

# **Environmental impact assessment process for the access roads for the Braamhoek Pumped Storage Scheme**

Focus Group Meeting at the Swinburne Farmers Association Hall

7 November 2005<sup>1</sup>

17H30

## **ATTENDANCE:**

ESKOM representatives

Ms. Deidre Herbst

Mr. Tobile Bokwe

Ms. Ntombi Malinga

Mr. Tim Gaskell

Manager: Environmental Management

Senior Environmental Advisor

Senior Advisor to Stakeholder Manager

Project Manager

Consultants

Mr. Benny de Lange

Consulting (EIA Consultant)

Ms. Mathilda du Preez

Consultant)

Africon: Environment & Sustainability

Afrosearch (Public Participation

Apologies

Mr. Thomas van Viegen

Ms. Linda Sharratt

Mr. Francois Poggenpoel

Project Coordinator – Africon

I&AP

Swinburne Farmers Association President

## **1. Opening & welcome**

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Mr. Casey, the secretary of the Swinburne Farmers Association, welcomed the representatives from Eskom and the consultants as well as the attendees. Dr. de Waal thanked the attendees for the opportunity to present the process to them and introduced the Eskom representatives and the EIA Consultants.

## **2. Introduction**

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<sup>1</sup> Note: This is not a verbatim reflection of the meeting, but an attempt to reflect the discussion session in a clear and concise manner.

Dr. David de Waal went through the proposed agenda with the attendees. The agenda was approved. Mr. Henk Badenhorst advised that the minutes from the previous meeting held in May 2005 have not been received yet. Dr. de Waal explained that the previous minutes would be sent out together with the minutes of this meeting.

Dr. de Waal clarified the objective of the meeting as:

- \* to notify stakeholders of the change of consultants, and
- \* advise the stakeholders of the way forward with regards to the Environmental Impact Assessment process.

Dr. de Waal asked Ms. Deidre Herbst to give a brief background to the recent changes in the EIA consultants.

As a background, Ms. Herbst reminded the attendees about process followed by the Braamhoek Consultants Joint Venture (BCJV) in the environmental impact studies of the project. She further reminded of the Plan of Study for Scoping (PoSS) that was approved by the authorities in December 2004, following an extensive public participation process of which most attendees formed part. Subsequent to this PoSS, the process produced a Draft Scoping Report that was made available for public comment. The scoping phase was close to completion when a concern about the independence of the environmental consultants was deemed risky for the project. Eskom obtained advice from the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT), who suggested that alternative consultants be appointed in order to avoid the risk. The contract with BCJV was cancelled and Africon Environment & Sustainability Consulting was appointed to continue with the work that had been started. Ms. Herbst also explained that changing of environmental consultants caused a delay in the access roads EIA.

Dr. de Waal thanked Ms. Herbst for the background and asked Mr. Benny de Lange to explain how the EIA process will be followed.

Mr. De Lange explained the purpose of the scoping phase as identification of impacts in consultation with the public. He re-iterated that the new consultants, Africon and Afrosearch, would pick up the process where the previous process left off. He explained that the issues raised in consultation with I&APs in the previous process would be recognized and taken forward. He stated that three alternatives are included in the EIA specialist assessments and alternative comparison; the alternatives are Alternatives 1, 2 & 3.

Mr De Lange explained the changes in the EIA process. Mr de Lange indicated that the scoping process conducted to date would have culminated in the submission of an EIA report. Mr de Lange indicated that, whereas issues raised during the Public Participation Process are typically only addressed in the EIA report, Africon would be addressing these within the Scoping report. After consultation with the relevant national and provincial officials during October 2005, it was agreed that an extended Scoping report could be submitted.

Mr De Lange further indicated that all issues and concerns raised during the previous public participation process would be carried forward and addressed within the extended scoping report, including a detailed alternatives assessment of alternatives 1, 2 and 3.

A draft of the Extended Scoping Report would be made available for public comment in early December 2005, and a feedback open day would be held in the week starting with the 16<sup>th</sup> of January 2005. He said that newspaper advertisements would be placed in order to inform all I&APs of the availability of report and the feedback open day to be held.

