



## Phosphate remains hot potato

**The government has not allowed a foreign company to conduct phosphate mining off the Namibian coast.**

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The minister of fisheries and marine resources, Bernhard Esau, has rubbished rumours that a licence for seabed phosphate mining has been issued to a foreign company.

At least two entities have shown interest in mining phosphate off the Namibian coast.

They include Namibian Marine Phosphate (NMP), which is a joint venture between Oman-owned Mawarid Mining LLC and the Namibian company Havana Investments, owned by well-known businessman Knowledge Katti.

The other firm is Leviev Group, which is owned by Israeli diamond dealer Lev Leviev.

"I am not aware of this. The Ministry of Environment and Tourism as the responsible authority must receive our opinion on environmental impact assessments (EIAs) before any clearance certificates can be issued," the minister recently said.

Esau said he had called for the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee comprising the mines and energy ministry and the environment ministry to jointly address the contentious issue of marine phosphate mining following the lapse in March 2015 of an 18-month cabinet moratorium.

A cabinet committee chaired by Minister Tom Alweendo was set up to investigate the impact of phosphate mining and whether to allow or ban the activity, and met in February.



(<http://content.my.na/images/3454/phosphate-remains-hot-potato2016-09-220.jpg>)

PRISTINE: Mining activities in the ocean will impact Namibia's coastline. Photo: Otis Finck

The committee was expected to make recommendations on the way forward but the cabinet has not yet made an announcement.

"I cannot just go ahead and pronounce myself on the issue of phosphate mining without proper consultation. The industry and relevant stakeholders need to be consulted. We are evaluating all comments and EIA reports received from those who want to do phosphate mining," Esau said.

"It was also recommended that an internal study be carried out by the ministry on behalf of the government. This study will then forecast on what to say with regard to the EIAs that were done by the applicants who want to do phosphate mining."

Esau confirmed that a scoping study was done by Norwegian company Sentech to determine the impact of marine phosphate mining on the seabed environment and on fisheries.

"They recommended that we first carry out an independent study to be conducted by a knowledgeable company which will inform and guide us scientifically. It is a time-consuming process which must be concluded before the Ministry of Environment finalises the opinion of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources on the issue of phosphate mining." Namibian Seaman and Allied Workers Union (NASAWU) president Paulus Hango announced this week that the union would march and hand over a petition protesting against phosphate mining to Erongo Governor Cleophas Mutjavikua today.

He did not want to elaborate on issues contained in the petition prior to it being handed over.

Phosphate mining in the seabed has described by some as a threat to the marine ecosystem and the fishing industry. More mining companies are expected take to the ocean as minerals needed for technology, including mobile phones and hybrid cars, become scarce on dry land and miners search for new frontiers to explore. This also applies to the diamond industry in Namibia.

Environmentalists throughout the world are alarmed and raised concern about digging up the seabed and dumping sediments back into the water. According to them this could devastate unique marine environments, suffocate organisms and compromise fish stocks.

The World Wildlife Fund has warned that governments are not adequately prepared to regulate a new extractive industry operating in an ocean already degraded by overfishing, industrial and consumer waste and climate change.

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