

PROJECT: Access roads to the Braamhoek Pumped Storage Scheme

Date: 17 January 2006

Time: 18h00

Venue: Harrismith Municipal Library

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

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Dr. de Waal opened the meeting and thanked everyone present. Dr. D de Waal explained that this is the Environmental Impact Assessment for the access roads for the Braamhoek Pumped Storage Scheme. He also explained the EIA process. He implied that the report would be sent out to DEAT; and the RoD would 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 labour 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

Mr Schalk Raats

How long will the contract take and who all will be involved maintaining the road after the contract is completed?

Tim Gaskell: replied that it would be APPROXIMATELY 18 months. The parties involved will be KZN and Free State roads department for maintaining the roads after the contract is completed.

Mr. Badenhorst

The classification of the environmental study is very basic and that the macro and socio-economic impact will also be more substantial than the study implicated.

Mr. Badenhorst said that alternative 3 included the Maluti Heritage site and job creation will be of significance on that route.

Mr Badenhorst also asked about the job creation on the Free State side and how the tenders will be award.

Tim Gaskell replied that the tender document will go in all relevant newspapers with the necessary criteria to apply. If a contractor from Gauteng or elsewhere is awarded the tender, there will be a criteria to employ some of the local contractors.

Mr B de Lange replied that yes, the environmental study is very broad but it indicates only if there will be a impact on certain aspects. A detailed study will be conducted as soon as the route is identified. It is critical for Eskom to have the shortest and most cost effective route

Leana Kleynhans

Thank all for a well organized Public Meeting.

Question to Tim Gaskell - Will the tenders be published in the relevant Harrismith newspapers so that the local contractors will be able to apply?

A discussion is to follow regarding the cost of the 3 routes that are involved.

Tim Gaskell replied that Route 3 is not financially viable to build. Very costly figures were given, but they are estimated. Yes, the tenders will be placed in the relevant news papers to inform the local contractors

Mr. George Galloway

Asked if, according to page 12 of the scoping report, Eskom implicated or made a gesture to tourism.

Mr B de Lange implied that it was a recommendation made by the consultants

Tim Gaskel said that it is not Eskom's responsibility to promote tourism or put infrastructure in place.

Mr Piet Roets:

He indicated that everybody must look at the broader concept. Is it not possible to find a solution that will be beneficial to all, the community, Eskom and the farmers and open the area up so that tourism could also be possible? Possibly put all resources together and look at the Kiesbeen road with an off ramp from the N3.

Leana Kleynhans

Asked if there could possibly be discussions with Provincial roads.

Mr B de Lange said that the Department of Provincial roads and transport will maintain the road after construction. They have no immediate concern to build the off ramp.

Deidre Herbst indicated that Eskom have no mandate to build roads as they do the electricity.

Ms Munro

She asked if there is any possibility for a partnership with the municipality and the National roads.

Tim Gaskel said that the scope of the EIA does not include it.

Mr Badenhorst

A detailed comment on their point was given in the previous report with the previous consultants but apparently there is not much sympathy with the people of Harrismith.

Mr B de Lange replied that the issues were addressed He indicated that there is a copy available and that it was not disregarded, however Eskom changed consultants.

Leana Kleynhans

Would like it to be noted that she would like a copy of the comments.

Mr George Galloway

He stated that we, the people pay, for the lines so why the investigation?

Dr D de Waal replied that it was part of the scoping report.

Deidre Herbst said that it is the municipality's priority for building off ramps at this stage.

Leana Kleynhans

She asked how many trips will be made to the pump station after construction. She also mentioned that somebody in a previous meeting said once a week.

Tim Gaskel said that at least once per day, although it could be more if necessary.

Closure

The meeting was closed at 21h00.