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Date</b>
Extended Scoping Report available for comment and review	12 December 2005 Harrismith Public Library Ladysmith Public Library Harrismith Municipality Ladysmith Municipality
Feedback public meeting- Harrismith	17 January 2006
Feedback public meeting - Ladysmith	18 January 2006

\* Venues for the above mentioned reports and meetings would be communicated at a later stage.

### **3. Discussion**

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3.1 Mr. Badenhorst enquired whether the comments that had been made on the previous Draft Scoping Report will still be taken into consideration. Mr. De Lange responded that all comments received up to date still form part of the process and that all will be addressed in the Draft Extended Scoping Report.

- 3.2 Mr. Badenhorst advised that the focus should be on the broader picture and that the preferred alternatives from the local people should be taken into consideration. Mr. De Lange responded that three alternatives are assessed as part of the extended scoping phase and that all will be assessed with regard to the bigger picture and the wider positive and negative impacts the various alternatives may have. He further reported that a socio-economic view on the roads would also be done for each of the three alternatives. He said that a preferred option would emanate from all these studies.
- 3.3 Ms. Herbst re-iterated that alternative three was not previously identified as one of the alternatives to take forward in the draft Scoping Report. However this alternative has now been included in the alternatives following requests from the public to include it.
- 3.4 An attendee said that the socio and socio-economic impact assessments should address the impact on the environment with specific reference to the Kliprivier District, Bedford, Braambosch and Chatsworth farms in the area. He also said that the feedback meeting should be held in Harrismith. Ms. Leona Kleynhans said that meeting are held claiming to be with key stakeholders, however, Swinburne is not the centre of people to be spoken to – people in Harrismith should be consulted with. She said that Mr. Henk Badenhorst could be a key role player in facilitating communication between the Harrismith community and the consultants. She said that Mr. Maree from the Harrismith Municipality should also be kept informed as well as Mr. Heins, Commanding Officer from the commando.
- 3.5 Mr. Badenhorst said that he had not received any response from the authorities with regard to the proposed alternatives. Ms. Herbst said that the public participation consultants and Eskom alike are also experiencing difficulty liaising with the Harrismith Municipality.

- 3.6 Mr. Casey commented that theft of stock in the area is already a problem and that it would probably increase during the construction period.
- 3.7 Ms. Herbst responded that security issues during construction will be taken up by the Project Manager for the Braamhoek PSS.
- 3.8 Ms. Kleynhans said that the meeting could not be considered "consultation with key stakeholders" since there were only 8 attendees. In response Dr de Waal explained the processes used to notify the I&APs.
- 3.9 Dr. de Waal responded that this meeting was not intended to be a public meeting, hence it was not advertised in the paper, and that it should be kept in mind that even though the current consultants are proceeding with the previous process it is only the start of Afrosearch as public participation consultant.
- 3.10 Mr. Badenhorst requested that a public consultation program be sent to him of which meeting will be held with which group and where in order to promote transparency. Dr. de Waal advised that a provisional program would be attached to the minutes of the meeting.
- 3.11 Mr. Badenhorst said that 20% of the work would be done on the Free State side, and that the employment opportunities should not intrude upon current farmer farm worker relations. The comment was noted.
- 3.12 Mr. Kleynhans asked whether all I&APs would receive notification of the feedback meeting. Dr. de Waal replied that they would.
- 3.13 Mr. Badenhorst asked whether this means that all comments would be taken into consideration as part of the draft environmental impact report (EIR). Dr. De Waal said yes and said that the EIR would be available for comment; he said that a Record of Decision (RoD) would be issued and that opportunity for appeals on the Record of Decision would be allowed. He reiterated that all comment would be included in the report.

3.14 Mr. Badenhorst said that the previous minutes of the meeting held in May should also be made available, and matter arising from those minutes should be discussed at a follow up meeting.

3.15 Ms. Kleynhans reiterated that a program of the meetings to be held should be included in the minutes.

#### **4. Closure**

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Dr. de Waal closed the meeting at 18:50 reiterating that the minutes would be made available for comment, which would include the minutes of the previous meeting held in May 2005 and also a program of the people who would be consulted with in the next 2 months.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Postal Address</b>	<b>Contact Details</b>
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