

BRAAMHOEK PUMPED STORAGE SCHEME

**CONSTRUCTION AND UPGRADE OF ACCESS
ROADS : ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
ASSESSMENT**

**MINUTES OF MEETING BETWEEN HARRISMITH DISTRICT FARMERS
ASSOCIATIONS, LOCAL RESIDENTS, BRAAMHOEK CONSULTANTS JOINT VENTURE
AND ACER (AFRICA)**

SWINBURNE FARMERS ASSOCIATION HALL, SWINBURNE, HARRISMITH

**18 FEBRUARY 2005
18h00 – 21h30**

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1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mr Francois Poggenpoel, Regional Representative and Chairman of Swinburne Farmers Association, welcomed all present and thanked them for attending the meeting. He introduced the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Project Team for the Braamhoek Pumped Storage Scheme (PSS) access roads. Mr Poggenpoel indicated that most farmers within the various Farmers Associations in the area have a specific interest in the project and would therefore like to understand how the proposed projects will impact on their environment, including their farms.

2. ATTENDANCE

Attendance was as follows:

NAME	POSITION & FARM NAME	ASSOCIATION / ORGANISATION
Ms Jaana-Maria Ball	Environmental Consultant	Braamhoek Consultants Joint Venture
Mr Gary Vok	Civil Engineer	Braamhoek Consultants Joint Venture
Ms Debbie McKirdy	Public Participation Consultant	ACER (Africa)
Mr Francois Poggenpoel	Chairman & Regional Representative	Swinburne Farmers Association
Mr PNJ Roets	Farmer, Langspruit	
Mr ZJ Roets	Project Manger	WFW
Mr DPR Coetze	Farmer, Berrysvale	
Mrs Liona Kleynhans	Member	TSP Maluti a Phofung, Berg Bohaai
Mr Hendrik van der Merwe	Member	Botanical Gardens
Mr Chris van der Merwe		CHG Grond Werke
Mr Chris Kunz	Farmer, Oakdale	Swinburne Farmers Association
Mr P Lombaard	Resident	Swinburne
Mr S Casey	Farmer, Nelson's Hoek	Swinburne Farmers Association
Mr JH de Jager	Farmer, Schriensdun & Hamilberg	Free State Road Board Harrismith Farmers Union
Mr Henk Badenhorst	Councillor	Maluti a Phofung Local Municipality Thabo Mofutsunyane District Municipality Maluti a Phofung Tourism
Mrs Julia Kramer	Member	Friends of Botanical Garden
Mr Phillip Schoultz	Contractor	SP Electrics
Mr Gert Nel	Farmer, Klaarfontein	Swinburne Farmers Association
Mr Howard Christie	Farmer, Fullerton	Subaru, Pietermarizburg
Mr Bob Benney		
Mr PL de Jager	Farmer, Franshoek	Swinburne Farmers Association
Mr Dave Short		Maluti a Phofung Tourism Association
Mrs Jenni Cleverly		Riverview Country Inn
Mr Wayne Casey	Farmer, Nelson's Hoek	Swinburne Farmers Association
Mr Thomas Mapp	Farmer, Bultfontein	Swinburne Farmers Association
Mr A Venter	Farmer, Gegund	Swinburne Farmers Association
Mr PW Blom	Farmer, Bedford	Eeram Farmers Association Harrismith District Farmers Union
Mr W Pelser		PL Consult

Mr Hennie du Plooy		HL du Plooy Plant Hire
Mr George Galloway	Farmer, Tygerskloof	Swinburne Farmers Association
Mr Gabba Coetzee	Farmer, Nelson's Hoek	Swinburne Farmers Association
Mr W Campher	Farmer, Riverbend	
Mrs Linda Sharrat	Farmer, Bronsbury (Montreal)	
Mr Brett Pringle	Private	

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

The primary objectives of the meeting were to:

- Inform the attendees of the proposed project (i.e. construction of access roads for the Braamhoek PSS).
- Obtain baseline information and *status quo* of the area regarding the proposed project.
- Identify issues (positive and negative) that require investigation.
- Provide an opportunity to interact directly with the project team.

