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21 February 2008

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Our Ref: 326
Your Ref: 12/12/20/433

Dear Sir

REFERENCE: ESKOM TRANSMISSION ZEUS-MERCURY 765kV TRANSMISSION LINE PROJECT: VREDEFORT DOME OPTIONS

In March 2007, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) issued a Record of Decision (RoD) for the proposed construction of a 765kV transmission line and associated infrastructure from Zeus substation, Mpumalanga province to Mercury substation in the Free State province. The DEAT project reference number for the RoD 12/12/20/433.

The RoD recommended that the route for the transmission line must follow the western corridor near the Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site. This recommendation led to a number of appeals against the RoD by landowners along the western corridor. Based on the nature of the appeals, the applicant decided to undertake an in depth extended study of the alignments that were looked at previously with input from relevant specialists (ecology, avifauna, social, heritage and visual specialists). As part of the extended study, every landowner who could potentially be affected by any of the alternative routes would be contacted. The attached documentation is the result of this study and should be used to decide on the outcome of the appeals.

Please find two sets of documentation. This letter, and attached appendices, describe and address the activities and issues raised during the public comment period of the Extended Study report. It should be noted that notwithstanding the issues raised during this period, the preference of the EIA consultants for the Central Alignment as the route for the proposed 765kV power line remains unchanged.

The other set comprises the Extended Study Report for the Vredefort Dome study. This Report, which was made available to the public for comment, has been amended as per the peer review of report undertaken on request of the applicant, (Eskom Transmission Services).

The amendments include the following:

- The motivation for the Zeus-Mercury transmission power line project is included as well as a sketch of the relevant transmission network that the proposed power line will form part of;
- A map of the entire recommended Zeus-Mercury route;
- Description of why Buffer Zones are required for World Heritage Sites and a statement to the effect that none of the alignment options and alternatives alignments cross into the Buffer Zone of the Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site (WHS);
- The basis of the appeals against the decision in the Record of Decision that the Western Alignment be followed;
- The Buffer Zone of the WHS is indicated more clearly on the map of the study area;

- Inclusion of a statement made by the applicant that although the applicant agrees that the central alignment is the preferred alignment, constraints may cause the final route alignment to deviate after negotiation with individual landowners so that landowner requirements for the placing of the power line on his/her property can be accommodated during servitude negotiations.
- With regard to the above statement, it is worthwhile noting the basis of selection of the central alignment was because of the existing power line and keeping the impact of the new power line in an area already impacted on hence any significant deviation needs to be substantiated by environmental reasons including visual impact and land use).
- The inclusion of a number of additional appendices including the Executive Summaries of all specialist reports; and the Executive Summaries of the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Reports for the Zeus-Mercury project.

The extended study assessed four alignment options to the north west of the Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site (WHS) together with a number of alignment alternatives recommended by landowners affected by the proposed transmission project (see *Appendix 1* for a map of the study area showing the alignments and alignment alternatives). The specialists involved in the study were from the fields of social impact, visual impact, avifauna, heritage and ecology.

From the studies undertaken, the Eastern and Central alignments were generally seen as the least impacting alignments for several reasons as set out in the Report. Apart from localized 'hotspots' on both routes, mitigation measures were seen to reduce the overall impact of the new line along these alignments to a low impact. The Central alignment will run parallel to the existing 400kV transmission power line and the Eastern alignment is the alignment situated closest to the Vredefort Dome WHS.

However, the Central alignment has a number of advantages in that surrounding developments and land uses have already adapted to the existing line and habitats have already been disturbed. Placing the new line in an area without existing power lines, would introduce a new and permanent impact to such an area. It would also spread the impact of the new line instead of keeping it to an area already impacted on. For the above reasons, the central alignment is identified as the preferred alignment for the proposed 765kV transmission line.

During the public comment period (from 1 November – 7 December 2007), a public meeting was held on 23 November 2007 in Potchefstroom, the minutes of which have been included for your information. The assessment by the Avifauna Specialist was queried by a landowner who stated that he had discussed the matter with John Ledger and Dr Rudie Erasmus who had agreed that although higher power lines might have a lower impact on birds, a high power line next to a lower power line will have an approximately 20% worse impact on wild birds.

The Avifauna Specialist for the study, Chris van Rooyen of the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) responded by supplying data showing that higher lines are probably more dangerous to bird life than smaller lines but that it is accepted best practice to group lines together where possible as this not only makes them a more visible obstacle, but resident birds should be aware of the existing power lines and would therefore continue to avoid the area because of the power line obstacle in that location (see *Appendix 2* regarding email correspondence regarding this matter as well as *Appendix 3.7 – Memorandum on behalf of John Fourie*).

