

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

**Date: 18 January 2006**

**Time: 18h00**

**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

**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 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 timeframe of the Project.

B. de Lange said that the Project will run from about June/July 2005 to July 2007.

An attendee asked what role NGOs will play in the organization. Who will be responsible? Will the councillors be responsible?

Dr de Waal reiterated that the forum was an environmental forum, and a decision must still be taken regarding who will form part thereof.

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

Deidre Herbst said that it would be subject to Government legislation, but employees would generally be no older than 65 years.

An attendee inquired if there would be recognition for attending the meeting? He asked if the chance of getting a job would be better once we have signed the register and asked if the register was for work

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

An attendee asked if the contractors would be evaluated so that local people could be employed with particular reference to cheap labour.

Dr de Waal explained that the Eskom labour issues had already been addressed.

An attendee asked how can one justify people working here from 30-40 km away.

Tim Gaskell said that nobody had justified it, and gave the example of the current tunnel project which employs a lot of local people.

An attendee asked how many people would be working on the project.

Deidre Herbst said that Eskom had agreements with Local Government and indicated that they felt confident that, through them, the community could be reached.

An attendee asked if Eskom was training people and when this training would commence. He further asked if the trainees would receive formal certificates for the qualifications.

Deidre Herbst said that it obviously depended on the type of job that they would be doing and added that different training will be required of the different jobs. She also said this would be mostly in work training (practical), and some of the trainees may receive certificates, but not in all cases.

An attendant mentioned that local counsellors and officials help their friends and family to get these types of jobs.....etc.

Dr de Waal asked if there were any further comments. He thanked everybody present for their comments and participation and closed the meeting at 20h00.

### **CLOSURE**

The meeting was closed at 20h00.