



## **BASIC ASSESSMENT REPORT**

**01 SEPTEMBER 2023**

**THE PROPOSED WITFONTEIN SOLAR PV 1 NEAR  
VILJOENSKROON, FREE STATE PROVINCE**

## PROJECT DETAIL

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<b>Project Title</b>	:	Proposed Witfontein Solar PV 1 near Viljoenskroon, Free State Province
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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

AC	Alternating Current
BA	Basic Assessment
BAR	Basic Assessment Report
BESS	Battery Energy Storage System
BOS	Balance of System
CBA	Critical Biodiversity Area
CEA	Cumulative Effects Assessment



CR	Critically Endangered
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
DC	Direct Current
DFFE	Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
DM	District Municipality
DMRE	Department of Mineral Resources and Energy
DWS	Department of Water and Sanitation
EA	Environmental Authorisation
EAP	Environmental Assessment Practitioner
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EMPr	Environmental Management Programme
EN	Endangered
EP	Equator Principles
EPFI	Equator Principles Financial Institutions
Environmental impact	Any change to the environment, whether adverse or beneficial, wholly or partially resulting from an organization's environmental aspects.
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GNR	Government Notice Regulation
HGM	Hydrogeomorphic
I&AP	Interested and affected party
IAP	Invasive Alien Plant
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IPP	Independent Power Producer
IRP	Integrated Resource Plan
kV	Kilo Volt
LC	Least Concern
LCOE	Lowest Levelized Cost of Energy
LM	Local Municipality

Mitigate	Activities designed to compensate for unavoidable environmental damage.
MW	Megawatt
NEMA	National Environmental Management Act No. 107 of 1998
NEM:BA	National Environment Management Biodiversity Act
NERSA	National Energy Regulator of South Africa
NFEPA	National Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Areas
NT	Near Threatened
NWA	National Water Act No. 36 of 1998
O&M	Operational & Maintenance
OHPL	Overhead Powerline
PROJECT AREA	Project area of influence
POSA	Plants of South Africa
PPP	Public Participation Process
PV	Photovoltaic
REIPPP	Renewable Energy IPP Procurement Process
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resources Agency
SAIIAE	South African Inventory of Inland Aquatic Ecosystems
SCC	Species of Conservation Concern
SDF	Spatial Development Framework
SEI	Site Ecological Importance
SPP	Solar Power Plant
VN	Vulnerable
VU	Vegetation Unit

## CONTEXT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT

According to Eskom, the demand for electricity in South Africa has been growing at approximately 3% per annum. This growing demand, fueled by increasing economic growth and social development, is placing increasing pressure on South Africa's existing power generation capacity. Coupled with this, is the growing awareness of environmentally responsible development, the impacts of climate change and the need for sustainable development. The use of renewable energy technologies, as 1 of a mix of technologies needed to meet future energy consumption requirements is being investigated as part of the national Department of Mineral Resources and Energy's (DMRE) (previously referred to as the Department of Energy) long-term strategic planning and research process.

The primary rationale for the proposed solar photovoltaic (PV) facility is to add new generation capacity from renewable energy to the national electricity mix and to aid in achieving the goal of 42% share of all new installed generating capacity being derived from renewable energy forms, as targeted by DMRE (Integrated Resource Plan Update 2010-2030). The IRP also identifies the preferred generation technologies required to meet the expected demand growth up to 2030 and incorporates government objectives including affordable electricity, reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, reduced water consumption, diversified electricity generation sources and localisation and regional development. In terms of the Integrated Resource Plan Update (2019 IRP Update, 2010-2030), over the short term (of the next two or three years), clear guidelines arose; namely to continue with the current renewable bid programme with additional annual rounds of 1000 MW PV, with approximately 8.4 GW of the renewable energy capacity planned to be installed from PV technologies over the next twenty years.

The proposed project is intended to form part of the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy's (DMREs) Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement (REIPPP) Programme or any other programmes/opportunities to generate power in South Africa. The REIPPP Programme aims to secure 14 725 Megawatts (MW) of new generation capacity from renewable energy sources, while simultaneously diversifying South Africa's electricity mix. According to the 2021 State of the Nation Address, Government will soon be initiating the procurement of an additional 11 800 MW of power from renewable energy, natural gas, battery storage and coal in line with the Integrated Resource Plan 2019 and fulfilling their commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Paris Agreement which include the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Eskom, our largest greenhouse gas emitter, has committed in principle to net zero emission by 2050 and to increase its renewable capacity.

During the 2022 State of the Nation Address it was indicated that during the past year the government had taken "firm steps" to bring additional generation capacity online as quickly as possible to close the shortfall in terms of electricity. As a result, it was confirmed that several new generation projects will be coming online over the next few years. During the recent 2023 State of the Nation Address, the government has embarked upon allowing private developers to



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generate electricity. There are now more than 100 projects, which are expected to provide over 9 000 MW of new capacity over time. A number of companies that have participated in the renewable energy programme will soon enter construction and deliver a total of 2 800 MW of new capacity. Through the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan, R1.5 trillion will be invested in our economy over the next five years in new frontiers such as renewable energy, green hydrogen and electric vehicles. A number of projects are already underway, including the development of a new facility by Sasol at Boegoebaai in the Northern Cape, the Prieska Power Reserve in the Free State, and the Hydrogen Valley initiative in Limpopo, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.

In response to the above, Witfontein Solar PV 1 (Pty) Ltd is proposing the development of a photovoltaic solar facility and associated infrastructure (including grid connection infrastructure) for the purpose of commercial electricity generation on the Remaining Extent of the Farm Witfontein No. 444 in the Free State Province situated within the Moqhaka Local Municipality area of jurisdiction (refer to Figure A for the locality map). The project entails the generation of up to 160 MW electrical power through photovoltaic (PV) technology. The total development footprint of the project will be up to 437 hectares (including supporting infrastructure) identified and assessed as part of the Basic Assessment (BA) process. The proposed grid connection and corridor will be assessed in a separate Basic Assessment.

From a regional site selection perspective, this region is preferred for solar energy development due to its global horizontal irradiation value of around 2068 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>. The region is also preferred based on its inclusion within the Klerksdorp Renewable Energy Development Z1 (REDZ) 10.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like many other small and developing municipalities in the country, the Moqhaka Local Municipality, within which the Witfontein PV 1 is proposed, faces a number of challenges in addressing the needs and improving the lives of the community. The Final Integrated Development Plan (2022-2027) of the Fezile Dabi District Municipality<sup>1</sup> states that it is the vision of the municipality to improve the lives of their citizens and progressively meet their economic, basic and social needs thereby restoring community confidence and trust in government. The municipality aims to achieve their key strategic goals, such as delivering quality basic services (i.e. electricity, water and sanitation) to their communities, stimulating local economic growth and to ensure sound financial management and viability within the municipality. The Moqhaka Local Municipality's Final Integrated Development Plan (2022-2027) indicates the specific key performance areas and priority areas of the municipality which include basic service delivery, good governance, local economic development and social and community development to name a few. The development of the Witfontein PV 1 will contribute to the goals of the respective local and district municipalities that will be affected by the proposed development, albeit to a limited extent.

Witfontein Solar PV 1 (Pty) Ltd intends to develop a 160 MW photovoltaic solar facility and associated infrastructure on the Remaining Extent of the Farm Witfontein No. 444, situated within the Moqhaka Local Municipality area of jurisdiction. The town of Viljoenskroon is located approximately ~15km southeast of the proposed development (refer to Figure A and B for the locality and regional map). The total footprint of the project will approximately be up to 437 hectares (including supporting infrastructure on site). The site<sup>2</sup> was identified as being highly desirable due to its suitable climatic conditions, topography (i.e., in terms of slope), environmental conditions (i.e., low agricultural potential, ecological sensitivity and archaeology), proximity to the R76 and R501 (i.e., to facilitate the movement of machinery, equipment, infrastructure and people during the construction phase).

Grid connection infrastructure is also being proposed and will be assessed in a separate Basic Assessment, which includes internal power lines as well as a main grid connection to connect the facility to the national grid. The grid connection infrastructure includes a 132kV power line to connect the facility from a collector substation to the national grid by connecting into the existing 132/400kV Mercury Main Transmission Substation (MTS).

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<sup>1</sup> The Moqhaka Local Municipality falls within the Fezile Dabi District Municipality.

<sup>2</sup> The site is defined as the Remaining Extent of the Farm Witfontein No. 137. The full extent of the site has been assessed as part of this BA process for the development by the EAP and the independent specialists.



In terms of the National Environmental Management Act (Act 107 of 1998), with specific reference to Sections 24 and 24D, as read with GNR 324-327, as amended (2017), Environmental Authorisation is required for the Witfontein Solar PV 1 project. The following listed activities have been identified with special reference to the proposed development and are listed in the EIA Regulations (as amended):

- LN1 - Activity 11 (i) (GN.R. 327): *“The development of facilities or infrastructure for the transmission and distribution of electricity (i) outside urban areas or industrial complexes with a capacity of more than 33 but less than 275 kilovolts.”*
- LN1- Activity 14 (GN.R 327): *“The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure, for the storage, or for the storage and handling, of a dangerous good, where such storage occurs in containers with a combined capacity of 80 cubic metres or more but not exceeding 500 cubic metres.”*
- LN1- Activity 19(i) (GN.R 327): *“The infilling or depositing of any material of more than 10 cubic metres into, or the dredging, excavation, removal or moving of soil, sand, shells, shell grit, pebbles or rock of more than 10 cubic metres from (i) a watercourse.”*
- LN1 - Activity 24 (ii) (GN.R 327): *“The development of a road (ii) with reserve wider than 13,5 meters, or where no reserve exists where the road is wider than 8 meters.”*
- LN1- Activity 27 (GN.R.327): *“The clearance of an area of 1 hectares or more, but less than 20 hectares of indigenous vegetation, except where such clearance of indigenous vegetation is required for (i) undertaking of a linear activity, or (ii) maintaining purposed undertaking in accordance with a maintenance management plan.”*
- LN1 - Activity 28 (ii) (GN.R. 327): *“Residential, mixed, retail, commercial, industrial or institutional developments where such land was used for agriculture or afforestation on or after 1998 and where such development (ii) will occur outside an urban area, where the total land to be developed is bigger than 1 hectare.”*
- LN1 - Activity 56 (ii) (GN.R 327): *“The widening of a road by more than 6 metres, or the lengthening of a road by more than 1 kilometre (ii) where no reserve exists, where the existing road is wider than 8 metres...”*
- LN2- Activity 1(GN.R 325): *“The development of facilities or infrastructure for the generation of electricity from a renewable resource where the electricity output is 20 megawatts or more.”*
- LN 2-Activity 15 (GN.R 325): *“The clearance of an area of 20 hectares or more of indigenous vegetation.”*
- LN3 - Activity 4 (b)(i)(bb)(ee) (GN.R 324): *“The development of a road wider than 4 metres with a reserve less than 13,5 metres within (b) Free State, (i) Outside urban areas (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy Focus areas, and (ee) Critical biodiversity*



*areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the Competent Authority or in bioregional plans.”*

- LN3 - Activity 10 (b)(i)(ee) (GN.R 324): *“The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure for the storage, or storage and handling of a dangerous good, where such storage occurs in containers with a combined capacity of 30 but not exceeding 80 cubic metres (b) Free State, (i) Outside urban areas (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy Focus areas, (ee) Critical biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the Competent Authority or in bioregional plans.”*
- LN3 - Activity 12 (b)(i)(ii)(iv) (GN.R 324): *“The clearance of an area of 300 square metres or more of indigenous vegetation (b) Free State (i) within any critically endangered or endangered ecosystem listed in terms of section 52 of the NEMBA or prior to the publication of such a list, within an area that has been identified as critically endangered in the National Spatial Biodiversity Assessment 2004, (ii) Within critical biodiversity areas identified in bioregional plans (iv) Areas within a watercourse or wetland; or within 100 metres from the edge of a watercourse or wetland.”*
- LN3 - Activity 18 (b)(i)(bb)(ee)(hh) (GN.R 324): *“The widening of a road by more than 4 metres, or the lengthening of a road by more than 1 kilometre (b) Free State (i) Outside urban areas (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy Focus areas (ee) Critical biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the Competent Authority or in bioregional plans, and (hh) Areas within a watercourse or wetland; or within 100 metres from the edge of a watercourse or wetland.”*

Activities required for the development of the solar PV facility which are listed under Listing Notice 1,2 and 3 (GNR 324-327 as amended 2017) implies that the development could potentially have a significant impact on the environment that will require mitigation. The proposed Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project is located within a Renewable Energy Development Z1 (REDZ) and subsequently a Basic Assessment process is required to be followed as described in Regulations 19 and 20 of the EIA Regulations (as amended). Solis-Environmental has been appointed as the independent Environmental Assessment Practitioner to undertake the Basic Assessment (BA) on behalf of Witfontein Solar PV 1 (Pty) Ltd.

Regulation 19 of the EIA Regulations (2017) requires that a Basic Assessment Report (BAR) must contain the information set out in Appendix 1 of the Regulations or comply with a protocol or minimum information requirements relevant to the application as identified and gazetted by the Minister in a government notice. Appendix 1 of GNR517 requires that the environmental outcomes, impacts and residual risks of the proposed activity be set out in the BAR. It has been determined through the BA process that the proposed development will have a net positive impact for the area and will subsequently ensure the optimal utilisation of resources and land. All negative environmental impacts can be effectively mitigated through the recommended mitigation measures and no residual negative impacts are foreseen. The potentially most





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significant environmental impacts associated with the development are briefly summarized below.

Predicted impacts during the construction phase:

During the construction phase minor negative impacts are foreseen over the short term. The latter refers to a period of up to 24 months. The potentially most significant impacts relate to impacts on fauna and flora including the destruction, loss and fragmentation of habitats, ecosystems and the vegetation community, introduction of Invasive Alien Plant (IAP) species and invasive fauna, destruction of protected plant species, and displacement of the indigenous faunal community, direct disturbance / degradation / loss to wetland soils or vegetation and increased erosion and sedimentation, visual impact of construction activities on sensitive visual receptors in close proximity to the Solar PV facility, loss or damage to sites, features or objects of cultural heritage significance (burial sites and homestead site located on site), destroy or permanently seal-in fossils at or below the surface that are then no longer available for scientific study. Socio-economic impacts relate to the including creation of direct and indirect employment opportunities, influx of jobseekers and change in population in the study area, temporary increase in safety and security concerns associated with the influx of people, temporary increase in traffic disruptions and movement patterns, nuisance impact (noise and dust) and increased risk of potential veld fires.

Predicted impacts during the operational phase:

During the operational phase the site will serve as a solar PV energy facility and the potential impacts will take place over a period of 20 – 30 years. The negative impacts are generally associated with impacts on fauna and flora include continued fragmentation and degradation of natural habitats and ecosystems, continuing spread of IAP and weed species and ongoing displacement and direct mortalities of the faunal community, potential for increased stormwater runoff leading to Increased erosion and sedimentation and potential for increased contaminants entering the wetland systems, and soil erosion and compaction effects. The operational phase will have a direct positive impact through the creation of employment opportunities and skills development, development of non-polluting, renewable energy infrastructure, contribution to Local Economic Development (LED) and social upliftment and increase in household earnings.

Predicted impacts during the decommissioning phase:

The negative impacts generally associated with the decommissioning phase include habitat destruction caused by clearance of vegetation and the loss of permanent employment. However, skilled staff will be eminently employable, and several temporary jobs will also be created in the process. It is not expected that the facility will be decommissioned, but rather that the technology used will be upgraded.

Cumulative impacts:



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Cumulative impacts could arise as other similar projects are constructed in the area. According to the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE) database, there are approximately eighteen (18) similar developments that have been proposed near the proposed activity.

The potential for cumulative impacts therefore exists. The draft Basic Assessment report includes an assessment of the potential cumulative impacts associated with the proposed development. Potential cumulative impacts with a significance rating of negative medium during the construction phase relate to habitat destruction and fragmentation, displacement of priority avian species from important habitats, loss of important avian habitats, impacts of employment opportunities, business opportunities and skills development and impact associated with large-scale in-migration of people. Cumulative impacts during the operational phase relate to habitat destruction and fragmentation and visual intrusion. The cumulative effect of the generation of waste was identified as being potentially significant during the decommissioning phase.

In accordance with the EIA Regulations, this draft BAR evaluates and rates each identified potential impact and identifies and recommends mitigation measures which will be required in order to ensure the reduction of the impact significance of negative impacts to acceptable levels and the avoidance of negative residual risks. This draft BAR also contains information that is required by the competent authority (Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE)) to consider the Application for Environmental Authorisation and to reach a decision as contemplated in Regulation 20 of GNR 326.

No fatal flaws or impacts with unacceptable levels of significance were identified and the impacts from the proposed development are expected to be at an acceptable level with the implementation of mitigation measures and therefore the project can be authorised subject to the implementation of the recommended mitigation measures.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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This section aims to introduce the Basic Assessment Report (BAR) and specifically to address the following requirements of the regulations:

**Appendix 1.** (3) A basic assessment report must contain the information that is necessary for the competent authority to consider and come to a decision on the application, and must include-

(a) details of:

(i) the EAP who prepared the report; and

(ii) the expertise of the EAP, including a curriculum vitae.

### 1.1 LEGAL MANDATE AND PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The National Environmental Management Act identifies listed activities (in terms of Section 24) which are likely to have an impact on the environment. These activities cannot commence without obtaining an Environmental Authorisation (EA) from the relevant competent authority, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE). Sufficient information is required by the competent authority to make an informed decision and the project is therefore subject to an environmental assessment process which can be either a Basic Assessment Process or a full Scoping and Environmental Impact Assessment process.

The Listing Notices 1,2 and 3 (GNR 324-327 as amended 2017) outline the activities that may be triggered and therefore require EA. This implies that the development is considered as potentially having a significant impact on the environment. A detailed description of the listed activities that are triggered are included in chapter 2 to follow. According to Appendix 1 of Regulation 326 the objective of the scoping process is to, through a consultative process:

- Determine the policy and legislative context within which the activity is located and document how the proposed activity complies with and responds to the policy and legislative context;
- Identify the alternatives considered, including the activity, location, and technology alternatives;
- Describe the need and desirability of the proposed alternatives;
- Through the undertaking of an impact and risk assessment process, inclusive of cumulative impacts which focused on determining the geographical, physical, biological, social, economic, heritage and cultural sensitivity of the sites and locations within sites and the risk of impact of the proposed activity and technology alternatives on these aspects to determine-

- The nature, significance, consequence, extent, duration and probability of the impacts occurring; and
- degree to which these impact-
  - can be reversed;
  - may cause irreplaceable loss of resources, and
  - can be avoided, managed or mitigated; and
- Through a ranking of the site sensitivities and possible impacts the activity and technology alternatives will impose on the sites and location identified through the life of the activity to–
  - Identify and motivate a preferred site, activity and technology alternative;
  - Identify suitable measures to avoid, manage or mitigate identified impacts; and
  - Identify residual risks that need to be managed and monitored.

This draft Basic Assessment report has been submitted to the DFFE for review and comment. According to Regulation 326 all registered I&APs and relevant State Departments (including Organs of State) must be allowed the opportunity to review and provide comment on the draft Basic Assessment report. The Draft Basic Assessment has been made available to I&APs and all relevant State Departments. They have been requested to provide written comments on the report within 30 days of receiving it. All issues to be identified and comments received during the review period will be documented and compiled into a Comments and Response Report to be included as part of the final Basic Assessment report. Where comments have been received prior to the release of the draft Basic Assessment report for the 30-day review and comment period, these comments have been included in Appendix C5 and C6 and has also been included and responded to in the Comments and Responses Report (Appendix C7).

## 1.2 DETAILS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PRACTITI1R (EAP)

Solis-Environmental was appointed by the applicant as the independent EAP to conduct the EIA and prepare all required reports. All correspondence to the EAP can be directed to:

Contact person: Herman Alberts

EAPASA Registration: 2019/1328

Postal Address: 14 Kingfisher Street, Tuscany Ridge Estate, Potchefstroom, 2531

Telephone: 063 685 2093 (Cell)

Electronic Mail: [herman@Solis-Environmental.co.za](mailto:herman@Solis-Environmental.co.za)

And/or

Contact person: Ayabulela Manjezi



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EAPASA Registration: 2019/1279

Postal Address: 14 Kingfisher Street, Tuscany Ridge Estate, Potchefstroom, 2531

Telephone: 063 443 1696 (Cell)

Electronic Mail: [aya@Solis-Environmental.co.za](mailto:aya@Solis-Environmental.co.za)

Contact person: Mary-Jane Khanyile

Postal Address: 14 Kingfisher Street, Tuscany Ridge Estate, Potchefstroom, 2531

Telephone: 060 953 7164 (Cell)

Electronic Mail: [mary-jane@Solis-Environmental.co.za](mailto:mary-jane@Solis-Environmental.co.za)

Regulation 13(1)(a) and (b) determines that an independent and suitably qualified and experienced EAP should conduct the BA process. In terms of the independent status of the EAP a declaration is attached as Appendix A to this report. The expertise of the EAP responsible for conducting the BA process is also summarized in the curriculum vitae included as part of Appendix A.

### **1.3 DETAILS OF SPECIALISTS**

Table 1.1 provides information on the specialists that have been appointed as part of the BA process. Regulation 13(1)(a) and (b) determines that an independent and suitably qualified, experienced and independent specialist should conduct the specialist study, in the event where the specialist is not independent, a specialist should be appointed to externally review the work of the specialist as contemplated in sub regulation (2), must comply with sub regulation 1. In terms of the independent status of the specialists, their declarations are attached as Appendix E to this report. The expertise of the specialists is also summarized in their respective reports.

**Table 2.1:** Details of specialists

Study	Prepared by	Contact Person	Postal Address	Tel	e-mail
Wetland Impact Assessment	Blue Science	Toni Belcher	PO Box 455, Somerset Mall, 7137	Tell:021 851 0555 Cell:082 883 8055	toni@bluescience.co.za
Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment	The Biodiversity Company	Andrew Husted		Cell: 081 319 1225	info@thebiodiversitycompany.com
Avifaunal Impact Assessment					
Soil and Agricultural Impact Assessment	Johan Lanz	Johann Lanz	1A Wolfe Street Wynberg 7800 Cape Town South Africa	Cell:0829279018	johann@johannlanz.co.za
Heritage Impact Assessment	CTS Heritage	Jenna Lavin		Cell:0828249308	jenna.lavin@ctsheritage.com
Paleontological Study					
Traffic Impact Assessment	BVi	Liza Botha	Edison Square, Century City 7441	Cell:0605577467	lizab@bviwc.co.za
Social Impact Assessment	Solis Environmental	Carli van Niekerk	14 Kingfisher Street, Tuscany Ridge Estate, Potchefstroom, 2531	Cell: 0822208651	carli@environamics.co.za

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Visual Impact Assessment	Green Tree Environmental Consulting	Yonanda Martin	7 Dublin Street Rangeview Ext 2 Krugersdorp	Cell: 0824090405	yonanda@gtec.net.za
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#### 1.4 STATUS OF THE BA PROCESS

The BA process is conducted strictly in accordance with the stipulations set out in Regulations 19 – 20 and Annexure 1 of Regulation No. 326. Table 1.3 provides a summary of the BA process and future steps to be taken. It can be confirmed that to date:

- A site visit was conducted by the EAP 6 July 2023.
- Site notices were erected on site on 6 July 2023 informing the public of the commencement of the BA process.
- A pre-application meeting request was submitted to DFFE on 24 July 2023.
- The DFFE indicated that a pre-application meeting is not required, in an email dated 01 July 2023.
- A newspaper advertisement was placed in the Klerksdorp Records newspaper on 20 July 2023, informing the public of the BA process and for the public to register as I&APs.
- An application form and the draft Basic Assessment Report was submitted to DFFE on 01 September 2023.
- The draft Basic Assessment Report has been made available for a 30-day review and comment period from 01 September 2023 to 03 October 2023.

It is envisaged that the Final Basic Assessment Report will be submitted to the Department in October 2023. and that the Final Scoping Report will be accepted by the Department in September 2023. The BA process should be completed within approximately five months of submission of the Draft Basic Assessment Report, i.e., by December/January 2024 – see Table 1.2.

**Table 2.2:** Estimated timeframe for completion of the ‘BA process’

Activity	Prescribed timeframe	Timeframe
Site visits	-	6 July 2023
Public participation (BID)	30 Days	13 July – 14 August 2023
Submit pre-application meeting request	-	24 July 2023
Conduct specialist studies	-	July - August 2023
Submit application form and DBAR	-	01 September 2023
Public participation (DBAR)	30 Days	01 September- 03 October 2023
Submit FBAR	90 Days	October 2023



Department acknowledges receipt	10 Days	November 2023
Decision	57 Days	January/February 2024
Department notifies of decision	5 Days	January/February 2024
Registered I&APs notified of decision	14 Days	January/February 2023
Appeal	20 Days	February 2024

Table 1.3 below provides more detail on timeframes as well as process flow for the BA process.

**Table 2.3:** Estimated Timeframe for Completion of the BA Process for the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project.

Tasks to be performed	July				August				September				October				November				December				January				February				March			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
<b>Pre-application meeting</b>																																				
<b>Site visits</b>																																				
<b>Public participation</b>																																				
– Press advertisement																																				
– On site advertisement																																				
– Distribution of notices																																				
– Complete PP report																																				
<b>Specialist inputs and reports</b>																																				
– Draft terms of reference																																				
– Receive specialist studies																																				
<b>‘Draft’ Basic Assessment Report</b>																																				
- Information gathering																																				
- Report writing																																				
- Circulate ‘Draft’ Basic Assessment Report																																				
<b>Complete and submit application form</b>																																				
– Information gathering																																				
– Complete and submit application form																																				
<b>Authority acknowledges receipt of application form</b>																																				
<b>Final Basic Assessment Report &amp; EMP</b>																																				
– Information gathering																																				
– Report writing																																				
– Submission of Final Basic Assessment Report																																				
– Approval																																				

## 1.5 SPECIALIST STUDIES IDENTIFIED IN THE DFFE SCREENING TOOL REPORT

In terms of GN R.960 (promulgated on 05 July 2019) and Regulation 16(1)(b)(v) of the 2014 EIA Regulations (as amended), the submission of a Screening Report generated from the national web based environmental screening tool is compulsory for the submission of applications in terms of Regulations and 21 – 24 of the EIA Regulations. The requirement for the submission of a Screening Report for the Witfontein Solar PV 1 is applicable as it triggers Regulation 21 of the EIA Regulations, 2014 (as amended).

The tables included below provides an indication of the specialist studies identified by the DFFE Screening Tool Report (Appendix B) within the different applicable categories, an indication of whether the studies were undertaken or not and a motivation or confirmation of the studies being included or not.

**Table 2.4:** Specialist studies identified by the DFFE screening tool, Witfontein Solar PV 1 category and specialist studies completed.

Study identified in the DFFE Screening Tool and sensitivity	Study included?	Comment and Appendix
Agricultural Impact Assessment Sensitivity: High Feature(s): Annual crop cultivation/ planted pastures rotation. Low to moderate land capability.	Yes	An Agricultural Impact Assessment is included in Appendix D1 of the draft Basic Assessment Report.
Animal Species Assessment Sensitivity: Medium Feature(s): Presence of sensitive animal species i.e., Mammalia, <i>Hydrictis maculicollis</i>	Yes	A Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment is included in Appendix D2 of the draft Basic Assessment Report.
Aquatic Biodiversity Impact Assessment Sensitivity: Low	Yes	An aquatic assessment is included in Appendix D3.  This assessment has been undertaken in terms of the Protocols of GNR320 – refer to the content of the report.

Archaeological and Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment  Sensitivity: Low	Yes	A Cultural Heritage assessment included in Appendix D7 of the Scoping Report, as per the requirements of the National Heritage Resources Act.
Avian Impact Assessment  Sensitivity: Low	Yes	An Avifaunal Impact Assessment is included in Appendix D4.
Civil Aviation Assessment  Sensitivity: Low  Feature(s): No major or other types of civil aviation aerodromes have been identified	No	The identification of the site as low sensitivity considering civil aviation is agreed to by the EAP. No major or other types of civil aviation aerodromes were found to be located in close proximity of the site.  The Civil Aviation Authority has been consulted regarding the development of the project since the commencement of the BA Process. No specific negative impacts or issues have been raised to date by the CAA regarding the project.
Defence Theme  Sensitivity: Low	No	The identification of the site as low sensitivity considering defence is agreed to by the EAP.  The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) has been consulted regarding the development of the project since the commencement of the BA Process. No specific negative impacts or issues have been raised to date regarding the project.
Landscape / Visual Impact Assessment	Yes	A Visual Impact Assessment is included in Appendix D5 of the draft Basic Assessment Report.

<p>Sensitivity: Very High</p> <p>Feature(s): The project area is characterised by mountain tops and high ridges</p>		
<p>Palaeontological Impact Assessment</p> <p>Sensitivity: High</p> <p>Feature(s): The project area may comprise features that have a very high paleontological sensitivity</p>	Yes	<p>A Palaeontological impact assessment is included in Appendix D8 of the draft BA Report, as per the requirements of the National Heritage Resources Act.</p>
<p>Plant species Assessment</p> <p>Sensitivity: Medium</p> <p>Feature(s): The project area has sensitive species 691 and Sensitive species 1261</p>	Yes	<p>A Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact is included in Appendix D2 of the draft Basic Assessment Report.</p>
<p>RFI Assessment</p> <p>Sensitivity: Medium</p> <p>Feature(s): The project area falls within 1 km of a telecommunication facility</p>	No	<p>A small section of the affected property infringes into a 1km buffer from a telecommunications facility. However, the remaining extent of the property is indicated as being of a low sensitivity.</p> <p>The South African Radio Astronomy Observatory (SARAO) has been consulted regarding the development of the project since the commencement of the S&amp;EIR Process. No specific negative impacts or issues have been raised to date by the SARAO regarding the project. The project is also not located within an area considered to be of a high sensitivity.</p> <p>OpenServe has also been consulted regarding the development of the project since</p>

		<p>the commencement of the BA Process.</p> <p>Refer to Appendix D for the Site Verification Report.</p>
<p>Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment</p> <p>Sensitivity: Very High</p> <p>Feature(s): The project area comprises of a Critical Biodiversity Area and Endangered Ecosystem (Vaal-Vet Sandy Grassland and Rand Highveld Grassland)</p>	Yes	<p>A Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact is included in Appendix D2 of the draft Basic Assessment Report.</p>
<p>Geotechnical Assessment</p> <p>Sensitivity: Not indicated</p>	No	<p>The detailed Geotechnical Assessment will be conducted before construction begins as part of the micro-siting of the facility layout. The consideration of geotechnical aspects is of a technical concern rather than an environmental concern.</p>
<p>Socio-Economic Assessment</p> <p>Sensitivity: Not indicated</p>	Yes	<p>A Social Impact Assessment is included in Appendix D6.</p>
<p>Traffic Impact Assessment</p> <p>Sensitivity: Not indicated</p>	Yes	<p>A Traffic Impact Assessment is included in Appendix D10.</p>

Kindly refer to the Site Verification Report included under Appendix D of the DBAR. The site verification report further details reasons for exclusion of specialist studies where applicable.

It must be noted that the DFFE Screening Tool Report indicates that the avian sensitivity for the site is of a low sensitivity, however an Avifaunal Impact Assessment is not indicated as being required for the proposed development. An Avifaunal Impact Assessment (Appendix D4) has however been undertaken for the development as the site is located just south of the Vaal River and to ensure that the Basic Assessment considers the impact of the development on avifauna as per the requirements of the BirdLife South Africa Best Practice Guidelines for the development of solar energy facilities.

## 1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report is structured in accordance with the prescribed contents stipulated in Appendix 1 of Regulation No. 326. It consists of seven sections demonstrating compliance to the specifications of the regulations as illustrated in Table 1.5.

**Table 2.5:** Structure of the report

Requirements for the contents of a BAR as specified in the Regulations		Section in report
<b>Appendix 1. (3) - A basic assessment report must contain the information that is necessary for the competent authority to consider and come to a decision on the application, and must include-</b>		
(a)	details of -	1
	(i) the EAP who prepared the report; and	
	ii) the expertise of the EAP, including a curriculum vitae.	
(b)	the location of the activity, including-	2
	(i) the 21-digit Surveyor General code of each cadastral land parcel;	
	(ii) where available, the physical address and farm name;	
	(iii) where the required information in items (i) and (ii) is not available, the coordinates of the boundary of the property or properties;	
(c)	a plan which locates the proposed activity or activities applied for as well as the associated structures and infrastructure at an appropriate scale, or, if it is-	2
	(i) a linear activity, a description and coordinates of the corridor in which the proposed activity or activities is to be undertaken; or	
	(ii) on land where the property has not been defined, the coordinates within which the activity is to be undertaken;	
(d)	a description of the scope of the proposed activity, including-	2
	(i) all listed and specified activities triggered and being applied for; and	
	(ii) a description of the activities to be undertaken including associated structures and infrastructure.	
(e)	a description of the policy and legislative context within which the development is proposed including:	3

	<p>(i) An identification of all legislation, policies, plans, guidelines, spatial tools, municipal development planning frameworks, and instruments that are applicable to this activity and have been considered in the preparation of the report; and</p> <p>(ii) How the proposed activity complies with and responds to the legislation and policy context, plans, guidelines, tools frameworks and instruments;</p>	
(f)	a motivation for the need and desirability for the proposed development including the need and desirability of the activity in the context of the preferred location;	4
(g)	A motivation for the preferred site, activity and technology alternative.	
(h)	<p>a full description of the process followed to reach the preferred alternative within the site including –</p> <p>(i) details of all the alternatives considered;</p> <p>(ii) details of the public participation process undertaken in terms of regulation 41 of the Regulations, including copies of the supporting documents and inputs;</p> <p>(iii) a summary of the issues raised by interested and affected parties, and an indication of the manner in which the issues were incorporated, or the reasons for not including them.</p> <p>(iv) the environmental attributes associated with the alternatives focusing on the geographical, physical, biological, social, economic, heritage and cultural aspects;</p>	5
	<p>(v) the impacts and risks identified including the nature, significance, consequence, extent, duration and probability of the impacts, including the degree to which these impacts- (aa) can be reversed; (bb) may cause irreplaceable loss of resources; and (cc) can be avoided, managed or mitigated;</p> <p>(vi) the methodology used in determining and ranking the nature, significance, consequences, extent, duration and probability of potential environmental impacts and risks associated with the alternatives;</p> <p>(vii) positive and negative impacts that the proposed activity and alternatives will have on the environment and on the community that may be affected focusing on the geographical, physical, biological, social, economic, heritage and cultural aspects;</p>	6 & 7



	<p>(viii) the possible mitigation measures that could be applied and level of residual risk;</p> <p>(ix) the outcomes of the site selection matrix;</p> <p>(x) if no alternatives, including alternative locations for the activity were investigated, the motivation for not considering such; and</p> <p>(xi) a concluding statement indicating the preferred alternatives, including preferred location of the activity;</p>	
(i)	<p>a full description of the process undertaken to identify, assess and rank the impacts the activity will impose on the preferred location through the life of the activity, including -</p> <p>(i) a description of all environmental issues and risks that were identified during the EIA process; and</p> <p>(ii) an assessment of the significance of each issue and risk and an indication of the extent to which the issue and risk could be avoided or addressed by the adoption of mitigation measures.</p>	
(j)	<p>an assessment of each identified potentially significant impact and risk, including-</p> <p>(i) cumulative impacts;</p> <p>(ii) the nature, significance and consequences of the impact and risk;</p> <p>(iii) the extent and duration of the impact and risk;</p> <p>(iv) the probability of the impact and risk occurring;</p> <p>(v) the degree to which the impact and risk can be reversed;</p> <p>(vi) the degree to which the impact and risk may cause irreplaceable loss of resources; and</p> <p>(vii) the degree to which the impact and risk can be mitigated;</p>	
(k)	<p>where applicable, a summary of the findings and recommendations of any specialist report complying with Appendix 6 to these Regulations and an indication as to how these findings and recommendations have been included in the final assessment report;</p>	6
(l)	<p>an environmental impact statement which contains-</p> <p>(i) a summary of the key findings of the environmental impact assessment:</p> <p>(ii) a map at an appropriate scale which superimposes the proposed activity and its associated structures and infrastructure on the</p>	8



	environmental sensitivities of the preferred site indicating any areas that should be avoided, including buffers; and	
	(iii) a summary of the positive and negative impacts and risks of the proposed activity and identified alternatives;	
(m)	based on the assessment, and where applicable, impact management measures from specialist reports, the recording of proposed impact management objectives, and the impact management outcomes for the development for inclusion in the EMPr;	
(n)	Any aspects which were conditional to the findings of the assessment either by the EAP or specialist which are to be included as conditions of authorisation;	Not applicable
(o)	a description of any assumptions, uncertainties and gaps in knowledge which relate to the assessment and mitigation measures proposed;	8
(p)	a reasoned opinion as to whether the proposed activity should or should not be authorised, and if the opinion is that it should be authorised, any conditions that should be made in respect of that authorisation;	
(q)	where the proposed activity does not include operational aspects, the period for which the environmental authorisation is required and the date on which the activity will be concluded, and the post construction monitoring requirements finalised;	Not applicable
(r)	an undertaking under oath or affirmation by the EAP in relation to- (i) the correctness of the information provided in the report; (ii) the inclusion of comments and inputs from stakeholders and interested and affected parties (I&APs); (iii) the inclusion of inputs and recommendations from the specialist reports where relevant; and (iv) any information provided by the EAP to I&APs and any responses by the EAP to comments or inputs made by I&APs; and	Appendix A to the report
(s)	where applicable, details of any financial provisions for the rehabilitation, closure, and ongoing post decommissioning management of negative environmental impacts;	Not applicable
(t)	any specific information that may be required by the CA; and	Not applicable

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(u)	any other matters required in terms of section 24(4)(a) and (b) of the Act.	Not applicable
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## 2 ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

This section aims to address the following requirements of the regulations:

**Appendix 1.** (3) An BAR (...) must include-

(b) the location of the activity, including-

- (i) the 21-digit Surveyor General code of each cadastral land parcel;
- (ii) where available, the physical address and farm name;
- (iii) where the required information in items (i) and (ii) is not available, the coordinates of the boundary of the property or properties;

(c) a plan which locates the proposed activity or activities applied for as well as the associated structures and infrastructure at an appropriate scale, or, if it is-

- (i) a linear activity, a description and coordinates of the corridor in which the proposed activity or activities is to be undertaken; or
- (ii) on land where the property has not been defined, the coordinates within which the activity is to be undertaken;

(d) a description of the scope of the proposed activity, including-

- (i) all listed and specified activities triggered and being applied for;
- (ii) a description of the associated structures and infrastructure related to the development.

