Lough Neagh Sand Traders
Delivering for Decades
Most people have heard about the world famous Lough Neagh eels and the associated fishing industry. However the largest commercial enterprise nowadays on Lough Neagh is the sand extraction business, with thousands of tonnes of sand dredged from the bottom of the Lough every day. Lough Neagh sand has always been in demand. History books make reference to early settlers in the 17th century using sand from the Lough Shore in early house building. The modern dredging operations have produced a multimillion pound value-added industry around the shores of Lough Neagh, with incalculable benefits to the local community and economy in terms of jobs and in much needed exports from Northern Ireland to the Republic and Great Britain. Products produced range from roof tiles to massive concrete bridge sections. It will be a sad day for the people of Lough Neagh if the sand runs out. Hopefully this will not happen for many years to come.

One of the first problems the Lough Neagh sand extraction pioneers faced was to find suitable vessels for the task and, with the expense of new barges prohibitive, eyes turned to the Liffey and the Guinness fleet in Dublin.

During the fifties, Guinness started making more use of road transport to deliver the Guinness, and work began to slacken off for their barges. This coincided with the increased demand for sand from Lough Neagh so a large proportion of the Guinness fleet made its way via the Irish Sea and the Lower Bann to Lough Neagh for a new life. In 1961 the last two also made their way to Lough Neagh to join their sister ships in the Scotts fleet. During the sixties Toome Canal was lined with Guinness barges as Scotts then had their sand quay at the Quay Wall in Toomebridge. The lockkeeper at Toome was kept very busy and sometimes had an assistant. The early days for the crews of the Lough Neagh sand barges were hard going. There was none of the sophisticated navigation...
equipment fitted nowadays such as radar, sounders or GPS. The best they had was a compass, a watch and their own skills. Fog on Lough Neagh can be quite dense and the skippers had to rely on the time it took to travel from the pumping ground and a compass bearing to their quay. A note of the various times and bearings was usually kept in the wheelhouse.

It has to be said that barges were brought to Lough Neagh from all parts of Europe. A notable addition to the fleet were the John Kelly dumb barges used on the Lagan for hauling imported coal from the John Kelly coal boats: a similar operation to the Guinness barges in reverse. There were at least six of these dumb barges used in the sand trade. Some were used with tugs and others were redesigned and fitted with diesel engines. Quite a few barges were manufactured locally in the Portadown Foundry and one, the Kathleen, which was last used as a pump boat in Toome Bay, can be seen at Milltown at the Head of Benburb Gorge on the Ulster Canal.

Sand extraction from Lough Neagh really took off during the building boom following the end of World War Two during the fifties and sixties. Notable pioneers were the Scott Brothers, Irwins of Portadown and Norman Emerson. The Emersons sand-barge dredger the 500-tonne The Norman caused quite a stir even before it was launched in Lough Neagh in 1998. Images of the impressive barge were splashed all over the local papers with stories outlining its lengthy journey to Lough Neagh.

In the early days sand was extracted from the edges of the Lough and sold at between 3 and 5 shillings per tonne.
At present there are fifteen barges working on Lough Neagh with carrying capacity ranging from two hundred to five hundred tonnes. All are loaded by pump, which brings a slurry of sand and water aboard into a settlement tank, with the excess water running overboard back into the Lough.

There are three methods used for discharging the load ashore: grab crane (the simplest), discharge by hopper into the harbour and pumped ashore or adding water to the settlement tank and pumping ashore as slurry.
Lough Neagh Sand is used not only in the construction materials industry but also in leisure and the agricultural sector. It is used in horse paddocks, golf courses, garden centres and sports fields. Some of the more famous projects include Croke Park and Lough Erne Golf Resort. The by product from the processing of the sand, the silt is sold to utility companies for bedding and covering of services.

Lough Neagh Sand was also used in the building of Parliament Buildings at Stormont.
Extraction of sand using dredging techniques has minimal visual impact. Sand operators can ensure the security of their sites and can provide a sanctuary area for wildlife with controlled and limited access to sites and adjacent shorelines. Indigenous trees and shrub species have been planted reducing visual impact, creating new and enhancing existing habitats.

The hyper-euthrophic condition of the Lough has not been caused by the sand traders who do not add to the phosphate loading of the Lough. The sand dredging operations do not add anything to the Lough that was not already there. To date sand dredging and processing operations have not been associated with any serious pollution incidents. Sand off loading and processing is well managed and controlled.

The Sand Traders take their environmental and social responsibilities seriously and have invested much in supporting schools, community groups and environmental projects around the Lough. For example

**The Tree Sparrow Project**

This project aimed to maintain and expand the range of the tree sparrows within the Lough Neagh Wetland. Tree sparrow is a Northern Ireland Priority Species. The Lough Neagh Wetlands is one of the most important areas for the species.

The tree sparrow is one of a number of birds causing some concern among conservationists, the population having declined by some 95% over a thirty year period. It is a priority species for both local and national Biodiversity Action Plans (BAP). The Lough Neagh Wetlands is a hotspot for the Tree Sparrow.

They are typically found on farmland, breeding in holes in trees, dense bushes or holes in farmland buildings. In winter they form large flocks and forage in stubble fields and farmyards.

The Sand Traders facilitated the erection of a number of nesting boxes around their sites on the edge of the Lough.

