



NEWS UPDATE



Gautrain given initial go-ahead

April 23, 2003

By Lucille Davie

AFTER months of consultation with the public, Bohlweki Environmental, the company appointed to undertake the environmental assessment study of the proposed route for the Gautrain between Johannesburg and Pretoria, has given its approval for the project, subject to certain conditions.

Says Bohlweki: "Based on the findings of the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) for the proposed Gautrain project, including the thorough and extensive public participation process that was conducted over 15 months as part of the EIA, it is concluded that the project may proceed, subject to the required financial approvals, and the implementation of the mitigation measures proposed in the specialist reports in the draft EIA report and the updated draft Environmental Management Plan in the Addendum."

Some of the mitigation measures include taking into account the biophysical environment - flora, fauna, surface water and air quality - and the socio-economic considerations - noise, vibration, traffic, archaeology and heritage aspects.

The 80-kilometre Gautrain, with an offshoot from Sandton to the Johannesburg International Airport, will take 15 minutes to reach the Airport, whereas the trip between Johannesburg to Pretoria will take 35 minutes, travelling at 160km/h. The cost of the return trip will be between R15 and R25. There will be four underground stations and eight surface stations, and some 14 kilometres of underground track (in some places 80 metres down).

It is hoped that the Gautrain will relieve the congestion of some 300 000 passengers each week travelling between Gauteng's two biggest

Route through Joburg

Most of the route in Johannesburg and its suburbs will be underground, moving from Park Station under the Johannesburg Hospital in Parktown towards Rosebank and on to Rivonia Road and Sandton. At the Mushroom Farm Park in Sandown the route surfaces for a short section before going into a tunnel again and then surfaces once more to cross over Grayston Drive. It passes under the M1 freeway and comes up for air at Marlboro Gardens. The entire section between Marlboro and Midrand is above ground.

The draft EIR divides the route up into sections, indicating the proposed route for each section, alternative routes suggested in the public meetings, as well as the EIA recommendations. The [report](#) can be accessed on

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cities.

The outcome of the consultation is being released to the public in the form of an [Addendum](#) to the draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA), which was submitted to the provincial Department of Agriculture, Conservation, Environment and Land Affairs (DACEL) on 17 April, for their appraisal and approval.

The Addendum provides a summary of the comments and concerns received by those affected by the Gautrain, and Bohlweki Environmental's replies to these comments. The updated version of the findings of the draft EIA report, which takes into account additional studies undertaken in view of comments received from those affected by the Gautrain, forms the main report of the Addendum.

The original route alignment has been "substantially amended and refined" over the preceding 15-month consultation period.

The Addendum also contains the results of two additional studies:

- The Environmental Resource Economics study of the area between Pretoria Station and Hatfield Station, looking particularly at affordability, welfare costs and environmental issues relating to the recommended route.
- Phase 2 of the Heritage Impact Assessment study, which examines the areas between Johannesburg, Pretoria and the Johannesburg International Airport.

Although Bohlweki has approved the process so far, it is far from over. Says Bohlweki: "The bidding consortia for the design, financing, construction and operation of the Gautrain will need to incorporate the proposed mitigation measures contained in the draft EIA report, and the updated draft Environmental Management Plan, into their proposals for the Gautrain system."

The findings of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) have been available for viewing since September 2002, and a number of open meetings have been held to receive feedback from the people most affected by the proposed route, which goes through a number of Johannesburg suburbs, mostly underground. Some 650 homes will have to be expropriated to make way for the train.

DACEL now has several months to consider the final report and Addendum, and should it approve the project, it will issue a Record of Decision, which will be available to the public for comment

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Copies of the Addendum are available for viewing at public libraries in Johannesburg and Pretoria. The list of libraries is available on the [Gautrain web site](#).

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1 Namibia's hunt for alternative energy sources becomes dire

11-06-04 Namibia's need to find an alternative source of power is becoming more urgent than ever.

Six years since the last studies were done, power utility company NamPower has just awarded a contract for an environmental assessment and management plan for the proposed gas-fired Kudu Power Plant at Oranjemund.

CSIR Environmentek, a South African company, has been mandated to carry out the environmental assessment to be completed as soon as the end of July. The public will also be given the opportunity to raise their viewpoints and concerns about the project at four meetings to be held in Windhoek, Alexander Bay, Oranjemund and Rosh Pinah.

NamPower says that continued supply from South Africa, from which it imports up to 60 % of its supply during winter, could prove problematic by 2007. NamPower's Chief Technical Advisor Reiner Jagau said that the company was directing a lot of its resources into the project as the need to find alternative energy sources for the country becomes more dire.

