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Monitoring report shows water pumping has no impact on groundwater, lagoon

KROPZ FLAGS ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE IF WATER USE LICENSE SUSPENSION BID SUCCEEDS

KROPZ, which is developing the Elandsfontein phosphate mine near Hopefield in the Western Cape, says the West Coast Environmental Protection Association's (WCEPA) application to have the mine's water use license (WUL) suspended, if successful, will cause irreversible environmental damage.

Kropz is opposing the WCEPA application. According to the company's legal advice, a bid by WCEPA to have Elandsfontein's water use license revoked has no grounds.

"If over time we are not be able to continue to safely pump the water out of the Elandsfontein aquifer, around our open pit and allow it to filter back into the aquifer in accordance with our dewatering system design, the pit will flood," Kropz Technical Director Michelle Lawrence explains.

"If dewatering stops for an extended period, the pit will increase in size due to erosion of its sidewalls by the water; the volume of water in the pit will increase significantly; and the water quality will deteriorate, negatively impacting groundwater."

Dr Fanie Botha, one of Kropz's groundwater specialists, confirms Lawrence's prognosis. He adds that uncontrollable water loss from the enlarged pit due to evaporation would be another consequence and describes WCEPA's moves as "illogical".

"We have invested more than R6 million on ground water studies and the development and peer review of the groundwater model that informs our responsible management of the Elandsfontein aquifer's water," says Lawrence.

"Importantly, all groundwater monitoring we have done since we began the dewatering and recharge of the aquifer shows these actions are not having a negative impact on it."

Background note to editors

The Elandsfontein mine has been developed since 2009 by Kropz at a capital cost of R1.5 billion. With an estimated life of mine of 15 years, Elandsfontein will produce approximately 1.35 million tonnes of phosphate a year at full production, both for the local market and export. Phosphate is an important contributor to countries' food security; currently, South Africa imports most of its requirements. At full production, Elandsfontein will provide direct employment for 450 people, 70% of whom will be drawn from the local municipality.

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In August this year, Kropz announced that commissioning of Elandsfontein would be delayed due both to a substantial drop in the global phosphate price and a need to reconfigure the mine's processing plant. Reconfiguration is necessary due to shallower, lower grade phosphate having to be mined because of a delay in the mine receiving its water use license. This delay meant that ground water levels could not be drawn down as planned to access the full orebody.

Kropz has indicated that commissioning will resume when plant modifications have been completed and the groundwater levels have been drawn down to suitable levels. It has undertaken to ensure that people retrenched due to the delay will be prioritised for re-employment when commissioning resumes.

Kropz has confirmed that it has been in discussions with the Saldanha Bay Municipality (SBM) regarding the possibility of working together with the municipality to provide aquifer water for the benefit of all of the latter's users during the current drought crisis. Both parties have confirmed that any such arrangement would be conditional both on SBM obtaining expert opinion and the approval of the Department of Water and Sanitation.

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