During the public meeting, Mr. John Fourie, owner of the farm Roodekraal 545 indicated that he would take legal action if, at the end of the appeal process, the Central alignment was recommended (see comments prepared by Willem Coetzee Incorporated, Potchefstroom in *Appendix 3-7*). Mr Nickie Pienaar, owner of the farm Kruitfontein 465, indicated that he would do the same if the Eastern alignment were selected.

At the end of the meeting, these two landowners recommended additional alternatives that would reduce the visual impact of the proposed power line on their respective properties. The alignment alternative (namely, 5A and 5B on the map in *Appendix 1*) follows the central alignment and then turns to the south west to either go north of south of a small koppie on the farm Roodekraal 454. Mr Pienaar stated that he preferred the alignment to the north of the koppie and Mr Fourie preferred the alignment to the south of the koppie.

It should be noted that the above alignment alternatives suggested all cross Mr. Fouries' property, whereas the alignments whilst having a visual impact on Mr Pienaar's property, do not fall within any property belonging to Mr. Pienaar.

A helicopter flyover of these new alternative alignments took place on 3 December 2007. Those flying were Deon Fourie (son of John Fourie), Jan Strydom, a landowner along the central alignment, Jean Beater of PBA International and Koos van der Merwe, the Eskom negotiator for the proposed power line. Mr. Pienaar did not participate in the flyover. However Ms. Beater and Mr. van der Merwe met with him afterwards where he stated that

he would only consider the alignment option to the north of the koppie (option 5A) as an alignment to the south of the koppie (5B) would remain as a big visual issue for him as the eastern alignment.

Mr John Fourie could also not take part in the flyover but the options were discussed with him telephonically and he said that the option to the south of the koppie (option 5B) was his preferred option but that he would accept option 5A if it meant that the new power line would not follow the central alignment all the way through his farm.

It should be noted that the above alignment alternative crosses Mr. Fourie's property before joining the eastern alignment where it then crosses properties of other landowners towards the west who have not been consulted with regard to this particular alignment option.

Although these localized route alternatives were explored with both parties, no clear resolution was achieved. These alignment alternatives are put forward as option to accommodate the above landowners. However, the opinion of the EIA consultant's remains that the Central alignment is the preferred option as the impact of the proposed power line would be limited to an area already impacted on by an existing power line. The environment surrounding the existing line has already been impacted on with bird flight paths already disrupted and existing land uses have adapted to its existence. The overall impact of the new line running parallel to the existing line is considered to be less than placing it along a new alignment that the above option would entail.

Several comments were received from individuals and groups of individuals concerning both the Extended Study Report and public meeting held on the 23rd of November 2007. These comments (and subsequent response by the EIA consultant) have been included in the *Appendix 3*, which includes the *Addendum Public Participation Report* that expands on the public participation activities that took place after the issue of the report for public comment.

It was mentioned several times at the public meeting that landowners had adapted their farming and other activities to the existing power line hence it made sense to these landowners to run the new power line along the existing line.

As stated above, the applicant, decided in December 2007 to send the Extended Study Report to an external reviewer, Dr. P.J. Aucamp of PTERSA Environmental Management Consultants. The brief received by the reviewer was to concentrate on the way the facts were presented, conflicting statements, missing information and logical presentation of the arguments. The review was received on 15 January 2007 with a number of comments and recommendations (see *Appendix 4*).

The applicant then requested that the Extended Study Report that was issued to the public be updated with several of Dr. Aucamp's recommendations. The accompanying Report contains these updates. The sections that have updated are indicated on the Contents Page in italics and are underlined in the Report.

It should be noted that not all the recommendations were included as some were as a result of the reviewer either misreading some of the appendices (see point 3 of the Review) or missing some of them (see 3rd bullet point under point 1 which is addressed in Appendix 3 of the Extended Study Report).

The proposal of the Extended Study Report that the central alignment is the preferred alignment has not changed. However, the Applicant has agreed that the central alignment is preferred but has indicated that due to various constraints the final route alignment may deviate after negotiation with individual landowners.

The recommendations of the Extended Study Report as well as the recommendations contained in the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Reports for the Zeus-Mercury EIA remain unchanged and in force.

As requested by the applicant, all those registered on the database of Interested and Affected Parties will be sent letters explaining the amendments to the report together with a copy of this letter for information.

Yours truly,

G.M. MAHLANGU

cc: Minister of Environmental Affairs & Tourism, Private Bag X9154, Cape Town 8000

Member: GM Mahlangu