

Dump in Haste and Regret at Leisure?

The May meeting of the Diamond Harbour Community Association received a presentation from the Lyttelton Port Company (CEO - Peter Davie, Infrastructure Programme Manager - Paul Keleghan, Engineering Manager - Neil McLennan, and Environmental Manager - Kim Kelleher) on their proposal for a 10ha land reclamation project (about the size of 10 rugby fields) at the port, which will jut out into the harbour on the eastern side of the existing breakwater in front of the coal-yard.

Despite short notice, there was a good turnout of local residents to the public forum, some of whom expressed concern that approval of the expansion project was being fast-tracked under the CERA legislation, thus preventing public submissions and the scrutiny and safeguards of the resource consent process.

Peter Davie said that since the 10ha project incorporated many of the features of their larger coal-yard expansion project (now shelved) which was subjected to public submissions and had been scrutinised by ECAN and other authorities (but not considered by the Environment Court); there was no need to submit the new project to the same lengthy procedure.

However, there are a number of significant differences: The proposed coal yard expansion was to begin with the construction of an outer containment wall and be filled with conventional quarried material; whereas in the new 10ha reclamation proposal there will be no containment wall and the material to be dumped in the harbour will consist mostly of rubble from the demolition of the Christchurch CBD. It will be a mixture of stone, bricks, tiles, aggregates, concrete, asphalt, glass, and general rubble. It may also include up to 5% gib and plaster board, timber, metals, carpet, plastic, and electrical cables.

The CBD rubble is to be overlaid with gravel, quarried from Gollans Bay beneath Summit Road. A skirted boom will be deployed to prevent debris escaping the dumped rubble and settling on the harbour floor or washing up on its beaches (as happened in March). The LPC explained that the boom used in the March dumping was unsuited to the task and will be replaced by a different type.

Presumably, most of the buildings to be demolished in the CBD are red-stickered, making it dangerous/impossible to thoroughly inspect them or remove proscribed toxic materials prior to demolition. These include: asbestos, cement, organics, liquids/semi-solids, chemicals, fine-grained material, contaminated soil and other hazardous substances. But to accurately identify and remove such materials after a building has been reduced to a pile of rubble and pulverised debris – in situ in a CBD under demolition – would seem impossible.

Up to 200 truck-loads a day will be despatched by CERA from the CBD to Lyttelton, where the LPC will check them before dumping them into the harbour. How is possible to identify the constituent parts of a pile of mixed rubble by simply looking at it?

The LPC expressed confidence that this process would be safe, and that there was no danger of an environmental catastrophe or long-term damage to marine and other life forms in and around the harbour. But how can they be certain – and what if they are mistaken? How often has a demolished CBD been dumped into a harbour? When departing from the tried and true, without the benefit of experience and the mistakes of others to learn from, it is prudent to tread carefully.

This is one project which should not be fast-tracked, but subjected to all the checks and balances of a full resource consent process and the scrutiny of a range of experts. It is difficult to understand why CERA considered this project urgent enough to warrant fast-tracking. While the LPC gave an account of the significant damage they suffered in the earthquakes, and described the scale of ongoing repair work at the port, no compelling argument was advanced as to why this 10ha reclamation project was essential to Christchurch's recovery.

Once the CBD demolition is in full swing, with a truck of rubble being despatched to the port every two or three minutes, it will be difficult or impossible to slow or pause the process if doubts arise about the quality of the material arriving; and the pressures of the process may not allow sufficient time for adequate checking.

A far sounder option would be to take the material destined for the port to Burwood for temporary storage. This would allow time for the full resource consent process, and full-scale testing to be undertaken at the port, with a comprehensive impact assessment on the harbour. It would also allow time and space for proper recycling and correct chemical and sorting processes to ensure that all the rubble dumped in the harbour was guaranteed clean and free from toxins and contaminants.

A diagram of the LPC expansion can be viewed [here](#).

Ron