### 2.1 THE LOCATION OF THE ACTIVITY AND PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The activities entail the development of a PV solar facility and associated infrastructure on the Remaining Extent of the Farm Witfontein No. 444. The site is located approximately 15km southeast of the town Viljoenskroon, Free State Province, and situated within the Moqhaka Local Municipality area of jurisdiction (refer to Figure A for the locality map and Figure B for the regional map respectively).

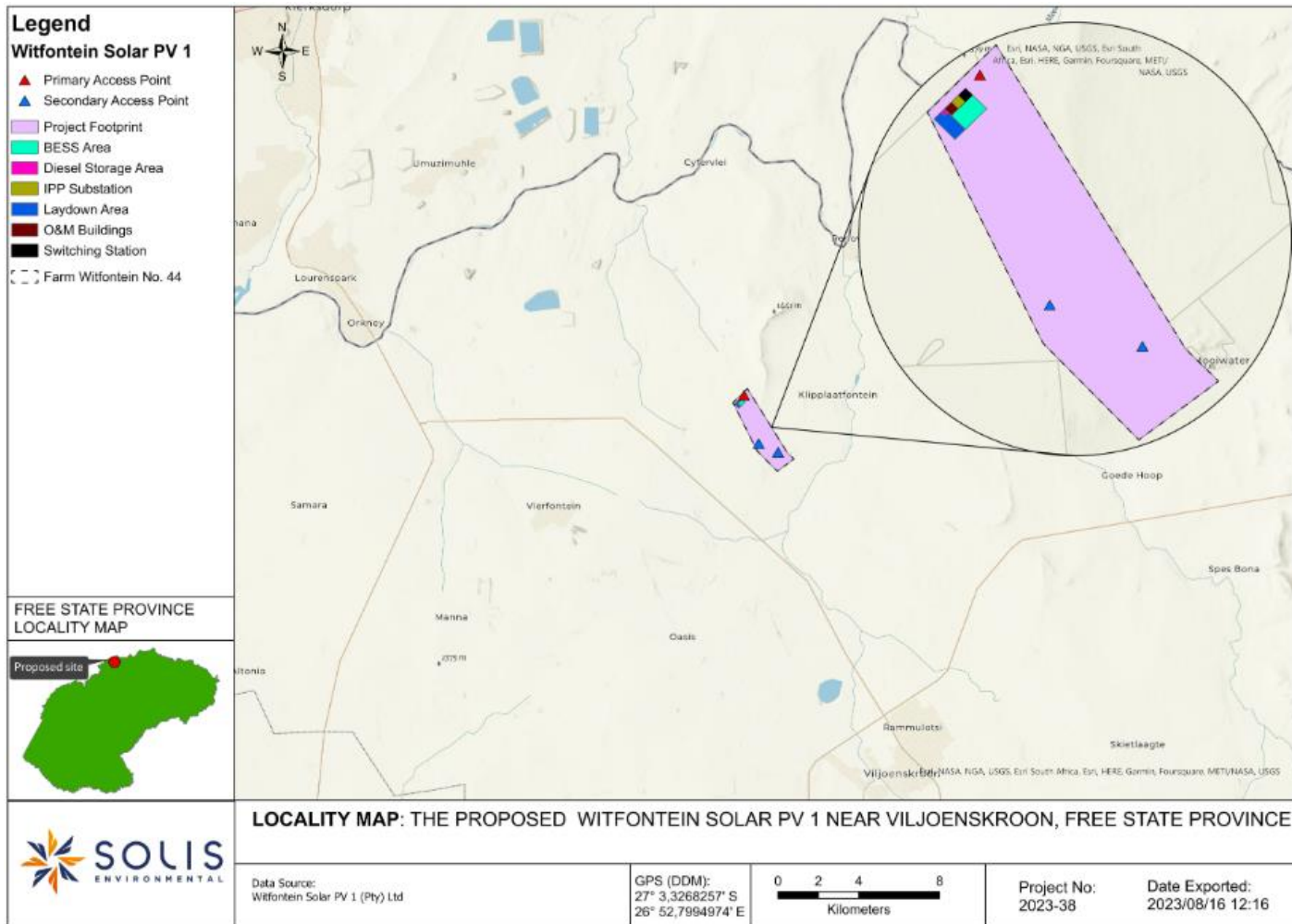
The project entails the generation of up to 160MW electrical power through the installation and operation of photovoltaic (PV) panels. An area of 437 ha has been assessed as part of the Basic Assessment process (hereafter referred to as the “development area”). The full extent of the development area has been considered during the BA process hectares (including supporting infrastructure on site, however excluding the overhead power line) with the aim of confirming the suitability from an environmental and social perspective. The property on which the facility is to be constructed will be leased by Witfontein Solar PV 1 (Pty) Ltd from the property owner for the life span of the project (minimum of 20 years).



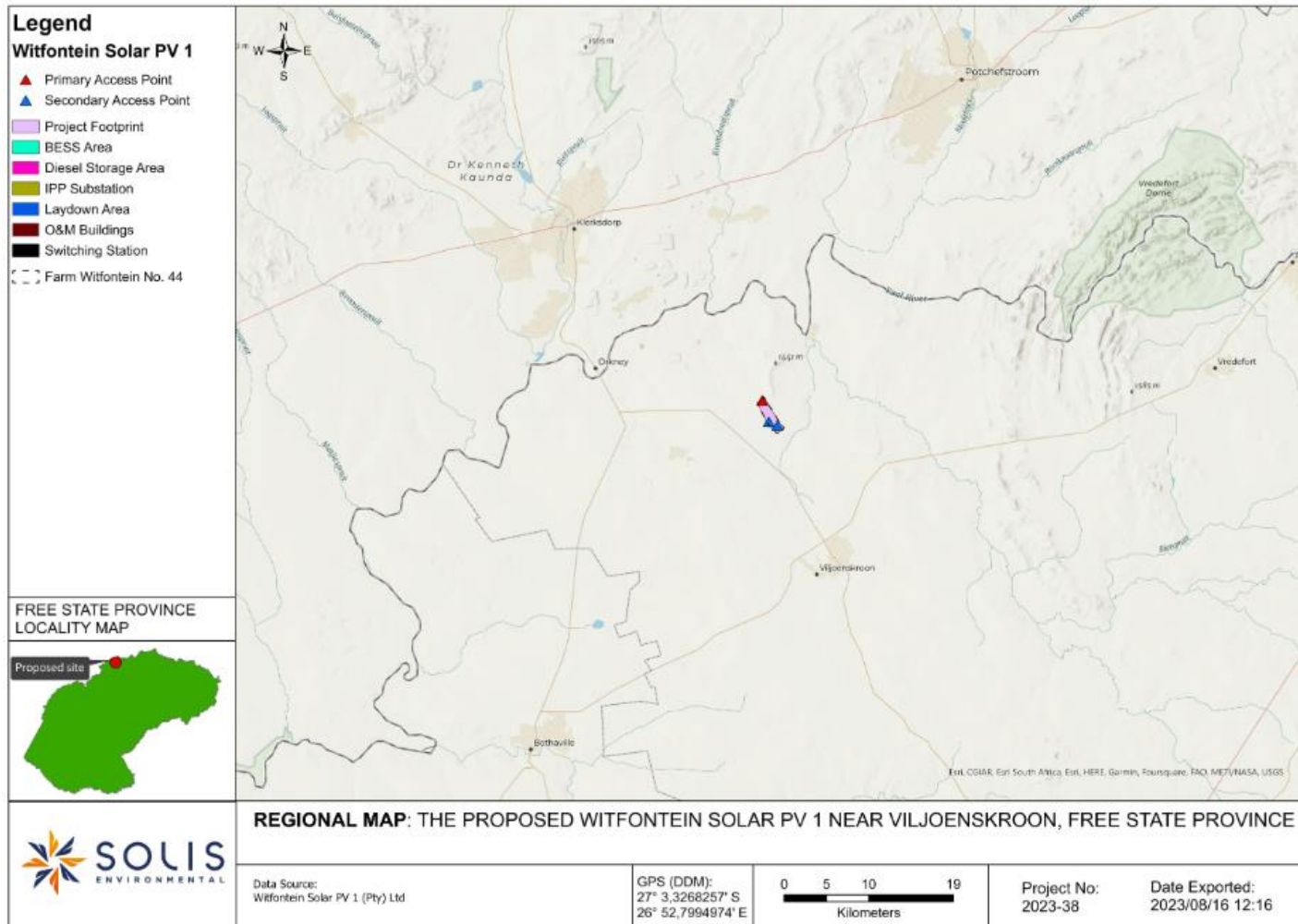
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Energy generated by the facility will be transmitted from the facility substation/Eskom switching station to the existing Mercury Substation via a new 132kV powerline or Zaaiplaats collector substation (alternative substation).

Confirmation in terms of the preferred alternative for the grid corridor will be based on the negotiations with the landowners and feedback provided by the Eskom Grid Access Unit and will be assessed separately from the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project. Refer to Table 2.1 for the general site information for the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project.



**Figure A:** Locality Map



**Figure A: Regional Map**

**Table 2.1:** General site information

Description of affected farm portion	<p><u>Solar PV Facility (Witfontein Solar PV 1):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remaining Extent of the Farm Witfontein No. 444</li> </ul> <p><u>Access Road:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access via the R76 and R501 and the existing farm roads.</li> </ul>
Province	Free State
District Municipality	Fezile Dabi District Municipality
Local Municipality	Moqhaka Local Municipality
Closest towns	The town of Viljoenskroon is located approximately 15 km southeast of the proposed development.
21 Digit Surveyor General codes	<p><u>Solar PV Facility:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remaining Extent of the Farm Witfontein No. 444</li> </ul> <p>F03600000000044400000</p>
Photographs of the site	Included in Plates as an appendix to the Report
Type of technology	Photovoltaic solar facility
Structure Height	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Panels up to 4.5 m</li> <li>Buildings up to 6 m</li> <li>Powerline up to 25 - 32 m</li> <li>BESS up to 4.5 m</li> <li>Lightning Masts on the switching station up to 25 m</li> </ul>
Battery storage	Within a 6-ha area of the development footprint.
Surface area to be covered (Development footprint)	Up to 380 ha
Structure orientation	Tracking system mounted with PV panels. PV panels with single axis tracking is preferred over fixed-axis or double axis tracking systems due to the potential to achieve higher annual energy yields whilst minimising the balance of system (BOS) costs, resulting in the lowest levelized cost of energy (LCOE).

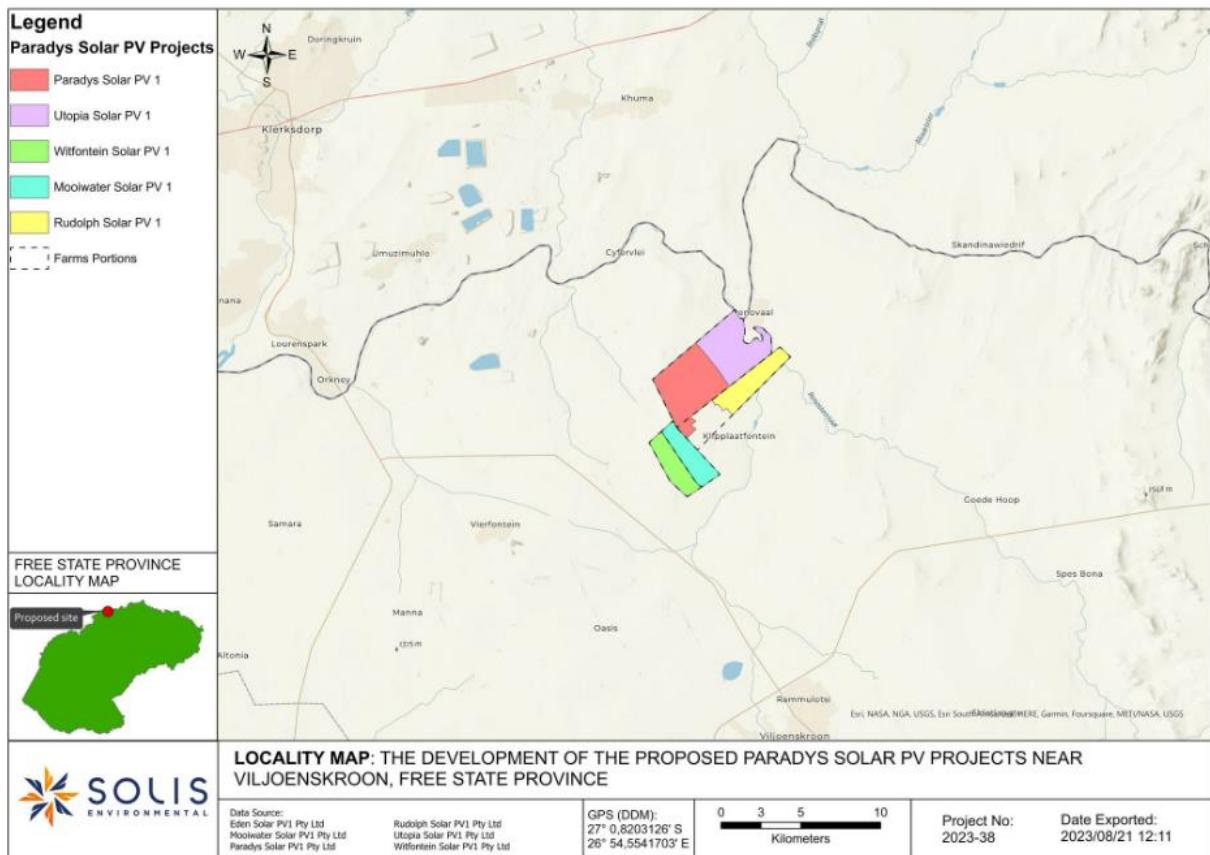




	The development of the PV facility will take into consideration during the final design phase the use of either single axis or bifacial PV tracking structures. Both options are considered feasible for the site.
Laydown area dimensions (area assessed as part of the EIA)	Assessed 437 ha
Generation capacity	Up to 160 MW
Expected production	Up to 387192 MWh

The site is located in a rural area and is bordered by farms where mainly agricultural activities are undertaken and mining activities. The site survey revealed that the affected properties currently consist of grazing cattle as well as crop production (where possible) – refer to plates 1-8- for photographs of the development area.

Further to the Basic Assessment process being undertaken for the Witfontein Solar PV Project 1, five other solar energy facilities are proposed directly adjacent to the development under assessment. These five developments are known as Utopia Solar PV Project 1 (Located on the Remaining Extent of the Farm Paradys No. 137 and proposed by Utopia Solar PV 1 (Pty) Ltd), Paradys Solar PV Project 1 (Located on the Remaining Extent of the Farm Paradys No. 137 and proposed by Paradys Solar PV 1 (Pty) Ltd), Mooiwater Solar PV Project 1 (Located on Portion 1 of Farm Mooiwater No. 408 and proposed by Mooiwater Solar PV 1 (Pty) Ltd), and Rudolph Solar PV Project 1 (Located on the Remaining Extent of the Farm Rudpolh No. 48 and proposed by Rudolph Solar PV 1 (Pty) Ltd).



**Figure C:** Combined locality map

## 2.2 ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

The National Environmental Management Act identifies listed activities (in terms of Section 24) which are likely to have an impact on the environment. These activities cannot commence without obtaining an EA from the relevant competent authority. Sufficient information is required by the competent authority to make an informed decision and the project is therefore subject to an environmental assessment process which can be either a Basic Assessment Process or a full Scoping and Environmental Impact Assessment process.

The EIA Regulation No. 327, 325 and 324 outline the activities that may be triggered and therefore require EA. The following listed activities with special reference to the proposed development is triggered:

**Table 2.2:** Listed activities

Relevant notice:	Activity No (s)	Description of each listed activity as per project description:
Listing Notice 1, GNR 327 (as amended in 2017)	Activity 11(i)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The development of facilities or infrastructure for the transmission and distribution of electricity (i) outside urban areas or industrial complexes with a capacity of more than 33 but less than 275 kilovolts.”</i></li> <li>• Activity 11(i) is triggered as the proposed photovoltaic solar facility will transmit and distribute electricity of 132 kilovolts outside an urban area.</li> </ul>
Listing Notice 1, GNR 327 (as amended in 2017)	Activity 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure, for the storage, or for the storage and handling, of a dangerous good, where such storage occurs in containers with a combined capacity of 80 cubic metres or more but not exceeding 500 cubic metres.”</i></li> <li>• Activity 14 is triggered since the proposed development will need to develop infrastructure for the storage and handling of dangerous goods (diesel and oils) in containers with combined capacity of 80 cubic metres. The capacity will not exceed 500 cubic metres. The goods are required for construction activities to be undertaken during the construction phase, including the operation of machinery and equipment, as well as during the operation phase for the undertaking of routine maintenance activities.</li> </ul>
Listing Notice 1, GNR 327 (as amended in 2017)	Activity 24(ii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The development of a road (ii) with reserve wider than 13,5 meters, or where no reserve exists where the road is wider than 8 meters;</i></li> </ul>

Relevant notice:	Activity No (s)	Description of each listed activity as per project description:
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activity 24(ii) is triggered as the internal and perimeter roads will vary between 6 and 12 meters in width.</li> </ul>
Listing Notice 1, GNR 327 (as amended in 2017)	Activity 19(i)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“The infilling or depositing of any material of more than 10cubic metres into, or the dredging, excavation, removal or moving of soil sand, shells, shell grit, pebbles or rock of more than 10 cubic meters from a watercourse.”</li> <li>Activity 19 is triggered as an exorheic depression wetland (artificial dam) is located within the site and the development footprint of the Witfonein Solar PV 1. This dam will be removed for the placement of the development footprint.</li> </ul>
Listing Notice 1, GNR 327 (as amended in 2017)	Activity 28(ii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“Residential, mixed, retail, commercial, industrial or institutional developments where such land was used for agriculture or afforestation on or after 1998 and where such development (ii) will occur outside an urban area, where the total land to be developed is bigger than 1 hectare.”</i></li> <li>Activity 28(ii) is triggered as portions of the affected farm has been previously used for grazing and the property will be re-z1d to “special” use.</li> </ul>
Listing Notice 1, GNR 327 (as amended in 2017)	Activity 56(ii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>The widening of a road by more than 6 metres, or the lengthening of a road by more than 1 kilometre (ii) where no reserve exists, where the existing road is wider than 8 metres...”</i></li> <li>Activity 56 (ii) is triggered as existing roads will require widening of up to 6 m and/or lengthening by more than 1 km, to</li> </ul>

Relevant notice:	Activity No (s)	Description of each listed activity as per project description:
		accommodate the movement of heavy vehicles and cable trenching activities.
Listing Notice 2, GNR 325 (as amended in 2017)	Activity 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The development of facilities or infrastructure for the generation of electricity from a renewable resource where the electricity output is 20 megawatts or more.”</i></li> <li>• Activity 1 is triggered since the proposed photovoltaic solar facility will generate up to 160 megawatts electricity through the use of a renewable resource.</li> </ul>
Listing Notice 2, GNR 325 (as amended in 2017)	Activity 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The clearance of an area of 20 hectares or more of indigenous vegetation.”</i></li> <li>• The cumulative area of indigenous vegetation to be cleared for the entire project (excluding linear activities) will exceed 20 ha.</li> </ul>
Listing Notice 3, GNR 324 (as amended in 2017)	Activity 4 (b)(i)(bb)(ee):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The development of a road wider than 4 metres with a reserve less than 13,5 metres (b) in the Free State, (i) outside urban areas and within (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy, (ee) critical biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the competent authority or in bioregional plans.”</i></li> <li>• Activity 4 (b)(i)(bb)(ee): is triggered as internal and perimeter access roads with a width of between 6 and 10 meters will be constructed and a portion of the site is located in a Critical Biodiversity Area 1 (CBA1).</li> </ul>
Listing Notice 3, GNR 517 (as amended in 2021)	Activity 10 (b)(i)(bb)(ee)(hh):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure for the storage, or storage and handling of a dangerous good, where such storage occurs in containers with a combined capacity of 30 but not exceeding</i></li> </ul>



Relevant notice:	Activity No (s)	Description of each listed activity as per project description:
		<p><i>80 cubic metres (b) in the Free State (i) outside urban areas and within (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy, (ee) Critical Biodiversity Areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the competent authority or in bioregional plans and (hh) Areas within a watercourse or wetland, or within 100 metres from the edge of a watercourse or wetland.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Activity 10(b)(i)(ee)(hh) is triggered since the proposed development will need to develop infrastructure for the storage and handling of dangerous goods (diesel and/or oils) in containers with a capacity exceeding 30 but not exceeding 80 cubic metres. A portion of the site is located in a Critical Biodiversity Area 1 (CBA1).</li> </ul>
Listing Notice 3, GNR 324 (as amended in 2017)	Activity 12 (b)(i)(ii)(iv):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>“The clearance of an area of 300 square metres or more of indigenous vegetation (b) in the Free State (i) within any critically endangered or endangered ecosystem listed in terms of section 52 of the NEMBA or prior to the publication of such a list, within an area that has been identified as critically endangered in the National Spatial Biodiversity Assessment 2004, (ii) within critical biodiversity areas identified in bioregional plans and (iv) areas within a watercourse or wetland; or within 100 metres from the edge of watercourse or wetland.”</i></li> <li>Activity 12(b)(i) is triggered since the project site falls with a Critical Biodiversity Area 1 (CBA1).</li> </ul>

Relevant notice:	Activity No (s)	Description of each listed activity as per project description:
Listing Notice 3, GNR 324 (as amended in 2017)	Activity 18 (b)(i)(bb)(ee)(hh):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>“The widening of a road by more than 4 metres, or the lengthening of a road by more than 1 kilometre (b) in the Free State (i) outside urban areas, within (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy, (ee) Critical biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the competent authority or in bioregional plans and (hh) Areas within a watercourse or wetland; or within 100 metres from the edge of a watercourse or wetland.”</i></li> <li>• Activity 18 (b)(i)(ee)(hh) is triggered since the existing access road to the site will need to be widened by more than 4 metres. The project is located within the Free State Province and outside urban areas. A portion of the site is located in a Critical Biodiversity Area 1 (CBA1) and wetland systems were identified on site and within the 500m Regulated Area.</li> </ul>

The potentially most significant impacts will occur during the construction phase of the development, which will include the following activities:

- Site clearing and preparation: Certain areas of the site and access road will need to be cleared of vegetation and some areas may need to be levelled.
- Civil works to be conducted:
  - Terrain levelling if necessary – Levelling will be minimal as the potential site chosen is relatively flat.
  - Laying foundation - The structures will be connected to the ground through cement pillars, cement slabs or metal screws. The exact method will depend on the detailed geotechnical analysis.
  - Construction of access and internal roads/paths – The majority of the access road will follow existing, gravel farm roads that may require widening up to 6 to 12 m (inclusive of storm water infrastructure). Where new sections of road need to be constructed/lengthened, this will be gravel/hard surfaced access road and only tarred if necessary. A network of gravel internal access roads and a perimeter road, each with a

width of up to 6 m, will be constructed to provide access to the various components of the PV development.

- Trenching – all Direct Current (DC) and Alternating Current (AC) wiring within the PV plant will be buried underground. Trenches will have a river sand base, space for pipes, backfill of sifted soil and soft sand and concrete layers where vehicles will pass.

### 2.3 PHOTOVOLTAIC TECHNOLOGY

The term photovoltaic describes a solid-state electronic cell that produces direct current electrical energy from the radiant energy of the sun through a process known as the Photovoltaic Effect. This refers to light energy placing electrons into a higher state of energy to create electricity. Each PV cell is made of silicon (i.e., semiconductors), which is positively and negatively charged on either side, with electrical conductors attached to both sides to form a circuit. This circuit captures the released electrons in the form of an electric current (direct current). The key components of the proposed project are described below:

- PV Panel Array - To produce up to 160MW, the proposed facility will require numerous linked cells placed behind a protective glass sheet to form a panel. Multiple panels will be required to form the solar PV arrays which will comprise the PV facility. The PV panels will be mounted on a single-axis tracking system. The tracking system will follow the sun from east to west during the day, maximising the amount of solar radiation falling onto the surface on the panels, thereby maximising their yield.
- Wiring to Inverters - Sections of the PV array will be wired to inverters. The inverter is a pulse width mode inverter that converts direct current (DC) electricity to alternating current (AC) electricity at grid frequency.
- Connection to the grid - Connecting the array to the electrical grid requires transformation of the voltage from the inverter's output voltage to 33kV (the typical medium voltage levels encountered in a utility scale PV facility) to 132kV (at which voltage level power will be fed into the Eskom grid). The normal components and dimensions of a distribution rated electrical substation will be required. Output voltage from the inverter is stepped up in transformers to 132kV. An onsite substation will be required to step the voltage up to 132kV, after which the power will be evacuated into the national grid via the proposed power line. It is expected that generation from the facility will connect to the national grid. Corridor will cover options to connect to the Mercury Substation or the Zaaiplaats Solar PV1 collector substation (a planned substation, under development by Mulilo, that forms part of the Mercury Solar PV cluster).
- Electrical reticulation network – An internal electrical reticulation network will be required and will be laid 1.5m underground as far as practically possible.
- Supporting Infrastructure – The following auxiliary buildings with basic services including water and electricity will be required on site:





- Operations & Maintenance Building / Office
  - Switch gear and relay room
  - Staff lockers and changing room
  - Security control
  - Offices
  - Ablutions with conservancy tanks
  - Construction camps (on laydown area)
  - Workshop (Part of O&M Buildings)
  - Temporary sanitation facilities during construction
  - Storage Warehouse (Part of O&M Buildings)
- Battery storage – Battery Storage Facilities with a maximum height of 5m and a capacity of 2500MWh will be installed in a 6-hectare area.
  - Roads - Access is most likely to be obtained via R76 Regional Road. This will be confirmed in the Traffic Impact Assessment which then lead onto the Vermaasdrift road which is the preferred route. The alternative route is also access via these roads.
  - Fencing - For health, safety and security reasons, the facility will be required to be fenced off from the surrounding farm. Fencing with a height of 3-4.5 meters will be used.

## 2.4 LAYOUT DESCRIPTION

The layout plan will consider and adhere to the limitations of the site and aspects such as environmentally sensitive areas, roads, fencing and servitudes on site (refer to Figures A to G). The total surface area proposed for the layout includes the PV panel arrays (spaced to avoid shadowing), access and maintenance roads and associated infrastructure (buildings, power inverters, power line, battery energy storage system, on-site substation and switching station and perimeter fences). Limited features of environmental significance exist on site, however the sensitivities that do exist have to be avoided in the layout of the solar facility. Table 2.3 below provides detailed information regarding the layout for the proposed facility (refer to Figures A to G).

**Table 2.3:** Technical details for the proposed facility

Component	Description / dimensions
Height of PV panels	Up to 4.5 meters
Area of PV Array	Up to 380 ha
Area occupied by inverter / transformer stations / substations / BESS	BESS: Up to 6 ha Facility substation: Up to 1 ha Collector Substation: Up to 1 ha
Capacity of on-site substation	132kV
Capacity of the power line	132kV

<b>Area occupied by both permanent and construction laydown areas</b>	Up to 6 ha
<b>Area occupied by buildings</b>	A 33 kV switch room, a gate house, ablutions, workshops, storage and warehousing areas, site offices and a control centre: Up to 12.5 ha
<b>Battery storage facility</b>	Maximum height: ~5m Storage capacity: 2500MWh
<b>Length of internal roads</b>	To be confirmed
<b>Power line servitude width</b>	31m

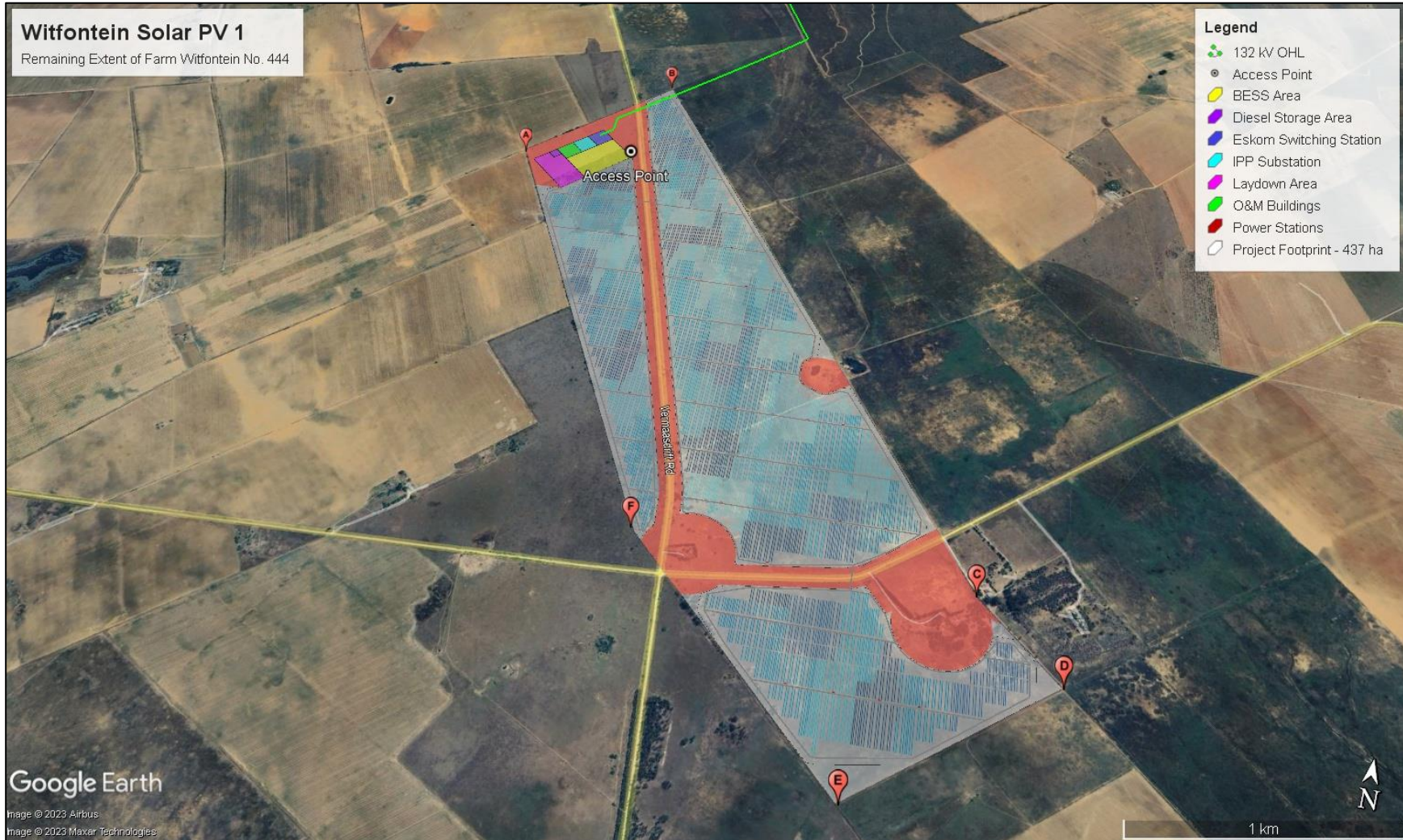
Table 2.4 provides the co-ordinate points for the proposed project site and associated infrastructure.

**Table 2.4:** Development co-ordinates

<b>Co-ordinates</b>			
<b>Site Boundary</b>	A	27° 2'35.07"S	26°52'1.32"E
	B	27° 2'11.72"S	26°52'25.84"E
	C	27° 3'53.75"S	26°53'34.96"E
	D	27° 4'5.12"S	26°53'47.50"E
	E	27° 4'24.92"S	26°53'18.71"E
	F	27° 3'51.76"S	26°52'42.64"E
<b>Supporting Infrastructure</b>			
<b>Laydown Area 1</b>	1	27° 2'40.26"S	26°52'14.95"E
	2	27° 2'43.65"S	26°52'11.05"E
	3	27° 2'36.84"S	26°52'3.56"E
	4	27° 2'34.54"S	26°52'6.05"E
<b>Diesel Storage Area</b>	5	27° 2'35.63"S	26°52'7.28"E
	6	27° 2'34.49"S	26°52'8.49"E
	7	27° 2'33.50"S	26°52'7.28"E
	8	27° 2'34.54"S	26°52'6.05"E
<b>O&amp;M Buildings</b>	1	27° 2'33.50"S	26°52'7.28"E

	2	27° 2'31.01"S	26°52'9.91"E
	3	27° 2'33.24"S	26°52'12.30"E
	4	27° 2'35.64"S	26°52'9.92"E
<b>BESS</b>	A	27° 2'28.53"S	26°52'17.51"E
	B	27° 2'33.23"S	26°52'22.53"E
	C	27° 2'40.19"S	26°52'15.08"E
	D	27° 2'35.64"S	26°52'9.92"E
<b>IPP Substation</b>	1	27° 2'28.63"S	26°52'12.40"E
	2	27° 2'31.01"S	26°52'9.91"E
	3	27° 2'33.24"S	26°52'12.30"E
	4	27° 2'30.88"S	26°52'14.77"E
<b>Eskom Switching Station</b>	1	27° 2'28.63"S	26°52'12.40"E
	2	27° 2'26.51"S	26°52'14.96"E
	3	27° 2'28.55"S	26°52'17.40"E
	4	27° 2'30.88"S	26°52'14.77"E

The Figure provided below correspond to the point location as presented on Table 2.4 above.



**Figure 2.1:** Co-ordinates points of the project boundary



**Figure 2.2:** Co-ordinate points of supporting infrastructure

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## **2.5 SERVICES PROVISION**

The following sections provide information on services required on the site e.g., water, sewage, refuse removal, and electricity.

### **2.6 Water**

Adequate provision of water will be a prerequisite for the development. Three options will be considered, in order of priority by the Developer:

1. Water will be trucked from the nearest municipality water take-off point during construction phase. During the operational phase, supply will be sourced from the Local Municipality (LM). The Developer will approach the Local Municipality to enquire whether they can provide all or part of the total water requirements of the Project. Specific arrangements will be agreed with the Local Municipality in a Service Level Agreement (SLA), following the appointment of preferred bidder during the financial close period.
2. Water will be abstracted from an existing borehole within the affected property, subject to NWA requirements.
3. A new borehole on site, subject to NWA requirements.

The estimated amount of water required during construction is 14 500L per day. The estimated maximum amount of water required during the operational phase is 1700L per day.

### **2.7 Stormwater**

To avoid soil erosion, it is recommended that the clearing of vegetation be limited where possible. Stormwater management and mitigation measures will be included in the Environmental Management Programme (EMPr) - refer to Appendix G.

### **2.8 Sanitation**

During construction phase, portable chemical toilets will be utilised, that will be serviced privately or by the local municipality. Wastewater will be disposed of at a licensed landfill site.

No effluent will be produced during operation of the facility, except for normal sewage from site and operations staff. Formal sanitation (such as chemical or water borne sanitation facilities) will be provided as far as practically possible.

### **2.9 Solid Waste**

During the construction phase, solid waste will mainly be in the form of construction material, hazardous waste (i.e., fuel, grease, etc.), excavated substrate and domestic solid waste. All waste will be disposed of in scavenger proof bins and temporarily placed in a central location for removal by an appointed contractor and disposed into a registered landfill site. Where possible the re-use



and recycling of waste material will be encouraged. Any other waste and excess material will be removed once construction is complete and disposed of at a registered waste facility. The relevant Local Municipality(s) will be contacted to formally confirm that it has the capacity to provide the proposed development with these services for the lifetime of the project (30 years). During the operational phase household waste will be removed to a licensed landfill site by a private contractor or by the local municipality particularly where re-use and recycling is not practical.

## **2.10 Electricity**

Electricity supply during construction will be provided by either on-site diesel generators or arranged with the Local Municipality or Eskom Distribution, via an existing or new 11 kV powerline. During operation, the electricity will be supplied by the PV facility/ via the main grid connection or via the installed construction supply. Efficient electricity appliances will be used as far as possible on site. Where possible, borehole pumps will be powered by solar energy.

## **2.11 DECOMMISSIONING OF THE FACILITY**

The operating period will be 20 up to 30 years from the commencement date of the operation phase. Thereafter two rights of renewal periods of 40 years and 20 years will be relevant. It is anticipated that new PV technologies and equipment will be implemented, within the scope of the Environmental Authorisation, when influencing the profitability of the solar facility.

A likely extension of the facility's lifetime would involve putting new, more efficient, solar panels on the existing structures to improve the efficiency of the facility as the technology improves. The specifications of these new panels will be the same as the current panels under consideration, but the conversion efficiency of sunlight to energy will be greater (comparable to new computer chips, that is the same, but faster and more efficient). If, for whatever reason the PV facility halts operations, the Environmental Authorisation and contract with the landowner will be respected during the decommissioning phase.

The decommissioning process will consist of the following steps:

- The PV facility would be disconnected from the Eskom grid.
- The BESS, inverters and PV modules would be disconnected and disassembled.
- Concrete foundations (if used) would be removed and the structures would be dismantled.
- Wastewater storage conservancy tank (if implemented) would be responsibly removed and the area would be rehabilitated.
- The underground cables would be unearthed and removed and buildings would be demolished and removed.
- The fencing would be dismantled and removed.



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- The roads can be retained should the landowner choose to retain them, alternatively the roads will be removed and the compaction will be reversed.
  - Most of the wires, steel and PV modules are recyclable and would be recycled to a reasonable extent. The Silicon and Aluminium in PV modules can be removed and reused in the production of new modules.
  - Any rubble and non-recyclable materials will be disposed of at a registered landfill facility.