Pre-feasibility studies on the company's other possible power-generating option, Popa Falls, will also officially be made public.

Jagau said the board had taken no decision on how it plans to proceed with the project, following the Okavango River Basin Water Commission (Okacom) approval in April to start on full-scale feasibility studies to gauge the viability of a hydro-power scheme near Divundu. He said a decision would depend on input from various affected and concerned parties.

With South Africa pressed by its own domestic energy demands, Namibia could face paying much higher charges for imports in future. The country's power demands have grown by nearly 60 % in the past 11 years -- estimated to be approximately 540 MW by 2012, up from the current 378 MW.

In addition to meeting NamPower's projected demand, electricity generated at Kudu of about 800 MW could be exported to South Africa. Previous studies identified Oranjemund, project Site D, as the most viable option for the building of the gas-fired station.

The EIA now underway will only focus on the construction and operation of the plant in this area and the pipelines going out from the site. It does not include components of the development upstream, the gas field, pipelines from the gas field, gas conditioning plant, nor construction of power lines from the power station.

Drilling gas wells in 1996, proved that there were sufficient proven natural gas reserves some 170 km offshore to support the plant for at least 20 years. Site D is on degraded, mined-out land within the high-security mining area.

The preliminary environmental assessment found corrosion from salt spray, access to the site, the power line route from the plant and matters related to construction as the main constraints hindering the construction of a power plant at this site.

Counting in its favour is its distance from the proposed Orange River Mouth Wetland Park and lower impact on the ecology of the area and to the marine environment.

Source: The Namibian

general

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July 14, 2004

Comment on Popa Falls Preliminary EIA

Comment on Popa Falls preliminary environmental impact assessment for NamPower by International Rivers Network

International Rivers Network (IRN) is pleased to have this opportunity to comment on the preliminary environmental impact assessment for a proposed 20 MW dam at Popa Falls. IRN is impressed by the breadth of this pre-assessment for the proposed dam. The report is thorough and clear in addressing impacts often overlooked or neglected by dam analysts, and is a positive reflection of Namibia's engagement in energy policy that seeks to benefit all Namibians.

After reviewing the preliminary environmental assessment, IRN has several significant concerns about this project proposal.

1. **Interrupted Sediment Flow:** The assessment clearly explains the critical nature of the sediment flow in the Okavango River to the geomorphological and ecological functioning of the Okavango Delta downstream. Any reduction in sediment flow is expected to strongly impact the delta's ecosystem health, including plants, fish, birds and other wildlife. This in turn will affect the tourism industry of the area and subsistence living of communities living from Popa Falls to the Delta.

It does not appear this "potentially fatal flaw" could be effectively mitigated. The report dismisses sluicing as an option, and indicates that the effectiveness of bypass pumping is still undetermined. Even if it were deemed effective, bypass pumping would still require the dam operators to be fully responsible and vigilant for continued pumping during the life of the dam. In Section 7.2.8, Impacts on Vegetation

Downstream of the Weir and Popa Falls, the reports notes, "should mitigation of sediment transport be less than optimal, the impact would have a high significance." While bypass pumping may be effective, it may be less than completely effective in neutralizing the impact on sediment flow, and will continue to bear the risk of failure due to human negligence for the duration of the dam's existence.

2. **Forced Relocation and Displacement:** The assessment states that, depending on dam siting, between 80 and 260 households will be directly displaced by the building of the dam and the filling of the reservoir. IRN is encouraged by the inclusion of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) findings in Sections 4.4.6, 7.2.15 and again in the assessment on Section 7.3, Impacts on Subsistence Livelihoods. The report states that Namibia has normally used cash compensation – a method shown to be less than effective in restoring lives and livelihoods. The report states, "It may therefore be necessary to engage with the community to develop economic alternatives," and "the impact of relocation on subsistence livelihoods is considered to be of medium significance as it should be possible to mitigate the impacts to some degree" (*italics added by IRN*). These families will lose their land and fisheries, being relocated possibly:
- on incomparable land
 - without participation in the process
 - into unwelcoming communities, and
 - into separate communities, destroying the social fabric of the once intact community.

While we understand that the consultants may have rated this impact as "medium" because there are relatively few families to be resettled, we believe the number of resettlers is actually quite high for the amount of electricity that will be produced, and that there is a very real risk that those affected by the project will be left worse off. As the WCD has shown, the record for restoring dam-affected people's lives is an extremely sorry one – hence its extensive recommendations on how best to engage

affected communities during the planning and construction of large dams, and its emphasis on sharing risks and benefits of such projects more equitably. We believe, therefore, that the impacts of displacement must be considered as being of high significance by NamPower and more thoroughly addressed in accordance with WCD findings before going forward.

