

SOKNDAL EIGERSUND BUSINESS WORKING LIFE ENERGY

Provoked by the proposal for a new Minerals Act: - The municipalities are totally overrun



GREAT OPPORTUNITIES: Mining has a long tradition in Dalane, and a company like Titania is very important to Sokndal municipality. Mayor Jonas Andersen Sayed is nevertheless concerned that the municipalities must have a say in the team when important decisions are to be made in the future. The proposal for a new mineral law greatly weakens the municipalities' influence, he concludes.

Av [Ingve Aalbu](#)

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A proposal for a new mineral law has been submitted to the government. The new law may have great significance for Dalane, but Sokndal mayor Jonas Andersen Sayed (KrF) is not happy with everything he reads.

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- When the leader of the committee handed over the report to the Minister of Trade and Industry, he said a little ragged that he thought there would be noise from the proposal. I agree with that, after skimming through the almost 350 pages. I am both surprised and provoked by parts of the content, says the mayor to Dalane Tidende

He agrees that there is a need for better procedures and coordination related to mineral projects. At the same time, Jonas Andersen Sayed believes it is absolutely necessary that the municipalities continue to be part of the team, and preferably to an even greater extent than today.

- Here they are instead planning a total overrun of the municipalities and the authority we have had until now. We are reduced to a pure consultation body, he argues.



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Loses the right of veto

Sayed believes that the municipalities today in practice have a veto right against new mining operations.

- Permits under the Minerals Act are dependent on clarifications under the Planning and Building Act. The municipality has the authority there, and that is important to us. This authority is greatly weakened in the new proposal. The current scheme does indeed have an opening for the Ministry of Local Government and District Affairs to adopt a state plan, but it is basically a narrow exception provision. What the committee is now proposing is an amendment to the Planning and Building Act which states that in mineral matters, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, in the same way as the Ministry of Petroleum and Energy in energy matters, can make decisions on state plans, the Sokndal mayor explains.

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This could be of great importance in Dalane, for example if Norge Mining goes ahead with the plans for large-scale mining in the Helleland area.

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- Have not learned from the processes around wind power

Another important point is that in the future the directorate will be able to make exemption decisions from municipal plans when it comes to conducting investigations.

- If one studies the map of granted exploration permits, the Dalane region is carpeted with squares showing permits that have already been granted. We know that the resources we have in Dalane are of national and international importance. In a report in May, the NGU (Norwegian Geological Survey) raised the estimates of both the Tellnes and Øgreid deposits. At Tellnes there are values of NOK 545 billion underground and at Øgreid even more. If the processes around these resources are to have legitimacy in the local environment, it is absolutely crucial that the municipalities are part of the team. The new proposal that has been presented indicates that the committee has not learned from the processes around wind power. Such major encroachments on nature require local change, argues Jonas Andersen Sayed.



LARGE RESOURCES: The squares show exploration permits granted in Sokndal and Dalane. The map is taken from the website of the Directorate for Mineral Management.

Will take up the matter in the regional council

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He understands that the industry itself has "pushed on" for more state control.

- One must still have the municipalities on the team. If you look at it historically, it is not the municipalities that have been the brake on the development of a new mineral industry. It has rather been the state that has been slow, the Sokndal mayor claims.

The municipality now has until 1 November to comment on the new proposal for a mineral law. That time should be used well.

- We will work out a good consultation response. It is also natural that this matter is aired in the regional council, as it concerns all the municipalities in Dalane. Sokndal is also a member of the Utmark municipalities' association, where I am a member of a subcommittee that works with mineral matters. There we have a legal secretariat that will also make a consultation statement, signals the KrF politician.

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Deadlines and requirements

- **Do you also find something positive in the proposal?**

- Yes, in principle I very much agree that we need a modernization of the Minerals Act, even though it has not been in force for so long. It is very good that there will be better coordination of case processing in mineral matters. A number of changes have also been proposed regarding exploration permits that have a positive effect. Among other things, deadlines must be set and requirements set for the plans, and the directorate can also reject applications at an early stage if it is quite obvious that they create conflict and have major consequences in the local environment, Andersen Sayed answers.

He adds:

- In November 2021, several exploration permits were granted in the far west of Sokndal, which I was not aware of until this week. The Directorate currently has no reporting to or dialogue with the municipalities when processing applications for exploration permits. It is proposed that it be introduced now, and that is positive, even though the involvement should have been even more clearly legislated, the mayor believes.

Running for the stars

Mining has traditionally been very important in Sokndal and Dalane. Jonas Andersen Sayed believes that there are great opportunities also in the future, but he is concerned that things must be done in the right way.

"We must not stumble over a rock because we are running after the stars," it has been said. In Dalane, we have been a driving force to get more focus on the mineral industry. There are enormous opportunities and resources in Dalane and Norway, which are absolutely necessary if we are to be able to adapt to a green society. But it must be done correctly, so that we ensure legitimacy and balance the various considerations in a good way. Because even though I think this is a necessary industry, one can not escape the fact that it is also a dirty industry with major encroachments on nature, greenhouse gas emissions, noise and dust.