The rehabilitation of the site would form part of the decommissioning phase. The aim would be to restore the land to its original form (or as close as possible). The rehabilitation activities would include the following:

- Removal of all structures and rubble;
- Breaking up compaction where required, loosening of the soil and the redistribution of topsoil; and
- Restoration of the surface to the original contours and application of hydro seeding.



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## 3 LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CONTEXT

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This section aims to address the following requirements of the regulations:

**Appendix 1.** (3) A BAR (...) must include-

(e) a description of the policy and legislative context within which the development is located and an explanation of how the proposed development complies with and responds to the legislation and policy context.

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Environmental decision making with regards to solar PV plants is based on numerous policy and legislative documents. These documents inform decisions on project level environmental authorisations issued by the National Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) as well as comments from local and district authorities. Moreover, it is significant to note that they also inform strategic decision making reflected in the IDPs and SDFs. Therefore, to ensure streamlining of environmental authorisations it is imperative for the proposed activity to align with the principles and objectives of key national, provincial and local development policies and legislation. The following acts and policies and their applicability to the proposed development are briefly summarised:

- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act No. 108 of 1996)
- National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998) [NEMA]
- The National Energy Act, 2008 (Act 34 of 2008)
- National Water Act, 1998 (Act No. 36 of 1998)
- National Environmental Management: Waste Act, 2008 (Act No. 59 of 2008)
- National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act, 2004 (Act No. 39 of 2004)
- The National Heritage Resources Act, 1999 (Act No. 25 of 1999)
- Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act, 1983 (Act No. 85 of 1983)
- The National Forests Act, 1998 (Act 84 of 1998)
- The White Paper on the Energy Policy of the Republic of South Africa (1998)
- The White Paper on Renewable Energy (2003)
- Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) for South Africa (2010-2030)
- National Development Plan of 2030
- National Infrastructure Plan of South Africa (2012)



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- New Growth Path Framework (2010)
  - Climate Change Bill (2018)
  - Climate Change Bill (2021) – for public comment
  - Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs) (2010 – 2030)
  - Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for wind and solar PV Energy in South Africa (2014)
  - Free State Provincial Spatial Development Framework (PSDF) (2012)
  - Fezile Dabi District Municipality Final Integrated Development Plan (IDP) 2022-2027
  - Moqhaka Local Municipality Final Integrated Development Plan (IDP) 2022-2027

The key principles and objectives of each of the legislative and policy documents are briefly summarised in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 to provide a reference framework for the implications for the proposed activity.

### 3.2 LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

**Table 3.1:** Legislative context for the construction of photovoltaic solar facilities

LEGISLATION	ADMINISTERING AUTHORITY	DATE	SUMMARY / IMPLICATIONS FOR PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
<b>The Constitution of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996)</b>	National Government	1996	<p>The Constitution is the supreme law of the Republic and all law and conduct must be consistent with the Constitution. The Chapter on the Bill of Rights contains a number of provisions, which are relevant to securing the protection of the environment. Section 24 states that “every1 has the right to (a) an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being and (b) to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that – (i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation; (ii) promote conservation; and (iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development. The Constitution therefore, compels government to give effect to the people’s environmental right and places government under a legal duty to act as a responsible custodian of the country’s environment. It compels government to pass legislation and use other measures to protect the environment, to prevent pollution and ecological degradation, promote conservation and secure sustainable development.</p> <p>The development of the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project and the aspects related thereto considers the creation of an environment which is not harmful or degraded through the implementation of appropriate mitigation measures.</p>
<b>The National Environmental Management Act</b>	National Department of Environmental Affairs (now known as the Department of	1998	NEMA provides for co-operative governance by establishing principles and procedures for decision-makers on matters affecting the environment. An important function of the Act is to serve as an enabling Act for the promulgation of legislation to effectively address integrated environmental management. Some of the principles in the Act are accountability; affordability;

<b>(Act No. 107 of 1998)</b>	Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment) and the Free State Province Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (DESTEA)	cradle to grave management; equity; integration; open information; polluter pays; subsidiary; waste avoidance and minimisation; co-operative governance; sustainable development; and environmental protection and justice.	The mandate for EIA lays with the National Environmental Management Act (107 of 1998) and the EIA Regulations No. 324, 325, 326, and 327 promulgated in terms of Section 24 of NEMA, as amended on 11 June 2021 (GN 517). The EIA Regulations determine that an Environmental Authorisation is required for certain listed activities, which might have a detrimental effect on the environment.	The BA process undertaken for the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project is in-line with the requirements of NEMA for the Application for Environmental Authorisation.
<b>The National Energy Act (Act No. 34 of 2008)</b>	Department of Mineral Resources and Energy	1 of the objectives of the National Energy Act was to promote diversity of supply of energy and its sources. In this regard, the preamble makes direct reference to renewable resources, including solar: <i>“To ensure that diverse energy resources are available, in sustainable quantities, and at affordable prices, to the South African economy, in support of economic growth and poverty alleviation, taking into account environmental management requirements (...); to provide for (...) increased generation and consumption of renewable energies...”</i> (Preamble).	Considering that the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project is proposed to make use of PV technology and the solar resource for the generation of electricity, the proposed project is in-line with the Act.	
<b>The National Water Act (Act No. 36 of 1998)</b>	Department of Water Affairs (now known as Department of Water and Sanitation)	Sustainability and equity are identified as central guiding principles in the protection, use, development, conservation, management and control of water resources. The intention of the Act is to promote the equitable access to water and the sustainable use of water, redress past racial and gender discrimination, and facilitate economic and social development. The Act provides the rights of access to basic water supply and sanitation, and environmentally, it		

provides for the protection of aquatic and associated ecosystems, the reduction and prevention of pollution and degradation of water resources.

As this Act is founded on the principle that National Government has overall responsibility for and authority over water resource management, including the equitable allocation and beneficial use of water in the public interest, a person can only be entitled to use water if the use is permissible under the Act. Chapter 4 of the Act lays the basis for regulating water use.

The National Water Act will be applicable in terms of obtaining the relevant license for the water uses triggered.

<p><b>National Environmental Management: Waste Act (Act No. 59 of 2008)</b></p>	<p>National Department Environmental Affairs (DEA) (now known as the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment)</p>	<p>2008</p>	<p>NEMWA has been developed as part of the law reform process enacted through the White Paper on Integrated Pollution and Waste Management and the National Waste Management Strategy (NWMS). The objectives of the Act relate to the provision of measures to protect health, well-being and the environment, to ensure that people are aware of the impact of waste on their health, well-being and the environment, to provide for compliance with the measures, and to give effect to section 24 of the Constitution in order to secure an environment that is not harmful to health and well-being.</p> <p>Regulations No. R921 (of 2013) promulgated in terms of Section 19(1) of the National Environmental Management: Waste Act (59 of 2008) determines that no person may commence, undertake or conduct a waste management activity listed in this schedule unless a license is issued in respect of that activity. It is not envisaged that a waste permit will be required for the proposed development as no listed activities in terms of waste management are expected to be triggered.</p>
<p><b>National Environment</b></p>	<p>National Department Environmental Affairs (DEA)</p>	<p>2004</p>	<p>The object of this Act is to protect the environment by providing reasonable measures for the protection and enhancement of the quality of air in the Republic; the prevention of air pollution</p>

<p><b>Management: Air Quality Act (Act No. 39 of 2004)</b></p>	<p>(now known as the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment)</p>	<p>and ecological degradation; and securing ecologically sustainable development while promoting justifiable economic and social development.</p> <p>Regulations No. R248 (of 31 March 2010) promulgated in terms of Section 21(1)(a) of the National Environmental Management Act: Air Quality Act (39 of 2004) determine that an Atmospheric Emission License (AEL) is required for certain listed activities, which result in atmospheric emissions which have or may have a detrimental effect on the environment. The Regulation also sets out the minimum emission standards for the listed activities. It is not envisaged that an Atmospheric Emission License will be required for the proposed development.</p>
<p><b>The National Heritage Resources Act (Act No. 25 of 1999)</b></p>	<p>South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA)</p>	<p>The Act aims to introduce an integrated and interactive system for the management of heritage resources, to promote good governance at all levels, and empower civil society to nurture and conserve heritage resources so that they may be bequeathed to future generations and to lay down principles for governing heritage resources management throughout the Republic. It also aims to establish the South African Heritage Resources Agency together with its Council to co-ordinate and promote the management of heritage resources, to set norms and maintain essential national standards and to protect heritage resources, to provide for the protection and management of conservation-worthy places and areas by local authorities, and to provide for matters connected therewith.</p> <p>The Act protects and manages certain categories of heritage resources in South Africa. For the purposes of the Heritage Resources Act, a “heritage resource” includes any place or object of cultural significance. In this regard the Act makes provision for a person undertaking an activity listed in Section 28 of the Act to notify the resources authority. The resources authority may request that a heritage impact assessment be conducted if there is reason to believe that heritage resources will be affected.</p>

	<p>A case file with reference number 21389 has been opened on SAHRIS for the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project and all relevant documents were submitted for their comments and approval. The Heritage Impact Assessment undertaken for the solar PV facility is included as Appendix D7.</p>
<p><b>Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (Act No. 85 of 1983)</b></p> <p>National and Provincial Government</p>	<p>The objective of the Act is to provide control over the utilisation of the natural agricultural resources of the Republic in order to promote the conservation of the soil, the water sources and the vegetation and the combating of weeds and invader plants; and for matters connected therewith.</p> <p>Consent will be required from the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) in order to confirm that the proposed development is not located on high potential agricultural land and to approve the long-term lease agreement. A Soils and Agricultural Impact Assessment have been provided for the Witfontein Solar 1 Project and included as Appendix D1.</p>
<p><b>The National Forests Act, 1998 (Act 84 of 1998)</b></p> <p>Department of Environmental Affairs (now known as the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment)</p>	<p>The purposes of this Act are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) promote the sustainable management and development of forests for the benefit of all;</li> <li>(b) create the conditions necessary to restructure forestry in State forests;</li> <li>(c) provide special measures for the protection of certain forests and trees;</li> <li>(d) promote the sustainable use of forests for environmental, economic, educational, recreational, cultural, health and spiritual purposes.</li> <li>(e) promote community forestry;</li> <li>(f) promote greater participation in all aspects of forestry and the forest products industry by persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination.</li> </ul> <p>Section 12(1) read with s15(1) of the NFA stated that the Minister may declare a particular tree, group of trees, woodland; or trees belonging to a particular species, to be a protected tree, group of trees, woodland or species. A list of protected tree species was gazetted in GN 635 of</p>

6 December 2019. The effect of the declaration is that no person may (a) cut, disturb, damage or destroy; or (b) possess, collect, remove, transport, export, purchase, sell, donate or in any other manner acquire or dispose of any protected tree, or any forest product derived from a protected tree, except under a license granted by the Minister; or in terms of an exemption published by the Minister in the Gazette.

An Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project and is included in Appendix D2.

### 3.3 POLICY CONTEXT

**Table 3.2:** Policy context for the construction of photovoltaic solar facilities

POLICY	ADMINISTERING AUTHORITY	DATE	SUMMARY / IMPLICATIONS FOR PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT
<b>The White Paper on the Energy Policy of the Republic of South Africa</b>	Department of Mineral Resources and Energy	1998	<p>The White Paper on the Energy Policy of the Republic of South Africa establishes the international and national policy context for the energy sector, and identifies the following energy policy objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing access to affordable energy services</li> <li>• Improving energy governance</li> <li>• Stimulating economic development</li> <li>• Managing energy-related environmental and health impacts</li> <li>• Securing supply through diversity</li> <li>• Energy policy priorities</li> </ul> <p>The White Paper sets out the advantages of renewable energy and states that Government believes that renewables can in many cases provide the least cost energy service, particularly when social and environmental costs are included. The White Paper acknowledges that South Africa has neglected the</p>



development and implementation of renewable energy applications, despite the fact that the country's renewable energy resource base is extensive, and many appropriate applications exist.

The White Paper notes that renewable energy applications have specific characteristics that need to be considered. Advantages include:

- Minimal environmental impacts in operation in comparison with traditional supply technologies; and
- Generally lower running costs, and high labour intensities.

Disadvantages include:

- Higher capital costs in some cases;
- Lower energy densities; and
- Lower levels of availability, depending on specific conditions, especially with sun and wind-based systems.

Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project is in line with this policy as it proposes the generation of renewable energy from the solar resource.

<p><b>The White Paper on Renewable Energy</b></p>	<p>Department of 2003 Mineral Resources and Energy</p>	<p>This White Paper on Renewable Energy supplements the <i>White Paper on Energy Policy</i>, which recognises that the medium and long-term potential of renewable energy is significant. This Paper sets out Government's vision, policy principles, strategic goals and objectives for promoting and implementing renewable energy in South Africa.</p> <p>The White Paper notes that while South Africa is well-endowed with renewable energy resources that have the potential to become sustainable alternatives to fossil fuels, these have thus far remained largely untapped. Government's long-term goal is the establishment of a renewable energy industry producing modern energy carriers that will offer in future years a sustainable, fully non-subsidised alternative to fossil fuels. The medium-term (10-year) target set in the White Paper is: <i>10 000 GWh (0.8 Mtoe) renewable</i></p>
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energy contribution to final energy consumption by 2013, to be produced mainly from biomass, wind, solar and small-scale hydro. The renewable energy is to be utilised for power generation and non-electric technologies such as solar water heating and bio-fuels. This is approximately 4% (1667 MW) of the projected electricity demand for 2013 (41539 MW) (Executive Summary, ix).

The Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project is in line with this paper as it proposes the generation of renewable energy from the solar resource.

<b>Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) for South Africa</b>	Department of Mineral Resources and Energy	<p>2010-2030</p> <p>The Integrated Resource Plan for Electricity for South Africa of 2010–2030 (further referred to as the IRP) is a “living plan” which is expected to be revised and updated continuously as necessary due to changing circumstances. According to the Summary of the plan the current IRP for South Africa, which was originally initiated by the Department of Energy (DoE) in June 2010 (the Department is now known as Department of Mineral Resources and Energy), led to the Revised Balanced Scenarios (RBS) for the period 2010–2030.</p> <p><i>“This scenario was derived based on the cost-optimal solution for new build options (considering the direct costs of new build power plants), which was then “balanced” in accordance with qualitative measures such as local job creation”.</i> In addition to all existing and committed power plants, the RBS included 11,4 GW of renewables, which relates to the proposed Witfontein Solar PV. In 2010 several changes were made to the IRP model. The main changes in the IRP were the disaggregation of renewable energy technologies to explicitly display solar photovoltaic (PV), concentrated solar power (CSP), and wind options (RSA, 2011a).</p> <p>The summary of the IRP further explains that traditional cost-optimal scenarios were developed based on the previously mentioned changes in the IRP. This resulted in the Policy-Adjusted IRP, which stated that:</p> <p><i>“The installation of renewables (solar PV, CSP and wind) have been brought forward in order to accelerate a local industry; To account for the uncertainties associated with the costs of renewables and fuels, a nuclear fleet of 9,6 GW is included in the IRP; The emission constraint of the RBS (275 million tons of carbon dioxide per year after 2024) is maintained; and Energy efficiency demand-side management (EEDSM) measures are maintained at the level of the RBS”</i> (RSA, 2011a:6).</p>
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*“The Policy-Adjusted IRP includes the same amount of coal and nuclear new builds as the RBS, while reflecting recent developments with respect to prices for renewables. In addition to all existing and committed power plants (including 10 GW committed coal), the plan includes 9,6 GW of nuclear; 6,3 GW of coal; 17,8 GW of renewables; and 8,9 GW of other generation sources” (RSA, 2011a:6).*

The IRP highlights the commitments before the next IRP. The commitments pertaining to the purpose of the proposed project in renewable energy is: *“Solar PV programme 2012-2015: In order to facilitate the connection of the first solar PV units to the grid in 2012 a firm commitment to this capacity is necessary. Furthermore, to provide the security of investment to ramp up a sustainable local industry cluster, the first four years from 2012 to 2015 require firm commitment.”*

*“Solar PV 2016 to 2019: As with wind, grid upgrades might become necessary for the second round of solar PV installations from 2016 to 2019, depending on their location. To trigger the associated tasks in a timely manner, a firm commitment to these capacities is necessary in the next round of the IRP at the latest. By then, the assumed cost decreases for solar PV will be confirmed” (IRP, 2011a:17).*

In conclusion the IRP recommends that an accelerated roll-out in renewable energy options should be allowed with regards to the benefits of the localization in renewable energy technologies (RSA, 2011a). It is however important to take note that since the release of the IRP in 2011 there has been a number of developments in the energy sector of South Africa. Therefore, the IRP was updated and was open for comments until March of 2017. The new IRP of 2019 was formally published in October 2019. For the revision scenario, analysis was conducted. The results revealed that for the period ending 2030 that: *“The committed Renewable Energy Independent Power Producers Programme, including the 27 signed projects and Eskom capacity rollout ending with the last unit of Kusile in 2022, will provide more than sufficient capacity to cover the projected demand and decommissioning of plants up to approximately 2025”; “Imposing annual build limits on renewable energy will not affect the total cumulative capacity and the energy mix for the period up to 2030”; and “the scenario without renewable energy annual build limits provides the least-cost option by 2030” (RSA, 2018:34).*

Lastly, the draft IRP of 2018 also included the scenario analysis for the period post 2030. Here it was observed that: *“Imposing annual build limits on renewable energy will restrict the cumulative renewable installed capacity and the energy mix for this period; adopting no annual build limits on renewables or imposing a more stringent strategy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions implies that no new coal power plants will be built in the future unless affordable cleaner forms of coal-to-power are available; and the scenario without renewable energy annual build limits provides the least-cost option by 2050”* (RSA, 2018:34–35).

In the final IRP of 2019 key considerations were taken into account together with required actions to be taken for the IRP of 2019 to be credible. In terms of renewable energy technologies like solar and wind, the IRP stated that *“The application of renewable build limits ‘smooths out’ the capacity allocations for wind and solar PV which provides a constant pipeline of projects to investment; this addresses investor confidence”*. The decision stated against this key consideration is to *“retain the current annual build limits on renewables (wind and PV) pending the finalization of a just transition plan”* (RSA, 2019:46). Hereby the IRP also recognises renewable technologies’ potential to diversify the electricity mix, create new industries and job opportunities and localize across the value chain (RSA, 2019:13).

The Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project is in line with this plan as it proposes the generation of renewable energy from the solar resource and will contribute to the energy mix of the country as set out in this plan.

<b>National Development Plan of 2030</b>	The Presidency: - National Planning Commission	The National Development Plan aims to <i>“eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030”</i> (RSA, undated). In order to eliminate or reduce inequality, the economy of South Africa needs to grow faster in order to benefit all South Africans. In May 2010 a Draft National Development Plan was drafted, which highlighted the nine (9) key challenges for South Africa. The highest priority areas according to the plan are considered to be the creation of employment opportunities and to improve the quality of national education. In this regard, the plan sets out three (3) priority areas, namely, to raise employment by a faster growing economy, improve the quality of education, and to build the capability of the state in order to play a more developmental and transformative role. 1 of the key challenges identified was that the economy is
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unsustainably resource intensive and the acceleration and expansion of renewable energy was identified as a key intervention strategy to address this challenge.

The Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project will contribute to the intervention strategy as identified within the plan.

<b>National Infrastructure Plan of South Africa</b>	Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Commission	2012	<p>In the year 2012 the South African Government adopted a National Infrastructure Plan (hereafter referred to as the Plan). The aim of this Plan is to transform the economic landscape, while strengthening the delivery of basic services and creating new employment opportunities. This Plan also supports the integration of African communities, and also sets out the challenges and enablers that our country needs in order to respond to the planning and development of infrastructure with regards to fostering economic growth (RSA, 2012). The Plan has developed eighteen (18) strategic integrated projects (further referred to as SIPs). These SIPs stretch over all nine (9) provinces, covering social and economic infrastructure, and projects that enhances development and growth. Of the eighteen (18), five (5) are geographically focused, three (3) spatial, three (3) energy, three (3) social infrastructure, two (2) knowledge, 1 (1) regional integration, and 1 (1) water and sanitation focussed. The three (3) SIPs according to the Plan, which are energy focused and correlate to the proposed project are as follow:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SIP 8: Green energy in support of the South African economy;</li> <li>• SIP 9: Electricity generation to support socio-economic development; and</li> <li>• SIP 10: Electricity transmission and distribution for all.</li> </ul> <p>SIP 8 according to the Plan <i>“support sustainable green energy initiatives on a national scale through a diverse range of clean energy options as envisaged in the IRP 2010 and support bio-fuel production facilities”</i>. The purpose of SIP 9 according to the Plan is to <i>“accelerate the construction of new electricity generation capacity in accordance with the IRP 2010 to meet the needs of the economy and address historical imbalances”</i>. SIP 9 should also monitor the implementation of major projects such as new power stations like Medupi, Kusile and Ingula. Lastly, SIP 10 aims to <i>“expand the transmission and distribution</i></p>
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*network to address historical imbalances, provide access to electricity for all and support economic development” (RSA, 2012:20).*

The Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project is in line with this plan as it proposes the generation of renewable energy from the solar resource which supports socio-economic development and will contribute to meeting the electricity demand of the country as set out in this plan.

**New Growth Path Framework** Department of Economic Development -

The New Growth Path was developed after 16 years of South Africa’s democracy, to respond to emerging opportunities and risks while building on policies. This framework provides a dynamic vision on how to collectively achieve a more developed, equitable and democratic society and economy. This framework mainly reflects the commitment of the South African Government to create employment opportunities for its people in all economic policies (RSA, 2011b).

This framework sets out the markers for job creation and growth and identify where there are viable changes in the character and structure of production, in order to create a more inclusive, greener economy in the long-term. It is stated in the framework that in order for this framework to reach its objectives, the Government is committed to:

- Identify the possible areas of employment creation; and
- Develop a policy to facilitate employment creation especially with regards to social equity, sustainable employment and growth in the creation of employment activities (RSA, 2011b).

This framework also identifies investments in five key areas, 1 of which is energy. This framework also states that the green economy is a priority area, which includes the construction of and investment in renewable energy technologies like solar (RSA, 2011b). In this regard it will also assist creating employment opportunities over the medium- and long-term.

Considering that the construction of and investment in renewable energy is a key area identified within the framework, the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project is considered to be in-line with the framework.

<p><b>Climate Change Bill</b></p>	<p>National Department of Environmental Affairs (now known as the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment)</p>	<p>2018</p>	<p>On 08 June 2018 the Minister of Environmental Affairs published the Climate Change Bill (“the Bill”) for public comment. The Bill provides a framework for climate change regulation in South Africa aimed at governing South Africa’s sustainable transition to a climate resilient, low carbon economy and society. The Bill provides a procedural outline that will be developed through the creation of frameworks and plans. The following objectives are set within the Bill:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide for the coordinated and integrated response to climate change and its impacts by all spheres of government in accordance with the principles of cooperative governance;</li> <li>• Provide for the effective management of inevitable climate change impacts through enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change, with a view to building social, economic, and environmental resilience and an adequate national adaptation response in the context of the global climate change response;</li> <li>• Make a fair contribution to the global effort to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that avoids dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system within a timeframe and in a manner that enables economic, employment, social and environmental development to proceed in a sustainable manner.</li> </ul> <p>The Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project comprises a renewable energy generation facility and would not result in the generation or release of emissions during its operation.</p>
<p><b>Climate Change Bill</b></p>	<p>National Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment</p>	<p>2021</p>	<p>The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment has published a new Climate Change Bill for public comment. The bill notes that climate change represents an urgent threat to human societies and the planet, and requires an effective, progressive and incremental response from both government and citizens.</p>

It recognises that South Africa has a global responsibility to reduce greenhouse gasses and that the anticipated impacts arising as a result of climate change have the potential to undermine achieving of the country's developmental goals.

The main objective of the bill is to enable the development of an effective climate change response and the long-term, just transition to a climate-resilient and lower-carbon economy and society, and to provide for matters connected therewith.

The Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project comprises a renewable energy generation facility and would not result in the generation or release of emissions during its operation.

<b>Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs)</b>	The Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Committee	<p>2010 - 2030</p> <p>The Presidential Infrastructure Coordinating Committee (PICC) is integrating and phasing investment plans across 18 Strategic Infrastructure Projects (SIPs) which have five core functions: to unlock opportunity, transform the economic landscape, create new jobs, strengthen the delivery of basic services and support the integration of African economies. A balanced approach is being fostered through greening of the economy, boosting energy security, promoting integrated municipal infrastructure investment, facilitating integrated urban development, accelerating skills development, investing in rural development and enabling regional integration. SIP 8 and 9 of the energy SIPs supports the development of the solar energy facility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SIP 8: Green energy in support of the South African economy: Support sustainable green energy initiatives on a national scale through a diverse range of clean energy options as envisaged in the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP 2010 – 2030) and supports bio-fuel production facilities.</li> <li>• SIP 9: Electricity generation to support socio-economic development: The proposed Witfontein Solar PV is a potential SIP 9 Project as electricity will be generated and social and economic upliftment, development and growth will take place within the surrounding communities. It would become a SIP 9 project if selected as a Preferred Bidder project by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy. SIP 9 supports the acceleration of the construction of new electricity</li> </ul>
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generation capacity in accordance with the IRP 2010 to meet the needs of the economy and address historical imbalances.

The Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project could be registered as a SIP project once selected as a preferred bidder under the REIPPP Programme. The project would then contribute to the above-mentioned SIPs.

<p><b>Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for wind and solar PV Energy in South Africa</b></p>	<p>National Department of Environmental Affairs (now known as the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment)</p>	<p>2014</p>	<p>The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) has committed to contribute to the implementation of the National Development Plan and National Infrastructure Plan by undertaking Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) to identify adaptive processes that integrate the regulatory environmental requirements for Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs) while safeguarding the environment. The wind and solar photovoltaic (PV) SEA was accordingly commissioned by DEA in support of SIP 8, which aims to facilitate the implementation of sustainable green energy initiatives.</p> <p>This SEA identifies areas where large scale wind and solar PV energy facilities can be developed in terms of SIP 8 and in a manner that limits significant negative impacts on the environment, while yielding the highest possible socio-economic benefits to the country. These areas are referred to as Renewable Energy Development Zones (REDZs).</p> <p>The REDZs also provide priority areas for investment into the electricity grid. Currently 1 of the greatest challenges to renewable energy development in South Africa is the saturation of existing grid infrastructure and the difficulties in expanding the grid. Proactive investment in grid infrastructure is the likely to be the most important factor determining the success of REDZs. Although it is intended for the SEA to facilitate proactive grid investment in REDZs, such investment should not be limited to these areas. Suitable wind and solar PV development should still be promoted across the country and any proposed development must be evaluated on its own merit.</p> <p>The proposed site falls within the Klerksdorp REDZ (refer to Figure G).</p>
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<b>Free State Provincial Spatial Development Framework (PSDF)</b>	Free State 2012 Provincial Government	<p>The Free State PSDF is a policy document that promotes a ‘developmental state’ in accordance with national and provincial legislation and directives. It aligns with the Free State Provincial Growth and Development Strategy which has committed the Free State to ‘building a prosperous, sustainable and growing provincial economy which reduces poverty and improves social development’.</p> <p>The PSDF includes comprehensive plans and strategies that collectively indicate which type of land-use should be promoted in the Province, where such land-use should take place, and how it should be implemented and managed. In broad terms, the PSDF:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicates the spatial implications of the core development objectives of the Free State Provincial Growth and Development Strategy.</li> <li>• Serves as a spatial plan that facilitates local economic development.</li> <li>• Lays down strategies, proposals and guidelines as it relates to sustainable development.</li> <li>• Facilitates cross-boundary co-operation between municipalities, adjoining provinces, and bordering countries.</li> <li>• Serves as a manual for integration and standardisation of the planning frameworks of all spheres of government in the Province.</li> </ul> <p>The Free State Provincial Growth and Development Strategy states that sustainable economic development is the only effective means by which the most significant challenge of the Free State, namely poverty, can be addressed. The PSDF gives practical effect to sustainable development, which is defined as development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.</p> <p>The PSDF is prepared in accordance with bioregional planning principles that were adapted to suit the site-specific requirements of the Free State. It incorporates and complies with the relevant protocols, conventions, agreements, legislation and policy at all applicable levels of planning, ranging from the international to the local.</p>
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The PSDF builds upon achievements and learns from mistakes of the past, reacts to the challenges of our time, incorporates the traditional knowledge of the people of the Free State, and builds upon international best-practice and technology.

The development of the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project is in-line with the framework based on the contributions and opportunities presented by a development of this nature.

<b>Fezile Dabi District Municipality Reviewed Final Integrated Development Plan (IDP)</b>	<b>Dabi</b>	Fezile District Municipality	Dabi	2022-2027	<p>The long-term vision of the Fezile Dabi DM is: “Improving the lives of citizens and progressively meeting their basic, social and economic needs, thereby restoring community confidence and trust in government”.</p> <p>The above stated vision defines what Fezile Dabi District Municipality would like to attain over medium to long-term, and for that achievement to effectively materialise, their mission is that: “Fezile Dabi District Municipality will strive to be a more responsive and accountable municipality towards sustainable development”.</p> <p>Of the eighteen (18) SIPs that are contained in the National Infrastructure Plan (NIP), there are eight which impact on the Fezile Dabi District and therefore need to be recognised and where appropriate; the municipality’s plans will be aligned with these SIPs in an effort to respond to national government’s service delivery initiatives. Furthermore, work is to be d1 to align key cross-cutting areas, namely human settlement planning and skills development in line with each of the Strategic Infrastructure Projects, especially:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Green Energy in support of the South African economy (SIP 8): Supporting sustainable green energy initiatives on a national scale through a diverse range of clean energy options as envisaged in the Integrated Resource Plan (IRP 2010).</li> <li>• Electricity Generation to support socio-economic development (SIP 9): acceleration of the construction of new electricity generation capacity in accordance with the IRP 2010 to meet the needs of the economy; and addressing historical imbalances.</li> </ul>
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Considering the plans for the alignment of the DM's plans with SIP 8 and SIP 9 it is confirmed that the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project is in line with the plan.

<b>Moqhaka Local Municipality Final Integrated Development Plan (IDP)</b>	Moqhaka Local Municipality	2022 - 2027	<p>The vision of the Moqhaka LM is to “...strive to <i>be a Municipality that creates an enabling environment for socio-economic growth and sustainable development.</i>”</p> <p>The Mission Statement is “<i>To maintain and enhance quality of life by providing effective, efficient quality and affordable services equitably and facilitating sustainable socio-economic growth through active community participation.</i>”</p> <p>The vision and mission of the municipality have led to the conceptualisation of the following strategic objectives below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broaden access and improve quality of municipal services.</li> <li>• Create an environment that promotes the development of the local economy and facilitates job creation.</li> <li>• Build united, non-racial, integrated and safer communities.</li> <li>• Promote a culture of participatory and good governance.</li> <li>• Improved organisational cohesion and effectiveness.</li> <li>• Improve overall financial management by developing and implementing appropriate financial management policies, procedures, and systems.</li> </ul> <p>The development of Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project will contribute to the local economy of the area and therefore assist (albeit to a limited extent) with socio-economic growth and therefore contribute to the strategic objectives of the LM.</p>
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### 3.4 OTHER LEGISLATION

Other legislation mainly refers to the following:

- Planning legislation governing the rezoning process and approval of the layout plan.
- Design standards and legislation for services provision such as water, sewerage, electricity, etc.
- Municipal bylaws related to building plans, building regulations, etc.

### 3.5 RELEVANT GUIDANCE

The following guidance was considered in conducting the EIA:

- The Equator principles III (2020)<sup>3</sup>
- World Bank Group Environmental, Health and Safety General Guidelines (EHS Guidelines) (2007)
- Environmental, Health, and Safety Guidelines for Electric Power Transmission and Distribution (2007)
- International Finance Corporation's Policy on Environmental and Social Sustainability (2012)
- DEA. (2013). Draft National Renewable Energy Guideline. Department of Environmental Affairs, Pretoria, South Africa
- DEA, (2012), Guideline 5 – Final companion to the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations of 2010
- DEA, (2012), Guideline 7 – Public participation in the Environmental Impact Assessment process
- DEA, (2012), Guideline 9 – Need and desirability
- DEA, (2006), Guideline 3 – General guide to the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations
- DEAT, (2006), Guideline 4 – Public participation in support of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations
- DEAT, (2006), Guideline 5 – Assessment of alternatives and impacts in support of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations
- BirdLife, (2017). Best Practise Guidelines Birds & Solar Energy: Guidelines for assessing and monitoring the impact of solar power generating facilities on bird in southern Africa.

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<sup>3</sup> Although this report is not written in terms of the Equator Principles (EPs), it fully acknowledges that the EPs will need to be complied with should funding for the project be required.

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### 3.6 CONCLUSION

The Basic Assessment process was undertaken in accordance with the EIA Regulations (as amended) published in GNR 326, in terms of Section 24(5) and 44 of the NEMA as amended as well as all relevant National legislation, policy documents, national guidelines, the World Bank EHS Guidelines, the IFC Performance Standards, and the Equator Principles.

The legislative and policy context plays an important role in identifying and assessing the potential social impacts associated with the proposed development, as well as an indication of the need and desirability of the proposed development from a national, provincial and local level. For this reason, the proposed development project will be assessed in terms of its fit with the key legislative, policy and planning documents discussed above.

The main findings of the review of the policy documents on all spheres of Government indicated that strong support was given towards renewable energy, specifically PV solar energy and therefore it is concluded that there is support for the development of the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project. The White Paper on the Energy Policy of the Republic of South Africa of 1998 stated that due to the fact that renewable energy resources operate from an unlimited resource base, i.e., the sun, renewable energy can increasingly contribute towards a long-term sustainable energy supply for future generations. This policy further highlights that due to the unlimited resources base of renewable energy in South Africa, renewable energy applications, like PV solar energy and associated infrastructure, are more sustainable in terms of social and environmental costs. The Integrated Resource Planning for Electricity for South Africa of 2010–2030, the National Infrastructure Plan of South Africa and the New Growth Path Framework all support the development of the renewable energy sector. In particular, the IRP also indicated that 43% of the energy generation in South Africa is allocated to renewable energy applications. On a District and Local level limited attention is given explicitly to renewable sources like PV solar energy, however the documents reviewed do make provision for such developments and efficiency in improving the quality of lives in terms of efficient physical infrastructure as well as socio-economic growth. At Provincial, District and Local level the policy documents support the applications of renewables.

The review of the relevant policies and documents related to the energy sector therefore indicate that renewables, like solar energy and the establishment of solar energy facilities and associated infrastructure, are supported on all spheres of Government. The proposed Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project is therefore supported by the related policy and planning documents reviewed in this section of the report.

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## 4 THE NEED AND DESIRABILITY

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This section aims to address the following requirements of the regulations:

**Appendix 1.** (3) An BAR (...) must include-

(f) a motivation for the need and desirability for the proposed development including the need and desirability of the activity in the context of the preferred location;

### 4.1 THE NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY

The proposed activity is a direct result of the growing demand for electricity and the need for renewable energy in South Africa. According to Eskom, the demand for electricity in South Africa has been growing at approximately 3% per annum. This growing demand, fuelled by increasing economic growth and social development, is placing increasing pressure on South Africa's existing power generation capacity. Coupled with this, is the growing awareness of environmentally responsible development, the impacts of climate change and the need for sustainable development.

Over 90% of South Africa's electricity generation is coal based, the World bank estimates that this results in an annual, per capita carbon emission of ~8.9 tons per person. Based on 2008 fossil-fuel CO<sub>2</sub> emissions statistics released by the Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Centre, South Africa is the 13th largest carbon dioxide emitting country in the world and the largest emitter in Africa (Boden, et al. 2011). In August 2021 an article confirmed that South Africa is the 12th highest greenhouse gas emitter in the world (source: <https://www.news24.com/fin24/economy/eskom-will-only-able-to-meet-global-air-quality-standards-by-2050-owing-to-financial-woes-20210818>).

The proposed project is intended to form part of the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy's (DMREs) Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement (REIPPP) Programme or any other appropriate energy generation programmes/opportunities. The REIPPP Programme aims to secure 14 725 Megawatts (MW) of new generation capacity from renewable energy sources, while simultaneously diversifying South Africa's electricity mix. According to the 2021 State of the Nation Address, Government will soon be initiating the procurement of an additional 11 800 MW of power from renewable energy, natural gas, battery storage and coal in line with the Integrated Resource Plan 2019 and fulfilling their commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and its Paris Agreement which include the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Eskom, the largest greenhouse gas emitter of South Africa, has committed in principle to net zero emission by 2050 and to increase its renewable capacity.

During the 2022 State of the Nation Address it was indicated that during the past year the government had taken "firm steps" to bring additional generation capacity online as quickly as possible to close the shortfall in terms of electricity. As a result, it was confirmed that several new generation projects will be coming online over the next few years. During the recent 2023 State of the Nation Address, the government has embarked upon allowing private developers to generate electricity. There are now more than 100 projects, which are expected to provide over 9 000 MW of new capacity over time. A number of companies that have participated in the renewable energy programme will soon enter construction and deliver a total of 2 800 MW of new capacity. Through the Just Energy Transition Investment Plan, R1.5 trillion will be invested in our economy over the next five years in new frontiers




such as renewable energy, green hydrogen and electric vehicles. A number of projects are already underway, including the development of a new facility by Sasol at Boegoebaai in the Northern Cape, the Prieska Power Reserve in the Free State, and the Hydrogen Valley initiative in Limpopo, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.

