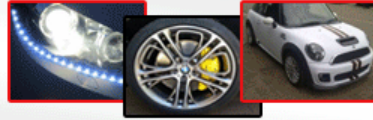




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Phosphate mining 'deserves fair chance'

Submitted by NamibianSun on Wed, 2016-07-06 01:00



More than 4 000 people have apparently signed a petition calling on the government to give Namibia Phosphate Mining (NPM) the green light to start offshore phosphate mining.

The support for the venture came after residents gained access to the verification programme report for the targeted dredge area located 60km offshore from Meob Bay and 120km southwest of Walvis Bay, where NMP is developing the Sandpiper Marine Phosphate Project.

According to NMP director Knowledge Katti, he received numerous phone calls from concerned residents of Walvis Bay requesting clarity on the envisioned effects of phosphate mining on the fishing industry.

He therefore invited people to attend a meeting with the line ministries.

"I am not a scientist and the community have a right to information. I understand the fear which co-exists with calls to protect the fishing industry.

"I am from Walvis Bay and have relatives working in fishing. The results of the EIA [environmental impact assessment] conducted by independent experts at considerable costs however speak for themselves.

"People should not sabotage the initiative but consider the facts gathered over the past two years and give it a fair chance," Katti said.

The initial EIA was completed in April 2012 and concluded that the project posed "minimal risks".

The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources called for additional site-specific information. In response, NMP then commissioned a pre-dredging environmental baseline survey.

According to Katti, the review team, consisting of three doctors and a professor, stated in the Verification Programme Report that the information provided convincingly pointed to there being minimal impact of the proposed operation on the Namibian shelf ecosystem.

Dr Sam Mafwila from the University of Namibia concluded that scientific studies conducted were comprehensive and addressed the uncertainties raised by the government.

To place the commercial fish species occurring in the dredging area in a broader context, biomass and recruitment studies were undertaken.

The biomass study indicated that less than 0.2% of the hake and monk species occur within the proposed dredging area.

The recruitment study indicated that there were no critical spawning areas surrounding the proposed dredging site.

According to NFM, dredging will take place in a "small" area of three square kilometres and the disturbance would be "significantly less" than that caused by diamond mining and bottom trawling.

The target production area is located in water deeper than 200 metres and therefore does not lie within the prohibition zone for bottom trawling, designated for the protection of fish spawning.

Katti said he respected the government's moratorium on offshore phosphate mining.

"In fact I will welcome a law that would dictate and ensure community involvement in companies within the mining and fishing industry. As a responsible citizen I am patiently waiting for feedback on the way forward. Government should use its discretion and the information at its disposal."

To date, NMP has spent more than N\$780 million on exploration, environmental, technical and feasibility studies on the Sandpiper project.

The project development cost is estimated at N\$5.2 billion, which makes it one of the single largest investment projects the country.

Once operational the project could generate annual revenues of N\$4.2 billion, and annual taxes and royalties payable to the government are estimated at N\$728 million.

According to Katti the project would create jobs for about 450 Namibians in the first stage of development. About 160 people would be required to run the operations in Walvis Bay (57 skilled and 103 semi-skilled/unskilled positions). Tests done by the International Fertiliser Development Corporation indicated that the Namibian phosphate concentrate is suitable for use as a direct-application fertiliser and the quality is comparable to that of the top three global producers.

The mining area is estimated to support operations for 20 years at an annual output of three metric tons of phosphate concentrate.

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