4. PROJECT BACKGROUND

Ms Jaana-Maria Ball explained the following:

- Mr Frans Louwinger, the Project Manager of Eskom Enterprises (Eskom - the proponent of the proposed project) and Mrs Deidre Herbst the Environmental Manager of Eskom Generation sent their apologies. She added that Mrs Herbst was currently attending a meeting with the Skeurklip Conservancy.
- The Braamhoek PSS is situated in the Drakensberg on the provincial border between the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal. Environmental authorisation for the Braamhoek PSS has been awarded in 2002.
- Eskom Generation is a division of Eskom with the responsibility of building and operating the Braamhoek PSS and is also responsible for the construction and upgrade of access roads EIA. Eskom Generation deals with the generation of electricity and is responsible for power generation stations.
- The construction and upgrade of access roads EIA and the construction of transmission power lines EIA will be required for the construction and operation of the Braamhoek PSS.
- The Braamhoek Consultants Joint Venture (BCJV) is leading the construction and upgrade of access roads EIA. ACER (Africa) has been appointed to conduct the public consultation exercise for both EIAs (for optimisation and synergy).
- The preferred road alternative(s) will only be selected at the end of the scoping exercise, where one or more will be studied in the impact assessment phase.

5. THE CONSTRUCTION AND UPGRADE OF ACCESS ROADS

5.1 Description

Ms Jaana-Maria Ball provided an overview of the construction and upgrade of access roads for the Braamhoek PSS.

In the presentation (Appendix A) the following was discussed:

- Background to the project.

- Project locality.
- The project has three kinds of roads envisaged:
 - ▶ External roads – access from existing regional roads.
 - ▶ Internal site roads – access within upper and lower reservoir sites.
 - ▶ Internal roads – roads linking upper and lower reservoirs (4 alternatives have been identified).
- Potential issues identified (construction and operation, short-term and long-term).

5.2 Discussion

This section summarises issues, concerns, comments and questions that were raised and discussed at the meeting:

Concerns and Issues	Responses provided by the Project Team
Mr JH de Jager. If we favour a particular alternative, will that information be forwarded to Eskom for their consideration? Alternative 1 only favours Ladysmith and Alternatives 1 and 2 have a road on the escarpment, which is not favourable.	The discussion will be recorded, incorporated into the Issues Report and included in the Scoping Report for Eskom's information and for the consideration of the Authorities.
Mr George Galloway. How have the distances of the alternatives been calculated, specifically the 'new' roads?	The measurement is from the lower to the upper reservoir site. This includes existing gravel tracks that require surfacing. There will be a certain amount of major works done on existing roads and this has been included into the measurement, so it does not necessarily mean a completely 'new' road.
Mr Dave Short. It is important to consider the alternative that opens the area up for tourism, specifically eco-tourism. The area is currently badly serviced. Why not consider a joint venture with provincial and national government to assist with costs?	All relevant departments have been consulted, and the project team has also discussed the proposed project with affected parties such as SANRAL and N3TC. Discussion with these parties will be ongoing throughout the project. The government departments also need to consider the fact that these roads will need to be maintained.
Mr Henk Badenhorst. Development in the Free State is a high priority and job creation is essential. The N3 carries a high volume of traffic and we need the greater area to be opened up for eco-tourism potential. A scenario must be developed whereby various aspects benefit from such a project. Eskom should consider the 'bigger picture'. Also, local labour must be utilised.	All these issues will be included in the Issues Report of the Scoping Report. Eskom is a parastatal with certain policies in place for the procurement of local labour and the training thereof. For the construction and upgrade of the roads, the construction period will be 20 months. Approximately 3 000 people will be employed. This equates to 60 000 man months of employment. A limited number of skilled labour (e.g. machine/ vehicle operators) would be required for road construction.
Mr JH de Jager. Apparently, the entire project is worth R 13 billion. The roads component is surely a small part of the project. The consideration of cost when deciding on which alternative should not be an influence compared to the total value of the project. Eskom owes us a decent road with benefits for the entire community.	You are correct in saying that the total project is worth billions and that the roads is a small component thereof.
Mr Dave Short. During construction, the roads will be utilised to bring in equipment. What will happen after construction?	Eskom will require access during operation for the operation and maintenance activities for the PSS. Eskom thus has a vested interest in the project. The provincial roads will be maintained by the provincial roads