Besides capacity additions, several assumptions have changed since the promulgation of IRP 2010–2030. Key assumptions that changed include the electricity demand projection, Eskom’s existing plant performance, as well as new technology costs. These changes necessitated the review and update of the IRP which resulted in the draft IRP 2018 that was made available for comment and updated to the draft IRP 2019 as per table 4.1 below:

**Table 4.1: Published Draft IRP 2019 (Approved by Cabinet for Consultation)**

	Coal	Coal (Decommissioning)	Nuclear	Hydro	Storage	PV	Wind	CSP	Gas & Diesel	Generation, CoGen, Biomass, Landfill)
<b>Current Base</b>	37 149		1 860	2 100	2 912	1 474	1 980	300	3 830	499
<b>2019</b>	2 155	-2373					244	300		Allocation to the extent of the short term capacity and energy gap.
<b>2020</b>	1 433	-527				114	300			
<b>2021</b>	1 433	-1403				300	818			
<b>2022</b>	711	-844			513	400	1000	1600		
<b>2023</b>	750	-555				1000	1600		500	
<b>2024</b>			1860				1600		1000	500
<b>2025</b>						1000	1600			500
<b>2026</b>		-3218					1600			500
<b>2027</b>	750	-847					1600	2000		500
<b>2028</b>		-475				1000	1600			500
<b>2029</b>		-1684			1575	1000	1600			500
<b>2030</b>		-1050		2500		1000	1600			500
<b>TOTAL INSTALLED CAPACITY by 2030 (MW)</b>	33364		1860	4600	5000	8288	17742	600	6380	
<b>% Total Installed Capacity (% of MW)</b>	43		2.36	5.84	6.35	10.52	22.53	0.76	8.1	
<b>% Annual Energy Contribution (% of MWh)</b>	58.8		4.5	8.4	1.2*	6.3	17.8	0.6	1.3	



- Installed Capacity
- Committed / Already Contracted Capacity
- Capacity Decommissioned
- New Additional Capacity
- Extension of Koeberg Plant Design Life
- Includes Distributed Generation Capacity for own use

According to the South African Energy Sector Overview (2021), there is currently 1 723 MW of installed PV capacity, while an additional 2 600 MW and 860 MW from wind and solar has been rewarded as part of Bid window 5 and 6, respectively (latter announced in 2022).

#### 4.2 THE DESIRABILITY OF THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY

The facility’s contribution towards sustainable development and the associated benefits to society in general is discussed below:

- Lesser dependence on fossil fuel generated power - The deployment of the facility will have a positive macro-economic impact by reducing South Africa’s dependence on fossil fuel generated power and assisting the country in meeting its growing electricity demand.



- Increased surety of supply - By diversifying the sources of power in the country, the surety of supply will increase. The power demands of South Africa are ever increasing and by adding solar power this demand can be met, even exceeded without increasing pollution in relation to the use of fossil fuels. The project has the potential of “securing” economic activity by assisting in removing supply constraints if Eskom generation activities result in a supply shortfall. When supply is constrained, it represents a limitation to economic growth. When a supply reserve is available, it represents an opportunity for economic growth.
- Local economic growth - The proposed project will contribute to local economic growth by supporting industry development in line with provincial and regional goals and ensuring advanced skills are drawn to the Free State Province. The project will likely encounter widespread support from government, civil society and businesses, all of whom see potential opportunities for revenues, employment and business opportunities locally. The development of the solar PV facility will in turn lead to growth in tax revenues for local municipalities and sales of carbon credits, resulting in increased foreign direct investment.
- Lower costs of alternative energy - An increase in the number of solar facilities commissioned will eventually reduce the cost of the power generated through solar facilities. This will contribute to the country’s objective of utilising more renewable energy and less fossil fuel-based power sources. It will assist in achieving the goal to generate 14 725 MW of electricity from renewable energy as per the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement (REIPPP) Programme of the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy. The Government will be initiating the procurement of an additional 11 800 MW of renewable energy as stated during the 2021 State of the Nation Address.
- Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions - The additional power supplied through solar energy will reduce the reliance on the combustion of fossil fuels to produce power. The South African electricity grid is predominantly coal-fired and therefore GHG emissions intensive (coal accounts for more than 92% of the fuel used in South Africa’s electricity generation). The reduction of GHG emissions as a result of the project implementation will be achieved due to reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from combustion of fossil fuel at the existing grid-connected PV facilities and plants which would likely be built in the absence of the project activity.
- CDM Project - A solar energy facility also qualifies as a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project (i.e., a financial mechanism developed to encourage the development of renewable technologies).
- Climate change mitigation - On a global scale, the project makes a contribution to greenhouse gas emission reduction and therefore contributes toward climate change mitigation.
- Reduced environmental impacts - The reduction in non-renewable electricity consumed from the grid will not only result in a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, but also the prevention of negative impacts associated with coal mining. For example, coal power requires high volumes of water, in areas of South Africa where water supply is already over-stretched and water availability is highly variable. Photovoltaic solar energy technology also does not produce the sulphur emissions, ash or coal mining concerns associated with conventional coal fired electricity generation technologies resulting in a relatively low level of environmental

impacts. It is a clean technology which contributes toward a better-quality environment for employees and nearby communities.

- Social benefits - The project activity is likely to have significant long-term, indirect positive social impacts that may extend to a regional and even national scale. The larger scale impacts are to be derived in the utilization of solar power and the experience gained through the construction and operation of the PV facility. In future, this experience can be employed at other similar solar installations in South Africa.
- Provision of job opportunities - The main benefit of the proposed development operating in the area is that local companies or contractors will be hired for the duration of the construction period. The operational phase will provide permanent job opportunities to the local communities from the surrounding area since security guards and general labourers will be required on a full-time basis. Approximately 347 employment opportunities will be created during the construction phase and up to 16 permanent employment opportunities during the operational phase.
- Indirect socio-economic benefits - The increase in the demand for services such as accommodation, transportation, security, general maintenance and catering will generate additional indirect socio-economic benefits for the local community members.
- Effective use of resources – The predominant land use of the site is limited to grazing and some crop fields. The proposed development in this specific area will generate alternative land use income through rental for the proposed energy facility, which will have a positive impact on agriculture. It will provide the farming enterprise with increased cash flow and rural livelihood, and thereby improve the financial sustainability of agricultural activities.
- Location of the activity within a REDZ - The Renewable Energy Development Z1s (REDZ) have a key role to play in South Africa's just energy transition. The REDZ create priority areas for investment in the electricity grid. Since the site is located within a REDZ it contributes to the desirability of the project.
- Increased access to electricity: Despite the abundant availability of coal, electricity generation and the development of related infrastructure has been inadequate in providing access to electricity for entire population of approximately 60 million people. South Africa has been described as a country with an energy-deprived population with more than 1.5 million households comprising approximately 5 million people that are without electricity. The national electricity crises of 2010 and the resultant effects on South African residents and the economy has highlighted how highly reliant we are on electricity as a source of energy. Government has committed to developing measures to promote energy saving, reduce energy costs to the economy, and reduce the negative impact of energy use on the environment.
- Cumulative impacts of low to medium significance – No cumulative impacts with a high residual risk have been identified. In terms of the desirability of the development of sources of renewable energy therefore, it may be preferable to incur a higher cumulative loss in such

a region as this 1, than to lose land with a higher environmental value elsewhere in the country.

## 5 DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

This section aims to address the following requirements of the regulations:

**Appendix 1.** (3) A BAR (...) must include-

- (g) A motivation for the preferred site, activity and technology alternative;
- (h) a full description of the process followed to reach the proposed preferred alternative, within the site, including –
  - (i) details of all the alternatives considered;
  - (ii) details of the public participation process undertaken in terms of regulation 41 of the Regulations, including copies of the supporting documents and inputs;
  - (iii) a summary of the issues raised by interested and affected parties, and an indication of the manner in which the issues were incorporated, or the reasons for not including them;
  - (iv) the environmental attributes associated with the alternatives focusing on the geographical, physical, biological, social, economic, heritage and cultural aspects;
  - (viii) the methodology used in determining and ranking the nature, significance, consequences, extent, duration and probability of potential environmental impacts and risks associated with the alternatives;
  - (x) if no alternatives, including alternative locations for the activity were investigated, the motivation for not considering such; and
- (xi) a concluding statement indicating the preferred alternative development location within the approved site.

### 5.1 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES

The DEAT 2006 guidelines on ‘assessment of alternatives and impacts’ proposes the consideration of four types of alternatives namely, the no-go, location, activity, and design alternatives. It is, however, important to note that the regulation and guidelines specifically state that only ‘feasible’ and ‘reasonable’ alternatives should be explored. It also recognizes that the consideration of alternatives is an iterative process of feedback between the developer and EAP, which in some instances culminates in a single preferred project proposal. An initial site screening was conducted by the developer of the affected properties and the farm portions were found favorable due to its proximity to grid connections, solar radiation, ecology and relative flat terrain. These factors were then taken into consideration and avoided as far as possible.

The following alternatives were considered in relation to the proposed activity and all specialists should also make mention of these:



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### No-go alternative

This alternative considers the option of 'do nothing' and maintaining the status quo. The site is currently z1d for agricultural land uses. Should the proposed activity not proceed, the site will remain unchanged and will continue to be used for agricultural purposes. The potential opportunity costs in terms of alternative land use income through rental for energy facility and the supporting social and economic development in the area would be lost if the status quo persist.

### Location alternatives

No other possible sites were identified on the Farm Witfontein No. 444. This site is referred to as the preferred site. The Mercury Substation is located approximately 5 km from the preferred site. Connection to the grid plays a vital role in the site location for renewable energy facilities. The location of the preferred site shortens the length of the required grid connection in order to evacuate energy into the national grid. There are some limited sensitive features that occur on the site. However, the size of the site makes provision for the exclusion of any sensitive environmental features that may arise through the BA process and will ensure that potential impacts are adequately mitigated.

### Battery storage facility

It is proposed that a nominal up to 2500 MWh Battery Storage Facility for grid storage would be housed in stacked containers, or multi-storey building, with a maximum height of 4.5m with associated operational, safety and control infrastructure. Three types of battery technologies are being considered for the proposed project: Lithium-ion, Sodium-sulphur or Vanadium Redox flow battery. The preferred battery technology is Lithium-ion.

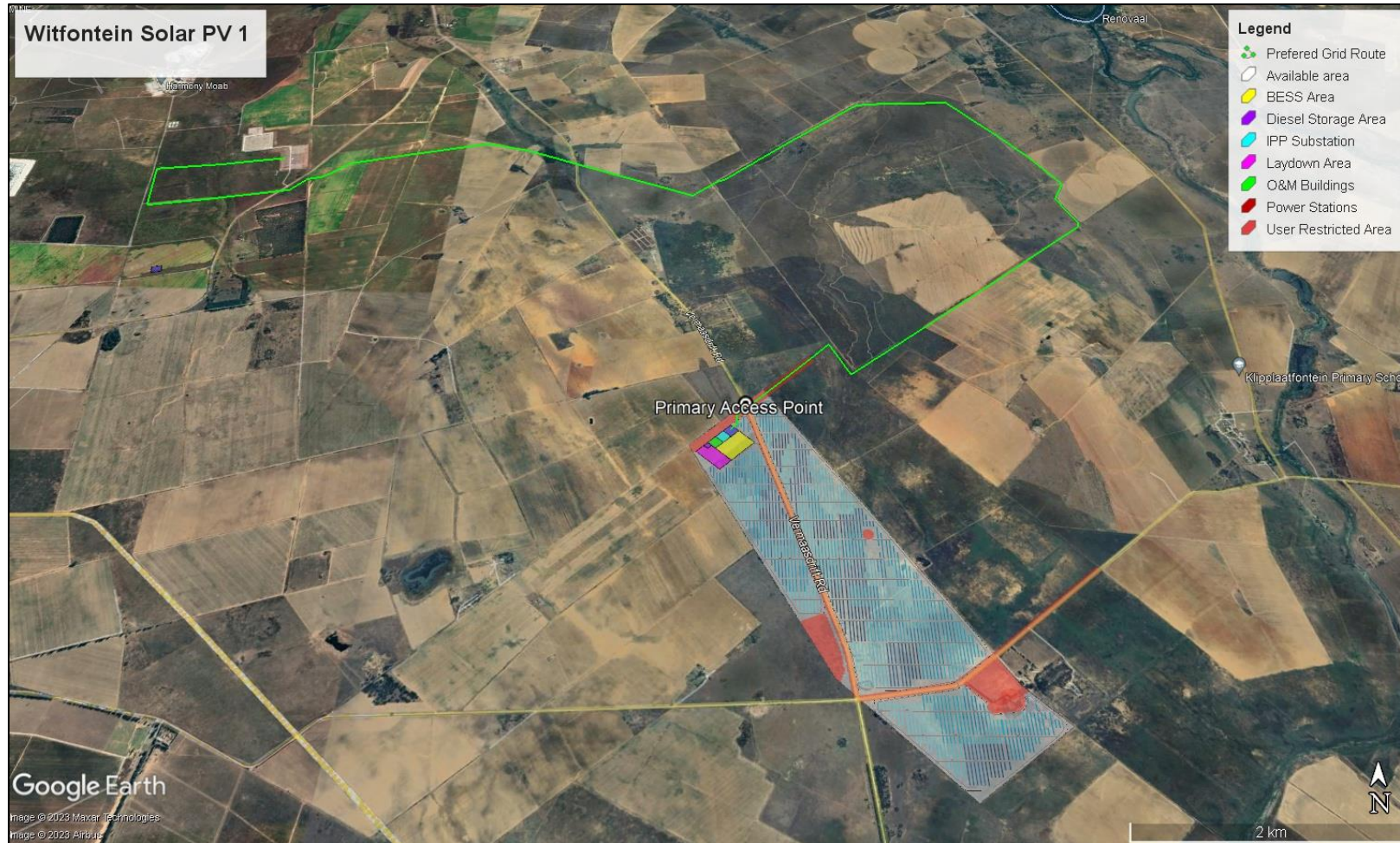
Battery storage offers a wide range of advantages to South Africa including renewable energy time shift, renewable capacity firming, electricity supply reliability and quality improvement, voltage regulation, electricity reserve capacity improvement, transmission congestion relief, load following and time of use energy cost management. In essence, this technology allows renewable energy to enter the base load and peak power generation market and therefore can compete directly with fossil fuel sources of power generation and offer a truly sustainable electricity supply option.

### Design and layout alternatives

Design alternatives will be considered throughout the planning and design phase and specialist studies are expected to inform the final layout of the proposed development.

### Technology alternatives

There are several types of semiconductor technologies currently available and in use for PV solar panels. Two, however, have become the most widely adopted, namely crystalline silicon (Mono-facial and Bi-facial) and thin film. The technology that (at this stage) proves more feasible and reasonable with respect to the proposed solar facility is crystalline silicon panels, due to it being non-reflective, more efficient, and with a higher durability. However, due to the rapid technological advances being made in the field of solar technology the exact type of technology to be used, such as bifacial panels, will only be confirmed at the onset of the project.



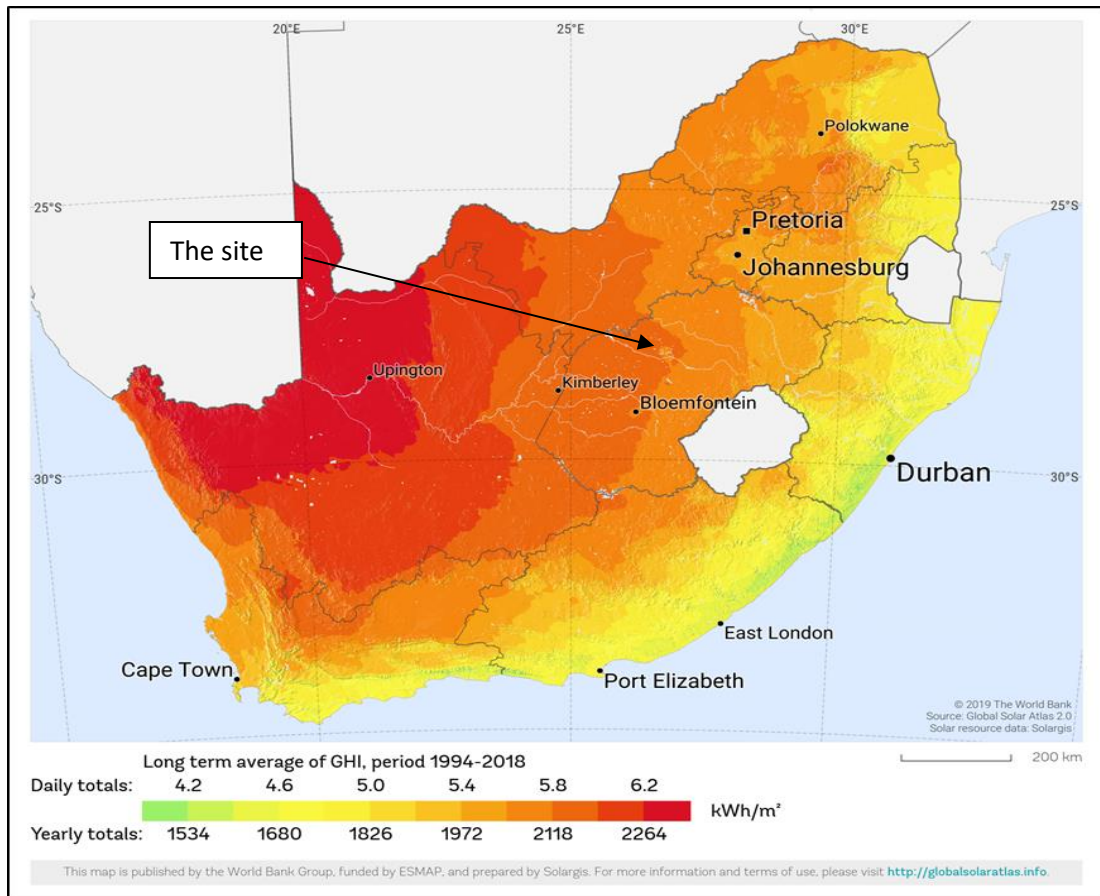
**Figure 5.1:** Location of the single preferred location alternative

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### 5.1.1 Activity Alternatives

The scoping process also needs to consider if the development of a solar PV facility would be the most appropriate land use for the particular site.

- Photovoltaic (PV) solar facility – Witfontein Solar PV 1 (Pty) Ltd is part of a portfolio of solar PV projects throughout South Africa.
- Wind energy facility - Due to the local climatic conditions a wind energy facility is not considered suitable as the area does not have the required wind resource. Furthermore, the applicant has opted for the generation of electricity via solar power rather than the use of wind turbines based on the renewable energy resource available for the area. This alternative is therefore regarded as not feasible and will not be evaluated further in this report.
- Concentrated solar power (CSP) technology - CSP technology requires large volumes of water, and this is a major constraint for this type of technology considering the water challenges and limitation experienced not only in the country but also within the local area. While the irradiation values are high enough to generate sufficient solar power (refer to Figure 5.2), the water constraints render this alternative not feasible. It must also be noted that the IRP no longer includes the use of CSP as part of the energy mix of the country. Therefore, this alternative will not be considered further in this report.



**Figure 5.2:** Global horizontal irradiation values for South Africa (Solar GIS, 2021) and the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project development footprint

### 5.1.2 Design and Layout Alternatives

Design alternatives were considered throughout the planning and design phase (i.e., what would be the best design option for the development?). In this regard discussions on the design were held between the EAP and the developer, which also included the consideration of the technical constraints as a part of the Draft Basic Assessment Report. The draft layout plan is included as Figure C and in Figure 5.3 below, but it should be noted that the final layout plan will be submitted as part of the Final Basic Assessment Report.

The limitations of the site and aspects such as environmental sensitive areas (supported by specialist input), areas under cultivation, roads, fencing and servitudes will be further considered and investigated during the detailed final BA phase. The total surface area proposed for layout options include the PV panel arrays spaced to avoid shadowing, access and maintenance roads and associated infrastructure (buildings, power inverters, power lines, BESS and perimeter fences). With regards to the structure orientation, the panels will either be fixed to a single-axis horizontal tracking structure where the orientation of the panel varies according to the time of the day, as the sun moves from east to west or tilted at a fixed angle equivalent to the latitude at which the site is located in order to capture the most sun.

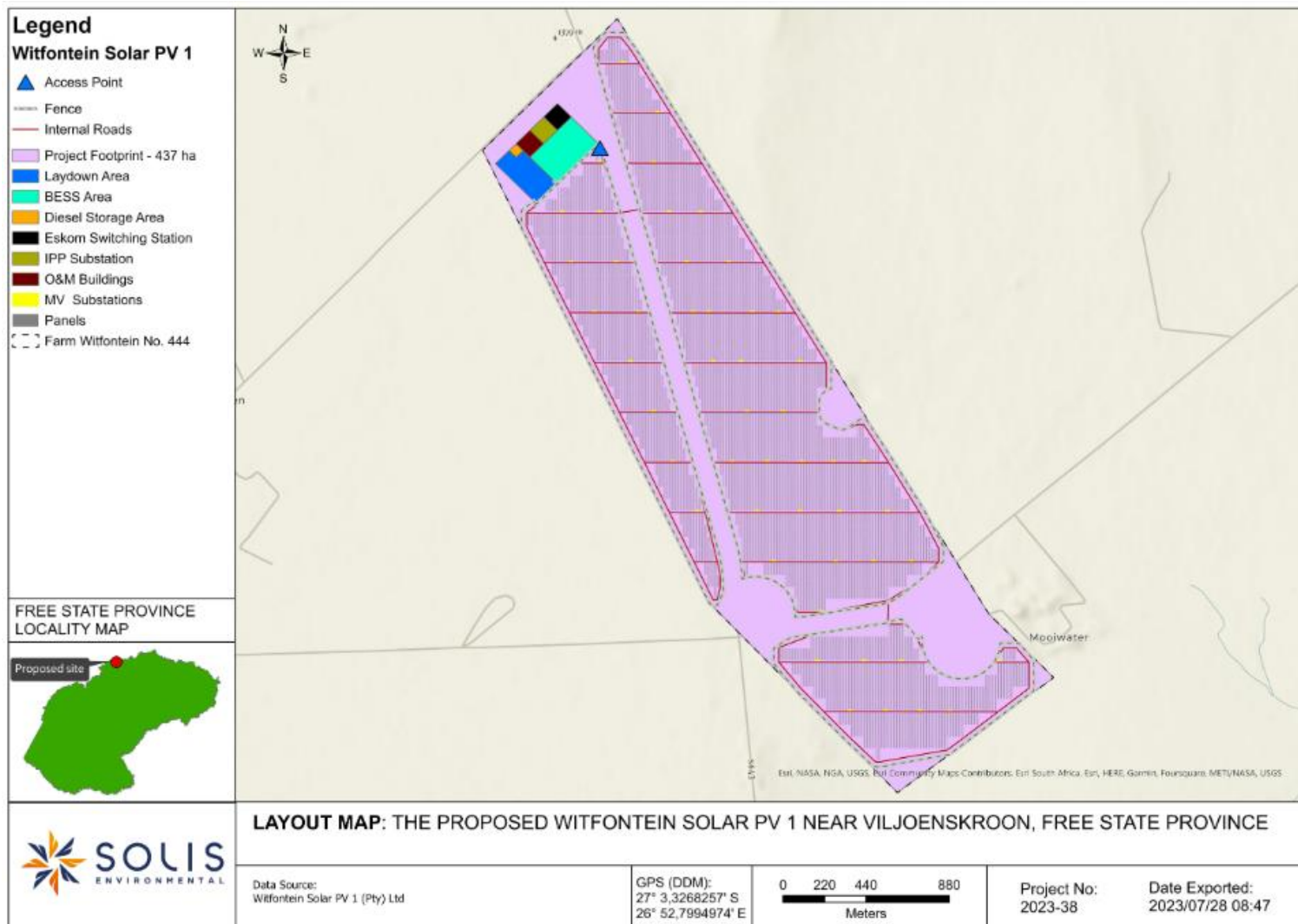


Figure 5.3: Draft layout plan for the Witfontein Solar PV 1



*Note: It is customary to develop the final/detailed construction layout of the solar PV facility only once an Independent Power Producer (IPP) is awarded a successful bid under the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) or an alternative programme, after which major contracts are negotiated and final equipment suppliers identified. For the purpose of the Basic Assessment (BA), site layout alternatives will not be comparatively assessed, but rather a single layout will be refined as additional information becomes available throughout the BA process (e.g., specialist input, additional site surveys, ongoing stakeholder engagement).*

*The development area presented in the draft Basic Assessment Report has been selected as a practicable option for the facility, considering technical preference and constraints, as well as initial No-Go layers informed by specialist site surveys. Following site screening by the specialists, the development footprint will be finalised for impact assessment.*

### **5.1.3 Technology Alternatives**

#### **Battery Energy Storage Facility (BESS):**

It is proposed that a nominal up to 2500 MWh Battery Storage Facility for grid storage would be housed in stacked containers, or multi-storey building, with a maximum height of 5m with associated operational, safety and control infrastructure. Three types of battery technologies are being considered for the proposed project: Lithium-ion, Sodium-sulphur or Vanadium Redox flow battery. The preferred battery technology is Lithium-ion.

Battery storage offers a wide range of advantages to South Africa including renewable energy time shift, renewable capacity firming, electricity supply reliability and quality improvement, voltage regulation, electricity reserve capacity improvement, transmission congestion relief, load following and time of use energy cost management. In essence, this technology allows renewable energy to enter the base load and peak power generation market and therefore can compete directly with fossil fuel sources of power generation and offer a truly sustainable electricity supply option.

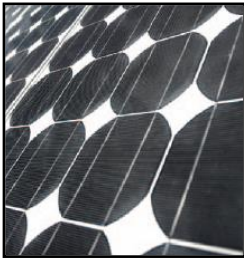
#### **PV Panels:**

With regards to the structure orientation, the panels will either be fixed to a single-axis horizontal tracking structure where the orientation of the panel varies according to the time of the day, as the sun moves from east to west or tilted at a fixed angle equivalent to the latitude at which the site is located in order to capture the most sun.

There are several types of semiconductor technologies currently available and in use for PV solar panels. Two, however, have become the most widely adopted, namely crystalline silicon and thin film. These technologies are discussed in more detail below:

- **Crystalline (high efficiency technology at higher cost):**

Crystalline silicon panels are constructed by first putting a single slice of silicon through a series of processing steps, creating 1 solar cell. These cells are then assembled together in multiples to make a solar panel. Crystalline silicon, also called wafer silicon, is the oldest and the most widely used material in commercial solar panels. Crystalline silicon modules represent 85-90% of the global annual market today. There are two main types of crystalline silicon panels that can be considered for the solar facility:



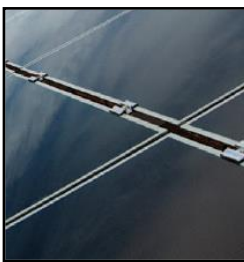
- Mono-crystalline Silicon - mono-crystalline (also called single crystal) panels use solar cells that are cut from a piece of silicon grown from a single, uniform crystal. Mono-crystalline panels are among the most efficient yet most expensive on the market. They require the highest purity silicon and have the most involved manufacturing process.



- Poly-crystalline Silicon – poly-crystalline panels use solar cells that are cut from multifaceted silicon crystals. They are less uniform in appearance than mono-crystalline cells, resembling pieces of shattered glass. These are the most common solar panels on the market, being less expensive than mono-crystalline silicon. They are also less efficient, though the performance gap has begun to close in recent years (First Solar, 2011).

- Thin film (low-cost technology with lower efficiency):

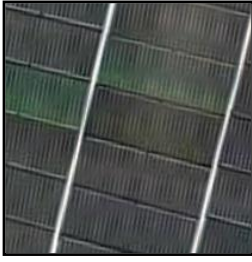
Thin film solar panels are made by placing thin layers of semiconductor material onto various surfaces, usually on glass. The term *thin film* refers to the amount of semiconductor material used. It is applied in a thin film to a surface structure, such as a sheet of glass. Contrary to popular belief, most thin film panels are not flexible. Overall, thin film solar panels offer the lowest manufacturing costs, and are becoming more prevalent in the industry. Thin films currently account for 10-15% of global PV module sales. There are three main types of thin film used:



- Cadmium Telluride (CdTe) - CdTe is a semiconductor compound formed from cadmium and tellurium. CdTe solar panels are manufactured on glass. They are the most common type of thin film solar panel on the market and the most cost-effective to manufacture. CdTe panels perform significantly better in high temperatures and in low-light conditions.



- Amorphous Silicon - Amorphous silicon is the non-crystalline form of silicon and was the first thin film material to yield a commercial product, first used in consumer items such as calculators. It can be deposited in thin layers onto a variety of surfaces and offers lower costs than traditional crystalline silicon, though it is less efficient at converting sunlight into electricity.



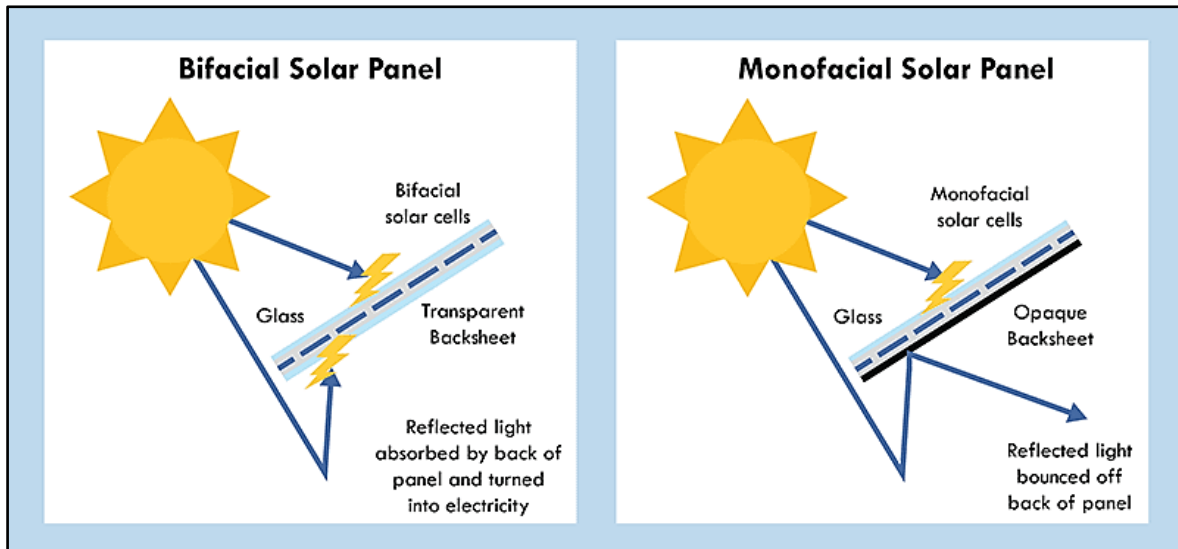
- Copper, Indium, Gallium, Selenide (CIGS) - CIGS is a compound semiconductor that can be deposited onto many different materials. CIGS has only recently become available for small commercial applications, and is considered a developing PV technology (First Solar, 2011).

- Bifacial panels:

As the name suggests, bifacial solar panels have two faces, or rather, they can absorb light from both sides of the panel. A lot of potential energy transfer is lost in traditional solar cells when the light hits the back of a solar panel. Most bifacial solar panels use monocrystalline cells, whereas traditional cells use polycrystalline materials. The monocrystalline materials, alongside the clear light pathway on both sides of the panel, enable the light to be absorbed from either side of the cell, and it is thought that the overall efficiency of these cells can be up to 30% greater in commercial applications. Although, the exact amount is variable depending on the surface that they are installed on. The front side of the solar panel still absorbs most of the solar light, but the back side of the solar panel can absorb between 5-90% of the light absorbed by the front of the solar panel. Refer to Figure 5.4 for an illustration of Bifacial versus Monofacial Solar Panel absorption.

Traditional solar panels use an opaque back sheet. By comparison, bifacial solar panels either have a clear/reflective back sheet or have dual panes of glass. Most of these solar panels are frameless so any issues with potential-induced degradation (PID) are reduced. To efficiently convert light into electricity from both sides, bifacial solar cells have selective-area metallization schemes that enable light to pass between the metallized areas, rather than the conventional thick metal collectors as seen with monofacial solar panels.

The technology that (at this stage) proves to be most feasible and reasonable with respect to the proposed solar facility is crystalline silicon panels, due to it being non-reflective, more efficient, and with a higher durability. However, due to the rapid technological advances being made in the field of solar technology the exact type of technology to be used, such as bifacial panels, will only be confirmed at the onset of the project.



**Figure 5.4:** Bifacial vs Monofacial Solar Panel absorption.

## 5.2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

The following sections provide detailed information on the public participation process conducted in terms of Regulations 39 to 44.

### 5.2.1 General

The following three categories of variables were taken into account when deciding the required level of public participation:

- The scale of anticipated impacts;
- The sensitivity of the affected environment and the degree of controversy of the project; and
- The characteristics of the potentially affected parties.

Since the scale of anticipated impacts is low, the general land use of the area is related to mining and agriculture, the limited environmental sensitivity of the site and the fact that no conflict was foreseen between potentially affected parties, no additional public participation mechanisms are considered at this stage of the process. The following actions have already been undertaken:

➤ Site notices

Site notices (size 60cm x 42cm) were placed on site in Sesotho, Afrikaans and English on 6 July 2023 to inform surrounding communities and immediately adjacent landowners of the proposed development and the commencement of the BA process. I&APs were given the opportunity to raise comments by 4 August 2023. Photographic evidence of the site notices is included in Appendix E2.

➤ Newspaper advertisement

An advertisement was placed in English in the Klerksdorp Record Local Newspaper on 20 July 2023 (see Appendix E1) notifying the public of the BA process and the proposed application for Environmental Authorisation. The advertisement invited Interested and Affected Parties (I&APs) to register on the project I&AP database and submit any comments to Solis-Environmental

Environmental Consultants. I&APs were given the opportunity to raise comments within 30 days of the advertisement (i.e., up until 21 August 2023). Since the proposed development is unlikely to result in any impacts that extend beyond the municipal area where it is located, it was deemed sufficient to advertise in a local newspaper.

➤ Background Information Document (BID)

The release of a BID providing information on the proposed development, which invited Interested and Affected Parties (I&APs) to register on the project's I&AP database was sent to the identified I&APs, including the adjacent landowners, key stakeholders and relevant organs of state on 13 July 2023.

➤ Direct notification of identified I&APs

Identified I&APs, including key stakeholders representing various sectors, were directly informed of the BA process on 13 July 2023 via registered post, teleph1 calls, WhatsApp's and emails (as relevant). The BID was distributed with the notification. For a complete list of I&APs with their contact details see Appendix E3 to this report. It was expected from I&APs to provide their inputs and comments by 14 August 2023.

➤ Direct notification of surrounding landowners and occupiers

Written notices were also provided via registered post, WhatsApp or email (as relevant) to all surrounding landowners and occupiers on 13 July 2023. The surrounding landowners were given the opportunity to raise comments within 30 days. For a list of surrounding landowners see Appendix E3.

➤ Circulation of Draft Basic Assessment Report

Copies of the draft Basic Assessment report were provided to all I&APs via courier, Dropbox and/or email (as relevant). Hard copies of the report were made available on request and where an I&AP did not have the resources to view the report on an online platform. I&AP's and organs of state were requested to provide their comments on the report between 01 September to 03 October 2023. The comments were documented and compiled into a Comments and Response Report to be included as part of the Final Basic Assessment Report for decision-making.

### 5.2.2 Consultation Process

Regulation 41 requires that the landowner, surrounding landowners, municipality, relevant ward councillor, any organ of state having jurisdiction in respect of any aspect of the activity should be given written notice of the activity. A complete list of all the consultees who received written notice as well as proof of correspondence is attached as Appendices E4 and E5. Refer to Figure 5.5 for the location of the surrounding landowners.

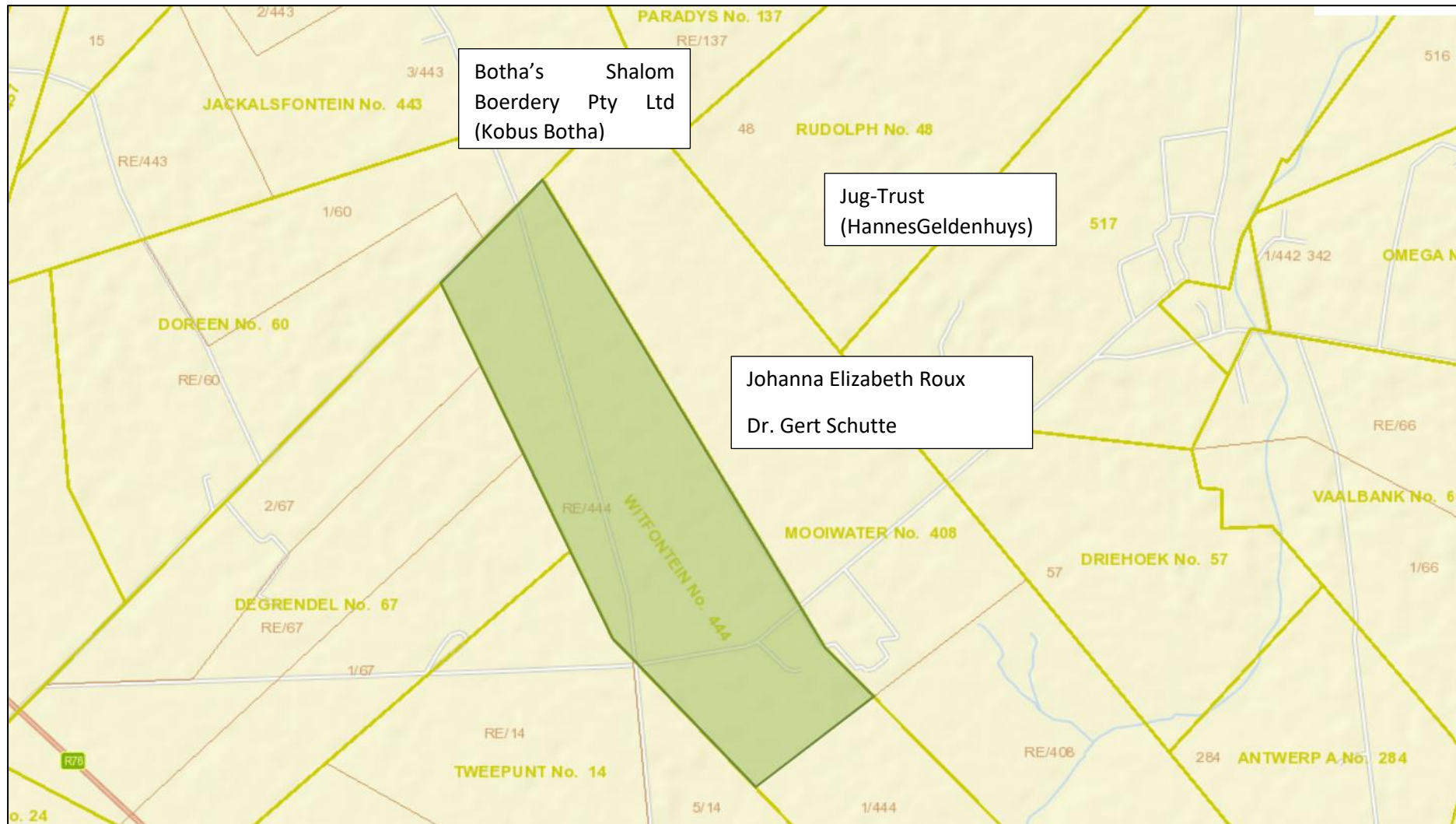


Figure 5.5: Affected property (Green) in relation to surrounding landowners

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### 5.2.3 Registered I&APs

I&APs include all stakeholders who deem themselves affected by the proposed activity. According to Regulation 43(1) *“A registered interested and affected party is entitled to comment, in writing, on all reports or plans submitted to such party during the public participation process contemplated in these Regulations and to bring to the attention of the prop1nt or applicant any issues which that party believes may be of significance to the consideration of the application, provided that the interested and affected party discloses any direct business, financial, personal or other interest which that party may have in the approval or refusal of the application.”*

This report is the Draft Basic Assessment Report which was made available to all potential and/or registered I&APs and State Departments. They were provided with a copy of the Draft Basic Assessment Report and were requested to provide written comments on the report within 30 days. All issues identified during the review period was documented and compiled into a Comments and Response Report to be included as part of the Final Basic Assessment report.

