

PRESS RELEASE - 15th February 2001

BAA Director Warmly Welcomed at Stormont

Aggregate Tax can be defeated, Members of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly told.

The British Aggregates Association's Director, Mr Robert Durward, was well received when he spoke of the dangers of the Chancellor's proposed Aggregates Tax to MLAs at Stormont this week. Mr Durward had been invited by Billy Armstrong, Ulster Unionist Party Member for Mid-Ulster, to address members of the Assembly about the dangers to Northern Ireland's quarrying and associated industries by the planned imposition of a £1.60 per tonne levy on all aggregates extracted in the Province from April 1st next year.

Mr Durward, who is leading the UK quarrying industry's fight against the Tax, said: "The research the UK Government commissioned into the quarrying industry is deeply flawed. The Aggregates Tax will cause quarry closures – leading to increased pollution and congestion – the use of inferior products which will lead to long term structural defects, and the driving overseas of our pre-cast concrete production. Northern Ireland will bear the brunt of the worst effects of this Tax," because of its problematic border with Eire.

Mr Durward went on: "Aggregates Tax will pave the way for complete domination of the quarrying industry by the five major, international players, who already claim 80% of the UK's output. They are expert in "vertical integration", whereby they buy up all the concrete and asphalt plants which allows them to control prices. They are now targeting Northern Ireland because of the amount of work which is about to be carried out on roads and infrastructure."

Mr Durward stressed that he firmly believes that the Aggregates Tax can be defeated by keeping pressure on the Government. In conclusion, he added: "I'm really impressed by the way Members at Stormont have been able to get to grips with this issue so quickly. This is in marked contrast with the Scottish Parliament where, after an initial burst of enthusiasm, the MSPs have become bogged down in a morass of bureaucracy and indecision. I think we should be telling our MSPs to get on the Stranraer ferry and visit Stormont to learn how real politicians go about their business."

Media enquiries: Robert Durward The Communication Group Director Tel: 0131 557 6767 British Aggregates Association Tel. 01555 663 444 fax: 01555 664 111 e-mail: baa@cloburn.co.uk

Notes to editors:

1. The British Aggregates Association is the representative body for independent UK quarry operators. It currently has 65 members operating over 100 quarries.
2. Aggregate Tax could take up to £40 million per year out of the Irish economy.
3. Pre-cast concrete production is one of Northern Ireland's principal industries.
4. Although imported aggregates are to be taxed there will be no tax on imported concrete products. This will cause production to be switched South of the border.
5. The Northern Ireland assembly has made a formal request to Westminster that Northern Ireland be exempted from this levy.
6. The BAA is at the forefront of the industry's fight against the imposition of the Aggregates Tax from April 2002. The Chancellor intends to impose a levy of £1.60 per tonne on all aggregates extracted in the UK and UK territorial waters.

Full details of BAA policies are available on: www.british-aggregates.com