The key issues that must be addressed per the findings of the WCD include the following:

- **Gaining Public Acceptance:** The project should have the "demonstrable acceptance" of the affected people, and with the "free, prior, informed consent" of indigenous and tribal peoples. This should be through negotiated decision-making processes that are legally binding.
 - **Sharing Benefits:** The WCD is clear that affected people should be left better off, and that they should be "recognised as first among beneficiaries of the project." Affected people include not just those directly displaced, but also indigenous tribes who customarily utilize the region, upstream communities where fisheries are negatively impacted, communities impacted by in-migration from resettlers, and those physically or economically affected downstream in the delta region.
3. **Additional Social Impacts:** There are additional unknown risks involved with this project which could significantly impact fisheries, tourism, and livelihoods. Many communities upstream from the project rely on subsistence fishing in the Okavango River for part of their diet. Fish migration around the dam will be difficult to mitigate without further study of the fish species and could reduce this food source for upstream communities. A mitigation option could fail if improperly designed for specific fish species. In addition, the report indicates that the impacts on tourism in Namibia are unknown. Because the river and delta are critical for tourism and subsistence living in Botswana, the

report states, "any negative impacts on the Okavango Swamps would not be acceptable in Botswana." The risk of increased disease – malaria, bilharzia, and HIV– could cripple the local populations without proper mitigation and increased accessible health services.

4. **Additional Environmental Impacts:** The areas impacted by this project are celebrated for their biological diversity and richness, and are areas of concern for conservation. The report found at least 17 Red Data species of birds that will or could be negatively affected by the project. The report clearly states that the impact on birds, "is rated high for the impoundment area as a substantial portion of available habitat will be lost, and there is no mitigation possible – except to reduce the height of the weir," which would directly impact power generation. The report also notes that the Draft Wetlands Policy is intended to promote the conservation and wise use of wetlands, and that the area around Popa Falls qualifies as a Ramsar site, and demands absolute protection of the rocky rapid habitat sections between Mukwe and Popa Falls on the Okavango River.
5. **Hydrological Risk:** The study does not adequately address hydrological risk. The report states that rainfall in the area is "highly variable and unreliable," but includes no mention of increased unpredictability in river flows due to climate change. The risk to the project's economic viability from climate change are great, and must be fully analyzed, including a more expansive sensitivity analysis of flows.
6. **Costs and Alternatives:** Now that an agreement for the Kudu Gas Plant has been signed, it is doubtful whether there is a real need for the power from a dam at Popa Falls. At this time, the Popa Falls project's costs remain highly speculative, as there are too many unknowns (e.g., social and environmental mitigation, impacts of climate change, etc.) For the purposes of this study, economic comparison of Popa Falls to other options (such as Kudu Gas project) is therefore flawed.

Conclusion: The predicted impacts outlined in this report, combined with the unknown risks described as

needing further study, may outweigh the benefits that this dam would bring to Namibia. Affected communities would bear all the environmental and social risk of this project and have potentially little opportunity to benefit from the project. IRN agrees with the assessment team that the precautionary principle should be applied. We urge Namibia to now turn its financial and human resources to studying better, less destructive alternatives, rather than pursuing the Popa Falls project at this time.

Additional Information

- Visit IRN's [Okavango Campaign](#)

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Green Beat Namibia and the Environment

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Epupa study incomplete

WERNER MENGES

THE final report of the feasibility study on the planned lower Kunene River hydropower scheme is short of agreed steps to soften the negative effects of the proposed project on the residents of the dam area.

The Namang international consortium of consultants which worked on a technical and an environmental study on the proposed Epupa hydroelectric scheme handed the 21-volume final report to Government on December 4.

The final feasibility study report does not include any specific, agreed measures to minimise the impact of the project in Namibia on the estimated 12 000 Kunene Region residents who belong to the Himba - who remain overwhelmingly opposed to the scheme - and other minority ethnic groups, the report reveals.

The reason for this omission, the consultants explain, is the breakdown in communication between the consultants and the affected Himba communities, who appear to be overwhelmingly against the project and who have expressed a "vote of no confidence in the political processes (accompanying the study) in both Angola and Namibia".

The social organisation of some Himba communities in the north of the region and the social balance of the Himba's lifestyle of semi-nomadic pastoralism could be destroyed by the proposed project, with the result that impoverished, displaced communities could grow in urban centres and especially on the edges of Opuwo, the report warns.