All comments received prior to the release of the Draft Basic Assessment Report for the 30-day review and comment period have been included in this report as Appendix E4 and Appendix E5 to provide I&APs an opportunity to confirm that their comments raised during the initial public participation phase had been included and considered as part of the BA process.

### 5.2.4 Issues Raised by I&APs and Consultation Bodies

To date comments have been received and are captured and responded to in the Comments and Response Report included in Appendix E6. Any comments received during the circulation of the Draft BAR will be summarised in the Final BAR. The full wording and original correspondence are included in Appendix E4 and Appendix E5.

### 5.3 THE ENVIRONMENTAL ATTRIBUTES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

The following sections provide general information on the biophysical and socio-economic attributes associated with the preferred alternative (i.e., the location of the development footprint within the affected property).

#### 5.3.1 Biophysical Environment

The biophysical environment is described with specific reference to geology, soils, agricultural potential, vegetation and landscape features, climate, biodiversity, heritage features (in terms of archaeology and palaeontology), the visual landscape and the social environment to be affected. A number of specialists were consulted to assist with the compilation of this chapter of the report – refer to Table 1.1.

Nevertheless, as the designated development area (referred to as the development footprint) is entirely composed of land dedicated to agricultural pursuits, and the developer has conscientiously steered clear of sensitive zones to the best extent possible, it is anticipated that no environmentally delicate regions or elements will be impacted. A comprehensive examination of the environmental attributes and qualities found on the site is provided in the subsequent discussion.

##### 5.3.1.1 Geology, Soil and Agricultural Potential

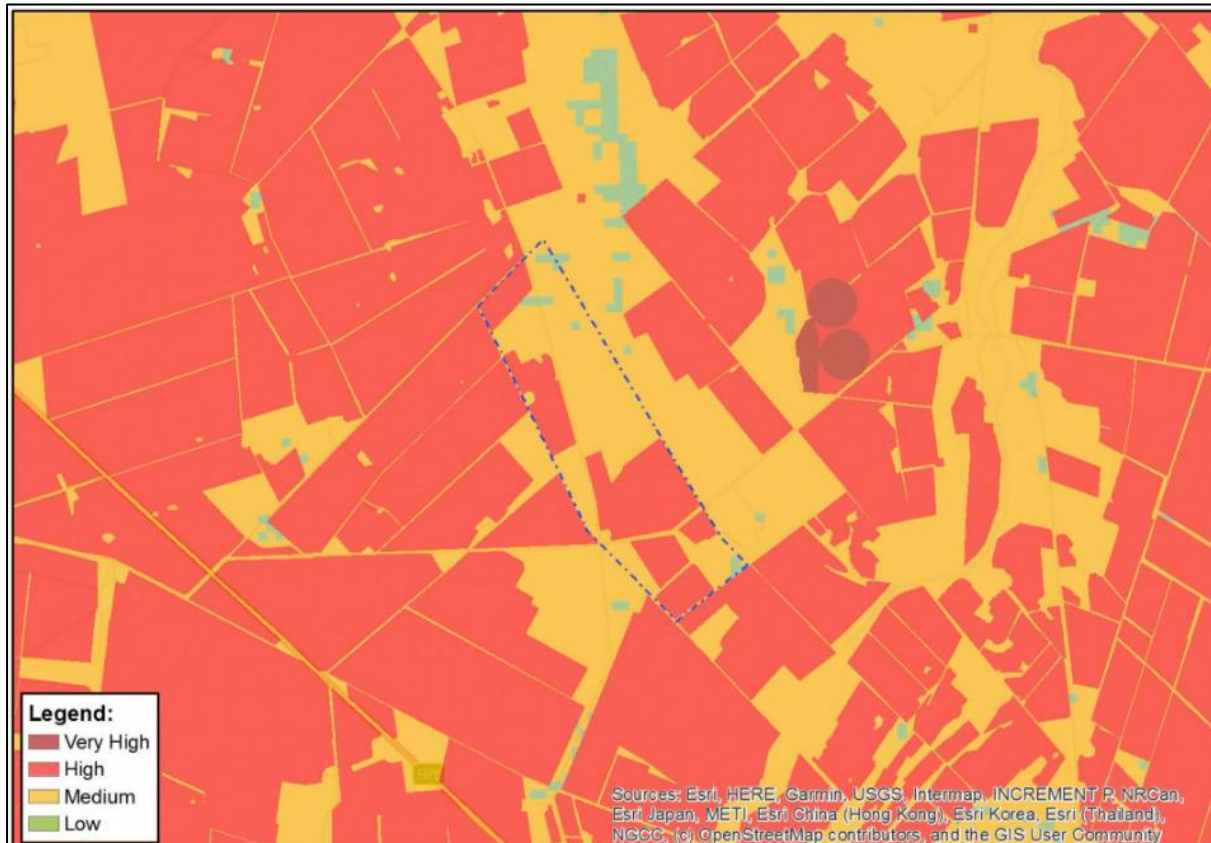
A Site Sensitivity Verification and Agricultural Compliance Statement (attached as Appendix D1) was undertaken for the Witfontein Solar PV Project site. The report addresses the agricultural production potential of the project site. The site is located on slopes of low ridge lines and mid-slopes and foot-slopes with slope gradient percentages of 0-3%. The dominant soils are very shallow to deep, medium to heavy textured soils, predominantly on underlying rock of predominantly Diabase and Hekpoort lava, shale, slate and quartzite of the Pretoria Group. The dominant soils are Mispah, Glenrosa and Hutton occur around the site.

According to the land type database (Land Type Survey Staff, 1972 - 2006), the site is characterised by the Bc25 land type. This land type is generally moderately deep to deep (>500 mm), loamy fine sand to loam overlying loam associated with very shallow soils and rock outcrops. The site falls within an area that is classified as a Protected Agricultural Area. However, there may be much variation within a Protected Agricultural Area and all land within it is not necessarily of sufficient agricultural potential to be suitable for crop production, due to site-specific terrain, soil, and other constraints. The proposed facility footprint has been laid out to specifically avoid all viable cropland areas and only utilise those parts of the farms that are not suitable for cropland.

The classification of certain areas in Figure 5.6, of the DFFE Screening Tool Report (Appendix B), as having high agricultural sensitivity (highlighted in red) is due to their categorization as cropland in the utilized dataset for the screening tool. However, this dataset is outdated. All the land within the area in question is no longer utilized for cropping and has remained uncropped for the past decade, as evidenced by historical imagery from Google Earth. Consequently, designating this land as cropland and assigning it high sensitivity is inappropriate. This evaluation challenges the screening tool's high sensitivity label, which is based on cropping status.



The assessed land capability within the area ranges from 5 to 8. This evaluation contradicts the designated land capability of 8 based on the report's assessment of the site's cropping potential (refer to the subsequent section) and confirms a maximum land capability of 7 (unsuitable for rain-fed cropping). Consequently, this evaluation establishes the entire assessed area as having medium agricultural sensitivity.



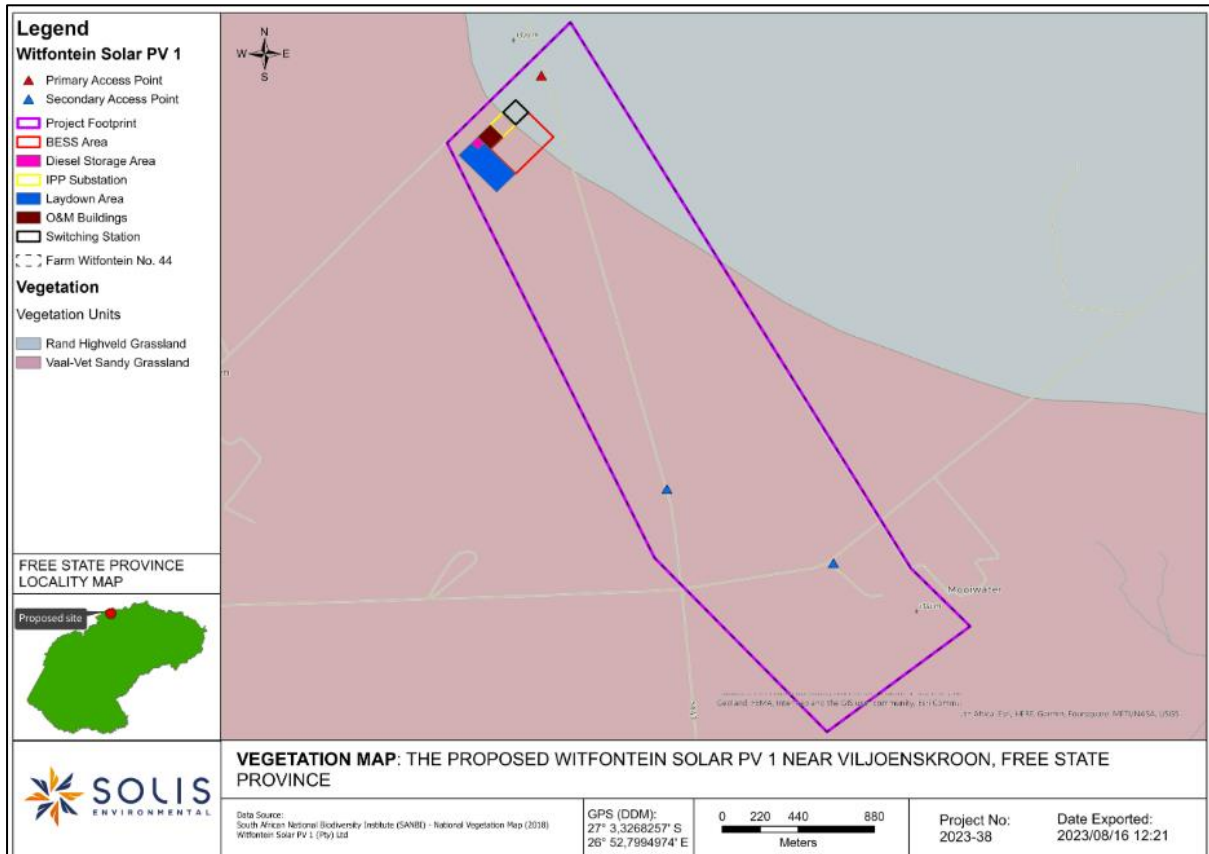
**Figure 5.6:** Agricultural sensitivity as identified by the DFFE Screening Tool.

### 5.3.1.2 Terrestrial Biodiversity

An impact assessment (attached as Appendix E2) was undertaken for the proposed project which discusses the vegetation, topography as well as the landscape features identified within the project area. The Witfontein Solar PV is vegetation type is characterised as Rand Highveld Grassland, Vaal-vet Sandy Grassland and Highveld Salt Pans.

The natural vegetation types indicated to occur in the area are Rand Highveld Grassland, a Vulnerable vegetation type, and Vaal-Vet Sandy Grassland, an Endangered vegetation type. The threat status of these vegetation types is a result of their loss to agricultural activities. Rand Highveld Grassland occurs on quartzite ridges and adjacent sloping plains while Vaal-Vet Sandy Grassland occurs on the aeolian and colluvial sands of the undulating plains of the North West and Free State Provinces. Both vegetation type tend to be dominated by Themeda and other grasses. Rand Highveld Grassland also contains a high diversity of herbs and sparse woodlands (*Protea caffra*, *P. welwitschii*, *Acacia caffra* and *Celtis africana*) on the ridges (Mucina and Rutherford, 2006). Within the study area, patches of natural vegetation still occur that tend to be associated with the ridges or areas where it has been too

wet in summer for agriculture. Cultivation may also have had an impact on an additional portion of the surface area of the unit where old lands are currently classified as grasslands in land-cover classifications and poor land management has led to degradation of significant portions of the remainder of this unit (refer to Figure 5.7).



**Figure 5.7:** Map illustrating the vegetation types associated with the Witfontein Solar PV 1

### 5.3.1.2.1 Ecosystem Threat Status

The Ecosystem Threat Status is an indicator of an ecosystem’s wellbeing, based on the level of change in structure, function or composition. Ecosystem types are categorised as Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN), Vulnerable (VU), Near Threatened (NT) or Least Concern (LC), based on the proportion of the original extent of each ecosystem type that remains in good ecological condition. According to the spatial dataset the proposed project site overlaps an EN ecosystem as per Figure 5.8 below.

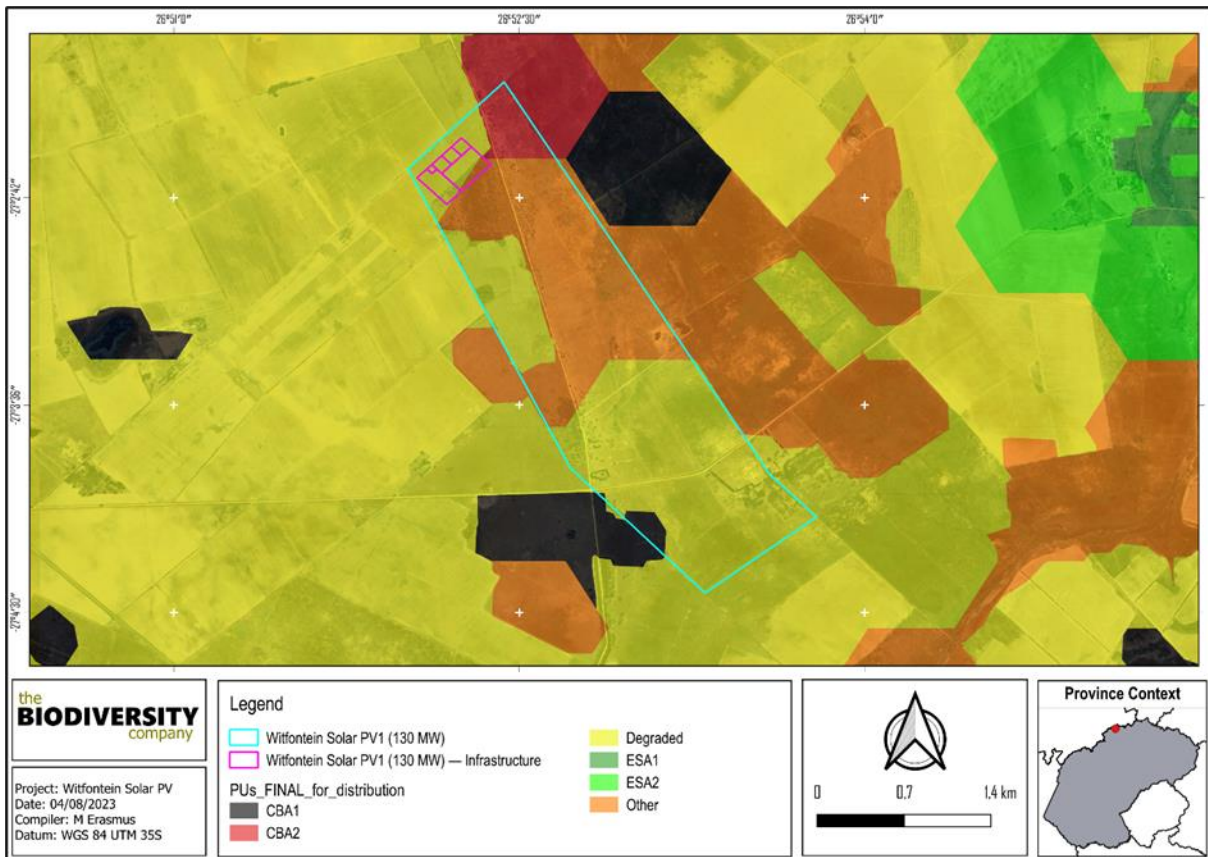
### 5.3.1.2.2 Protected Areas, Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBA) and Ecological Support Areas (ESA)

The Free State Province Biodiversity Plan classifies areas within the province on the basis of their contributions to reaching the associated conservation targets within the province. These areas are primarily classified as either Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBAs) or Ecological Support Areas (ESAs). These biodiversity priority areas, together with protected areas, are important for the persistence of a viable representative sample of all ecosystem types and species, as well as the long-term ecological functioning of the landscape as a whole.

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- CBAs are areas of the landscape that need to be maintained in a natural or near-natural state to ensure the continued existence and healthy functioning of important species and ecosystems and the delivery of ecosystem services. Thus, if these areas are not maintained in a natural or near natural state then provincial biodiversity targets cannot be met (SANBI, 2017).
  - ESAs are areas that are not essential for meeting biodiversity representation targets but play an important role in supporting the ecological functioning of ecosystems as well as adjacent Critical Biodiversity Areas, and/or in delivering ecosystem services that support socio-economic development (SANBI, 2017).

Provincial CBAs and ESAs are often further classified into sub-categories, such as CBA1 and CBA2 or ESA1 and ESA2. These present fine scale habitat and biodiversity area baseline requirements and associated land management objectives or outcomes. The highest categorisation level is often referred to as a CBA1 'Irreplaceable Critical Biodiversity Area' which usually represents pristine natural habitat that is very important for conservation. Figure 5.8 shows the project area superimposed on the conservation plan. The project area overlaps with areas predominantly classified as Other Natural Areas and Degraded Areas. Notable areas classified as CBA 1 are also located within the project area.

The South Africa Protected Areas Database (SAPAD) contains spatial data pertinent to the conservation of South African biodiversity. It includes spatial and attribute information for both formally protected areas and areas that have less formal protection. SAPAD is updated on a continuous basis and forms the basis for the Register of Protected Areas, which is a legislative requirement under the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act, Act 57 of 2003. According to the protected area spatial datasets from SAPAD (2022) and SACAD (2022), the project area does not occur within 50 km of a protected area as per Figure 5.8 below.



**Figure 5.8:** indicates that the PAOI overlaps with CBA 1, CBA2, ESA1, ESA2, Other and Degraded features but mainly ESA1, ESA2 areas.

### 5.3.1.2.3 National Protected Area Expansion Strategy

National Protected Areas Expansion Strategy (NPAES) provides spatial information on areas that are suitable for terrestrial ecosystem protection. These focus areas are large, intact and unfragmented and therefore, of high importance for biodiversity, climate resilience and freshwater protection.

National Protected Area Expansion Strategy 2016 (NPAES) areas were identified through a systematic biodiversity planning process. They present the best opportunities for meeting the ecosystem-specific protected area targets set in the NPAES and were designed with a strong emphasis on climate change resilience and requirements for protecting freshwater ecosystems. These areas should not be seen as future boundaries of protected areas, as in many cases only a portion of a particular focus area would be required to meet the protected area targets set in the NPAES. They are also not a replacement for fine scale planning which may identify a range of different priority sites based on local requirements, constraints and opportunities (NPAES, 2016). The project area does not overlap with NPAES areas.

### 5.3.1.2.4 Flora Assessment

The most prominent indigenous vegetation recorded included stands of *Cynodon dactylon* throughout most of the area. *Stoebe plumosa* was also numerous which were found in areas that are wet, i.e., within the drainage/wetland areas. However, the species also occurred within the disturbed areas. Portions of the area within the project area have received heavy grazing pressure and as such the condition of the veld has retrogressed to a disturbed state. Also, historically portions of the project

area was used as old agricultural fields and has not recovered since due to the ongoing disturbance. The herbaceous layer was disjoint and varied significantly throughout the area due to the historical impacts, which occurred in large areas, but also in smaller portions randomly located. The disturbed grassland and woody grassland habitats were found to be more functional consisting of indigenous vegetation, albeit in a disturbed state. No protected trees or SCC flora species were observed. Small disjoint portions of the project area were found to be representative of recovered Vaal-Vet Grassland vegetation and can be found within the disturbed woody grassland habitat. The ESA identified by the Gauteng Conservation Plan that overlap with the medium sensitivity area(drainage/wetland) may be considered viable constituents of ESA, albeit disturbed.

The terrestrial field assessment is provided in Table 5-1. The property was surveyed as the aim of the fieldwork was to assess the overall condition of the vegetation within the area and to determine if any floral or faunal SCC were present or may occur. Any sensitive habitat features were also assessed.

**Table 5-1:** Summary of the field assessment

**Site photos**



**Example of disturbed grassland habitat observed within the project area**

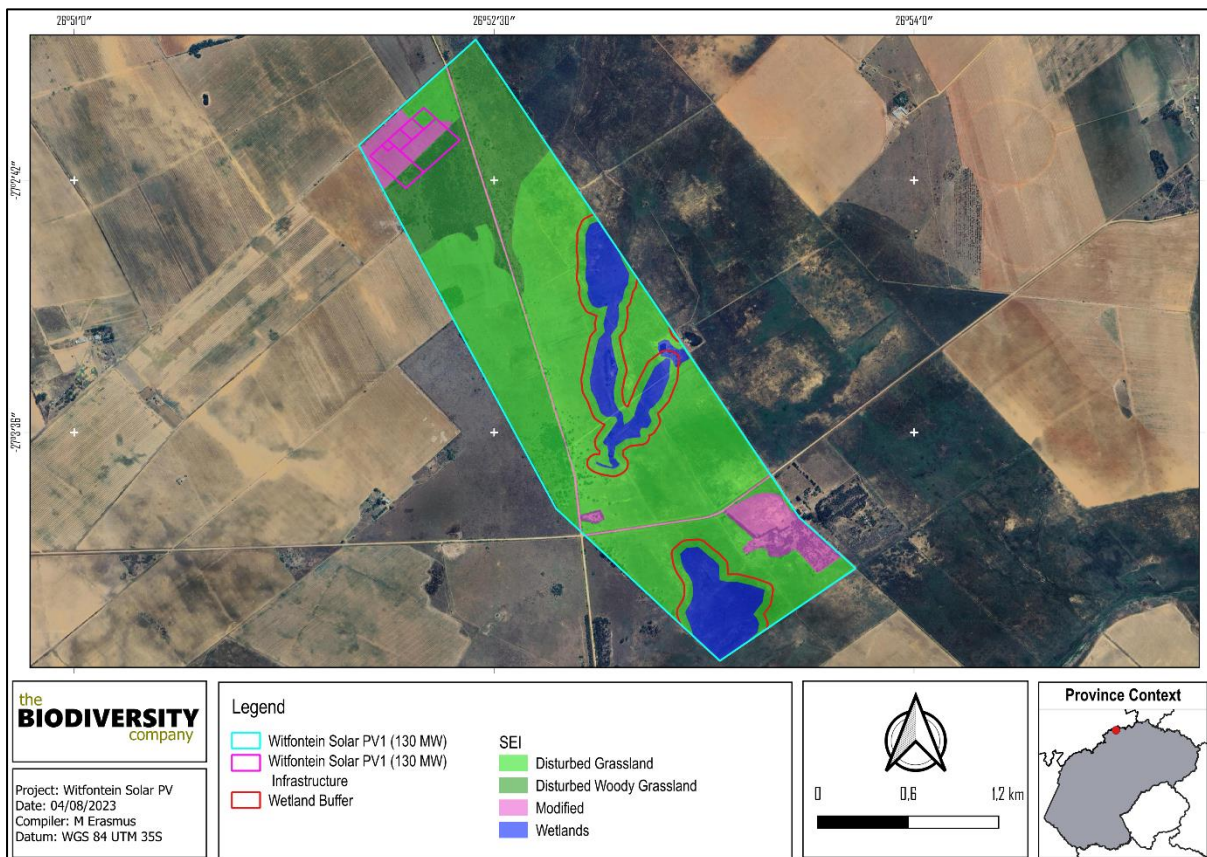


**Example of disturbed woody grassland habitat observed within the project area**



**Example of water resource habitat observed within the project area**

<b>Habitat state</b>	The habitat states ranged from modified to disturbed and is further discussed in Table 5-5 and can be seen in Figure 5.9.
<b>Current Impacts</b>	Existing impacts included agriculture, secondary roads, livestock grazing and mismanagement of natural areas.



**Figure 5.9:** Map depicting relative terrestrial biodiversity habitats within the PAOI

### 5.3.1.2.5 Faunal Assessment

Mammal activity was medium, which is expected for an area in fragmented and disturbed state. Observations of *Lepus saxatilis* (Scrub Hare), *Hystrix Africa Australis* (Cape Porcupine), *Cynictispencillata* (Yellow Mongoose) and *Sylvicapra grimmia* (Common Duiker). It is however

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assumed that these species may not be resident due to the modified state of the area, however using the area for forage or a migration corridor. No SCC was recorded, nor are expected.

#### **5.3.1.2.6 Site Ecological Importance (SEI)**

As per the Terms of Reference for the project, GIS sensitivity maps are required in order to identify sensitive features in terms of the relevant specialist discipline/s within the project area. The habitat types were delineated within the project area. Based on the criteria provided in Section 6.5 of this report, the habitat within the project area was allocated a sensitivity category (Table 5-2). The sensitivity of the habitat type delineated is illustrated in Figure 5.10.

It is important to note that this map does not replace any local, provincial or government legislation relating to these areas or the land use capabilities or sensitivities of these environments but is done in relation to the legislation.

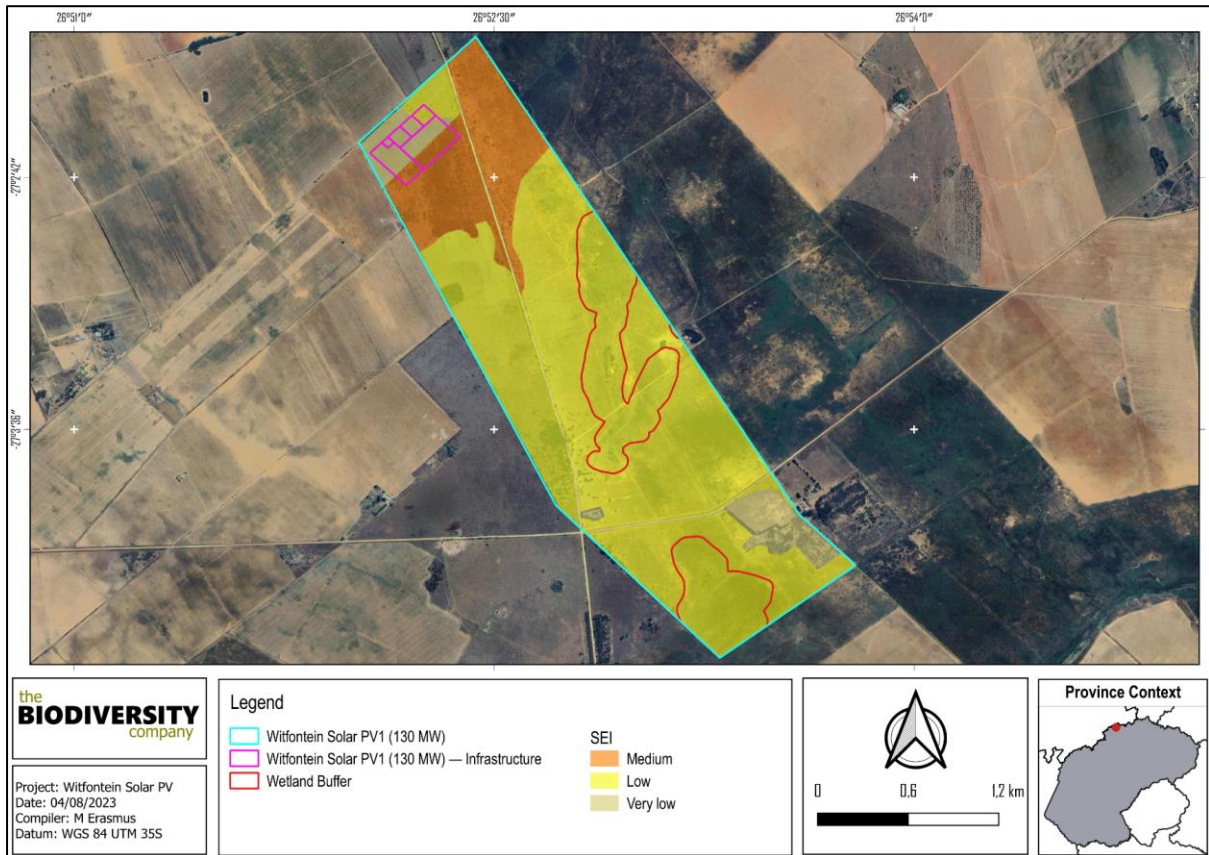
**Table 5-2:** Sensitivity summary of the habitat types delineated within the Project area of Influence.

Habitat	Description	Ecosystem Processes and Services	Conservation Importance	Functional Integrity	Biodiversity Importance	Receptor Resilience	Site Ecological Importance
<b>Water Resources</b>	Impacted permanently to seasonally wet portions of land as delineated by the wetland specialist	Provides surface water resources within the landscape. Aids in trapping sediment and nutrients carried by surface runoff. Corridor for fauna dispersion within the landscape and important foraging and nesting habitat.	Low < 50% of receptor contains natural habitat with limited potential to support SCC.	Medium Larger areas of poor habitat connectivity and a busy used road network between intact habitat patches. Mostly minor current negative ecological impacts, with some major impacts and a few signs of minor past disturbance. Moderate rehabilitation potential.	Low	Medium	Low <sup>1</sup>
<b>Disturbed Grassland</b>	The disturbed habitat is regarded as areas that have been impacted by edge effects of modified areas as well as direct impacts from historic and ongoing overgrazing, clearing and infringement. These habitats exist in a constant disturbed state, as it cannot recover to a more natural state due to ongoing disturbances and impacts it receives, especially grazing and unregulated burning.	Provides limited grazing and foraging resources for indigenous fauna and livestock. Aids in the filtration of water permeating through the soil into the drainage areas. Important corridor for fauna dispersion within the landscape.	Low < 50% of receptor contains natural habitat with limited potential to support SCC.	Medium Larger areas of poor habitat connectivity and a busy used road network between intact habitat patches. Mostly minor current negative ecological impacts, with some major impacts and a few signs of minor past disturbance. Moderate rehabilitation potential.	Low	Medium	Low
<b>Disturbed Woody Grassland</b>	Similar to the Disturbed grassland, however, including woody plant species in form of trees and shrubs.					Low	Medium
<b>Modified</b>	The transformed areas have little to no remaining natural vegetation due to land transformation by historic and current mining, agriculture and mismanagement. These habitats exist in a constant disturbed state as it cannot recover to a more natural state due to ongoing disturbances and impacts it receives.	The ecological services provided by this habitat are limited due to the extensive cover of impermeable surfaces and the large amount of bare land. Locally common bird species will forage and nest in the larger trees, and parts of the area may be considered a movement corridor.	Very Low  No natural habitat remaining.	Very Low  Several major current negative ecological impacts.	Very Low	Medium	Very Low

<sup>1</sup> Sensitivity as per the wetland specialist







**Figure 5.10:** The SEI of the project.

The allocated sensitivities for each of the relevant themes are either disputed or validated for the overall Project Area in Table 5-3 below. A summative explanation for each result is provided as relevant. The specialist-assigned sensitivity ratings are based largely on the SEI process followed in the previous section, and consideration is given to any observed or likely presence of SCC or protected species. The screening tool terrestrial theme sensitivity can be seen in below.

**Table 5-3** *Summary of the screening tool vs. specialist assigned sensitivities.*

Screening Tool Theme	Screening Tool	Specialist	Tool Validated or Disputed by Specialist - Reasoning
Animal Theme	Medium	Low	Disputed – Habitat is disturbed and secondary in nature with high impact presence. No SCC were recorded, nor expected.
Plant Theme	Medium	Low	Disputed – Habitat is disturbed and secondary in nature. No SCC were recorded, nor expected.
Terrestrial Theme	Very High	Low	Disputed – Habitat disturbed and secondary in nature. Areas of CBA are no longer viable, not to mention marginal in relation to the project area. Ecosystem threat status may be EN, but longer viable due to its impacted condition.

### 5.3.1.2.7 Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment

According to the Biodiversity Company (2023) the ecological integrity, importance and functioning of the High sensitive areas play a crucial role as a water resource system and an important habitat for various fauna and flora. The preservation of these habitats is the most important aspect to consider for the proposed project and must therefore be protected.

When considering the possible impacts the Witfontein Solar PV Project will have on the terrestrial biodiversity, the following main impacts are expected below for a more detailed list of the proposed impacts:

- Habitat loss and fragmentation;
- Degradation of surrounding habitat;
- Disturbance and displacement caused during the construction and maintenance phases; and
- Direct mortality during the construction phase.

The PV project is expected to have an overall low residual impact. If mitigation measures as described in this report are implemented as this will reduce the significance of the risk to an acceptable level.

This denotes that avoidance mitigation wherever possible must be implemented. This includes changes to project infrastructure design to limit the amount of habitat impacted. The maintenance of basal vegetation cover beneath the solar panels will contribute to achieving avoidance, so complete clearance is not recommended. Project planning and layout considered provides favourable avoidance mitigation. The overall low cumulative residual impact does not present a fatal flaw for the development, and in accordance with the Biodiversity Offset Guideline (2022) will not incur a listed (and notable) change to the land and resource.

**Considering the above-mentioned information, no fatal flaws are evident for the proposed project.**

#### **5.3.1.3 Wetlands and Riparian Features**

A South African Inventory of Inland Aquatic Ecosystems (SAIIAE) was established during the National Biodiversity Assessment of 2018. It is a collection of data layers that represent the extent of the river and inland wetland ecosystem types as well as pressures on these systems. Strategic Water Source Areas (SWSAs) are defined as areas of land that supply a quantity of mean annual surface water runoff in relation to their size and therefore, contribute considerably to the overall water supply of the country. These are key ecological infrastructure assets and the effective protection of surface water SWSAs is vital for national security because a lack of water security will compromise national security and human wellbeing. National Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Area (NFEPA) database provides strategic spatial priorities for conserving the country's freshwater ecosystems and associated biodiversity as well as supporting sustainable use of water resources.

The Ecosystem Threat Status (ETS) of river and wetland ecosystem types are based on the extent to which each river ecosystem type had been altered from its natural condition. Ecosystem types are categorised as Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN), Vulnerable (VU), or Least Concern (LC), with CR, EN and VU ecosystem types collectively referred to as 'threatened' (Van Deventer et al., 2019; Skowno et al., 2019).

The natural aquatic features within the wider study area comprise an unnamed tributary of the Olifantsvlei River and some seep wetland areas. The stream largely occurs outside of the proposed development area and passes along its northern border. The seep wetlands are highly modified, occurring in previously cultivated areas. Most of the natural aquatic vegetation associated with the aquatic features has been removed and the remaining vegetation tends to be dominated by a mix of indigenous and alien grasses such as *Cynodon dactylon*, *Imperata cylindrica*, *Paspalum dilatatum*, *Eragrostis inamoena* and *Agrostis lachnantha*. Seasonal wetland vegetation occurring within the

wetter wetland areas in the area includes *Juncus* spp., *Cyperus rupestris*, *Cyperus congestus*, *Mariscus congestus*, *Kyllinga alba*, and *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*. Figure 5.11 and 5.12 provides views of the aquatic features located at the site. According to the report, the site lies to the south of the Vaal River within the Middle Vaal Management Area (Quaternary Catchments C24B and C70K). The wider study area is relatively flat, with the low hill of Paradyskop occurring within the site. The general drainage on the site is towards the Olifantsvlei and Renoster Rivers to the east, as well as the Vaal River to the north and Table 5-4 below provides an overview of the aquatic resources associated with the proposed site.

