

SANparks allegedly advise against licence for mine

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Documents published on social media allege that SANParks, owner of West Coast National Park, has taken a stand against the proposed phosphate mine on the park's borders.

The local action group against the Elandsfontein mine, West Coast Environmental Protection Association (WCEPA), recently posted what appears to be SANParks official comment to the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWAS) about the mine.

In the documents – posted on WCEPA's Facebookpage – SANParks apparently urge the department not to grant the mine an Integrated Water Use Licence (IWUL).

The IWUL is one of two outstanding requirements for Kropz (formerly known as Elandsfontein Exploration and Mining) to commence mining operations.

According to WCEPA-chairperson Carika van Zyl the documents are authentic.

On enquiry Willem Louw, Senior Manager: Land Transfers at SANParks, declined to comment on the document claiming he was not aware of it.

In it SANParks apparently raise various concerns about the impact mining operations will have on the underground aquifer and Langebaan Lagoon.

"SANParks remains unconvinced that mining operations could be relied on to



Construction cost on the phosphate mine by September last year had already been around R800 million, but without an integrated water-use licence they can't start mining. Photo: Heléne Meissenheimer

ensure successful mitigation of negative impacts [of mining]," the document states.

Supposedly their statement follows on an independent study done last year by groundwater specialist Jaco Nel for SANParks.

The proposed mining site, outside Hopefield and 15 km from the Langebaan Lagoon, is adjacent to the park's buffer zone.

In addition to the IWUL Kropz also require an Air Emissions Licence, which was expected by November last year.

It plans to mine 1,2-1,5 metric tons of

phosphate per annum, intended for export through the port of Saldanha, for use as fertiliser.

Mining the mineral will entail delving into the top half of the Elandsfontein Aquifer, which consists of two water bodies separated by a thick clay layer. The aquifer is a freshwater source of the Langebaan Lagoon.

According to SANParks' alleged comments there are too many uncertainties about the impact mining operations could have on the aquifer, one of only a few freshwater sources on the

arid West Coast, currently in a drought.

Concerns are also raised that Kropz "failed to follow due legal process for its proposed mining operations."

The document also suggests that independent studies on the landscape of the water body should be done and feels Kropz's proposal of groundwater monitoring is too vague.

"It is all very well to say 'monitor and mitigate', but what will this really entail?"

In a statement to *Weslander* Kropz said it could not respond to "unofficial statements posted on social media".

The company did however say that "extensive studies" were commissioned "on the impact of mining on water sources" to the tune of R5.5 million.

Kropz says according to these findings it believes mining will not impact the ground water or the Lagoon.

Concerns raised in the document about the dewatering Kropz says it a "tried and tested method" which has been successful in various mining operations.

Mine spokesperson Charmaine Russell confirmed neither the IWUL or AEL have been issued but reiterate that mining production will only commence as soon as these licences have been awarded.

● The Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) commissioned Kropz Environmental Authority to undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment for a proposed rotary dryer. The 18 m long dryer will be used to dry the phosphate.