**Creation of Sand Martin Nests**

Frequent visitors to the Sand Traders Sites every year around March time are thousands of Sand Martins. The Sand Traders facilitate the sand martins by providing nesting banks that have been in place for many years and to which the birds return every March from sub Saharan Africa. On many occasions the companies have worked with the RSPB to ring the sand martins for monitoring purposes. It is evident when one talks to the employees on the sites that they have a real passion for protecting wildlife and enhancing the biodiversity on their sites.
The Sand Traders have been long time supporters of the rescue services on Lough Neagh. They have regular liaison with the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and have held a number of safety days with them. In fact, over the years there have been a number of incidents where the Sand Traders have come to the aid of Lough users who have gotten into difficulty. The barges are equipped with modern life saving equipment and the operators are fully trained in life saving and water rescue techniques.

In 2008 the Lough Neagh Sand Traders, comprising of four companies Cemex NI, Northstone, Lagan Group and the Norman Emerson Group, donated £4000 to Lough Neagh Rescue to assist them in the purchase of much needed equipment including their new rescue boat “The Bungy”. This was the second such donation the companies have made to the rescue team in recent years and reflects the value the companies put on the work that the rescue teams do for the users of Lough Neagh. The picture shows Mr George Emerson, Chairman of the QPA Lough Neagh Sand Traders Committee presenting a cheque for £4000 to the Agriculture Minister Michele Gildernew MP, MLA.
There are 30 people employed directly working on the Lough. In addition there are another 120 employed directly by the sand traders related to Lough Neagh operations. Indirectly employed including haulage and maintenance workers would be approximately another 150 people. In terms of value and wages into the local communities around the Lough this comes to several million pounds per year.

Hundreds more depend on Lough Neagh Sand for their employment in the quarry products sector. Other Companies manufacturing Quarry Products within the Lough Neagh area are:

- Northstone Materials (Rooftiles)
- Acheson & Glover (paving and precast concrete products)
- Creagh Concrete (precast concrete products)
- Macrete Ireland (precast concrete products)
- WD Irwin & Sons (specialist sand and gravels)
- Lagan Tile (Rooftiles)

These companies employ over 1000 people directly.

The Lough Neagh Sand Traders have a Directorship on the Lough Neagh Partnership which won the British Urban Regeneration Association award in Manchester 2012 for water way development.

Lough Neagh Sand Traders have supported cultural projects such as the building of the Lough Neagh clinker traditional sailing boat.

Conor Jordan, Norman Emerson Group, (third from left) representing the Sand Traders on the Lough Neagh Partnership
The picture above shows Northstone Materials Sand and Gravel Production Manager, Dessie McGuckin, explaining the dangers of working at and more importantly trespassing at sand processing sites. One way this was demonstrated was by showing that the tyre of the front loading shovel was bigger than a student which all the children found very amusing but they could understand the difficulty a driver would have in seeing them from the cab of the vehicle.

Working with Communities

Students watch as the Sandy Bay barge moored along the key wall
Oliver Plunkett Primary School visiting Northstone Materials Toomebridge Site

Pupils from St Marys Primary School Derrymacash visiting the Norman Emerson sand quay at Ardmore
**Sand Traders Commitment**

- The Sand Traders will continue to work to further reduce environmental impact.
- We will work together as companies to improve health and safety on the Lough.
- We will continue to support our local Communities.
- QPANI will support and advise the Sand Traders on all areas relating to improving biodiversity around their sites.
- We will develop and enhance our relationships with NGOs such as the RSPB, UWT, Woodland Trust and to protect and enhance wildlife and biodiversity around the Lough.
- We will work with Government, local Councils and other statutory bodies to improve the management and protection of Lough Neagh.
- We will be viewed by our Community and Government as an industry that operates in a safe and environmentally responsible way.
- We will work to create an environment where our employees are highly trained and Customer focused.
## Ownership of Lough Neagh Sand Deposits
Shaftesbury Estates (From 1600s)

## Permission to extract sand
Shaftesbury License

## Shaftesbury Business Interest
Royalty Charged on Tonnage

### No. of License Holders
- 6 Northstone Materials (2)
- Lagans
- Norman Emerson Group
- A E Mulhollands
- Walls

### Site Locations
- Toome (Northstone, Walls)
- Ballyginnif (Northstone)
- Sandy Bay (Northstone, Lagans)
- Derryclone Bay (AE Mulholland)
- Trowagh Bay (Emerson)

### Number of Boats
- Northstone: 6
- Lagans: 2
- Emerson: 2
- Mulholland: 2
- Walls: 1
- **TOTAL**: 13

### Annual Production
Circa 1.5 million ton (30% NI requirement)

### Market
- Value Added Concrete Products
- Ready Mixed Concrete
- Dried Sand Mixes
- Bitumen Producers
- Sports Pitches
- Equestrian Arenas

### Employment
- 150 direct
- 150 associated

### Management
Lough Neagh Sand Traders Committee (QPANI) Quarterly Meetings:
- Health & Safety
- Environment
- Legislative updates
- Legal Compliance

### External Interaction
Lough Neagh Advisory Representation
Lough Neagh Partnership Director
Local Biodiversity Action Plans - (Lough Neagh Wetlands, Craigavon Council, Antrim Council, Dungannon Council, QPANI)

### Key Improvements
- 14001 & BS8555 environmental management accreditation for members
- MCA Pilot Licenses for members
- Biodiversity improvement at sites
- Linkage with Lough Neagh Development Strategy at specific site
- Joint Study into Water Discharges with NIEA completed in 2009
How it used to be done, sand dredged from the edges of the Lough using a digger and barge
The Quarry Products Association NI is the trade association for the aggregates, asphalt, concrete and lime industries.

For further information visit www.qpani.org

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