WHO'S TO BLAME?

Namang lays the responsibility for this shortcoming in the final report at the door of its client, the Namibian and Angolan governments, whose responsibility it was to facilitate the community consultation process.

The previous version of the feasibility study report, the draft final report which was released in October last year, was marked incomplete on its covers because it did not contain measures to address the impact of the planned scheme on the affected Himba communities in the proposed dam areas. Since the release of the draft report, the Himba to be directly affected by the building of a dam in their midst have continued to refuse to discuss such measures with the consultants. Communication on this was finally halted early this year, says the report.

Namang has however gone ahead and, in the absence of such agreed measures, completed the environmental assessment by including chapters on principles for a social mitigation programme in its place.

In the introduction to the environmental assessment of the Epupa and Baynes sites the report says, "In the view of Namang there has not been sufficient dissemination of information concerning the scheme, or local community consultation, participation and involvement in the details of site selection and development of an acceptable social mitigation programme. (...) It will be the task of the two Governments and their implementing organisation to eventually work out a Social Mitigation Programme in consultation with the affected local population."

The process towards community based identification of mitigation was "interrupted by another, political, process completely beyond the control of Namang," the report explains.

"Namang in no way suggests that the social mitigation/compensation component of the project is in place or that the people in the direct impact zone are reconciled to the project. What is demonstrated in the (Environmental Assessment) is a clear commitment to the principle of consultation by Namang and a record of the extensive efforts made to facilitate dialogue with local people."

BAD START

The intended process of consultations between the affected people and the consultants was bedevilled from the start by inadequate and misleading communication on the planned project between the Himba and the two governments as clients for the study, the report indicates.

In Namibia, especially, the project became politicised and debate about it became distorted by the controversy created around the issue by the Namibian Himba Chiefs and the government, which in turn had an effect on the Angolan Himba's reaction to the project plans.

Whereas the Namibian Himba from the outset rejected plans to build a dam at either the Epupa site some seven km downstream from the Epupa Falls or at the Baynes site some 40 km downstream from the falls, the Angolan Himba were initially willing to discuss the possibility of the Baynes option, although they, too, rejected all talks about the Epupa site.

From the very start, the consultation process got off on a bad note, with the Himba communities in Namibia misinformed about the true nature and extent of a possible dam after an information visit by a then Swawek team to the area before further consultations from 1992. The report notes that this tour "created misunderstandings more than anything else", and that "the first contact between between Himba and officials created the impression amongst some local people that the Himba were to be tricked. Unfortunately, very little was done in 1992 and 1993 to correct this image."

The report states that since interaction on possible mitigation measures "is not possible for political reasons, the project has achieved what can be achieved and reached a logical conclusion. A political solution has to come prior to continued community interaction for social mitigation."

The details for compensation would have to be negotiated with the concerned communities, "if and when circumstances change, in accordance with the generally accepted criteria of bankability".

THE DIFFERENCES

The final report has adjusted the price tag for the scheme's two options slightly upwards, to a total of 542,81 million US dollars (N\$3 256,86 million at yesterday's exchange rate of N\$6 per US dollar) for the Epupa site and US\$554,38 million (N\$3 326,28 million) for the Baynes site.

A dam at Baynes will cover some 57 square kilometres of land under water being held back by a dam wall 200 m high - a height which would be a world record for a dam of its kind. It would also drown some 15 grave sites and 45 archaeological sites, displace less than a hundred permanent users and affect about 2 000 permanent users of the area.

At Epupa, though, a dam wall 163 metres high will create a reservoir covering 380 square kilometres when full. The scenic Epupa Falls will be permanently drowned by such a dam. The top of the falls will be about 100 metres under the water surface when the dam is full, or about 30 metres deep at the lowest level at which its proposed 360 megawatt hydropower plant would be able to operate.

The Epupa dam would displace 1 100 people and affect 5 000 occasional users of its area, and drown 95 archaeological sites and 160 treasured Himba grave sites.

It would also have a major impact on the habitat of two critically endangered fish species, and would in effect destroy the only known habitat of a third, a new species of *Leptoglanis* which was discovered only in the proposed dam's area during the feasibility study period.

The final report's Executive Summary explains that both options have some serious shortcomings.

Economically, the environmentally less damaging Baynes options is less feasible. Without the benefit of the war-disabled Gove Dam in the Angolan highlands regulating the flow of the Kunene River, the Baynes option is not economically viable or bankable to attract investors. With Gove working, though, a scheme at Baynes "can be characterised as a medium risk, economically marginal and environmentally acceptable option", says the summary.

