

NAMIBIAN Sun tells it all

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Fishrot used to up phosphate pressure

Former fisheries minister Bernhardt Esau, who is among those behind bars for the Fishrot bribery saga, has been scathing of the phosphate mining project.

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Namibian Marine Phosphate (NMP) has accused those implicated in the Fishrot bribery scandal of costing Namibia a whopping N\$730 million a year in the form of direct and indirect taxes, duties and royalties that could already be flowing into treasury's coffers.

Earlier this week, the NMP management said as the Fishrot scandal unfolds, it appears that employment in

OPPORTUNITIES: Namibian Marine Phosphate has accused those implicated in the Fishrot scandal of spearheading opposition to their Sandpiper project. Photo: FILE

both the fishing and mining industries could well have been compromised by those implicated, who had been spearheading opposition to the Sandpiper project. The main accused in the Fishrot Six debacle include former fisheries minister Bernhardt Esau, former justice minister Sacky Shanghala, as well as Esau's son-in-law Tamson Hatuikulipi, his cousin James Hatuikulipi and businessmen Ricardo Gustavo and Pius Mwatelulo. They are accused of accepting N\$150 million in bribes from Icelandic company Samherji in exchange for fishing quotas. Esau in particular has been scathing of the phosphate mining project. On 13 June 2019, President Hage Geingob wrote a letter to environment minister Pohamba Shifeta on government's dillydallying in coming to a decision on the project.

“It is disheartening that almost 10 years down the road since the development of the Sandpiper marine phosphate project was first mooted, there is still no decision whether the environment clearance certificate duly issued to NMP remains valid or not,” Geingob wrote.



“There is an unwelcome trend where potential investors in Namibia are frustrated by drawn-out processes and indecision by Cabinet ministers. Ministries fail to respond to investors in a timely and professional manner.” NMP said this week: “It appears the objections to NMP’s phosphate project, as proposed and scientifically substantiated by independent environmental assessments, were spearheaded by individuals who are now implicated in what is perhaps Namibia’s biggest post-independence corruption scandal, the Fishrot Files.”

“These individuals appear to have placed their own interests above that of Namibia’s marine environment, fish resources, employment and social upliftment.” NMP said it is against this background that people should question the motivation for the strenuous opposition to phosphate mining by the individuals implicated in the scandal. NMP is majority-owned by Al Barwani, who has an 85% stake through his company Mawarid Mining LLC, while Namibian middleman Knowledge Katti owns 15% through Havana Investment. The Sandpiper project is located about 120 kilometres southwest of Walvis Bay. Following widespread controversy, the environmental clearance certificate for the project was set aside in 2018 by the environment ministry. There is also a court case underway over concerns that seabed mining for phosphates could inflict irreversible damage to Namibia’s lucrative fishing industry. According to NMP, the Sandpiper project development will require about N\$3.2 billion in investment capital, of which nearly N\$1 billion has already been invested into the project. Its 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 for treasury.

According to NMP, Namibia has potentially lost billions in revenue and much-needed job-creation.

ELLANIE SMIT