

**Meeting of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Local Government
and Heritage**

6 December 2022

**Opening Statement – Geraldine Larkin, Chief Executive Officer, National
Standards Authority of Ireland - NSAI**

I would like to thank the committee for the invitation to assist in its consideration of the issues relating to Quarries and deleterious materials. My name is Geraldine Larkin, and I am the CEO of the National Standards Authority of Ireland – NSAI.

I am accompanied by my colleagues, Mr Seán Balfe, Head of sustainability and built environment, Mr Enda McDonnell, Director of standards and metrology and Ms Yvonne Wylde, Head of standards technical, and today we are eager to assist the Committee in your work and address any questions you may have.

I am aware that the committee will be addressed by officials from the Department of the Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the National Building Control and Market Surveillance Office and since that Department and Office have policy and statutory responsibilities for the national building regulations and the EU construction products legislation, I will confine my comments to NSAI's roles in supporting businesses in the construction sector to comply with the regulatory frameworks.

NSAI, as the Irish national standards body, was established by the NSAI Act 1996 as an agency under the auspices of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment. In that capacity it is the national member of the international and

European standardization organizations, ISO, IEC, CEN and Cenelec, and the provider of certification for statutory and non-statutory schemes.

We have a broad role that creates the infrastructure for products and services to be recognised and relied on all over the world. Standards play a significant role in supporting government policies and legislation. We facilitate stakeholders representing all aspects of Irish life to build consensus on standards needed for their sectors in the development of national, European and international standards and related guidance documents. NSAI has a strong and well recognised reputation in helping to develop standards and certification both at home and abroad.

The issue of defective blocks and deleterious materials within the blocks is a serious one with lasting and damaging consequences for all those affected by it. We are acutely aware of the problems faced by homeowners and recognise the importance of all parties working together to ensure the safety and peace of mind of the public.

Much of the current debate and policy is shaped by recent problems experienced by homeowners particularly in Donegal and Mayo. The cause of these problems are deleterious materials which are naturally occurring minerals found in rock deposits in Ireland. When incorporated into the block in excessive quantities, they can react in the presence of moisture which can lead to the breakdown of the block.

The bottom line is simple. Serious problems happen when standards are ignored. Since July 2013, by law, concrete block manufacturers must CE Mark, conduct prescribed tests on their products and engage a third party notified body in accordance with the European Construction Products Regulation (CPR). In national implementing regulations the market surveillance authorities have

powers to carry out investigations on these blocks and any economic operators involved.

Furthermore, the introduction of new building control regulations in 2014 brought more stringent requirements for the construction sector to ensure that the complex array of standards and technical information that experts develop at NSAI are properly applied in practice.

This has been evidenced by the publication of product standards and codes of practice available for reference by industry to use in contract documents, technical guidance to building regulations, and in the provision of construction related product and practice certification schemes.

For example, to support CPR implementation, NSAI has developed guidance for certain harmonised standards in the form of Standard Regulations (SRs). These documents set out appropriate minimum performance requirements for intended uses of products in Ireland.

In relation to NSAI's certification role for the construction sector, we are the principal notified body designated by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, with a scope of activities related to quarries.

Under the CPR, and depending on the category of product, certification by a third party notified body is a prerequisite for the application by the manufacturer of CE marking. A manufacturer, by drawing up a 'declaration of performance' and affixing the CE marking takes full responsibility for the conformity of the product with its declared performance.

NSAI operates four schemes for construction products which can apply to quarries. A national scheme for certification to IS EN 206, commonly referred to as 'ready-mixed concrete' and three others for conformity with products

covered by the CPR, namely IS EN 12620 Aggregates for concrete, IS EN 771-3 Aggregate Concrete Masonry units (blocks) and IS EN 13242 Aggregates for materials for use in civil engineering work and road construction.

In conducting audits of the businesses, NSAI's role as a notified body is limited to the initial inspection of the manufacturing plant and of Factory Production Control (FPC) followed by ongoing annual surveillance visits.

It is important to note that the scope of the certification process relates only to the manufacturer's capability to produce compliant products. The manufacturer has sole responsibility for production of compliant products.

NSAI's work across standards and certification for the construction sector is essential for the value it brings to citizens and businesses in everyday life. We are conscious of the important role we play and the importance of this work. I would like to assure the committee of our continued commitment to assist in delivering the government's solution for homeowners affected by defective properties.