The Epupa option would be economically viable with or without the Gove Dam working properly. However, whereas in the Baynes option the social consequences are considered to be "largely mitigable", those likely to be caused by the Epupa option - in the shape of changed identities, lifestyles and production systems - are described as including some "unmitigable social issues which will have extremely serious consequences for a small group of people".

With the Epupa site, the prospects of financing a project look promising, says the report. But this is qualified by the statement - "provided that the identified environmental impacts are not considered to create unacceptable risks by investors."

Also:

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THE DEBATE

Environmental impact assessments are 'seriously flawed'

August 6, 2004

By Laurianne Claase

Biodiversity is the lifeblood of the planet. Birds, reptiles, insects and mammals depend on plants for their survival.

Alarming, South Africa has the second highest number of plant extinctions in the world. While the Cape Floral Kingdom earned international recognition recently as South Africa's newest World Heritage Site, other conservation initiatives also seem to bode well for the preservation of what remains of the Western Cape's unique biodiversity. Or do they?

The South African government has made great strides in promulgating legislation to protect the environment. This includes the National Environmental Management Act (1998) and the Living Marine Resources Act.

The Biodiversity Act was signed into law by President Thabo Mbeki on May 31. In addition, the government has ratified international conventions such as the Convention on Biodiversity, Ramsar, Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) and the World Heritage Convention.

The Western Cape has also moved to redress the damage done to its natural heritage. The Property Rates Bill of 2003 makes protected areas exempt from land tax. Where agriculture has decimated indigenous fynbos, private landowners now have an incentive to preserve what is left.

The world, too, has recognised the importance of the Cape Floral Kingdom, and the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme have donated millions of US dollars to the Cape Action Plan for People and Environment (Cape) project, which aims to have "effectively conserved the natural environment and biodiversity of the Cape Floristic Region" by 2024.

However, uncontrolled and un-scrupulous development threatens such worthy ambitions. Currently, the City of Cape Town is objecting to a proposed toll road development that will cut through the Cape Flats, a biodiversity hotspot with over 1 400 indigenous plant species. The R300/N21 also threatens irreplaceable Renosterveld in the Durbanville area and a number of Red Data species of both flora and fauna.

In addition, Cape Nature Conservation's plea for high-level intervention in the proliferation of golf courses and estates along the southern Cape's Garden Route has attracted the attention of the new provincial MEC for Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, Tasneem Essop. She has initiated an investigation into the sustainability of such developments to help formulate a provincial policy guideline for golf estates.

There are already at least 22 golf courses along the Garden Route and a positive record of decision was announced for yet another in September 2003.

The R1 billion Kingswood Golf Estate, with its 730 residential units and 18-hole golf course, will be situated between the George Golf Club and Fancourt estate.

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These developments are contentious for other reasons. Doubt has been cast on the planning approval given for some of these estates, and a number of court cases are under way.

The Cape Times has also noted that in 2003, environmental laws in the Western Cape were disregarded by developers in 140 recorded instances. The application for the proposed 600ha Fynboskruin development near Sedgfield was rejected in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as "too ecologically valuable to be disturbed".

Then-minister of environmental affairs and tourism Valli Moosa gave his approval anyway, ostensibly for the benefit of tourism and the economy.

Despite the job creation invariably touted in the developers' justification for their projects, there is increasing scepticism both from the public and now, it seems, from Essop: "While it can be argued that golf estates are of value for tourism and job creation, this still needs to be assessed. The negative impacts on our natural resources, especially our limited water resources, may well outweigh the benefits."

In spite of the vocal support of new Environmental Affairs Minister, Marthinus van Schalkwyk, for placing "people firmly at the centre of conservation", there is an increasing perception that these developments are not for the community but for corporate profits.

There are legal obligations to perform EIAs before such developments are given the go-ahead.

However, a number of serious flaws in the process have been noted. In its response to the draft EIA on the R300/N21 toll road, the City of Cape Town noted that "there are numerous errors and omissions in the text and terminology of the draft EIA".

A seeming insurmountable problem with the EIA process is that the consultants that undertake the assessment are paid by the developer. An unbiased EIA is unlikely in such circumstances.

In addition, the public participation process in many of these EIAs have been inadequate. The draft EIA on the R300/N21 toll road amounted to five hefty volumes of specialist information, inaccessible to most of Cape Town's population even if they could view the report on the internet or in 10 libraries around the city.

Legislation without enforcement is a toothless lion.

These issues need urgent attention - otherwise soon we will all have to take up golf to enjoy the "great outdoors".

- Claase is responsible for media liaison for the Zeekoevlei Environmental Forum.

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