**Table 5-4:** Key water resources information for the proposed project development area

Descriptor	Name / details	Notes
Water Management Area	Middle Vaal	
Catchment Area	Vaal River	Tributary - Orange River
Quaternary Catchment	C24B (Vaal River); C70K (Renoster and Olifantsvlei Rivers)	
Present Ecological state	Vaal (C24B): Moderately modified (C Category) Renoster (C70K): Moderately modified (C Category) Olifantsvlei (C70K): Largely modified (D Category)	DWS (2014) rapid PES and EI&ES assessments
Ecological Importance (EI) and Ecological Sensitivity (ES)	Vaal (C24B): EI: High; ES: High Renoster (C70K): EI: High; ES: High Olifantsvlei: EI: Moderate; ES: Moderate	
Target Ecological Category	Vaal (C24B): Largely modified (D Category) Renoster (C70K): Moderately modified (C Category)	DWS (2014) RQOs
Location of the centre of site	27° 0'47"S	Latitude
	26°53'19"E	Longitude



**Figure 5.11.** View of a typical *Imperata* seep wetland in the study area



**Figure 5.12.** Views of the Olifantsvlei (top) and Renoster (bottom) Rivers further to the east of the site

#### **5.3.1.3.1 Wetland Impact Assessment**

The purpose of an aquatic ecological assessment is to determine the relative importance, sensitivity, and current condition (ecological state) to assess the impact of proposed development activities on the associated aquatic ecosystems. The assessment is also required to make recommendations in terms of mitigation measures that can be used to prevent or minimise the impact on the freshwater resources. This assessment of the seasonal watercourses and seep wetlands identified within the wider study area is based on existing information as well as the field assessment. The wetlands have been subjected to physical habitat disturbance with flow and water quality modification largely as a result of the surrounding farming activities. In terms of the current ecological state of the wetlands are considered to be largely to serious modified. Some wetlands have been less impacted by agriculture in the higher lying areas.

Based on the present ecological condition (largely to seriously modified) and ecological importance and sensitivity (moderate to low), as well as the recommended ecological condition of the wetlands (largely modified), buffers have been recommended to protect these ecosystems. The recommended buffer area between the aquatic features and the project components to ensure these aquatic ecosystems are not impacted by the proposed activities ranges between 20m and 50m from the delineated edge of the wetlands. The highly degraded (low sensitivity) wetlands within existing cultivated lands are not deemed a constraint to the proposed project as they have already been significantly modified by agricultural activities and are of low aquatic sensitivity.

#### 5.3.1.4 Climate, Geology and Geohydrology

Within the study area, average temperatures vary from 9.3°C in June/July to 22.4°C in January and February. The wet season occurs from October to mid-April, with February tending to be the wettest month and July the driest month. The mean annual rainfall for the area is 525mm, with the highest rainfall month on average being January (78mm) and the lowest, June/July (0mm). Except for the larger rivers (Vaal, Renoster and Olifantsvlei Rivers that are off-site) the aquatic features in the area are non-perennial. These non-perennial or seasonal aquatic features are thus only inundated in summer during the rainfall period. A minor intergranular and fractured aquifer occurs in the area that has low yields of less than 0.5 l/s. The groundwater table is generally about 22 m below ground level. The water quality is relatively poor, with electrical conductivities of between 150 and 370 mS/m. The aquifer has a medium to high susceptibility to contamination from anthropogenic activities. The site is not in a Strategic Water Source Area for surface or groundwater.

#### 5.3.1.5 Avifauna

The primary cause of loss of biological diversity is habitat degradation and loss (IUCN, 2004; Primack, 2006). In the case of this study special attention was given to the identification of sensitive species or animal life and birds on site. The following section will discuss the state of avifauna biodiversity on the site in more detail. A baseline description of the avifaunal community has been provided in the Terrestrial Biodiversity Assessment (Appendix D2) and avifaunal site sensitivity verification report (attached as Appendix D4) was undertaken for this project. Sampling of the entire proposed Paradys PV Cluster was conducted in winter, over 5 days, from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 2023.

During the assessment SABAP2 data indicate that 291 avifauna species are expected for the PAOI and surrounding habitats. Of these, 15 are considered SCC and include those listed in Table 5-5. Eighty (80) of the 291 expected species were observed during the single site visit. Only two SCC have been observed during the first field investigation.

**Table 5-5:** Species of Conservation Concern, endemic and near-endemic bird species predicted and recorded




Common Name	Scientific Name	Regional	Global <sup>4</sup>
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	VU	LC

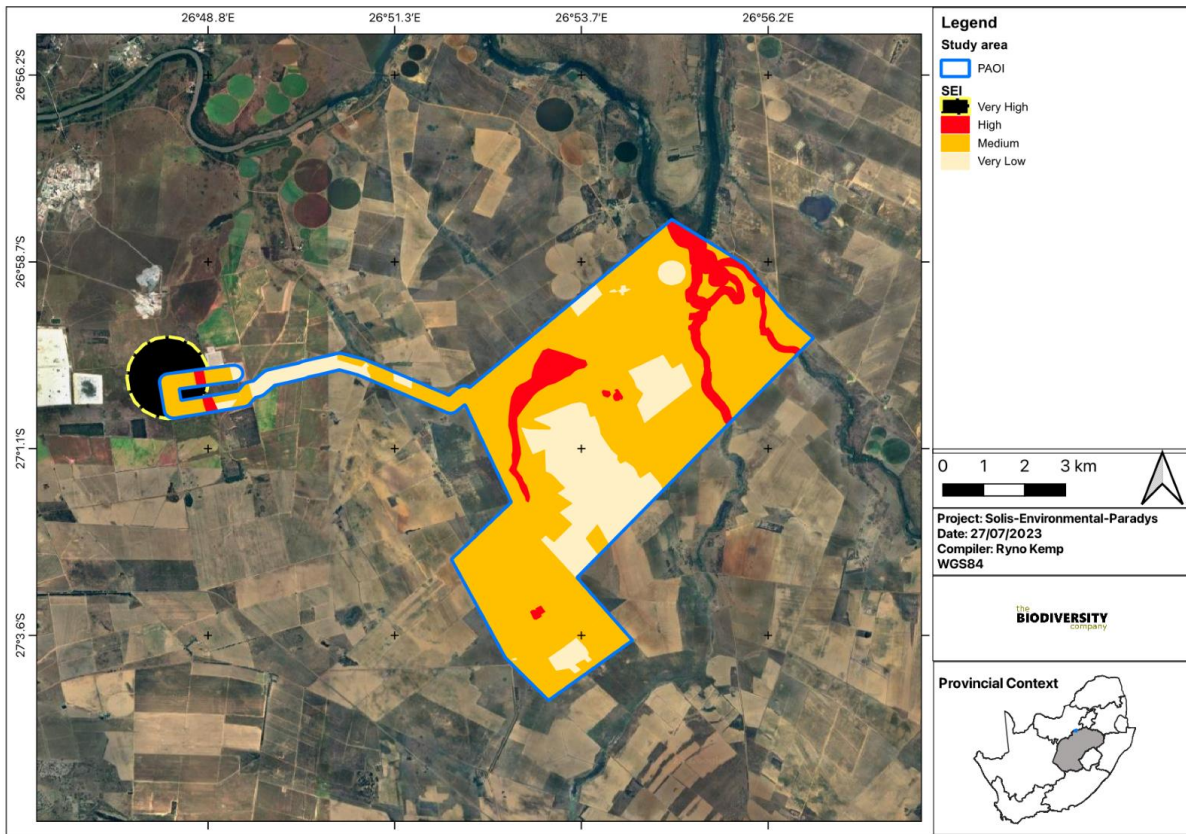
<sup>4</sup> Threatened avifauna species that are expected to occur within the project area CR = Critically Endangered, EN = Endangered, LC = Least Concern, NT = Near Threatened and VU = Vulnerable

Common Name	Scientific Name	Regional	Global <sup>4</sup>
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	NT	LC
Caspian Tern	<i>Hydropogone caspia</i>	VU	LC
Secretarybird	<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>	VU	EN
Maccoa Duck	<i>Oxyura maccoa</i>	NT	EN
Martial Eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>	EN	EN
Lesser Flamingo	<i>Phoeniconaias minor</i>	NT	NT
African Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus ranivorus</i>	EN	LC
African Grass Owl	<i>Tyto capensis</i>	VU	LC
Black-winged Pratincole	<i>Glareola nordmanni</i>	NT	NT
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	NT	LC
Curlew Sandpiper	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>	LC	NT
Abdim's Stork	<i>Ciconia abdimii</i>	NT	LC
Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>	EN	LC
White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>	CR	CR

The different habitat types within the PAOI were delineated and identified based on observations during the field assessment and available satellite imagery. These habitat types were assigned Site Ecological Importance (SEI) categories based on their ecological integrity, conservation value, the presence of species of conservation concern. The habitat types were delineated within the Project Area, namely Bushveld, Degraded Bushveld, degraded Bushveld and Modified habitat (see Table 5-6 below). Their respective SEI and the corresponding mitigation guidelines are visually illustrated in Figure 5.13.

**Table 5-6** illustrate the different type of habitat in the site (see below).

Habitat	Description	SCC possibly occurring there	Photographs
<b>Water Resource</b>	Water System	Phoenicopterus roseus, Hydropogone caspia, Oxyura maccoa, Phoeniconaias minor, Circus ranivorus, Tyto capensis, Calidris ferruginea, Ciconia abdimii, Mycteria ibis	
<b>Degraded Grassland</b>	Grassland and savannah systems with some evidence of past agricultural activities.	Falco biarmicus, Sagittarius serpentarius, Polemaetus bellicosus, Glareola nordmanni, Coracias garrulus	
<b>Modified</b>	Homesteads and associated infrastructure as well as prominent roads, disturbed areas and current agricultural activities	Falco biarmicus	



**Figure 5.13:** Avifauna Site Ecological Importance (SEI) for the proposed Solar Power Plant (SPP) Project Area



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### 5.3.1.5 Visual Landscape

Visual impacts occur when changes in the landscape are noticeable to viewers looking at the landscape from their homes or from parks and conservation areas, highways and travel routes, and important cultural features and historic sites.

The proposed Solar PV development is located in close proximity to the Vaal River, Renoster River, Olivantsvlei and the Paradys koppie that traverse, spatial distribution of the various landscape types identified:

- Koppies
- Rivers/streams
- Grassland
- Lodges or tourist accommodation
- Residential (farmsteads and workers villages)
- Agricultural fields
- Infrastructure (roads, railway and power lines)

Landscape character types are landscape units refined from Mucina and Rutherford (2009) vegetation types, the regional physiographic and cultural data derived from 1:50 000 topographical maps, aerial photographs and information gathered on the site visit. Photographic panoramas are presented in Figures 5 – 7 (Landscape Character) to illustrate the nature and character of the study area's landscape.



Photo 1: View from the R76 towards the proposed project site, approximately 10.2km west.



Photo 2: View from the R76 towards the proposed project site, approximately 5.6km west.



Refer to Figure 3 for the location of the viewpoints.

### Figure 5: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project  
August 2023



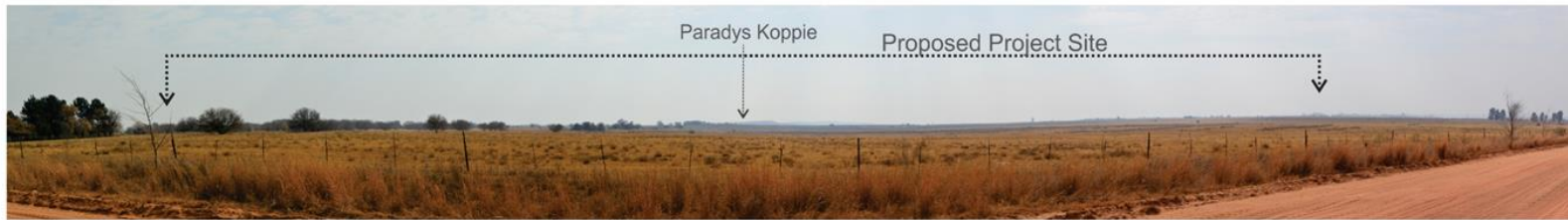


Photo 5a: View from the S462 towards the proposed project site, northern section.



Photo 5b: View from the S462 towards the proposed project site, southern section.



Photo A: Example of vegetation forming a screen along the Vermaasdrift Rd.

Refer to Figure 3 for the location of the viewpoints.



**Figure 6: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER**

Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project  
August 2023





Photo 6a: View from the Vermaasdrift Rd towards the proposed project site, northern section.



Photo 6b: View from the Vermaasdrift Rd towards the proposed project site, western section.



Photo B: View of the Mercury Substation.

Refer to Figure 3 for the location of the viewpoints.



### Figure 7: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project  
August 2023



#### **5.3.1.5.1 Visual Receptors**

The visibility of the proposed project is based on the distance from the proposed project to selected viewpoints. The 'zone of potential influence' was established at 10km, over 10km the impact of the Project's activities would have diminished as the project will recede into the background and/or views to the site would be screened by vegetation, the rolling topography and existing residential/urban structure.

Visual receptors most susceptible to change are generally likely to include:

- Residents at home;
- People who are engaged in outdoor recreation, including use of public rights of way, whose attention or interest is likely to be focused on the landscape and or particular views;
- Visitors to heritage assets or other attractions, where views of the surroundings are an important contributor to the experience;
- Communities where views contribute to the landscape setting and enjoyed by residents in the area

Visual receptors with a moderate susceptibility to change will include:

- Travellers on road, rail or other transport routes.

Visual receptors that are likely less sensitive to change would include:

- People engaged in outdoor sport or recreation which does not involve or depend on appreciation of views of the landscape;
- People at their place of work whose attention may be on their work and not on their surrounding

#### Visual Impact

The visual impact of the proposed project was determined by first looking at the *severity/magnitude* of the visual impact. This is determined using visibility, visual absorption capacity, landscape integrity, visual exposure and viewer sensitivity criteria. When the *severity/magnitude* of the impact is qualified with spatial, duration and probability criteria the significance of the impact can be predicted. This is done by using the Impact Assessment Criteria as provided by the Environmental Assessment Practitioner.

The visual impact of the project will be caused during the construction, when vegetation is cleared for the purpose of site establishment, stockpiling of material, the movement of heavy vehicles and machinery on site, the site office or camp site and the construction of the PV plant and associated infrastructure. During the operational phase the entire Project will have an impact on the visual resource of the area. During the decommissioning phase the Project will not necessarily have a negative visual impact but will rather be a nuisance to the surrounding community due to the

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decommissioning of the panels, generation of dust and heavy vehicles using the access roads. Activities associated with the Project will mostly be visible during daytime and at night it is anticipated that the visual impact will be limited to the security lights associated with the Project and will therefore have an impact on the surrounding farmsteads.

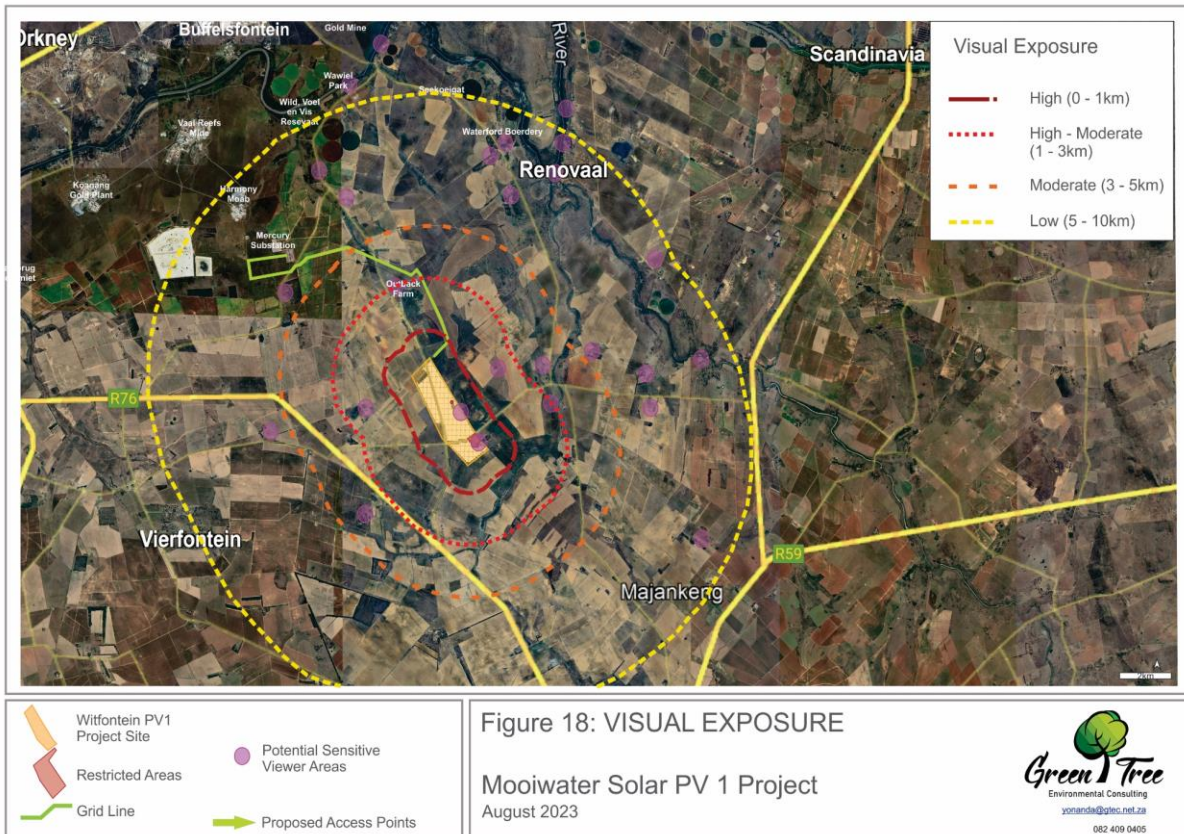
The most prominent views to the Project site would be from the farmsteads and smaller worker's villages that directly surround the Project site or falls within the first kilometre from the project. These include the farmsteads bordering the western boundary and farmsteads located to the east of the project site. Other viewers with a potentially *high* sensitivity toward the Project include people visiting the area due to the aesthetic beauty of the area, this would include tourist destinations in the area, and farmsteads located within the Medium Visual Exposure Zone (1-3km from the project site). Although these viewers are sensitive viewers it should be noted that the Project, as per the previous comments, would mostly be obstructed, due to the topography and vegetation within the study area.

Visual exposure is determined by qualifying the visibility with a distance rating to indicate the degree of intrusion and visual acuity. The following criteria was used to describe the visual exposure (see Table 5-7 below):

- Highly visible – dominant or clearly noticeable, foreground view (0km – 1km)
- High-Moderately visible – noticeable to the viewer, middle-ground view (1km – 3km)
- Moderately visible – recognisable to the viewer, middle-ground view (3km – 5km)
- Marginally (Low) visible – not particularly noticeable to the viewer, background view (5km – 10km)

**Table 5-7: Sensitive Receptors – Visual Exposure**

Foreground View	Middle-ground View		Background View
High 0km - 1km	High-Moderate 1km - 3km	Moderate 3km - 5km	Low 5km - 10km
<p>The project will be in the foreground for viewers located within this zone. Views will vary from clear to partially obstructed views. Viewers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Outback Farm</li> <li>• Farmsteads located to the south and along the north-eastern corner</li> <li>• Sections of the Vermaasdrift Rd</li> <li>• Sections of the S463</li> </ul>	<p>The project will be in the middle ground for viewers located within this zone. Views will vary from clear, partially obstructed to completely screened views. Viewers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Waterford Boerdery</li> <li>• Farmstead located on the corner of the S462 &amp; S463 (South-east of site)</li> <li>• Farmstead located on the S462 (south of site)</li> <li>• Farmstead along Vermaasdrift Rd (West of the site)</li> <li>• Sections of the Vermaasdrift Rd</li> <li>• Sections of the S463</li> <li>• Sections of the S462</li> </ul>	<p>The project will be in the middle to background for viewers located within this zone. Views will vary from partially to obstructed/ screened views. Viewers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourist accommodation along the Vaal River such as Renovaal, and Inyadu Lodge</li> <li>• Seekoigat</li> <li>• Farmstead located south-west of the site</li> <li>• Farmstead along Vermaasdrift Rd (North-west of the site)</li> <li>• Farmstead located along Olifantsvlei (south-east of the site)</li> <li>• Sections of the Vermaasdrift Rd</li> <li>• Sections of the S463</li> <li>• Sections of the S462</li> </ul>	<p>The project will be in the background for viewers located within this zone. Views will vary from partially to obstructed/ screened views. Viewers include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourist accommodation along the Vaal River such as Wawiel Park</li> <li>• Wild, Voël en Vis Reservaat</li> <li>• Farmstead located to the south, east and the south-west of the site.</li> <li>• Sections of the S463</li> <li>• Sections of the S462</li> <li>• Section of the R76</li> </ul>



**Figure 5.14:** Visual Exposure Map for the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Project.

It is anticipated that the significance of the visual impact will be “Negative Moderate” but with the correct and successful implementation of mitigation measures it will be “Negative Low” for the Witfontein Solar PV Project.

### 5.3.1.6 Traffic consideration

Due to the nature of the development, it is anticipated that the solar panel technology and large electrical components will be imported and arrive at ports of entry via ship. This required the identification of the most optimal shipping port(s) at which large components could be delivered to the region, the assessment of feasible transportation routes, route lengths and potential constraints to be considered in further phases of the project. Two possible ports of entry have been identified from where the solar panel technology and large electrical components will be transported, namely: Richards Bay and Durban. The distance from the Port of Richards Bay to the Witfontein Solar PV 1 is approximately 678km via the R34 and R723 and from Port of Durban to the Witfontein Solar PV 1 is approximately 607km via the N3, N5 and R76. Based on the shortest travel distance, it is recommended that the Port of Durban be the preferred port of entry (see table 5-8 below).



**Table 5-8: Route overview – Port of Durban**

PREFERRED ROUTE	ALTERNATIVE ROUTE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head north from the Port of Durban,</li> <li>• Turn right onto Quayside Rd,</li> <li>• At the roundabout, take the 1st exit and stay on Quayside Rd,</li> <li>• Continue onto Stalwart Simelane St,</li> <li>• Turn left onto Bram Fischer Rd/M4,</li> <li>• Continue on David Webster St/M4/R102 past Durban Central,</li> <li>• Merge onto N3 to Pietermaritzburg, Stay on N3,</li> <li>• Merge onto N5 via the ramp to N1/Harrismith/Bethlehem/Bloemfontein,</li> <li>• Continue onto Hospital Rd/R26 past Bethlehem,</li> <li>• Turn left onto Malan St,</li> <li>• Turn right onto Lindley St,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Head north from Port of Durban,</li> <li>• Turn right onto Quayside Rd,</li> <li>• At the roundabout, take the 1st exit and stay on Quayside Rd,</li> <li>• Continue onto Stalwart Simelane St,</li> <li>• Turn left onto Bram Fischer Rd/M4,</li> <li>• Continue on David Webster St/M4/R102 past Durban Central,</li> <li>• Merge onto N3 to Pietermaritzburg, Stay on N3,</li> <li>• Stay on N3 until exit 133 for R34 towards Vrede/Frankfort,</li> <li>• Turn Left onto R34 and Stay on R34 past the town of Frankfort, and towards town of Heilbron,</li> <li>• Turn right then, Turn right onto Laer Street,</li> </ul>

PREFERRED ROUTE	ALTERNATIVE ROUTE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turn left at the 3<sup>rd</sup> cross street onto Pretorius St,</li> <li>• Turn right onto Commissioner St/R76 past town of Lindley, Steynsrus and towards town of Kroonstad,</li> <li>• At the roundabout, take the 2<sup>nd</sup> exit onto South Rd/R76,</li> <li>• At the roundabout, take 2<sup>nd</sup> exit onto R76,</li> <li>• At the roundabout, take the 2<sup>nd</sup> exit onto Louw St/R76,</li> <li>• At the roundabout take the 1<sup>st</sup> exit, continue onto R76 towards town of Viljoenskroon,</li> <li>• Continue onto R76 past intersection with R59,</li> <li>• Turn right onto first intersection on your right after passing the river on your right, continue straight towards Witfontein SPP access point ahead.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turn left onto R723 towards town of Vredefort,</li> <li>• Turn right onto Plein St/R721,</li> <li>• Turn left onto 1ste Laan,</li> <li>• Turn left onto R59 towards town of Majankeng,</li> <li>• Turn right onto R501 towards Bruwer trekker Veld Dienst and Arthurs Rest,</li> <li>• Turn left on intersection across Bruwer Trekker Veld Dienst just before Arthur's rest intersection of the right,</li> <li>• Turn right on T junction towards Klipplaatfontein primary school, continue straight towards Witfontein SPP access point ahead.</li> </ul>



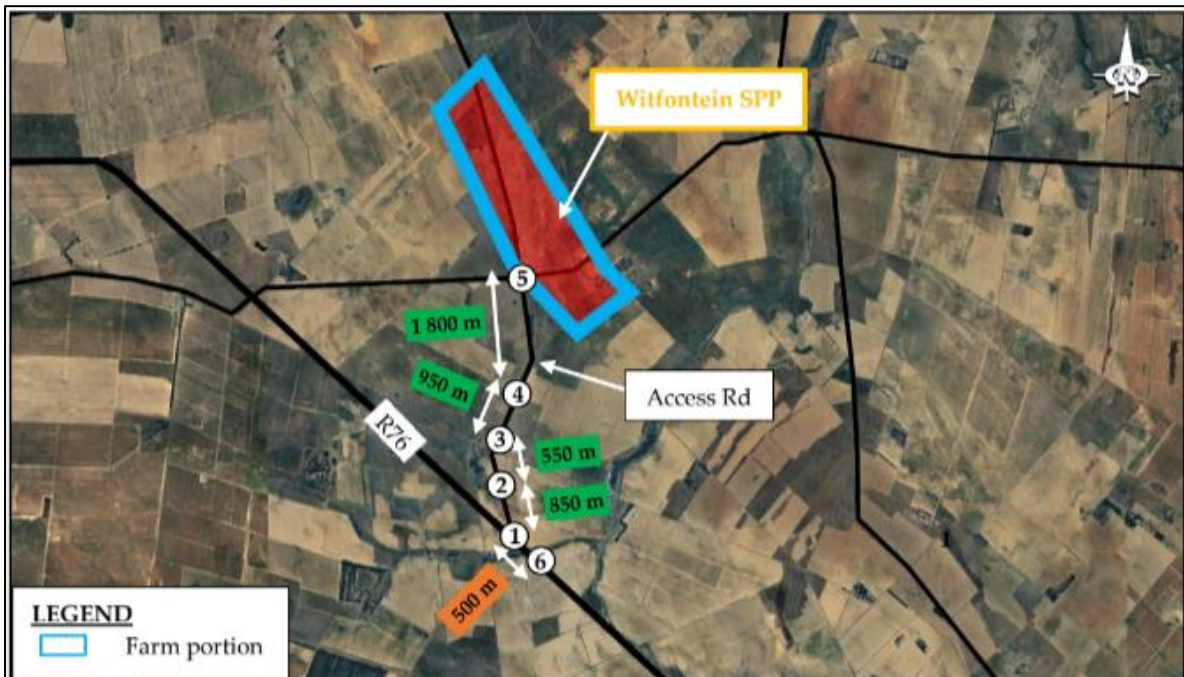
**Figure 5.15:** Preferred haulage route from Port Durban to Witfontein Solar PV 1 (via N3, N5 and R76)

Witfontein Solar PV 1 project is expected to generate additional traffic on the surrounding road network in three distinct phases, namely: construction, operation & maintenance, and decommissioning. Table 5-9 below provide the typical staff breakdown expected for the Witfontein Solar PV 1. It was assumed that 10% of staff/ workers will make use of private vehicles and the remaining 90% of staff/ workers will make use of public transport.

**Table 5-9:** Typical staff breakdown

STAFF CATEGORY	NO. OF STAFF	VEHICLE TYPE	VEHICLE OCCUPANCY	NO. OF VEHICLES
Construction labourers	340	Buses	60	6
Foremen	20			
Specialists	20	Light vehicles	1.2	34
Engineers	10			
Project Managers	10			

It should be noted that the majority of the other roads surrounding the proposed project site are unsurfaced (i.e., gravel or sand-based) roadways classified as Class 3 Rural Minor Arterial roadway and primarily fulfil an access function for the neighbouring farms. Two existing farm access roadways are located within the proposed site development footprint and these are shown on Figure 5.15. This may likely be a requirement as part of the wayleave application approval of the *Matzikama Local Municipality*, *West Coast District Municipality* and *Western Cape Department of Roads and Transport*.



**Figure 5.16:** Existing intersections and access spacing.

The assessment concluded that the major traffic impact occurs during the construction phase of the project. The impact of the construction trip generation, on the predicted traffic volumes on the local and the regional transportation routes are expected to be

## 5.3.2 Description of the Socio-Economic Environment

The socio-economic environment is described with specific reference to social, economic, heritage and cultural aspects.

### 5.3.2.1 Socio-Economic Conditions

According to the Social Impact Assessment (Appendix E6) Free State Province is the landlocked core of the country. It is centrally placed, with good transport corridors to the north and the coast. It is the third biggest of South Africa's nine provinces in terms of size, and primary agriculture is a key economic sector. Mining is also important but has been declining steadily since 2008. Although the Free State is the third-largest province in South Africa, it has the second-smallest population and the second-lowest population density. It covers an area of 129 825km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 2 834 714—5.1% of the national population. Languages spoken include Sesotho (64.4%), Afrikaans (11.9%) and Zulu (9.1%). The Free State Province contributes 5.4% to South Africa's total gross domestic product (2006).

Agriculture is a key economic sector—8% of the country's produce comes from Free State. In 2010, agriculture provided 19.2% of all formal employment opportunities in the region. The economy is dominated by agriculture, mining and manufacturing. Known as the 'bread-basket' of South Africa, about 90% of the province is under cultivation for crop production. It produces approximately 34% of the total maize production of South Africa, 37% of wheat, 53% of sorghum, 33% of potatoes, 18% of redmeat, 30% of groundnuts and 15% of wool. The province is the world's fifth-largest gold producer, with mining the major employer.

The Free State Province is divided into five (5) district municipalities, i.e. the Fezile Dabi, Thabo Mofutsanyana, Lejweleputswa, Manguang and Xhariep district municipalities. Figure 5.21 below illustrates the location of the District Municipality within the Free State Province. The study area is located within the Fezile Dabi district municipality. This district municipality covers an area of approximately 20 668 km<sup>2</sup> and consists of four (4) local municipalities, i.e. the Moqhaka, Ngwathe, Metsimaholo, and Mafube local municipalities. The proposed Paradys SEF is located in the Moghaqa Local Municipality, which comprises of 7 925 km<sup>2</sup> and the administrative seat is located in the town of Kroonstad.



**Figure 5.17:** District Municipalities located within the Free State Province

Fezile Dabi District Municipality

Fezile Dabi District Municipality’s (DC20) population makes up 494 777 (17.45%) of the Free State Province. The Fezile Dabi District Population is distributed across the four local municipalities as displayed on the table below as sourced from Stats SA, Community Surveys 2016:

**Table 5-10:** Analysis of Demographic Profile of Fezile Dabi District Municipality (FDDM, 2002-2027:17)

Analysis of Demographic Profile: Fezile Dabi District Municipality				
Name of Local Municipality	Total Population (SC 2016)	% of District Population	Total Population (Stats. 2011)	Growth rate from 2011 (%)
Metsimaholo	163 564	33.05	149 108	2.1
Mafube	57 574	11.64	57 876	-0.1
Moqhaka	154 732	31.27	160 532	-0.8
Ngwathe	118 907	24.03	120 520	-0.3

From the above table, it is evident that the majority of the population in the district is situated in Metsimaholo Local Municipality (FS204), which accounts for 33.05% of the population of the district.

It is followed by Moqhaka Local Municipality (FS201), with 31.27% of the district population, then followed by Ngwathe Local Municipality (FS203), which 24,03% of the district population. Mafube Local Municipality (FS205) has the smallest population percentage in the district at 11,64%.

Except for Metsimaholo Local Municipality which has recorded a positive population growth of 2.1% between 2011 and 2016, the other three municipalities have realised a negative growth, with Moqhaka Local Municipality's population having declined by 0.8%.

Private households provides employment to about 17.6% of the district's employed population, which is higher than the SA District average, followed by community and social services and agriculture, hunting and forestry. Electricity, gas and water sectors are providing the least employment in the district, at below 1%, which is in line with the SA District average. However, measures must be taken to explore the potential that these and other sectors such as manufacturing, construction, etc can be assessed to determine their potential to create more jobs in the district.

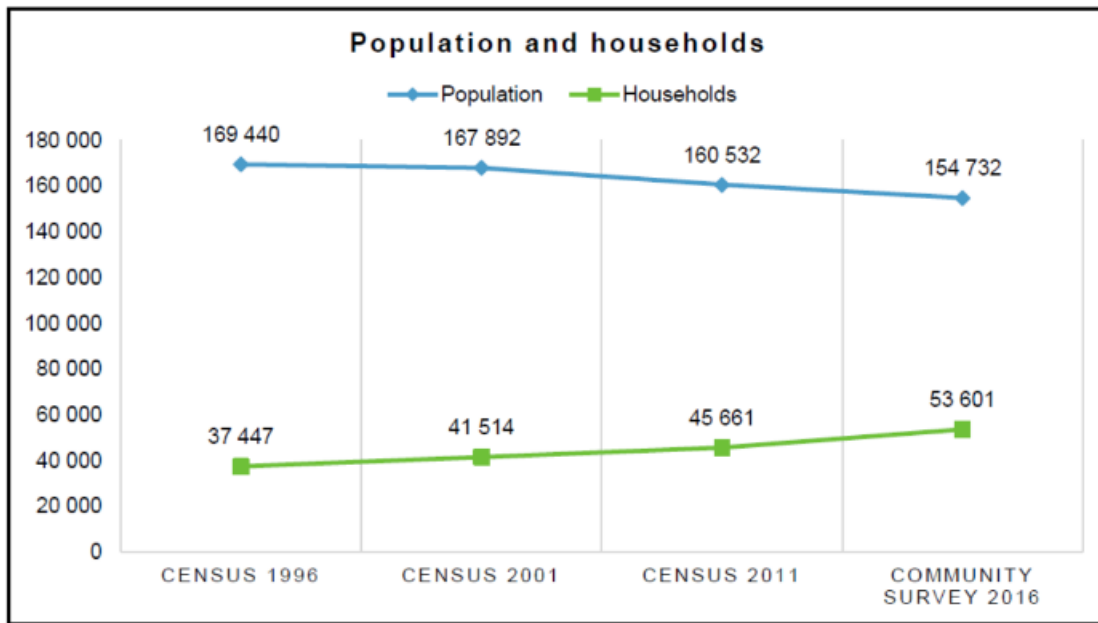
#### Moqhaka Local Municipality

The Paradys solar energy facility is located within the Moqhaka Local Municipality (MLM) within the Fezile Dabi District Municipality. The area of jurisdiction of the MLM is situated in the southern part of the Fezile Dabi District Municipality. The former Kroonstad, Steynsrus and Viljoenskroon Transitional Local Councils and sections of the Riemland, Kroonkop and Koepel Transitional Rural Councils are included in the MLM.

Apart from the dominant role agriculture plays in the region, no other significant economic activity exists. The Moqhaka area, like the rest of the Fezile Dabi District, is not considered as a primary tourist destination, although the area is increasingly becoming a favourite weekend destination. The hunting and guesthouse industries displayed an exceedingly rapid growth the past few years. Recreation areas and facilities are predominantly confined to the urban areas. The Kroonpark recreation and holiday resort in Kroonstad attracts interest throughout the region.

The Vaal River borders Moqhaka to the west. The Vals and Renoster Rivers drain through the area towards the Vaal River. These rivers play a significant role in providing the raw water supply to Kroonstad, Steynsrus and Viljoenskroon respectively. The topography of the area is particularly homogeneous with no prominent features and the area is characterised by extremely moderate slopes. The western areas, in the vicinity of Viljoenskroon, are known for various shallow and non-perennial pans.

The figure below indicates that the population of the municipality has decreased by 4.4% from 167 892 in 2001 to 160 532 persons in 2011. The community survey conducted during 2016 indicated that the population once again decreased with 3.61% to 154 732. Contrary to the aforementioned, the number of households increased by 10.0% from 41 514 in 2001 to 45 661 and increased again with 17.39% to 53 601 according to the Community Survey results of 2016.



**Figure 5.18:** Population and household

### 5.3.3 Cultural and Heritage Environment

In order to determine the feasibility of the project, a cultural heritage assessment was d1 for the proposed Witfontein Solar PV Project, in order to determine if there would be any red flag issues on the project site.

#### 5.3.3.1.1 Historic Background

The proposed Witfontein Solar PV facility and associated grid infrastructure is located in peri-urban farms just outside the towns of Orkney (North West) and Viljoenskroon (Free State). The town of Orkney was established in 1940 at the junction of the various railway lines. It was name after the old gold mine opened by Thomas Leask, who came from the Orkney Islands, in 1880 (SESA1973 in Van Schalkwyk 2021). Viljoenskroon is a maize and cattle farming town located in the Free State province of South Africa. It was named after the original farm owner J. J. Viljoen and his horse Kroon. The town was laid out in 1921 on the farm "Mahemskuil" and became a municipality in 1925. A number of large gold and diamond mines are also located in between the three solar PV sites, namely Taulekoa Mine next to Goedgenoeg 433, Kopanong Gold Mine next to Pretorius Kraal 53 and Great Noligwa Mine next to Groot Vaders Bosch 592. Ruins of or intact avenues of trees, historical farmsteads and farm labourer’s cottages may potentially be found within the proposed development areas. The cultural landscape is characterised by a agriculture with abrupt transitions into extremely heavy industrial areas in and around the mining compounds.

#### 5.3.3.1.2 Archaeology

Archaeological sites spanning different Stone Age periods have been discovered in the region, despite significant agricultural changes. In assessments of Pretorius Kraal 53, some modern buildings near the Vaal River were considered non-conservation-worthy. Artefacts from the Middle to Later Stone Age

were observed on the Grootdraai 468 farm during an impact assessment of the Siyanda Solar farm. However, visibility challenges due to dense vegetation hindered ground visibility, and a proposed power line corridor was not surveyed. Two burial sites were recorded, guided by a local informant. Other assessments in the vicinity yielded archaeological materials, including stone artefacts and a blade-like flake potentially from the Middle Stone Age. An archaeological assessment for the Orkney PV Facility identified cemeteries, hinting at the likelihood of more burials and Stone Age artifacts on the proposed solar PV areas. An archaeological field survey is recommended.