Concerns and Issues	Responses provided by the Project Team
	department, however, Eskom also has an interest in the maintenance thereof.
Mrs Liona Kleynhans. TSP Maluti a Phofung, Berg Bohaa is conducting research which is being funded by the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA). There may be additional funds available for tourism projects. Eskom should discuss the possibility of a joint venture with the DBSA?	This information and contact details of the contact person within the DBSA will be passed on to Eskom for their consideration and possible action.
Mr P Lombaard. What is the ecological cost of the impact of the construction of the roads? This should be considered and not only the length and cost in Rands and Cents.	Resource economics is a tricky science and it is difficult to assign a Rand value to potential environmental impacts. However, all aspects need to be considered and this will be taken into consideration during the EIA and the various specialist studies that will be conducted.
What about the S793? Was that not considered as an alternative?	No, it was not considered. The road has many sharp bends over the Wilge River and it would be difficult for trucks to travel safely on this road.
Mr T Coetzee. Who has been notified about this project and how many I&APs have responded to date? What is the general feeling regarding the alternatives?	Seven advertisements were placed in various newspapers. A database of approximately 800 were initially notified via personalised letters. To date, approximately 1 000 people have been sent Background Information Documents. Approximately 50 comments have been received specifically regarding the roads. There is no indication of a preferred alternative at this stage and this will possibly emerge out of the scoping process.
Mrs Liona Kleynhans. Many of the people here registered with Eskom in March last year. Why has this information not been included onto your data base?	The EIA Team will investigate this issue with Eskom. The names of all attendees will also be forwarded to Eskom. Please also assist the public participation process by updating the database and providing additional names to be included.
Mr George Galloway. What would the maintenance cost be over 10 years? Who will travel the road after construction, how many times a week, as there will not be staff at the upper site.	This has not yet been calculated. Only construction has been considered in the calculations. Also, time and travel costs should be taken into account. Please note that certain components of the Braamhoek PSS could possibly be constructed before all the roads are upgraded.
Mr George Galloway. The timeframes for the entire project are unclear. Please send us a schedule of activities for the whole project. Also, at the next meeting, please ensure that representatives of Eskom are present to answer the greater strategic questions.	Comments noted with thanks. The scoping process will be finalised in March and the study team will be in the area again during 4-8 April 2005 to discuss the Draft Scoping Report. The EIA process will then commence with another round of public meetings scheduled for November/December 2005. A programme for the entire project will be forwarded to the Associations present as well as Mr Galloway.

Concerns and Issues	Responses provided by the Project Team
What about the issue of long-term maintenance? Also, the proposed N3 toll road crosses your roads in two places.	The EIA Team has been in consultation with the N3TC. The proposed N3 will only be construction post-2010, as it is entirely dependent on traffic volumes and demand. There is no conflict with the N3 design and any alternatives identified in this process.
Mr Hendrik van der Merwe. The flora and fauna must be respected during construction activities. We would like to work with the specialists to help save and relocate whatever we can. An action plan must be compiled to this effect.	Comments noted. This information will be passed onto Eskom and included in the Scoping Report.
Mrs Liona Kleynhans. During construction, Eskom will require access from KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State. After construction, all Eskom will require is a short maintenance route. There are already 13 passes between the two provinces. Roads along the escarpment are not favoured.	The need to provide a "short" access link between the reservoir sites may require that a new road up the escarpment be provided, however your concern is noted.
Mr Francois Poggenpoel. Who will control the access routes and ensure that Eskom and Contractor's vehicles are using the correct route?	There will be contract documents with specifications. Vehicles transporting goods will be obliged to follow certain routes.
Mrs Jenni Cleverly. Is the cost of construction calculated per kilometre? Also, please note that Alternative 1 and 2 include the construction of new roads, which will result in much erosion.	The estimation was done taking into account gravel layers, major bridges or culverts, cut and fill and compared using the same rates per kilometre. Erosion will be limited by good design practice. However, your concern in noted.
Mr Piet Roets. Only Alternatives 3 and 4 will benefit the Harrismith area.	Your preference for Alternatives 3 (De Beers – Skeurklip) and 4 (Kiesbeen) is noted.
Mr George Galloway. Will Alternative 1 be a public road after construction? Who would use that road beside myself? At the public meeting in November, it was stated that the initial upgrading would be gravel and that tarring would only occur in 2009. Is this true?	All provincial roads would be public roads after construction, except those servicing the upper and lower reservoir sites and other associated infrastructure (i.e. within Eskom owned properties). The construction of the roads should be completed by the beginning of 2008. Construction of other parts of the scheme may need to commence before the roads are completed. In other words some roads may not be surfaced before commencement of construction on other sections of the scheme.
George Galloway. Have borrow pit sites been identified? Also, where will the construction camps be located?	This has not yet been finalised. Aerial photography will enable engineers to identify suitable locations. This will form part of the EIA. Eskom is currently liaising with the Department of Minerals and Energy (DME) in this regard. Also, erosion has been identified as a major problem on site which will have to be taken into account during the Geotechnical Studies, construction and

