, Western Isles Council reverses its support for the superquarry and votes 21-

8 to side with the objectors.

June 6: Final meeting of inquiry held in Leverburgh School, south Harris. Acting for Redlands Mr Roy Martin's closing submission runs to 213 pages.

The eight-month long inquiry cost an estimated £2 million. It sat for 100 days, with over 100 witnesses appearing and over 800 written submissions. An estimated £1 million was spent by Redland while SNH spent £400,000.

1997

Dec: In a hostile bid French multi-national Lafarge takes over Redland Aggregates.

1998

Mar: Inquiry Reporter Gillian Pain circulates Part One of her report to those who took part in the inquiry (the report runs to two volumes and 629 pages).

July 15: In a major blow to the proposal, Government funded research commissioned by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) reveals a collapse in European aggregate demand. The report finds that UK exports of crushed rock peaked in 1993 at over 5 million tonnes but fell in 1996 to only 2.5 million tonnes. The report also finds that lack of demand has led to existing superquarries operating well below predicted levels and in one case even abandoning their operations.

Groups including Friends of the Earth make responses to Part One of report.

1999

May: Part Two of the report (including conclusions and recommendations) is submitted to the Scottish Office.

July: Scottish Parliament established. Sarah Boyack appointed Minister for Transport and the Environment.

2000

Jan: In yet another blow to the proposal Friends of the Earth reveals that industry body, the Quarry Products Association (of which Redland/Lafarge is a prominent member), has advised the Government that demand will remain flat at 215 million tonnes per annum (mtpa), and that it should project demand for the next 20

years as remaining "flat". This contrasts with the projections given at the inquiry of demand levels between 370 mtpa and 440 mtpa by 2011.

March: Following much deliberation by civil servants the report finally arrives on the desk of Transport and Environment Minister, Sarah Boyack.

March 21: In the Budget the Chancellor announces an aggregates tax will be levied on all aggregates extracted for use in the UK or imported into the UK (except recycled or secondary materials). Due to come into effect in April 2002 the cost to the developers at Lingerbay at full production could be £16 million per annum. The effect of this on the viability of the project was not considered at the Inquiry.

Sept 11: Redland/Lafarge begins judicial review proceedings against the Executive for the delay. The company claims that the Executive's delay is a contravention of its "human rights"!!!! **Note:** review based on Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights

Sept 12: In court it is revealed for the first time that Inquiry Reporter recommended planning permission be granted.

Oct: Draft Consultation Paper issued by the Department of the Environment "Planning for the Supply of Aggregates in England" confirms Government view that aggregate demand has now peaked and will now remain flat at 200 mtpa (some 50% less than previous estimates). Contrary to previous predictions it assumes no import of rock will now be required to meet demand in England.

Oct 18: As a result of judicial review proceedings instigated by Lafarge in September, Court of Session demands Executive make decision within 21 days, describing the delay as of "scandalous proportions." **Note:** The case sets a very worrying precedent as it effectively gives companies rights under human rights legislation.

Oct 29: Sam Galbraith appointed Environment Minister.

Oct 31: Friends of the Earth, RSPB and WWF (3 of the original 17 members of the Link Quarry Group) write to Sam Galbraith to ensure that the Minister's decision will be based on the most up-to-date policy and statistical information available.

Nov 3: Environment Minister, Sam Galbraith rejects superquarry stating that Inquiry Reporter had "seriously underestimated the impact the quarry would have on the national scenic area in which the quarry would be sited".

Dec 20: Lafarge lodge an appeal at the Court of Session against Sam Galbraith's decision.

2001

Jan 9: Lafarge takes over Blue Circle Industries in a £3.1 billion deal creating the world's largest cement manufacturer.

Mar 23: 1965 consent: Lafarge claim to have evidence that proves a valid planning permission already exists which would allow a quarry at Lingerbay. Lafarge maintain that a planning consent granted by Inverness County Council in 1965 remains valid and should therefore be included on a list of mineral sites by Western Isles Council. The company also claims that the 1965 consent is for a much larger area (600 hectares) of development than that proposed by Lafarge (459 hectares).

May 16: 1965 consent: Scottish Executive announce week-long public inquiry to consider appeal by Lafarge following Western Isles Council's refusal to include a 1965 planning consent for quarrying at Lingerbay on its list of mineral sites. Note: Under the 1997 Planning Act every local authority has duty to list any old, valid planning permissions in respect of mineral sites within its area, with a view to establishing modern working practices and modern planning conditions.

May 20: Scottish Executive announces that it is considering a review of National Planning Policy Guidelines (NPPG)s relating to quarries. The current guidance was last updated in 1994.

Nov 26: 1965 consent: A 5-day long planning inquiry into the validity of a 1965 planning permission for quarrying takes place at Leverburgh on Harris.

2002

Mar 19: Scottish Executive announces that it will have to make a re-determination of its decision to reject the superquarry. Legal advice suggested that the Executive could not justify upholding a decision by Sam Galbraith and his ministerial colleagues, when they refused the development in November 2000 as it failed to give "sufficient and adequate" reasons. This re-determination will only be made after the matter of the validity of the 1965 consent is resolved.

May 29: 1965 consent: Scottish Executive Inquiry Reporters Unit decide that a 1965 planning application for quarrying at Lingerbay is valid but only for an area of five hectares and not the 600 hectares sought by Lafarge.

Aug 2: 1965 consent: Lafarge lodge an appeal at the Court of Session over Scottish Executive Inquiry Reporters Unit decision.

Local Harris councillor Morag Munro comments "I am both surprised and disappointed that they have decided to appeal the ministers' decision on this old planning permission. This means the final decision is now even further away...The community will be affected by the uncertainty for another period and this has already been going on for 11 years."

2003

Nov 25: 1965 consent: Court action by Lafarge to secure planning permission to establish a superquarry at Lingerbay is heard at Edinburgh Court of Session. Proceedings last a week.

2004

Jan 9: 1965 consent: Judges at the Edinburgh Court of Session unanimously reject appeal Lafarge.

Apr 2: Friends of the Earth Scotland's longest ever running campaign finally comes to an end as Lafarge announces it is to withdraw its plans to establish a superquarry on Harris. [Full details](#)

For the record:

The superquarry was the subject of Scotland's longest-running planning inquiry sitting for 100 days between October 1994 and June 1995. The inquiry heard from more than 100 witnesses and received between 400 and 500 written submissions.

Lafarge is the world's biggest producer of building materials. It owns 800 quarries around the world and employs 83,000 people in 75 countries.

More background information can be found :

<http://www.foe-scotland.org.uk/nation/superquarry.html>

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