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## **FOCUS GROUP REPORT**

### **DWAALBOOM SWITCHING STATION**

Prepared by:



**JULY 2008**



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## AMENDMENTS PAGE

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the feelings and reactions of a selected group of the public to the proposed development by Eskom. This proposed development is the construction of a switching station in the North West Province, on the farm De Paarl 246. The purpose of the focus group was to determine the feelings of the public with regards to the construction of a switching station, their understanding of what a switching station is, and what would it mean to the community as a whole to have a switching station in their area.

This focus group was a mixed gender group and included members of the public, businesspeople, and pensioners. The methodology for the focus group is detailed in the report.

The report ends with a series of recommendations, which are listed below:

1. *Part of the presentation at the public meeting include a detailing of the number of construction and operations jobs that would be created by the project. These should be broken down into the categories – skilled and unskilled. The nature of the skills required under the skilled category should also be explained.*
2. *The presentation at the public meeting should include a section on compensation.*
3. *That Eskom addresses whether or not they would undertake community development initiatives within the local community.*
4. *The size of the substation as well as all associated secondary infrastructure should be included by Eskom in their presentation.*

This report serves as a guideline to follow while conducting the upcoming public meetings on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2008. It also provides an indication as to what can be expected at the upcoming meetings.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nemai Consulting has been appointed by Eskom Holdings to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment process (EIA) process for the construction of a switching station near Nonceba in the North West Province.

An important part of the Scoping Phase of the EIA is public participation. The aim of the public participation process is to ensure that interested and affected parties are provided with an opportunity to raise concerns regarding the proposed activity.

It is mandatory that public meetings be held to introduce the activity to interested and affected parties and more importantly to provide an opportunity for all involved to raise their concerns and views on the project.

Due to the potentially controversial nature of the project and the need to thoroughly prepare for the public meetings, a focus group was held prior to the public meetings. The aim of the focus group was to uncover the community's perception, fears and opinions of the project.

### 1.1. Structure of the Report

The report contains the following sections:

- Introduction – this section covers the background to the project, the reasons for conducting the focus group and the aims of the focus group. The Introduction also provides the structure of the report;
- Methodology – the methodology covers the research methodology as well as the manner in which the investigation was conducted;
- Focus Group Session – the findings of the focus group is presented in this section;
- Conclusion – provides a summary of the findings from the focus group; and

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- Way forward – based on the Conclusion, recommendations are made to address the community's issues and concerns.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Powell et. al. define a focus group as a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research (1996: 499). The focus groups are group discussions, which are 'focused' on a single or a narrow range of a topic.

It should be noted that the focus group methodology is qualitative and explanatory in nature. Focus groups are designed to elicit reactions from participants about a particular topic and to generate ideas and concepts that will help the client to understand a subject area. The output from the focus groups is also often helpful in developing hypotheses and parameters to be included in a qualitative study.

The results from a focus group investigation should never be considered representative of any population segment or a point of view of the target population. Nevertheless, the results of a focus group investigation can provide a great insight into the subjects the community holds dear. These findings are often considered invaluable when preparing for a public meeting.

A focus group should in principle not be larger than 8 to 10 participants, although larger groups are possible.

### 2.1. The Advantages of Focus Groups

The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions in a way that would not have been feasible using other methods, for example observation, one-to-one interviewing, or questionnaire surveys. Even though these attitudes may be partially independent on

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a group or its social setting they are more likely to be revealed via a social gathering and the interaction that comes from being in a focus group.

Compared to individual interviews, which also aim at revealing the same knowledge, focus groups elicit numerous views and emotional responses within a group context. This method of data collection was thus considered suitable by the researchers to be used for this particular project.

The focus group was held in the village of Nonceba with participants drawn from the local community.

## **2.2. Strategy Used to Inform and Liase with the Target Population**

The participants of the focus group session were the residents living in the area and well as various community leaders within the vicinity of the project. The selection of participants from the different sectors of the society ensured that the a range of views of the community were understood and captured. The selected participants were contacted by the Ward Councillor and invited to attend the Focus Group meeting. The focus group session was held at the Nonceba Community Hall.

## **3. OUTCOMES**

The following summarises the issues raised by the community members during the focus group session.

### **3.1. Input on Preferred Site**

The focus group wanted input from the researcher on issues such as the location and size of the switching station. Once they were given this information, the general consensus at the meeting was that De Paarl is a good area to place a switching station. Given the nature of a focus group it was not possible to insist that they choose one of the three sites as a preferred alternative.

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### **3.2. Understanding Environmental Issues**

The environmental process was not fully understood.

### **3.3. Labour Issues**

This was the most important issue raised by the focus group. The group wanted to know who would be employed during the construction and operation phases of the switching station. They believed that community members would be employed during both the construction and operation phases. Even though it was explained that any employment opportunities would occur only during the construction phase and that this would be for unskilled labour, the focus group was satisfied that there would at least be some employment of the local community.

The focus group remarked that the switching station may provide extra capacity within Dwaalboom to hire new staff and the community would, for that reason, support the switching station.

### **3.4. Security**

The issue of security was raised, the focus group wanted to know whether the site would be fenced.

A second query around security was whether a security company was needed for the switching station and if so, would Eskom hire a local security firm.

### **3.5. Community Development**

The issue of community development was raised. Skills transfer and youth training were raised as issues during the meeting. The focus group wanted to know whether Eskom would bring community development programmes into Nonceba.

The focus group raised the issue of Eskom mediating between themselves and PPC with regard to the local people starting up small-scale quarries and providing materials to PPC.

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### **3.6. Current Initiatives**

The focus group was interested in whether Eskom would upgrade the dirt roads leading to the three sites. A response from within the focus group was that the Municipality was already planning to upgrade those particular roads.

The Local Municipality is in the planning to build 300 RDP houses in the Nonceba area, this would include among others, multipurpose centre and a butchery. The focus group pointed out that these developments as well as the switching station would improve the infrastructure of the area.

### **3.7. Budget**

Whether or not Eskom has already budgeted for the switching station was raised.

### **3.8. Compensation**

The issue of compensation was raised, the focus group wanted to know whether Eskom would be paying for the land use on a monthly or annual basis.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion no one present at the focus group meeting raised any negative comments and the focus group indicated that the community would support the development.

The issue that seemed to be the most important to the focus group was the issue of job opportunities provided by the proposed development. The other issues such as compensation and community development were also important to the focus group.

## **5. WAY FORWARD**

Based upon feedback at the focus group session, a list of questions that might be asked at the public meeting by members of the public has been compiled.

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No.	Question
1	What job opportunities will this project create?
2	What will Eskom do as part of this project to improve and develop affected communities?
3	What does a switching station look like?
4	How will Eskom compensate us for the use of our land?
5	How much will the project cost?
6	How large is the switching station?
7	Will security be required for the station?
8	What exactly is the environmental process?

Participants should use these questions to prepare themselves for the public meeting. Most of these questions would be asked of Eskom, there are few which would be directed at the independent environmental consultant.