Concerns and Issues	Responses provided by the Project Team
	<p>rehabilitation. A baseline study has been conducted on site. The erosion situation is much worse than anticipated, therefore, Eskom have put extra measures in place to ensure that erosion can be mitigated. Borrow pit sites are currently being investigated and have not yet been finalised. There is a possible source at the lower reservoir site, however, it would not be suitable to transport material up the escarpment. A site near the upper reservoir is currently being sourced and the materials tested.</p> <p>On site facilities at both the upper and lower reservoir sites will include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Temporary ablutions, first aid centre, emergency and support services. 2) Temporary and permanent accommodation. <p>Most of the labourers (70-80%) will be recruited locally and only temporary accommodation facilities for the remaining labourers will be provided. A few permanent guest houses and a laboratories are planned to be constructed as well. The exact location of the accommodation facilities will be determined during the design stage which is currently in progress. The focus will be to minimise environmental and social impacts.</p>
Mr Hendrik van der Merwe. At the next meeting, please ensure that decision-makers from Eskom are present for informative discussion.	Comments noted with thanks.
Mr Hendrik van der Merwe. Has the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) been consulted in this EIA process?	Yes. DWAF is involved on a number of levels and has been identified as a key I&AP. Also, the general authorisation and integrated water use licence application for the project will be submitted to DWAF for their consideration. The national and provincial departments have been consulted.
Mr Piet Roets. Please keep all contact details and forward to Eskom. When representatives of Eskom, the EIA Team or specialists come onto our property, we must be notified. This is very important.	Comments noted with thanks.
Mr Gert Nel. When deciding on the preferred alternative, it should be noted that mist, snow, rain, hail, smoke, etc. are frequent in this area and especially up the escarpment. There will be a high accident level with the introduction of new roads.	Road signs will be provided to warn motorist of unsafe condition, however your concern is noted
Mr Henk Badenhorst. The new N3 will be constructed when the demand arises. There should be a junction constructed with the Kiesbeen road to open the area for eco-tourism potential. This would be the N3TC's	As stated, this is a SA National Road Agency (SANRAL) responsibility.

Concerns and Issues	Responses provided by the Project Team
responsibility.	
Mr Howard Christie. I have heard that a dam will be constructed on the Wilge River. This would flood portions of my farm (Fullerton) and portions of the project area. Please provide clarification.	To the best of our knowledge, a dam on the Wilge River is not under consideration at this time. It is probable that the information you obtained concerned a previous study of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry aimed at addressing deep scouring and erosion downstream of the Lesotho Highlands outfall into the Ash River. Various alternatives were considered but, ultimately, a series of weirs were constructed in the Ash River. A construction activity like this would definitely require an EIA and environmental authorisation. During this progress the I&APs have the opportunity to formally comment.

6. GENERAL INFORMATION

Mr Francois Poggenpoel highlighted why Alternatives 3 and 4 are favoured by the meeting attendees (specifically Alternative 3 with the upgrading of the S790):

- The potential for eco-tourism must be considered to open the area for development.
- The farming sector would benefit.
- Job opportunities in the Free State would be created.
- Wetland areas to be conserved would create some job opportunities.
- A direct link to the N3 would be created via the S790, which favours a broad spectrum of tourism.
- There would not be such severe effects on the environment with no road construction on the escarpment.
- Impacts would be minimised (fauna and flora, visual, erosion, wetlands, etc.).
- The area experiences heavy snow at times and this alternative is the safest alternative route during these weather conditions.
- The cost could potentially be shared with other institutions/organisations.
- Alternative 1 will only benefit Eskom.

Ms Ball explained that there will be one week of focus group meetings (4-8 April 2005) where the project team will be available to discuss the Draft Scoping Report with stakeholder groups that request a meeting. The availability of the Draft Scoping Reports for both the access roads and integration EIAs, as well as an invitation to request focus group meetings will be advertised in the local press. There would also be opportunities for stakeholders to attend other meetings to discuss the proposed project and EIA with Eskom and the project team during the course of the EIA, which ends in November/December 2005.

7. CONCLUSION

Mr Francois Poggenpoel concluded that:

- A meeting should be scheduled with the same forum (i.e. The Swinburne Farmer's Association, Harrismith Farmers Union and all attendees of this meeting) during the week 4-8 April 2005 to discuss progress. He requested that Acer come back to the forum with a suitable date and time for the proposed meeting in April. It was requested that senior personnel from Eskom attend the next meeting with the forum.
- ACER (Africa) will distribute the minutes of the meeting to all attendees for verification.
- The list of attendees will be forwarded to Ms Charmain Dombai of Eskom for inclusion onto the Braamhoek PSS database.

Ms Jaana-Maria Ball thanked Mr Francois Poggenpoel for the opportunity to discuss the project and the attendees for raising important issues. Mr Poggenpoel thanked the EIA Project Team members for their contribution in making the meeting a success and closed the meeting.