

**PROJECT: Access roads to the Braamhoek Pumped Storage Scheme**

**Date: 18 January 2006**

**Time: 10h00**

**Venue: Ladysmith Town Hall**

**Draft minutes for comment**

**ATTENDANCE**

**Eskom Representatives**

Ms. D Herbst	Manager : Environmental Management
Mr. T Gaskell	Project Manager
Mr. T Bokwe	Senior Environmental Adviser
Ms. N Malinga	Senior Advisor to Stakeholder Management

**Consultants**

Mr. B de Lange	Africon
Mr. R Bekker	Africon
Dr. D de Waal	Afrosearch
Ms. M Moolman	Afrosearch
Mr M Mathebula	Afrosearch

**APOLOGIES**

Mr. B Le Roux                      Ladysmith Council

**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

Dr. de Waal opened the meeting and thanked everyone present and gave attendees and consultants the opportunity to introduce themselves. Dr. D de Waal explained that this meeting is about the Environmental Impact Assessment for the access roads for the Braamhoek Pumped Storage scheme and not employment related. He also explained the EIA process briefly. It was implied that the report will be sent out to DEAT; and the RoD will then be issued. Dr D de Waal explained that the discussion would revolve around the environmental issues, and that Eskom would later address questions regarding labor related issues.

**PRESENTATION**

An environmental application for the Braamhoek Pumped Storage Scheme (PSS) was lodged with DEAT in 1999, and the Record of decision issued in 2002. The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) indicated that the access roads were not adequately addressed in the Braamhoek PSS Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), however, and required that a separate EIA be conducted for the construction and upgrade of the access roads. Various roads had been identified by Eskom for use, including the S790 (Swinburne to Kiesbeen); S61 (Kiesbeen down De Beers Pass); D48 (De Beers pass

to Besters); S922 (Kiesbeen to upper reservoir site); a new road along scarp form the upper reservoir to the S61; or a new road up Braamhoek pass from the lower reservoir connecting to the new scarp road.

Initially, the Braamhoek Consultants Joint Venture (BCJV) was tasked to undertake the environmental authorization. BCJV, in conjunction with Acer Africa, conducted a detailed Scoping and public participation (PPP) exercise. BCJV was in the process of submitting a scoping report for authorization, to be followed by a detailed EIA on authorization of the Scoping Report. Due to potential problems with the independence of BCJV, Africon was appointed to conduct the EIA and finalize the authorization process. During discussions between Africon, DEAT, KwaZulu Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs (DAEA) and Free State Department of Tourism, Environment and Economic Affairs (DTEEA), it was established that the various authorities would support the submission of an extended scoping report

During the initial scoping and PPP, various issues and route alternatives were identified. These indicators included biodiversity; surface water; air quality; land use; geology and soils; visual aesthetic; noise, heritage resources; regional and local tourism; and socio-economy. The three alternatives identified by the stakeholders for assessment include the construction of a new road up Braamhoek Pass (Alternative 1) with partial upgrading of the D275 and D48 to de Beers Pass; construction of a new road along the scarp only (Alternative 2) with partial upgrading of the D275 and D48 up the De Beers Pass road to the S61; and the upgrading of the D275, D48, S61 and S922 (Alternative 3).

Various specialist assessments were conducted to address these issues, and determine the impact of construction or upgrading of the various road alignments on the identified environmental, cultural or social indicators. An alternatives assessment was conducted on the proposed alternatives, indicating the potential impact – either positive or negative – of the different alternatives on the receiving environment. A basic indicator of -1 was allocated for a negative impact, +1 for a positive impact and no score where no impact was predicted. Based on this, Alternative 2 was selected as the preferred option with an overall score of -3, with Alternative 3 scoring -4. Alternative 1 indicated an overall score of -5.

Based on the outcome of this alternatives assessment, a detailed EIA was conducted on Alternative 2. The EIA indicated potential high impacts on erosion, surface water and personal safety, with moderately significant impacts air quality and biodiversity. Potential positive impacts of Alternative 2 included job creation during the construction phase, and increased accessibility and road safety during the operational phase. Mitigation to reduce significant negative impacts to within acceptable levels was proposed, as were actions required to ensure that potential impacts will be sustainable.

The EIA therefore concluded that upgrading or maintenance of existing roads associated with alternative 2 will have minor **negative environmental** impact, but can be expected to have moderate **positive socio-economic** impact. Similarly, the construction of new roads associated with alternative 2 will have a moderate to high **negative environmental** impact

and a low to moderate **positive** *socio-economic* impact. Critical areas which must be addressed include protection of Heritage resources along route alignments; impact on drainage features along various alignments; and traffic safety along the alignment during the operational phase.

Based on this, it was recommended that a project specific Environmental Management Plan (EMP) must be applied during the construction phase and that mitigation measures proposed in the EIA should be incorporated into the EMP. Further, design interventions would be required to ensure protection of critical sensitive features such as drainage features or sensitive landscape and vegetation components. Finally, it was proposed that due care and responsibility be enforced by Eskom through the implementation of an external EMP audit system and that an Environmental Forum be established during the construction phase, to ensure successful and acceptable implementation of the EMP.

## **DISCUSSION**

An attendee asked what the time frame is for the project.

Mr. B de Lange: The project will run from about June/July to 2007.

An attendee asked what role the NGOs will play in the organization. Also, who is going to be responsible? Will the Councillors be responsible?

Dr. de Waal: This forum is an environmental forum and we are still going to decide who will form part thereof.

An attendee asked what the age restriction would be regarding labour.

D.Herbst: This would be subject to Government Legislation, but employees would generally be no older than 65 years.

An attendee asked if they would be recognised for attending the meeting. The attendee also asked if their chances of getting a job would be better once they signed the register, and is it a register for work?

Dr. de Waal: Attending this meeting does not guarantee you a job and this is not going to replace the meeting about labour issues. The positive thing about attending this meeting is that you know more than other people about the project.

An attendee asked how the contractors would be evaluated so that local people would be employed, with special preference for cheap labour.

Dr. de Waal: The ESKOM Labour issues have already been addressed.

An attendee asked it can be justified having people work here from 30 to 40 km away.

Mr. T. Gaskell: Nobody justified it. Take for example the current Tunnel Project that employs a lot of local people.

An attendee asked how many people would be working on the project and how they would know about this.

D. Herbst: We have an agreement with Local Government groups and believe that through them, we will reach the community.

An attendee asked when the training will commence is ESKOM is training people. Also, will trainees receive formal certificates for these qualifications?

D. Herbst: That will obviously depend on the type of job they will be doing. Different training will be required for different jobs, but this will mostly be in-work training (practical), and yes, some employees may receive certificates, but not in all cases.

## **CLOSURE**

The meeting was closed at 21h00.