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(EDS, 2021)

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EDS welcomes surprise advice from New Zealand Aluminium Smelters Ltd

28 May 2021

In an unexpected communication, EDS has been advised by the Chief Executive of New Zealand Aluminium Smelters Ltd (NZAS), Stewart Hamilton, that the company has made some fresh commitments to responsibly manage the waste products from its operations.

“Late last year EDS commenced legal proceedings against NZAS seeking urgent removal of Ouvea Premix from a flood-prone site at Maitai. These proceedings settled recently with an agreement to remove the material on an urgent basis. The costs of removal were to be shared between the company and government agencies,” said EDS CEO Gary Taylor.

“EDS is now very pleased to note that following changes in senior board and management positions at Rio Tinto, the majority shareholder in NZAS, further steps are being taken to address and pay for the New Zealand company’s clean-up obligations at its Tiwai Point site and in the Invercargill environs.

“These commitments followed a recent meeting between the new CEO of Rio Aluminium, Ivan Vella, and Mr Hamilton, with senior government Ministers Robertson, Parker and Woods earlier in May.

“Over 2021 and beyond, NZAS has advised EDS it has made the following commitments regarding Ouvea Premix, Spent Cell Liner and ground contamination:

- to expedite the relocation of the Maitai Ouvea Premix to Tiwai point, as agreed with EDS. As of 17 May, 3000 tonnes of material remain stored at Maitai. Progress will continue over the next few weeks until approximately 1500 tonnes remain. NZAS will then await the arrival of further shipping containers (coming from China) in mid-June to complete the removal.

• to remove all Spent Cell Liner from the Tiwai site at its eventual closure.

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- to share 20 years of ground water monitoring results from the Spent Cell Liner pad and landfill with the relevant authorities.
- to share the sampling plan for soil contamination on site with the relevant authorities.
- to work with Environment Southland and Ngāi Tahu to develop further sampling plan requirements and assess options to address the outcomes of the sampling.
- to progressively relocate the Ouvea Premix currently stored at all the other Invercargill locations back to the Tiwai site as space allows.
- to fund the shortfall in processing costs for all of the remaining Ouvea Premix.
- to take full funding responsibility for the TAHA Ouvea Premix material from Matura and, in doing so, assume the current funding commitments of Ministry for the Environment, Invercargill City Council, Environment Southland, Gore District Council and the building owners (\$4M).
- to remove and process the buried Haysoms dross on site. This dross was relocated from Bluff approximately 20 years ago and has a government indemnity in place.
- To work with Ngāi Tahu, Ministry for the Environment and Environment Southland to identify other processing options for Ouvea Premix and Spent Cell Liner.

“Whilst EDS contends that all of these undertakings are what should be expected from a responsible corporate citizen, they are nonetheless very welcome and represent a fundamentally changed approach to what we experienced in the early phases of the litigation.

P. “In particular, it is noteworthy that the company is completely taking over previous agreements for government funding contributions and meeting all costs itself.

“We commend NZAS, Rio Aluminium and Rio Tinto on its new approach to environmental management at the Tiwai Site,” Mr Taylor concluded.

Download full statement

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