

## NMP confident of moving forward with Sandpaper project



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JOHANNESBURG (miningweekly.com) – Project developer Namibian Marine Phosphate (NMP) is confident of moving ahead with its Sandpaper marine phosphate project as it addresses all environmental recommendations following renewed environmental consultations. The group has been working to correct much of the misinformation it believes surrounds the project, which has been the centre of controversy over its ambitions of trawling the seabed for phosphates.

The project aims to establish Namibia as a premier rock phosphate producer in the global market, with a feasibility study envisaging steady-state production of three-million tons a year of phosphate

concentrate product over an initial mine life of 20 years, including a two-year ramp-up period.

However, the project has stalled, facing environmental objections, with its environmental clearance certificate having been set aside in 2018 after having been awarded in 2016.

There is also a court case under way over concerns that seabed mining for phosphates could inflict irreversible damage to Namibia's lucrative fishing industry.

Following completion of an independent report commissioned by the Environmental Commissioner and concluded in 2018, after another round of public consultation, NMP has progressed work to effectively deal with recommendations put forth in that report, NMP COO **Mike Woodborne** tells *Mining Weekly*.

All the work NMP has already done has only confirmed the project will have minimal impact, and that it will be an economical catalyst, adds NMP CEO **Chris Jordinson**, referring to the dozen environmental studies that have been completed, which concluded that the Sandpiper project would have “no significant environmental impact on the marine environment”.

“There is no factual evidence [that] phosphate mining and fishing cannot co-exist.”

While the legal action is still holding up the project, NMP continues to invest in the operations, with the project having been technically ready since 2012.

“We believe in the project. The shareholders believe in the project. It is a good project and the project fundamentals are excellent. We just have to persevere with the path we are on,” Jordinson comments.

It has many other positives, he adds, pointing to the potential economic boost and job creation.

NMP outlines that the project will contribute to national and regional growth through employment, royalties and tax revenues, along with the opportunity for capacity development and training.

The project development will require about N\$3.2-billion in investment capital, with nearly N\$1-billion already invested into the project, while the operations could potentially employ about 450 Namibians directly and indirectly in the Erongo region.

Once operational, the project is expected to generate an estimated N\$730-million a year toward the Namibian Treasury in the form of direct and indirect taxes, duties and royalties.

Had the project been developed on schedule eight years ago, alongside the existing marine diamond mining and fishing industries, it could have contributed N\$14.7-billion to the gross domestic product; N\$11.3-billion to gross national income; N\$18.7-billion in export revenue and created 51 593 direct, indirect and induced jobs by 2016, says NMP.

However, until the current court action is completed, the proposed development and economic benefits of NMP's phosphate project remain on hold.

Further, the company comments on questions relating to the motives and justifications of those opposed to the phosphate project in light of a scandal that has hit the Namibian fisheries industry.

Jordinson, expressing concerns over the "Fishrot Files" scandal, says this could throw into doubt the credibility of the public statements made by the implicated parties.

“It raises an interesting question,” he says, noting that while conclusions cannot be drawn immediately, Sandpiper has been affected against a background of widespread misinformation.

“In NMP’s opinion, these events place a question mark over the objectivity of the fishing industry regarding their stated position on the purported threats posed by marine phosphate mining.

“Therefore, it is important to question any claims by the implicated parties . . . opposing marine phosphate mining.”

However, having invested well over N\$750-million in this project since 2008, NMP and its shareholders, in both Namibia and Oman, will continue to have confidence in Namibia’s legislation and regulatory system and the country as an investment destination for mining development. 🇳🇲

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