

PROJECT: Access roads to the Braamhoek Pumped Storage Scheme

Date: 26 January 2006

Time: 10h00

Venue: Hamilberg School

Draft minutes for comment

ATTENDANCE

Eskom Representatives

Mr. T Bokwe

Senior Environmental Advisor

Ms. N Malinga

Senior Advisor to Stakeholder Manager

Consultants

Mr. R Bekker

Africon: Environmental Consultant

Dr. D de Waal

Afrosearch

Ms. M Moolman

Afrosearch

Mr. M Mathebula

Afrosearch

OPENING AND WELCOME

Mr. M Mathebula, as the Facilitator, welcomed the representatives from Eskom and the consultants as well as the attendees.

Introduction

Mr. M Mathebula explained the purpose of the meeting and introduced the Eskom Representatives.

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 from 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 from 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

Mr. Jansen

He owns a farm through which the Braamhoek pumped storage scheme roads will pass from the D48. He asked firstly whether Eskom will buy property rights for this road. He also stated that he would like a site visit with Eskom to discuss this matter on site.

Eskom replied that the roads alignment will be investigated and that the matter will be addressed.

An Attendee asked how people will be employed in the construction period and how do they go about registering?

Eskom replied that the correct procedure according to legislation will be to register their skills with the Department of Labor. There is also an agreement between the local municipalities of Harrismith and Ladysmith for the provision of labor as they are strategic partners in this project. Local people may also register their small businesses with the Chamber of Business or local municipalities, as Eskom will require that the main contractor utilizes local business and skills of the area.

An Attendee asked if the area would automatically be electrified due to the fact that the station will be in the area.

Eskom replied that that they will forward the message to the local Municipality as they are the responsible authority for providing electricity to the community. Eskom is responsible for providing bulk Electricity in the form of power lines.

An Attendee asked if there will be equal chances of employment for everybody. The attendee also asked if they would be able to receive some training.

Eskom replied that training will be provided. Eskom also replied that they do abide by government policies on equality and that Eskom ensures that such opportunities are equally available to all.

CLOSURE

Mr. Mathebula closed the meeting at 12h00 and thanked everybody for the participation at the meeting.