In 2022, an HIA (Heritage Impact Assessment) was conducted by CTS Heritage for the nearby Mercury PV Cluster solar project. The assessment revealed a single archaeological site and a few scattered individual artifacts. Henderson and Koortzen (2007, SAHRIS ID 7340) note that “These artefacts had been brought up from an unknown depth (probably no more than a metre or two) and were mostly undiagnostic flakes with one blade-like flake which could be Middle Stone Age. Raw material included cryptocrystalline, chert and quartz. Van der Walt (2016) conducted an archaeological field assessment and identify two cemeteries. It is therefore highly likely that further burials may be located on the proposed solar PV areas as well as Stone Age material similar to the artefacts recorded but not mapped by Van der Walt. One isolated historic burial and an historic burial ground were identified within the vicinity of the Zaaiploats farm werf. These resources have high levels of social and intrinsic cultural value and are graded IIIA. The presence of these burials highlights the possibility of further hidden or unmarked burials located throughout the development area. It is likely that similar archaeological resources will be present within this development area.

The field assessment identified two historic stone kraals located within the PV footprint for the Witfontein PV facility. These sites (Site 40 and 41). These sites represent historic kraals which contribute to the broader agricultural history of the context of the PV development area. These sites have therefore been determined to have low levels of local significance and have been graded IIIC. It is recommended that a no-development buffer of 50m is implemented around these sites to ensure that they are not damaged by the development of the PV infrastructure (refer to Table 5-11). This recommended buffer is not reflected in the layout provided.

**Table 5-11: Heritage Resource identified**

Obs#	Description	Type	Period	Density	Latitude	Longitude	Grade	Mitigation
035	Graves, born 1908, Johannes W? G? NG, completely overgrown, hard to tell how many are here	Graves/ Burial Grounds	Historic	n/a	-27.065817	26.899601	IIIA	100m Buffer
040	Rectangular stone kraal with entrance feature, historical	Structure	Historic	n/a	-27.053338	26.882659	IIIC	50m Buffer
041	More kraal features	Structure	Historic	n/a	-27.051986	26.882445	IIIC	50m Buffer
048	Graves	Graves	Modern	n/a	-27.0608371	26.8767177	IIIA	100m Buffer

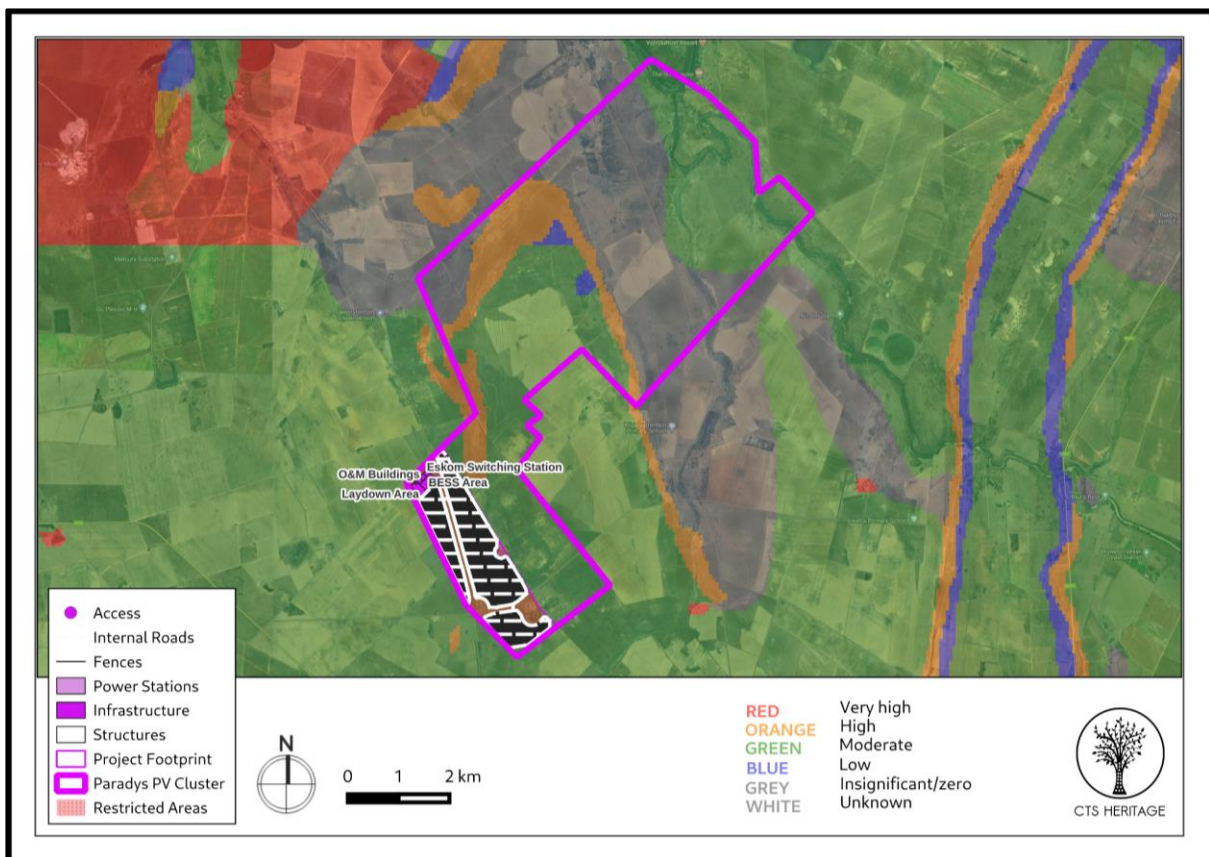
### 5.3.3.1.3 Palaeontology

According to the Palaeontological Impact Assessment (refer to Appendix D7), the proposed Witfontein Solar PV is underlain by Allanridge and Rietgat Formations of the Ventersdorp Subgroup. Ventersdorp Subgroup characterises a major occurrence of igneous extrusion that is associated with the fracturing



of the Kaapvaal Craton approximately 2.7 Billion years ago. The broader area is “underlain near-surface or at depth by shallow marine carbonate bedrocks of the Malmani Subgroup (Chuniespoort Group, Transvaal Supergroup) of Precambrian age that are known to contain fossil stromatolites (laminated microbial bio-sedimentary structures) of various shapes and sizes (domes, columns etc). Indeed, stromatolite occurrences on Farm Grootdraai 468 are specifically mentioned in the Kroonstad 1: 250 000 geological sheets.

Site visit indicated that exposure levels of Precambrian bedrocks within the solar facility and grid connection project areas are generally very low due to low topographic relief and karstic weathering across an ancient land surface, widespread sandy soil cover and dense grassy vegetation. Well-preserved occurrences of stromatolites worthy of scientific interest are apparently rare, while the stromatolite varieties recorded here are likely to be of widespread. The proposed PV projects are located entirely on moderately sensitive Quaternary sands.” As such, neither the Allanridge Formation nor the Rietgat Formation are known to be fossiliferous. It is therefore very unlikely that the proposed development will impact on significant palaeontological heritage (refer to Figure 5.18 for the PaleoMap) and no further assessment is recommended in this regard.



**Figure 5.19:** Palaeontological sensitivity of the proposed development area

#### 5.4 SITE SELECTION MATRIX

Due to the nature of the proposed development, the location of the solar PV facility is largely dependent on technical and environmental factors such as solar irradiation, climatic conditions,



topography of the site, access to the grid and capacity of the grid. Studies of solar irradiation worldwide indicate that the Free State Province has a high potential for the generation of power from solar.

The receptiveness of the site to Witfontein Solar PV includes the presence of optimal conditions for the siting of a solar energy facility due to high irradiation values and optimum grid connection opportunities (i.e., the grid connection points are located within the affected property which minimises the length of power line development and consolidates the overall impacts and disturbance of the project within the affected property). The Remainder of the Farm Witfontein No. 444 where the project is proposed to be located is considered favorable and suitable from a technical perspective due to the following characteristics:

- Climatic conditions: Climatic conditions determine if the project will be viable from an economic perspective as the Solar PV facility is directly dependent on the annual direct solar irradiation values of a particular area. The Free State receives high averages of direct normal and global horizontal irradiation daily. This is an indication that the regional location of the project includes a low number of rainy days and a high number of daylight hours experienced in the region. The Global Horizontal Radiation value is around 2118 kWh/m<sup>2</sup> per annum is relevant in the area.
- Topographic conditions: The surface area on which the proposed facility will be located has a favourable level topography, which facilitates work involved with construction and maintenance of the facility and ensures that shadowing on the panels do not occur. The topographic conditions, which are favourable, minimises the significance of the impact that will occur during the clearing and leveling of the site for the construction activities.
- Extent of the site: A significant portion of land is required to evacuate up to 160 MW and space is a constraining factor in PV facility installations. Provision was made to assess a larger area than is required for the facility to make provision for any other environmental or technical constraints that may arise and avoiding those areas. Larger farms are sought after to make provision for any constraints imposed by the Department of Agriculture on the extent of land that may be used for such facilities per farm, as well as the opportunities presented for the avoidance of sensitive environmental features present. The Remaining Extent of the Farm Witfontein No. 444, and the development footprint assessed therein is considered to provide an opportunity for the successful construction and operation of a solar PV facility with a capacity of up to 160 MW, as well as opportunities for the avoidance and mitigation of impacts on the affected environment and sensitive environmental features.
- Site availability and access: The land is available for lease by the developer. Reluctant farm owners or farmers over capitalising hamper efforts to find suitable farms. Access to the site is most likely to be obtained via the R76 (Provincial Road) and existing farm roads.
- Grid connection: In order for the PV facility to connect to the national grid the facility will have to construct an on-site substation, Eskom switching station and a power line from the project site to connect to the Eskom grid. Available grid connections are becoming scarce and play a huge role when selecting a viable site. The proposed Witfontein Solar PV 1 overhead power

line route will connect directly into the existing Mercury Substation or via a Zaaiplaats collector substation connection into existing Eskom infrastructure. 400m grid alternatives have been identified based on the location of the connection point into the national grid in relation to the proposed solar PV facility. These alternatives are however discussed in more detail in the Impact Assessment for the grid lines.

- **Environmental sensitivities:** From an environmental perspective the proposed site is considered highly desirable in terms of geology, agricultural potential, vegetation and landscape features, climate, biodiversity and the visual landscape despite some of the environmental sensitivities identified (refer to Section 5.3.1 of this report). The developer has skillfully positioned the Witfontein PV 1 project footprint to avoid sensitive environmental zones or attributes, ensuring the project's environmental suitability and compliance with the mitigation hierarchy.

It is evident from the discussion above that the Remaining Extent of the Farm Witfontein No. 444, may be considered favourable and suitable in terms of the site and environmental characteristics. As mentioned previously, no alternative areas on the property have been considered for the placement of the development footprint as the assessed development footprint will aim to avoid areas that are under cultivation within the affected property. The development footprint of this project will cover a significant portion of the farm; however, provision will be made to exclude any sensitive areas from the facility layout to be developed within the development footprint.

## 5.5 CONCLUDING STATEMENT ON ALTERNATIVES

When considering the information provided by the specialists with regards to the site selection criteria, the site is identified as preferred due to fact that the opportunities presented on the site to develop the project in such a way which avoids the areas and features (including the associated buffers) of high environmental sensitivity.

Therefore, development of the up to 160 MW Witfontein Solar PV on the Remainder of the Farm Witfontein No. 444 is the preferred option.

The draft layout considers technical constraints as a part of this scoping process. Where specific features of environmental sensitivity are identified by the independent specialists as part of the Scoping Phase, these areas and the associated required buffers will be considered by the developer during the EIA phase to ensure that the facility layout is appropriate considering the sensitive features present. Refer to Figure I for the draft layout proposed for development.

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## 6 DESCRIPTION OF THE IMPACTS AND RISKS

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This section aims to address the following requirements of the regulations:

**Appendix 1. (3)(i) A BAR (...) must include-**

(i) a full description of the process undertaken to identify, assess and rank the impacts the activity and associated structures and infrastructure will impose on the preferred location through the life of the activity, including-

(i) a description of all environmental issues and risks that were identified during the EIA process; and

(ii) an assessment of the significance of each issue and risk and an indication of the extent to which the issue and risk could be avoided or addressed by the adoption of mitigation measures.

(j) an assessment of each identified potentially significant impact and risk, including-

(i) cumulative impacts;

(ii) the nature, significance and consequences of the impact and risk;

(iii) the extent and duration of the impact and risk;

(iv) the probability of the impact and risk occurring;

(v) the degree to which the impact and risk can be reversed;

(vi) the degree to which the impact and risk may cause irreplaceable loss of resources; and

(vii) the degree to which the impact and risk can be mitigated;

(k) where applicable, a summary of the findings and recommendations of any specialist report complying with Appendix 6 to these Regulations and an indication as to how these findings and recommendations have been included in the final report;

### 6.1 SCOPING METHODOLOGY

The contents and methodology of the basic assessment report aimed to provide, as far as possible, a user-friendly analysis of information to allow for easy interpretation.

- Checklist (see section 6.1.1): The checklist consists of a list of structured questions related to the environmental parameters and specific human actions. They assist in ordering thinking, data collection, presentation and alert against the omission of possible impacts.
- Matrix (see section 6.1.2): The matrix analysis provides a holistic indication of the relationship and interaction between the various activities, development phases and the impact thereof on the environment. The method aims at providing a first order cause and effect relationship between the environment and the proposed activity. The matrix is designed to indicate the relationship between the different stressors and receptors which leads to specific impacts.

The matrix also indicates the specialist studies that have been conducted to address the potentially most significant impacts.

### 6.1.1 Checklist Analysis

The independent consultant conducted a site visit on 6 July 2023. The site visit was conducted to ensure a proper analysis of the site-specific characteristics of the study area. Table 6.1 provides a checklist, which is designed to stimulate thought regarding possible consequences of specific actions and to assist scoping of key issues. It consists of a list of structured questions related to the environmental parameters and specific human actions. They assist in ordering thinking, data collection, presentation and alert against the omission of possible impacts. The table highlights certain issues, which are further analysed in matrix format in section 6.2.

**Table 6.1:** Environmental checklist

QUESTION	YES	NO	UN-SURE	DESCRIPTION
<b>1. Are any of the following located on the site earmarked for the development?</b>				
I. A river, stream, dam or wetland		X		No wetlands or rivers are located within 500m of the site.
II. A conservation or open space area		X		No SA Conservation Areas are located 5km from the site
III. An area that is of cultural importance		X		No world heritage sites are located within 10km of the site
IV. Site of geological significance		X		N1.
V. Areas of outstanding natural beauty		X		N1.
VI. Highly productive agricultural land		X		Although there are crop fields they were not considered to have high productivity.
VII. Floodplain		X		N1.
VIII. Indigenous Forest		X		N1.
IX. Grass land	X			Most of the PV site is located on the Vaal-Vet Sandy Grassland (Gh10) except for a small portion to the northeast of the site which is located on the Rand Highveld Grassland (Gm11). Both these vegetation units are reclassified as 'Endangered'

X. Bird nesting sites		×		Not located in an IBA
XI. Red data species		×		N1.
XII. Tourist resort		×		N1.

2. Will the project potentially result in potential?				
I. Removal of people		×		N1.
II. Visual Impacts	×			The significance of the visual impact will be a “Negative Low Impact” after mitigation for the SEF combined with either grid options. The only receptors likely to be impacted by the proposed development are the nearby property owners and nearby roads.
III. Noise pollution	×			Construction activities will result in the generation of noise over a period of 24 months. The noise impact is unlikely to be significant.
IV. Construction of an access road	×			Access is most likely to be obtained via the R76 and R501 Regional Road and existing farm roads. Internal access roads linking the various components will also be required.
V. Risk to human or valuable ecosystems due to explosion/fire/ discharge of waste into water or air.		×		N1.
VI. Accumulation of large workforce (>50 manual workers) into the site.	×			Approximately 347 employment opportunities will be created during the construction phase and up to 16 permanent employment opportunities during the operational phase.
VII. Utilisation of significant volumes of local raw materials such as water, wood etc.	×			The estimated amount of water required during construction is 14 500 L per day. The estimated maximum amount of water required during the operational phase is 1700L per day.

VIII. Job creation	X			Approximately 347 employment opportunities will be created during the construction phase and up to 16 permanent employment opportunities during the operational phase.
IX. Traffic generation			X	The estimated trip generation during the construction phase will include normal heavy load (solar panels); normal heavy load (construction materials); and Private vehicles (staff).
X. Soil erosion	X			The site will need to be cleared or graded to a limited extent, which may potentially result in a degree of dust being created, increased runoff and potentially soil erosion. The time that these areas are left bare will be limited to the construction phase, since vegetation will be allowed to grow back after construction.
XI. Installation of additional bulk telecommunication transmission lines or facilities		X		N1.
<b>3. Is the proposed project located near the following?</b>				
I. A river, stream, dam or wetland		X		No wetlands or rivers are located within 500m of the site.
II. A conservation or open space area		X		The site is not located within 5km of protected areas
III. An area that is of cultural importance	X			No world heritage sites are located within 10km of the site
IV. A site of geological significance		X		N1.
V. An area of outstanding natural beauty		X		N1.
VI. Highly productive agricultural land	X			Numerous areas identified as crop fields are located around the project area.
VII. A tourist resort		X		N1.

VIII. A formal or informal settlement	×			Viljoenskroon is located approximately 15km southeast of the proposed project site.
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### 6.1.2 Matrix Analysis

The matrix describes the relevant listed activities, the aspects of the development that will apply to the specific listed activity, a description of the environmental issues and potential impacts, the significance and magnitude of the potential impacts and possible mitigation measures. The matrix also highlights areas of particular concern (see Table 6.2) for more in-depth assessment during the EIA process. An indication is provided of the specialist studies being conducted and which informed the initial assessment. Each cell is evaluated individually in terms of the nature of the impact, duration and its significance – should no mitigation measures be applied. This is important since many impacts would not be considered insignificant if proper mitigation measures were implemented.

In order to conceptualise the different impacts, the matrix specify the following:

- **Stressor:** Indicates the aspect of the proposed activity, which initiates and cause impacts on elements of the environment.
- **Receptor:** Highlights the recipient and most important comp1nts of the environment affected by the stressor.
- **Impacts:** Indicates the net result of the cause-effect between the stressor and receptor.
- **Mitigation:** Impacts need to be mitigated to minimise the effect on the environment.

Detailed impact assessments have been undertaken by each of the respective specialists which has informed the matrix analysis as included in Table 6.3, as well as the key issues identified as included in sections 6.2.1-6.2.3. The Table 6.2 includes reference to the sections in the respective specialist studies where the details of the in-depth assessment of potential environmental impacts can be obtained, which has informed the matrix analysis.

**Table 6.2:** Reference to the sections in the respective specialist studies where the details of the in-depth assessment of potential environmental impacts can be obtained.



Specialist Study	Impact Assessment (pg.)	Cumulative Impacts (pg.)	Mitigation measures (pg.)
Terrestrial Compliance Statement (Appendix D1)	57-63	64	67-75
Wetland Impact Assessment (Appendix D2)	26-32	33	27-32
Agriculture Compliance Statement (Appendix D3)	12	14	16
Avifauna Impact Assessment (Appendix D4)	17	17	8
Visual Impact Assessment (Appendix D5)	37-49	50-54	46
Heritage Impact Assessment (Appendix D6)	29	35	31
Traffic Impact Assessment (Appendix D7)	27-36	34	29-32
Social Impact Assessment (Appendix D8)	60-85	82	61-85

## 6.2 METHOD OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

The environmental assessment aims to identify the various possible environmental impacts that could result from the proposed activity. Different impacts need to be evaluated in terms of its significance and in doing so highlight the most critical issues to be addressed.

Significance is determined through a synthesis of impact characteristics which include context and intensity of an impact. Context refers to the geographical scale i.e., site, local, national or global whereas intensity is defined by the severity of the impact e.g., the magnitude of deviation from

background conditions, the size of the area affected, the duration of the impact and the overall probability of occurrence. Significance is calculated as shown in Table 4.1.

Significance is an indication of the importance of the impact in terms of both physical extent and time scale, and therefore indicates the level of mitigation required. The total number of points scored for each impact indicates the level of significance of the impact.

### Impact Rating System

The Impact assessment must take account of the nature, scale, duration, extent of impacts on the environment whether such impacts are positive or negative. Each impact is also assessed according to the project phases:

- planning
- construction
- operation
- decommissioning

Where necessary, the proposal for mitigation or optimisation of an impact should be detailed. A brief discussion of the impact and the rationale behind the assessment of its significance should also be included. The rating system is applied to the potential impacts on the receiving environment and includes an objective evaluation of the mitigation of the impact. In assessing the significance of each impact, the following criteria is used:

**Table 6.2:** The Impact Rating System

NATURE		
Include a brief description of the impact of environmental parameter being assessed in the context of the project. This criterion includes a brief written statement of the environmental aspect being impacted upon by a particular action or activity.		
GEOGRAPHICAL EXTENT		
This is defined as the area over which the impact will be experienced.		
1	Site	The impact will only affect the site.
2	Local/district	Will affect the local area or district.
3	Province/region	Will affect the entire province or region.
4	International and National	Will affect the entire country.
DURATION		

This describes the duration of the impacts. Duration indicates the lifetime of the impact as a result of the proposed activity.		
1	Short term	The impact will either disappear with mitigation or will be mitigated through natural processes in a span shorter than the construction phase (0 – 1 years), or the impact will last for the period of a relatively short construction period and a limited recovery time after construction, thereafter it will be entirely negated (0 – 2 years).
2	Medium term	The impact will continue or last for some time after the construction phase but will be mitigated by direct human action or by natural processes thereafter (2 – 10 years).
3	Long term	The impact and its effects will continue or last for the entire operational life of the development, but will be mitigated by direct human action or by natural processes thereafter (10 – 30 years).
4	Permanent	The only class of impact that will be non-transitory. Mitigation either by man or natural process will not occur in such a way or such a time span that the impact can be considered indefinite.
<b>REVERSIBILITY</b>		
This describes the degree to which an impact can be successfully reversed upon completion of the proposed activity.		
1	Completely reversible	The impact is reversible with implementation of minor mitigation measures.
2	Partly reversible	The impact is partly reversible but more intense mitigation measures are required.
3	Barely reversible	The impact is unlikely to be reversed even with intense mitigation measures.
4	Irreversible	The impact is irreversible, and no mitigation measures exist.
<b>IRREPLACEABLE LOSS OF RESOURCES</b>		

This describes the degree to which resources will be irreplaceably lost as a result of a proposed activity.		
1	No loss of resource	The impact will not result in the loss of any resources.
2	Marginal loss of resource	The impact will result in marginal loss of resources.
3	Significant loss of resources	The impact will result in significant loss of resources.
4	Complete loss of resources	The impact is result in a complete loss of all resources.
<b>CUMULATIVE EFFECT</b>		
This describes the cumulative effect of the impacts. A cumulative impact is an effect which in itself may not be significant but may become significant if added to other existing or potential impacts emanating from other similar or diverse activities as a result of the project activity in question.		
1	Negligible cumulative impact	The impact would result in negligible to no cumulative effects.
2	Low cumulative impact	The impact would result in insignificant to minor cumulative effects.
3	Medium cumulative impact	The impact would result in minor to moderate cumulative effects.
4	High cumulative impact	The impact would result in significant cumulative effects
<b>PROBABILITY</b>	<b>PROBABILITY</b>	<b>PROBABILITY</b>
This describes the chance of occurrence of an impact.	This describes the chance of occurrence of an impact.	This describes the chance of occurrence of an impact.
1	Unlikely	The chance of the impact occurring is extremely low (Less than a 25% chance of occurrence).
2	Possible	The impact may occur (Between a 25% to 50% chance of occurrence).
3	Probable	The impact will likely occur (Between a 50% to 75% chance of occurrence).

4	Definite	Impact will certainly occur (Greater than a 75% chance of occurrence).
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<b>INTENSITY/ MAGNITUDE</b>		
Describes the severity of an impact.		
1	Low	Impact affects the quality, use and integrity of the system/component in a way that is barely perceptible.
2	Medium	Impact alters the quality, use and integrity of the system/component but system/component still continues to function in a moderately modified way and maintains general integrity (some impact on integrity).
3	High	Impact affects the continued viability of the system/component and the quality, use, integrity and functionality of the system or component is severely impaired and may temporarily cease. High costs of rehabilitation and remediation.
4	Very high	Impact affects the continued viability of the system/component and the quality, use, integrity and functionality of the system or component permanently ceases and is irreversibly impaired. Rehabilitation and remediation often impossible. If possible rehabilitation and remediation often unfeasible due to extremely high costs of rehabilitation and remediation.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

Significance is determined through a synthesis of impact characteristics. Significance is an indication of the importance of the impact in terms of both physical extent and time scale, and therefore indicates the level of mitigation required. The calculation of the significance of an impact uses the following formula: **(Extent + probability + reversibility + irreplaceability + duration + cumulative effect) x magnitude/intensity.**

The summation of the different criteria will produce a non-weighted value. By multiplying this value with the magnitude/intensity, the resultant value acquires a weighted characteristic which can be measured and assigned a significance rating.

Points	Impact significance rating	Description
6 to 28	Negative low impact	The anticipated impact will have negligible negative effects and will require little to no mitigation.
6 to 28	Positive low impact	The anticipated impact will have minor positive effects.
29 to 50	Negative medium impact	The anticipated impact will have moderate negative effects and will require moderate mitigation measures.
29 to 50	Positive medium impact	The anticipated impact will have moderate positive effects.
51 to 73	Negative high impact	The anticipated impact will have significant effects and will require significant mitigation measures to achieve an acceptable level of impact.
51 to 73	Positive high impact	The anticipated impact will have significant positive effects.
74 to 96	Negative very high impact	The anticipated impact will have highly significant effects and are unlikely to be able to be mitigated adequately. These impacts could be considered "fatal flaws".
74 to 96	Positive very high impact	The anticipated impact will have highly significant positive effects.

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- **Mitigation Confidence**

The significance of the impact is assessed following the implementation of mitigation measures, based on the confidence levels that the mitigation measures will reduce and/or enhance the impact.

**Mitigation Confidence - Negative and Positive Impacts**

1	Very low	There is no confidence that the mitigation measures will reduce/enhance the impact.
0.8	Low	20% confidence that the mitigation measures will reduce/enhance the impact
0.5	Moderate	50% confidence that the mitigation measures will reduce/enhance the impact
0.2	High	80% confidence that the mitigation measures will reduce/enhance the impact

**Table 6.2:** Matrix analysis

For ease of reference the significance of the impacts is colour-coded as follow:

Low significance		Medium significance		High significance		Positive impact	
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LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
<b>CONSTRUCTION PHASE</b>															
<p>LN1 - Activity 11 (i) (GNR 327): "The development of facilities or infrastructure for the transmission and distribution of electricity (i) outside urban areas or industrial complexes with a capacity of more than 33 but less than 275 kilovolts."</p> <p>LN 1 - Activity 14 (GNR 327): "The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure, for the storage, or for the storage and handling, of a dangerous good, where such storage occurs in containers with a</p>	<p><u>Site clearing and preparation</u></p> <p>Certain areas of the site will need to be cleared of vegetation and some areas may need to be levelled.</p> <p><u>Civil works</u></p> <p>The main civil works are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Terrain levelling if necessary– Levelling will be minimal as the potential site chosen is relatively flat.</li> </ul>	Flora and Habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Destruction, loss and fragmentation of habitats (including wetlands and rocky outcrop habitats in certain areas), ecosystems and the vegetation community (including protected plants).</li> </ul>	2	4	3	3	4	4	4	80	See Table 6.4	0,5	40	Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment (Appendix D1)
		Flora and Habitats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of IAP species and invasive fauna.</li> </ul>	3	3	2	2	3	3	3	48		0,2	9,6	



LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION	
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation		
<p>combined capacity of 80 cubic metres or more but not exceeding 500 cubic metres.”</p> <p><u>LN 1 – Activity 19(i) (GNR 327):</u> “The infilling or depositing of any material of more than [5] 10 cubic metres into, or the dredging, excavation, removal or moving of soil, sand, shells, shell grit, pebbles or rock of more than [5] 10 cubic metres from [-(i)] a watercourse.</p> <p><u>LN1 - Activity 24 (ii) (GNR 327):</u> “The development of a road (ii) with reserve wider than 13,5 meters, or where no reserve exists where the road is wider than 8 meters.”</p> <p><u>LN1 - Activity 28 (ii) (GNR 327):</u> “Residential, mixed, retail, commercial, industrial or institutional developments where such land was used for agriculture or afforestation on or after</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Laying foundation- The structures will be connected to the ground through cement pillars, cement slabs or metal screws. The exact method will depend on the detailed geotechnical analysis.</li> <li>Construction of access and inside roads/paths – existing paths will be used where reasonably possible. Additionally, the turning circle for trucks will also be taken</li> </ul>	Fauna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Displacement of the indigenous faunal community (including SCC) due to habitat loss, direct mortalities, and disturbance (road collisions, noise, dust, light, vibration, and poaching).</li> </ul>	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	42		0,5	21		
		Surface Water Resources / Wetlands / Riparian areas	Disturbance of aquatic habitat; water quality impacts	1	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	24	See Table 6.4	0,5	12	Wetland and Aquatic Biodiversity Impact Assessment (Appendix E3)
		Avifauna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of priority avian species from important habitats</li> <li>Loss of resident avifauna through increased disturbance</li> <li>Long-term or permanent degradation and modification of the receiving environment resulting to in the loss of important avian habitats</li> </ul>	1	2	2	3	4	2	3	42	See Table 6.4	0.5	21	Avifauna Impact Assessment (Appendix E4)	

LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
<p>1998 and where such development (ii) will occur outside an urban area, where the total land to be developed is bigger than 1 hectare.”</p> <p><u>LN1 - Activity 56 (ii) (GNR 327):</u> “The widening of a road by more than 6 metres, or the lengthening of a road by more than 1 kilometre (ii) where no reserve exists, where the existing road is wider than 8 metres...”</p> <p><u>LN2 - Activity 1 (GNR 325)</u> “The development of facilities or infrastructure for the generation of electricity from a renewable resource where the electricity output is 20 megawatts or more.”</p> <p><u>LN2 - Activity 15 (GNR 325)</u> “The clearance of an area of 20 hectares or more of indigenous vegetation.”</p> <p><u>LN3 - Activity 4 (b)(i)(bb)(ee)(gg) (GNR</u></p>	<p>into consideration</p> <p><u>Transportation and installation of PV panels into an Array</u></p>	Soil and Agriculture	<p>Loss of land capability during the construction phase – PV Facility</p> <p>Loss of land capability during the construction phase – Grid Connection</p>	1	2	1	1	3	2	2	20	See Table 6.4	0.5	10	Soil and Agricultural Impact Assessment (Appendix E1)
	<p>The panels are assembled at the supplier’s premises and will be transported from the factory to the site on trucks. The panels will be mounted on metal structures which are fixed into the ground either through a concrete foundation or a deep-seated screw. The BESS and grid connection infrastructure will also be installed and constructed.</p> <p><u>Wiring to the Central Inverters</u></p>	General Environment (risks associated with BESS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mechanical breakdown / Exposure to high temperatures</li> <li>Fires, electrocutions and spillage of toxic substances into the surrounding environment.</li> <li>Spillage of hazardous substances into the surrounding environment.</li> <li>Soil contamination–leachate from spillages which could lead to an impact of the productivity of soil forms in affected areas.</li> <li>Water Pollution–</li> </ul>	1	2	2	2	3	4	3	42	See Table 6.6	0.5	21	General Environment (risks associated with BESS)

LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
<p><u>324): “The development of a road wider than 4 metres with a reserve less than 13,5 metres within (b) Free State, (i) Outside urban areas, (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy Focus areas, (ee) Critical biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the Competent Authority or in bioregional plans and (gg) areas within 10 kilometres from national parks or world heritage sites or 5 kilometres from any other protected area identified in terms of NEMPAA or from the core areas of a biosphere reserve, excluding disturbed areas”.</u></p> <p><u>LN3 - Activity 10 (b)(i)(bb)(ee)(gg)(hh) (GNR 324): “The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure for the storage, or storage and handling of a dangerous</u></p>	<p>Sections of the PV array would be wired to central inverters. The inverter converts DC electricity to alternating electricity (AC) at grid frequency.</p>		<p>spillages into surrounding watercourses as well as groundwater.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Health impacts– on the surrounding communities, particularly those relying on watercourses (i.e. rivers, streams, etc) as a primary source of water.</li> </ul> <p>Generation of hazardous waste</p>												
		Visual Landscape	<p>Change in the landscape character of the study area. Loss of the visual resource.</p> <p>Change in the sense of place of the area. Increase in the visibility of the project. Bad housekeeping can result to dust, waste/ litter on site and therefore create an eyesore.</p>	2	1	2	3	4	4	2	28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good housekeeping to reduce impacts that could cause a nuisance. Dust suppression proper waste collection clean and neat site camp/office o shade net to block views towards site camp/office</li> <li>Retain the vegetation,</li> </ul>	0.5	14	Visual Impact Assessment (Appendix E5)

LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
<p>good, where such storage occurs in containers with a combined capacity of 30 but not exceeding 80 cubic metres (b) Free State, (i) Outside urban areas, (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy Focus areas, (ee) Critical biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the Competent Authority or in bioregional plans, (gg) areas within 10 kilometres from national parks or world heritage sites or 5 kilometres from any other protected area identified in terms of NEMPAA or from the core areas of a biosphere reserve, excluding disturbed areas and (hh) Areas within a watercourse or wetland; or within 100 metres from the edge of a watercourse or wetland.”</p> <p><u>LN3 - Activity 12 (b)(i)(ii)(iv) (GNR 324):</u> “The clearance of an area</p>											especially along the boundary of the site				
	Traffic	Increase in traffic volumes leading to and surrounding the SPP	3	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	22	See Table 6.4	1	22	Traffic Impact Assessment (Appendix E9)
	Heritage resources	As no sites, features or objects of cultural historic significance have been identified in the site, there would be no impact as a result of the proposed development.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	See Table 6.4	0.5	3	Heritage Impact Assessment (Appendix E7)
	Paleontological Heritage	Loss of fossil heritage Destroy or permanently seal-in fossils at or below the surface that are then no longer available for scientific study	1	4	1	12	1	2	12	12	21	See Table 6.4	0.5	10.5	Palaeontological Impact Assessment (Appendix E8)
	Social impacts	The creation of local employment and business opportunities, as well as opportunities for skills development and on-site training.	3	1	4	1	4	3	4	4	64	See Table 6.4	1	64	Social Impact Assessment (Appendix E6)

LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
<p><i>of 300 square metres or more of indigenous vegetation (b) Free State (i) within any critically endangered or endangered ecosystem listed in terms of section 52 of the NEMBA or prior to the publication of such a list, within an area that has been identified as critically endangered in the National Spatial Biodiversity Assessment 2004, (ii) Within critical biodiversity areas identified in bioregional plans and (iv) and (iv) areas within a watercourse or wetland; or within 100 metres from the edge of watercourse or wetland."</i></p> <p><u>LN3 - Activity 18 (b)(i)(bb)(ee)(gg)(hh) (GNR 324): "The widening of a road by more than 4 metres, or the lengthening of a road by more than 1 kilometre (b) Free State (i) Outside urban areas, (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy Focus areas (ee) Critical</u></p>			The potential maximising of opportunities to local and regional SMMEs and other businesses for service delivery.	2	1	2	1	3	3	3	36		1	36	
			The provision of technical support and advice to local farmers and the municipality in terms of the establishment of solar energy technologies to meet their energy needs	2	1	2	1	3	2	1	11		1	22	
			The potential immigration or potential influx of job seekers that potentially might have impacts on family structures, communities, social networks, and basic community services of the LM	2	1	1	1	3	3	2	22			11	
			The potential safety risk for farmers, risk of livestock theft and farming infrastructure, that	2	1	1	1	3	1	2	18		1	9	

LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
<i>biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the Competent Authority or in bioregional plans, (gg) areas within 10 kilometres from national parks or world heritage sites or 5kilometres from any other protected area identified in terms of NEMPAA or from the core areas of a biosphere reserve, excluding disturbed areas and (hh) Areas within a watercourse or wetland; or within 100 metres from the edge of a watercourse or wetland</i>			are associated with the construction phase and the presence of the workers on the proposed construction site.												
			The potential increased risk of veld fires associated with the construction phase	3	1	1	1	3	1	3	30		1	9	
			The presence of construction workers on-site and in the area on the local communities of Viljoenskroon, and on their social networks and on family structure	2	1	1	1	3	3	1	11			11	
<b>OPERATIONAL PHASE</b>															
LN1 - Activity 11 (i) (GN.R. 327): <i>“The development of facilities or infrastructure for the transmission and distribution of electricity (i) outside urban areas or</i>	The key components of the proposed project are described below:	Flora Habitats and	Continued fragmentation and degradation of natural habitats and ecosystems (including sensitive rocky areas, and protected plants).	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	45	See Table 6.5	0,5	22.5	Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment (Appendix E2)

LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
<p><i>industrial complexes with a capacity of more than 33 but less than 275 kilovolts."</i></p> <p><i>Activity 14 (GNR 327): "The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure, for the storage, or for the storage and handling, of a dangerous good, where such storage occurs in containers with a combined capacity of 80 cubic metres or more but not exceeding 500 cubic metres."</i></p> <p><i>Activity 28 (ii) (GN.R 327): "Residential, mixed, retail, commercial, industrial or institutional developments where such land was used for agriculture or afforestation on or after 1998 and where such development (ii) will occur outside an urban area, where the total land to be developed is bigger than 1 hectare."</i></p> <p>LN2 - Activity 1 (GN.R. 325): <i>"The development of facilities or infrastructure for the generation of electricity from a renewable resource where</i></p>	<p><u>PV Panel Array</u> - To produce up to 260MW the facility will require numerous linked cells placed behind a protective glass sheet to form a panel. Multiple panels will be required to form the solar PV arrays which will comprise the PV facility.</p> <p><u>Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)</u> -The battery energy storage system will make use of solid state or flow battery technology and will have a capacity of up to 400MWh. Both lithium-ion and Redox-flow technology are being considered for the project,</p>	Flora Habitats and	Continuing spread of IAP and weed species	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	45	See Table 6.5	0,5	22.5	
		Fauna	Ongoing displacement and direct mortalities of the faunal community (including SCC) due to continued disturbance (road collisions, noise, light, dust, vibration, poaching, etc.)	2	3	2	2	3	2	3	42		0,5	21	
		Surface Water Resources / Wetlands / Riparian areas	Degradation of the ecological condition of aquatic ecosystems; modification of flow and water quality; erosion; and alien vegetation invasion in aquatic features"	1	3	2	2	3	2	2	26	See Table 6.5	0,5	13	Wetland and Aquatic Biodiversity Impact Assessment (Appendix E3)
		Avifauna	Long-term or permanent degradation and modification of the receiving environment resulting to in the loss of important avian habitats. Loss of resident avifauna through increased disturbance.	1	2	2	3	4	2	3	42	See Table 6.5	0.5	21	Avifauna Impact Assessment (Appendix E4)

LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
<p><i>the electricity output is 20 megawatts or more...</i></p> <p>Activity 10 (b)(i)(ee)(GN.R 324): “The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure for the storage, or storage and handling of a dangerous good, where such storage occurs in containers with a combined capacity of 30 but not exceeding 80 cubic metres (b) Free State, (i) Outside urban areas (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy Focus areas, (ee) Critical biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the Competent Authority or in bioregional plans.</p>	<p>depending on which is most feasible at the time of implementation. The extent of the system will be 3ha. The containers may be single stacked only to reduce the footprint. The containers will include cells, battery charge controllers, inverters, transformers, HVAC, fire, safety and control systems.</p> <p><u>Inverters-</u> Sections of the PV array will be wired to inverters. The inverter is a pulse-width mode inverter that converts direct current (DC) electricity to alternating current (AC)</p>		Collisions with PV panels and electrocution risks leading to injury or loss of avian life which decreases avifauna species diversity. Collisions with overhead power lines and electrocution risks leading to injury or loss of avian life which decreases avian diversity												
		Soil and Agriculture	Loss of land capability during the construction phase – PV Facility  Loss of land capability during the construction phase – Grid Connection	1	2	1	1	3	2	2	20	See Table 6.5	0.5	10	Soil and Agricultural Impact Assessment (Appendix E1)
		Visual Landscape	Change in the landscape character of the study area. Loss of the visual resource. Change in the sense of place of the area. Increase in the visibility of the project. Bad housekeeping can result to dust, waste/litter on site and therefore create an eyesore.	2	1	2	2	4	4	2	30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good housekeeping to reduce impacts that could cause a nuisance. Dust suppression proper waste collection clean and neat site camp/office or shade net to block</li> </ul>	0.5	15	Visual Impact Assessment (Appendix E5)



LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION	
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation		
	electricity at grid frequency.  <u>Supporting Infrastructure</u> – The following auxiliary buildings with basic services including water and electricity will be required on the site:											views towards site camp/office • Retain the vegetation, especially along the boundary of the site				
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operations &amp; Maintenance Building / Office (~500m<sup>2</sup>);</li> <li>• Switch gear and relay room (~400m<sup>2</sup>);</li> <li>• Staff lockers and changing room (~200m<sup>2</sup>);</li> <li>• Security control (~60m<sup>2</sup>);</li> <li>• Temporary Laydown Areas; (~2000</li> </ul>	Traffic	Increase in traffic volumes leading to and surrounding the SPP	2	3	1	1	3	1	1	11	See Table 6.5	1	11	Traffic Impact Assessment (Appendix E9)	
		Heritage resources	As no sites, features or objects of cultural historic significance have been identified in the site, there would be no impact as a result of the proposed development.	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	See Table 6.5	0.5	3	Heritage Impact Assessment (Appendix E7)	
		Paleontological Heritage	Loss of fossil heritage  Destroy or permanently seal-in fossils at or below the surface that are then no longer available for scientific study	1	3	4	4	1	2	3	45	See Table 6.5	0.5	22.5	Paleontological Impact Assessment (Appendix E8)	

LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
	<p>0 m2) and construction site camp/site office;</p> <p><u>Roads</u> – Access will be obtained via the S322 secondary road and various gravel farm roads within the area and affected property. An internal site road network will also be required to provide access to the solar field and associated infrastructure. Access roads will be up to 8m wide (6m wide road surface, with 1m drainage either side).</p> <p><u>Fencing</u> - For health, safety and security reasons, the facilities will require perimeter fencing and internal security</p>	Social impacts	The creation of local employment and business opportunities, as well as opportunities for skills development and on-site training.	2	3	4	1	4	2	2	32	See Table 6.5	1	2	Social Impact Assessment (Appendix E6)
The potential up- and downstream economic opportunities for the impacted community	2		3	4	1	4	2	2	32	1	32				
The establishment of renewable energy infrastructure and the generation of clean, renewable energy	4		3	4	1	4	3	2	38	1	38				
The generation of additional land use income for landowners	1		3	1	1	4	2	2	24	1.5	36				

LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
	fencing. The fencing will be up to 2.4 m in height		The potential positive impacts associated with the establishment of a Community Trust	2	3	4	1	3	3	2	32		1.5	48	
			Visual impact and impact on sense of place	2	3	3	1	4	3	2	32	See Table 6.5	0.5	16	
			The potential impact on the tourism industry	2	3	1	1	3	2	2	24		0.5	12	
			The potential impact on property values and operations	2	3	2	1	3	2	2	26		0.9	24	
<b>DECOMMISSIONING</b>															
	Dismantlement of infrastructure During the decommissioning	Surface Water Resources / Wetlands / Riparian areas	Disturbance of aquatic habitat; water quality impacts	1	1	1	2	3	2	2	20	See Table 6.6	0,5	10	Wetland and Aquatic Biodiversity Impact Assessment (Appendix E3)

LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
	<p>phase the Solar PV Energy facility and its associated infrastructure will be dismantled.</p> <p><u>Rehabilitation of biophysical environment</u></p> <p>The biophysical environment will be rehabilitated.</p>	Visual landscape	<p>Visual impact of activities on sensitive visual receptors in close proximity to the proposed Paradys Solar PV 1.</p> <p>The decommissioning phase of the project will result in the same visual impacts experienced during the construction phase of the project. However, in the case of Witfontein PV 1 it is anticipated that the proposed facility will be refurbished and upgraded to prolong its life.</p> <p>No decommissioning of the facility is proposed.</p>	2	1	1	1	4	3	2	24	See Table 6.6	0,5	12	Visual Impact Assessment (Appendix E5)
		Traffic volumes	e.g Increase in traffic volumes leading to and surrounding the SPP	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	8	Table 6.6	1	8	Traffic Impact Assessment (Appendix E9)
		Social Impact	The potential loss of employment opportunities and associated income	2	2	2	1	2	1		30	Table 6.6	1	11	Social Impact Assessment (Appendix E6)

LISTED ACTIVITY	ACTIVITIES	POTENTIAL IMPACTS		IMPACT ASSESSMENT MATRIX								MITIGATION OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS			SPECIALIST STUDIES / INFORMATION
		Aspect	Impact description / consequence	Extent	Duration	Reversibility	Irreplaceable loss of resources	Probability	Cumulative Impact	Magnitude / Intensity	Significance	Mitigation measures	Mitigation Confidence	Significance after Mitigation	
			due to the decommissioning of the proposed Witfontein SEF												

## 6.3 KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED

From the above it is evident that mitigation measures should be available for potential impacts associated with the proposed activity and development phases. The scoping methodology identified the following key issues which were addressed in more detail in the BA report.

### 6.3.1 Impacts During the Construction Phase

During the construction phase the following activities will have various potential impacts on the biophysical and socio-economic environment:

- LN1 - Activity 11 (i) (GN.R. 327): *“The development of facilities or infrastructure for the transmission and distribution of electricity (i) outside urban areas or industrial complexes with a capacity of more than 33 but less than 275 kilovolts.”*
- LN 1 - Activity 14 (GNR 327): *“The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure, for the storage, or for the storage and handling, of a dangerous good, where such storage occurs in containers with a combined capacity of 80 cubic metres or more but not exceeding 500 cubic metres.”*
- LN1- Activity 19(i) (GN.R 327): *“The infilling or depositing of any material of more than 10 cubic metres into, or the dredging, excavation, removal or moving of soil, sand, shells, shell grit, pebbles or rock of more than 10 cubic metres from (i) a watercourse.”*
- LN1 - Activity 24 (ii) (GN.R 327): *“The development of a road (ii) with reserve wider than 13,5 meters, or where no reserve exists where the road is wider than 8 meters.”*
- LN1 - Activity 28 (ii) (GN.R. 327): *“Residential, mixed, retail, commercial, industrial or institutional developments where such land was used for agriculture or afforestation on or after 1998 and where such development (ii) will occur outside an urban area, where the total land to be developed is bigger than 1 hectare.”*
- LN1 - Activity 56 (ii) (GN.R 327): *“The widening of a road by more than 6 metres, or the lengthening of a road by more than 1 kilometre (ii) where no reserve exists, where the existing road is wider than 8 metres...”*
- LN2 - Activity 1 (GN.R. 325): *“The development of facilities or infrastructure for the generation of electricity from a renewable resource where the electricity output is 20 megawatts or more...”*
- LN2 - Activity 15 (GN.R. 325): *“The clearance of an area of 20 hectares or more of indigenous vegetation...”*
- LN3 - Activity 4 (b)(i)(ee) (GN.R 324): *“The development of a road wider than 4 metres with a reserve less than 13,5 metres within (b) Free State, (i) Outside urban areas (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy Focus areas, (ee) Critical biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the Competent Authority or in bioregional plans.”*

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- LN3 - Activity 10 (b)(i)(ee) (GN.R 324): *“The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure for the storage, or storage and handling of a dangerous good, where such storage occurs in containers with a combined capacity of 30 but not exceeding 80 cubic metres (b) Free State, (i) Outside urban areas (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy Focus areas, (ee) Critical biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the Competent Authority or in bioregional plans.”*
  - LN3 - Activity 12 (b)(ii)(iv) (GN.R 324): *“The clearance of an area of 300 square metres or more of indigenous vegetation (b) Free State (i) within any critically endangered or endangered ecosystem listed in terms of section 52 of the NEMBA or prior to the publication of such a list, within an area that has been identified as critically endangered in the National Spatial Biodiversity Assessment 2004, (ii) Within critical biodiversity areas identified in bioregional plans (iv) Areas within a watercourse or wetland; or within 100 metres from the edge of a watercourse or wetland.”*
  - LN3 - Activity 18 (b)(i)(bb)(ee)(hh) (GN.R 324): *“The widening of a road by more than 4 metres, or the lengthening of a road by more than 1 kilometre (b) Free State (i) Outside urban areas(bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy Focus areas (ee) Critical biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the Competent Authority or in bioregional plans and (hh) Areas within a watercourse or wetland; or within 100 metres from the edge of a watercourse or wetland.”*

During the construction phase temporary negative impacts are foreseen over the short term. Table 6.3 summarises the potentially most significant impacts and the mitigation measures that are proposed during the construction phase.

**Table 6.3:** Impacts and the mitigation measures during the construction phase

SPECIALIST STUDY	IMPACT	PRE-MITIGATION RATING	POST MITIGATION RATING	SUMMARY OF MITIGATION MEASURES
Terrestrial Compliance Statement (Appendix E2)	Destruction, loss and fragmentation of habitats (including wetlands), ecosystems and the vegetation community.	Negative High	Negative Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All development areas must be clearly demarcated. No Very High SEI areas should be disturbed at all.</li> <li>• Areas of indigenous vegetation outside of the direct project footprint, should under no circumstances be fragmented or disturbed further. The construction area must be fenced off and no ingress into other areas allowed.</li> <li>• All activities must make use of existing roads and tracks as far as practically and feasibly possible. No new roads or servitudes should be constructed where existing infrastructure can be used.</li> <li>• Apply for a permit to relocate (where possible) protected plant species to similar habitat recommended by a specialist. Where Protected plants are located within the fenced area but outside the development area, these must be marked and not disturbed (as far as practicable).</li> <li>• All laydown areas, chemical toilets etc. should be restricted to disturbed areas where possible. Any materials may not be stored for extended periods of time and must be removed from the project area once the construction phase has been concluded. Use of re-usable/recyclable materials are recommended.</li> <li>• Areas that have been disturbed during construction, but will not undergo development, must be revegetated with indigenous vegetation dominant in the area.</li> </ul>



				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A spill management plan must be put in place to ensure that should there be any chemical spill out or over that it does not run into the surrounding areas. The Contractor shall be in possession of an emergency spill kit that must always be complete and available on site. Drip trays or any form of oil absorbent material must be placed underneath vehicles/machinery and equipment susceptible of leakages.</li> <li>• A stormwater management plan must be developed and applied to the site.</li> </ul>
	Introduction of IAP species and invasive fauna.	Negative Medium	Negative Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The footprint area of the construction should be kept to a minimum. The footprint area must be clearly demarcated to avoid unnecessary disturbances to adjacent areas thereby causing further encroachment of invasive species.</li> <li>• An alien invasive plant management plan must be developed and applied to the site.</li> </ul>
	Displacement of the indigenous faunal community (including SCC) due to habitat loss, direct mortalities, and disturbance (road collisions, noise, dust, light, vibration, and poaching).	Negative medium	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A qualified environmental control officer must be on site when construction begins to identify fauna species that will be directly disturbed and to relocate protected fauna/flora that are found during the construction activities. The area must be walked though prior to construction to ensure no faunal species remain in the habitat and get killed. Should animals not move out of the area on their own relevant specialists must be contacted to advise on how the species can be relocated.</li> <li>• Noise must be kept to an absolute minimum during the evenings and at night to minimize all possible disturbances to nocturnal mammals</li> <li>• No trapping, killing, or poisoning of any wildlife is to be allowed</li> <li>• Fencing mitigations include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Top 2 strands must be smooth wire</li> <li>○ Routinely re-tension loose wires</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Minimum 30cm between wires</li> <li>○ Place markers on fences</li> <li>● Fauna should be kept out of the PV area by employing low and high electrified strands top prevent small and large mammal ingress.</li> <li>● Dust-reducing mitigation measures must be put in place and must be strictly adhered to, for all areas of construction. This includes wetting of exposed soft soil surfaces. No non-environmentally friendly suppressants may be used as this could result in the pollution of water sources.</li> <li>● All personnel to undergo Environmental Awareness Training. A signed register of attendance must be kept for proof. Discussions are required on sensitive environmental receptors within the project area to inform contractors and site staff of the presence of species, their identification, conservation status and importance, biology, habitat requirements and management requirements within the Environmental Authorisation and the EMPr.</li> </ul>
Wetland Impact Assessment (Appendix E3)	Degradation of the ecological condition of aquatic ecosystems; modification of flow and water quality; erosion; and alien vegetation invasion in aquatic features"	Negative medium	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Alien plant growth and signs of erosion should be monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure that the disturbed areas do not become infested with invasive alien plants or eroded. Observed invasive alien plant growth should be cleared from the sites regularly according to measures as laid out in the EMPr for the project.</li> <li>● Stormwater runoff infrastructure must be designed to mitigate both the flow and water quality impacts of any stormwater leaving developed areas. The runoff should rather be dissipated over a broad area covered by natural vegetation or managed using appropriate shaping with berms, channels and swales.</li> <li>● Should any erosion features develop, they should be stabilised as soon as possible.</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any water supply, sanitation services as well as solid waste management services required for the sites should preferably be provided by an off-site service provider."</li> </ul>
Avifaunal Impact Assessment (Appendix E4)	Loss of resident avifauna through increased disturbance	Positive medium	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disturbance can be managed and mitigated at the design stage by avoiding important nesting, roosting and foraging areas of sensitive species during site selection and layout design.</li> <li>All identified No Go Areas must be excluded from the development footprint, and areas of high sensitivity should be avoided.</li> <li>The development footprint should exclude a 1 km No-Go buffer (Very High Sensitivity) surrounding any active or inactive/previous Secretarybird breeding site, as per Birdlife SA's Guideline.</li> <li>Secretarybird typically change breeding sites every 1-5 years, and an area of up to 3 km surrounding the proposed development footprint should be monitored regularly post-authorisation in order to avoid conflicts at the start of construction.</li> <li>It is noted that there are currently no known Secretarybird breeding sites within 3 km of the proposed project development footprint. Should a nest be located within 3 km of the authorised facility infrastructure post-authorisation development activities within 1 to 3 km of any active Secretarybird breeding site must be minimised to mitigate disturbance (Birdlife SA 2022) and the applied minimisation measures and any construction activities to take place must be signed-off in advance by a SACNASP registered avifaunal specialist in discussion with the Developer.</li> <li>Minimisation measures could entail amending the construction schedule to commence construction as late as possible within the inside of the buffer area, and only commence with activities that create the least amount of disturbance to a breeding pair and immature bird until it has left the nest.</li> </ul>

				<p>It should be noted that the detail of what can be expected to be acceptable will depend largely on the breeding status at the time, but due to the nature of juvenile dispersal is likely to exclude the clearing of indigenous vegetation within a 1 – 2 km Secretarybird nest buffer area, which the juvenile bird relies on to forage for food before dispersal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breeding sites must be monitored regularly to determine breeding activity throughout the year, as Secretarybird can breed any time of the year, influenced by rainfall, until it is confirmed to be abandoned.</li> <li>• A walkthrough of the authorised final development layout and the 3 km surrounding area must be conducted by an avifaunal specialist or observer trained by an avifaunal specialist within 30 days prior to the commencement of construction to confirm SCC breeding activities.</li> <li>• Should any SCC be found breeding within 3 km of the operational facility, or facility to be decommissioned, a 1 km area surrounding the nest must be cordoned off as a no-go area as far as practically possible, and an avifaunal specialist must immediately be consulted for further instruction.</li> <li>• All disturbance can be further minimised by demarcating the disturbance footprint, and minimising this to the development footprint as much as practically possible.</li> </ul>
Agricultural Compliance Statement (Appendix E1)	Loss of land capability	Negative low	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A system of storm water management, which will prevent erosion on and downstream of the site, will be an inherent part of the engineering design on site.</li> <li>• Any excavations done during the construction phase, in areas that will be re-vegetated at the end of the construction phase, must separate the upper 30 cm of topsoil from the rest of the excavation spoils and store it in a separate stockpile. When the excavation is back-filled, the topsoil must be back-filled last, so that it remains at the surface. Topsoil should only be</li> </ul>
	Soil erosion	Negative low	Negative low	

				<p>stripped in areas that are excavated. Across the majority of the site, including construction lay down areas, it will be much more effective for rehabilitation, to retain the topsoil in place. If levelling requires significant cutting, topsoil should be temporarily stockpiled and then re-spread after cutting, so that there is a covering of topsoil over the entire cut surface. It will be advantageous to have topsoil and vegetation cover below the panels during the operational phase to control dust and erosion</p>
Heritage Impact Assessment (Appendix E7)	Loss or damage to sites, features or objects of cultural heritage significance	Negative low	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The anticipated impact will have negligible negative effect and will require little to no mitigation.</li> </ul>
Palaeontological Impact Assessment (Appendix E8)	Destroy or permanently seal-in fossils at or below the surface that are then no longer available for scientific study	Negative low	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If Palaeontological Heritage is uncovered during surface clearing and excavations the <b>Chance find Protocol</b> attached should be implemented immediately. Fossil discoveries ought to be protected and the ECO/site manager must report to South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) (Contact details: SAHRA, 111 Harrington Street, Cape Town. PO Box 4637, Cape Town 8000, South Africa. Tel: 021 462 4502. Fax: +27 (0)21 462 4509. Web: www.sahra.org.za) so that mitigation (recording and collection) can be carried out.</li> <li>Preceding any collection of fossil material, the specialist would need to apply for a collection permit from SAHRA. Fossil material must be curated in an accredited collection (museum or university collection), while all fieldwork and reports should meet the minimum standards for palaeontological impact studies suggested by SAHRA.</li> </ul>

Visual Impact Assessment (Appendix E5)	Visual impact of construction activities of the solar facility	Negative Low	Negative Low	<p>Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain and maintain natural vegetation immediately adjacent to the development footprint.</li> </ul> <p>Construction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that vegetation is not unnecessarily removed during the construction phase.</li> <li>Plan the placement of laydown areas and temporary construction equipment camps in order to minimise vegetation clearing (i.e., in already disturbed areas) where possible.</li> <li>Restrict the activities and movement of construction workers and vehicles to the immediate construction site and existing access roads.</li> <li>Ensure that rubble, litter, etc. are appropriately stored (if it can't be removed daily) and then disposed of regularly at a licenced waste site.</li> <li>Reduce and control dust during construction by utilising dust suppression measures.</li> <li>Limit construction activities to normal daytime hours, where possible, in order to reduce the impacts of construction lighting.</li> <li>Rehabilitate all disturbed areas immediately after the completion of construction work and maintain good housekeeping.</li> </ul>
Traffic Impact Assessments (Appendix D7)	Increase in traffic volumes, for both light and heavy vehicles, influencing traffic congestion and road safety	Negative Low	Negative Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All construction vehicles must be roadworthy, and drivers must have the relevant licences for the types of vehicles they are operating, and</li> <li>All vehicle drivers need to strictly adhere to the rules of the road</li> </ul>
	The creation of local employment,	Positive High	Positive High	Enhancement:

<p>Social Impact Assessment (Appendix E6)</p>	<p>business opportunities, and opportunities for skills development and on-site training.</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The project proponents of the Witfontein SEF should liaise with the Local Municipality to establish a local skills database of companies for the associated area. This skills database should be made available to the contractors before the commencement of the construction phase to establish the extent of the potential service providers in the Local Municipality.</li> <li>• The key stakeholders, local authorities and the community need to be informed regarding the outcome of the decision of the proposed Witfontein SEF. Local service providers should be notified of the tender process and assisted in this regard. The potential employment opportunities and the employment procedure that the project proponent intends to follow should also be clearly communicated before the commencement of the construction phase.</li> <li>• Reasonable and practical efforts should be made by the project proponent to appoint local contractors by implementing a 'locals first' policy. However, do to the technical nature of this project it is likely that skilled positions will be filled by people from outside the local areas.</li> <li>• Efforts should be made to employ local contractors first, and also contractors that are compliant with the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) criteria.</li> <li>• The recruitment selection process should also seek to promote gender equality.</li> <li>• If feasible, training and skills development programmes for the local workers should be initiated prior to the construction phase of the Witfontein SEF.</li> </ul>
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	The maximising of opportunities to local and regional SMMEs and other business for service delivery.	Positive medium	Positive medium	<p>Enhancement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The project proponent of Witfontein SEF should liaise with the LM to establish a database for the local companies/service providers of the associated areas. This database should be made available to the contractors before the initiation of the construction phase to notify and invite such service providers to tender for project-based services. However, it should be clearly communicated to potential contractors, that competitive tender processes may not guarantee the employment of local service providers.</li> <li>Efforts should be made by the project proponent to assist local Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) companies regarding the application and submission of tenders.</li> <li>The LM, in conjunction with the local business sector and representatives from the local hospitality industry, should identify strategies aimed at maximising the potential benefits associated with the project.</li> </ul>
	The provision of technical support to local farmers and the municipality.	Positive low	Positive low	<p>Enhancement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workshops and private consultations with the local farmers and the LOCAL MUNICIPALITY should be held to inform the and provide advice regarding the installation of solar energy facilities and the costs associated with it</li> </ul>
	The presence of construction workers on-site and in the impacted area and communities	Negative low	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The project proponent needs to develop a code of conduct which must be signed by appointed construction workers prior to the construction phase. The code of conduct should clearly outline the acceptable behaviour and activities of construction workers. In doing so construction workers will be legally informed and held liable for any damages or losses. It is however important that dismissals or fines must comply with the South African labour legislation.</li> </ul>



				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proposed site for the Witfontein SEF should be clearly fenced off to effectively monitor the movement of construction workers in the vicinity of the project site.</li> <li>The project proponent needs to arrange transportation for the construction workers on a daily basis, especially for low and semi-skilled construction workers, in order to enable the proponent to effectively monitor the movement of construction workers to and from the project site. Where necessary arrangements need to be made by the project proponents to enable construction workers to return to their hometowns over weekends/on a regular basis to reduce the potential risks posed to local family structures and social networks.</li> </ul>
	In-migration of people (non-local workforce and jobseekers).	Negative low	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As stated above a 'locals first' policy should be implemented by the project proponents, where the local community of Viljoenskroon should be employed first, specifically for un-skilled and low-skilled employment opportunities.</li> <li>A policy that no employment opportunities will be available at the gate, should be implemented by the project proponent.</li> <li>The proposed construction site for the Witfontein SEF should be clearly fenced off for potential security risks in this regard.</li> <li>Although the significance of this impact is likely to be low, the influx of job seekers cannot be avoided or prevented.</li> </ul>
	The presence of construction workers on-site and in the impacted areas and communities.	Negative low	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The project proponent and appointed contractors need to develop a code of conduct which must be signed by construction workers prior to the construction phase. The code of conduct should clearly outline the acceptable behaviour and activities of construction workers. In doing so the construction workers will be legally informed and held liable for any damages/theft. Construction workers found guilty of such an offence</li> </ul>

				<p>should be charged and dismissed, however it is important that dismissals or fines must comply with the South African labour legislation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The project proponent must enter into an agreement with the farmer prior to the construction phase, whereby the damages/losses to farming property/infrastructure be compensated for, if it can be proven to be associated with the construction activities of the proposed SEF.</li> <li>All farm gates must be closed after passing through.</li> </ul>
	Safety risk of farmers, risk of livestock theft and theft of farming infrastructure.	Negative low	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proposed construction site for the Witfontein SEF should be clearly fenced off and the movement of construction workers should be limited to the vicinity of the construction site.</li> <li>The project proponent/appointed contractors should provide transportation to the construction workers on a daily basis. This will ensure the potential risk regarding the trespassing of construction workers on farmers' properties, be reduced.</li> <li>No staff should be accommodated over-night on the construction site, except for the presence of security staff throughout the night on site.</li> <li>The project proponent should hold the appointed contractors liable for the compensation to farmers for any damages or losses that can be associated with the construction phase of the proposed project. This should also be included in the code of conduct signed by all key stakeholders.</li> <li>Procedures regarding waste management on the construction site should be clearly outlined in the Environmental Management Programme (EMPr), to reduce the risk it poses to livestock.</li> </ul>
	Nuisance impacts (noise and dust)	Negative low	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The movement of construction vehicles on the site should be confined to agreed access road/s.</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The movement of construction vehicles on the site should be confined to agreed access road/s.</li> <li>• All damages to the roads must be repaired by the contractor during the construction phase, and the costs associated with the damage must be borne by the contractor.</li> <li>• Measures for dust suppression should be implemented on a regular basis to minimize potential dust pollution. Examples of measures include wetting of gravel roads.</li> <li>• Vehicles that are used for the transportation of loose building materials, for example sand, should be fitted with covers to avoid any spillage.</li> <li>• The appointed contractors should ensure that all vehicles are road-worthy and that the drivers of all vehicles have the relevant licensing documents. The drivers must be made aware of the speed limits and potential road safety issues.</li> <li>• All vehicles related to the construction related activities should adhere to the speed limits.</li> </ul>
	Increased risk of potential veld fires	Negative medium	Negative medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlled firebreaks must be implemented by the contractor around the perimeters of the construction site.</li> <li>• No construction staff should be accommodated on the site over-night except for the presence of security personnel.</li> <li>• No smoking should be permitted on the site.</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The appointed contractor should ensure that no open fires for the use of cooking or heating should be allowed, except for designated areas.</li> <li>• Adequate fire-fighting equipment should be provided by the contractors and should be readily available and serviced on a regular basis. Additionally, all staff should be training in fire-fighting and how to use the related fire-fighting equipment.</li> <li>• The appointed contractors should ensure that any construction related activities that might pose potential fire risks, for example welding and grinding, are confined to the designated areas and that it is properly managed. Measures to reduce the risk of fires include avoiding working in high wind conditions when the risk of fires is greater. In this regard special care should be taken during the high-risk dry, windy winter months.</li> </ul>
	Visual and sense of place impacts	Negative low	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement mitigation measures identified in the Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) prepared for the project.</li> <li>• As far as possible, limit noise generating activities to normal daylight working hours and avoid weekends and public holidays.</li> <li>• The movement of heavy vehicles associated with the construction phase should be timed to avoid weekends, public holidays, and holiday periods where feasible.</li> <li>• Dust suppression measures must be implemented for heavy vehicles such as wetting of gravel roads on a regular basis and ensuring that vehicles used to transport sand and building materials are fitted with tarpaulins or covers.</li> <li>• All vehicles must be road-worthy, and drivers must be qualified and made aware of the potential road safety issues and need for strict speed limits.</li> </ul>

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				<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communication, complaints, and grievance channels must be implemented and contact details of the CLO must be provided to the local community in the study area.</li></ul>
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### 6.3.2 Impacts During the Operational Phase

During the operational phase the site will serve as a solar facility. The potential impacts will take place over a period of 20 – 30 years. During the operational phase the following activities will have various potential impacts on the biophysical and socio-economic environment:

- LN1 - Activity 11 (i) (GN.R. 327): *“The development of facilities or infrastructure for the transmission and distribution of electricity (i) outside urban areas or industrial complexes with a capacity of more than 33 but less than 275 kilovolts.”*
- LN2 - Activity 1 (GN.R. 327): *“The development of facilities or infrastructure for the generation of electricity from a renewable resource where the electricity output is 20 megawatts or more...”*
- LN3 - Activity 10 (b)(i)(ee) (GN.R 325): *“The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure for the storage, or storage and handling of a dangerous good, where such storage occurs in containers with a combined capacity of 30 but not exceeding 80 cubic metres (b) Free State, (i) Outside urban areas (bb) National Protected Area Expansion Strategy Focus areas, (ee) Critical biodiversity areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the Competent Authority or in bioregional plans.”*

During the operational phase minor negative impacts are foreseen over the long term. The latter refers to at least a 25-year period. Table 6.4 summarizes the potentially most significant impacts and the mitigation measures that are proposed during the operational phase.

**Table 6.4:** Impacts and the mitigation measures during the operational phase

SPECIALIST STUDY	IMPACT	PRE-MITIGATION RATING	POST MITIGATION RATING	SUMMARY OF MITIGATION MEASURES
Terrestrial Compliance Statement (Appendix E2)	Continued fragmentation and degradation of natural habitats and ecosystems (including wetlands).	Negative medium	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The clearing of vegetation must be minimized where possible. All activities must be restricted to within the authorised areas. It is recommended that areas to be developed be specifically and responsibly demarcated so that during the construction phase only the demarcated areas be impacted upon.</li> <li>• Existing access routes, especially roads, must be made use of.</li> <li>• Any materials may not be stored for extended periods of time and must be removed from the PAOI once the construction phase has been concluded. No permanent construction phase structures should be permitted. Construction buildings should preferably be prefabricated or constructed of re-usable/recyclable materials. No storage of vehicles or equipment will be allowed outside of the designated laydown areas.</li> <li>• Areas that are denuded during construction need to be re-vegetated with indigenous vegetation according to a habitat rehabilitation plan, to prevent erosion during flood and wind events and to promote the regeneration of functional habitat. This will also reduce the likelihood of encroachment by invasive alien plant species. All</li> </ul>

				<p>grazing mammals must be kept out of the areas that have recently been re-planted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A hydrocarbon spill management plan must be put in place to ensure that should there be any chemical spill out or over that it does not run into the surrounding areas. The Contractor shall be in possession of an emergency spill kit that must always be complete and available on site. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Drip trays or any form of oil absorbent material must be placed underneath vehicles/machinery and equipment when not in use.</li> <li>○ No servicing of equipment on site unless necessary.</li> <li>○ All contaminated soil / yard st1 shall be treated in situ or removed and be placed in containers.</li> <li>○ Appropriately contain any generator diesel storage tanks, machinery spills (e.g., accidental spills of hydrocarbons oils, diesel etc.) in such a way as to prevent them from leaking and entering the environment.</li> <li>○ Construction activities and vehicles could cause spillages of lubricants, fuels and waste material negatively affecting the functioning of the ecosystem.</li> <li>○ All vehicles and equipment must be maintained, and all re-fuelling and servicing of equipment is</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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				<p>to take place in demarcated areas outside of the project area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It must be made an offence for any staff to take/ bring any plant species into/out of any portion of the project area. No plant species whether indigenous or exotic should be brought into/taken from the project area, to prevent the spread of exotic or invasive species or the illegal collection of plants.</li> <li>• A fire management plan needs to be complied and implemented to restrict the impact fire would have on the surrounding areas.</li> </ul>
	<p>Introduction of IAP species and invasive fauna.</p>	<p>Negative medium</p>	<p>Negative low</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An Invasive Alien Plant Management Plan must be compiled and implemented. This should regularly be updated to reflect the annual changed in IAP composition.</li> <li>• The footprint area of the construction should be kept to a minimum. The footprint area must be clearly demarcated to avoid unnecessary disturbances to adjacent areas. Footprints of the roads must be kept to prescribed widths.</li> <li>• Waste management must be a priority and all waste must be collected and stored adequately. It is recommended that all waste be removed from site on a weekly basis to prevent rodents and pests entering the site. A location specific waste management plan must be put in place to limit the presence of rodents and pests</li> </ul>

				<p>and waste must not be allowed to enter surrounding areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A pest control plan must be put in place and implemented; it is imperative that poisons not be used to control pests due to the likely occasional presence of SCC.</li> </ul>
	<p>Displacement of the indigenous faunal community (including SCC) due to habitat loss, direct mortalities, and disturbance (road collisions, noise, dust, light, vibration, and poaching).</p>	Negative medium	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The areas to be disturbed must be specifically and responsibly demarcated to prevent the movement of staff or any individual into the surrounding environments, signs must be put up to enforce this.</li> <li>• Noise must be kept to an absolute minimum during the evenings and at night to minimize all possible disturbances to reptile species and nocturnal mammals.</li> <li>• No trapping, killing, or poisoning of any wildlife is to be allowed and</li> <li>• Signs must be put up to enforce this. Monitoring must take place in this regard.</li> <li>• Outside lighting should be designed and limited to minimize impacts on fauna. All outside lighting should be directed away from any sensitive areas. Fluorescent and mercury vapor lighting should be avoided, and sodium vapor (green/red) lights should be used wherever possible.</li> <li>• All construction and maintenance motor vehicle operators should undergo an environmental induction that includes instruction on the need to comply with speed limits, to respect all forms of wildlife. Speed limits</li> </ul>

				<p>must be enforced to ensure that road killings and erosion is limited.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schedule activities and operations during least sensitive periods, to avoid migration, nesting, and breeding seasons.</li> <li>• Fencing mitigations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Top 2 strands must be smooth wire</li> <li>○ Routinely re-tension loose wires</li> <li>○ Minimum 30cm between wires</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Place markers on fences.</li> <li>• Use environmentally friendly cleaning and dust suppressant products.</li> </ul>
Wetland Impact Assessment (Appendix E3)	Degradation of the ecological condition of aquatic ecosystems; modification of flow and water quality; erosion; and alien vegetation invasion in aquatic features	Negative medium	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design and Implement an effective stormwater management plan.</li> <li>• Promote water infiltration into the ground beneath the solar panels.</li> <li>• Release only clean water into the environment.</li> <li>• Stormwater leaving the site should not be concentrated in a single exit drain but spread across multiple drains around the site each fitted with energy dissipaters (e.g., slabs of concrete with rocks cemented in).</li> <li>• Re-vegetate denuded areas as soon as possible. Regularly clear drains.</li> <li>• Minimise the extent of concreted / paved / gravel areas.</li> <li>• A covering of soil and grass (regularly cut and maintained) below the solar panels is ideal for infiltration. If not feasible then gravel is preferable over concrete or paving.</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid excessively compacting the ground beneath the solar panels.</li> </ul>
Avifauna Impact Assessment (Appendix E4)	Vegetation clearing and brush cutting of vegetation for the associated infrastructure will lead to direct habitat loss.	Positive medium	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenous herbaceous and graminoid vegetation should be maintained under the connection grid to maintain biodiversity and prevent soil erosion— Environmental Officer (EO) to supervise and oversee vegetation clearing activities.</li> <li>• Once confirmed, avoid ‘High’ SEI water resources, including appropriate buffers.</li> <li>• Compile and implement a Rehabilitation Plan from the onset of the project.</li> <li>• Consult a fire expert and compile and implement a Fire Management Plan to minimise the risk of veld fires around the project site.</li> <li>• A Solid Waste Management Plan must be developed and implemented to avoid impacts on surrounding habitats.</li> <li>• Applying covers on phases or grounds where adequate separation is not feasible. Examples of covers include insulator/conductor covers, bushing covers, arrester covers, cutout covers, and jumper wire covers.</li> <li>• Fencing mitigations:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Top 2 strands must be smooth wire.</li> <li>○ Routinely retention loose wires.</li> <li>○ Minimum 30 cm between wires</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	Increased human presence can lead to poaching and the increase in vehicle traffic may lead to roadkill	Positive medium	Negative low	
	displacement of avifaunal species,	Positive medium	Negative low	

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Environmental Awareness Training for all staff and contractors. Hunting of species must be made a punishable offence. This is especially pertinent to avifauna SCC.</li> </ul>
Agricultural Compliance Statement (Appendix E1)	Loss of land capability	Negative low	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A system of storm water management, which will prevent erosion on and downstream of the site, will be an inherent part of the engineering design on site.</li> <li>Any excavations done during the construction phase, in areas that will be re-vegetated at the end of the construction phase, must separate the upper 30 cm of topsoil from the rest of the excavation spoils and store it in a separate stockpile. When the excavation is back-filled, the topsoil must be back-filled last, so that it remains at the surface. Topsoil should only be stripped in areas that are excavated. Across the majority of the site, including construction lay down areas, it will be much more effective for rehabilitation, to retain the topsoil in place. If levelling requires significant cutting, topsoil should be temporarily stockpiled and then re-spread after cutting, so that there is a covering of topsoil over the entire cut surface. It will be advantageous to have topsoil and vegetation cover below the panels during the operational phase to control dust and erosion</li> </ul>
	Soil erosion	Negative low	Negative low	
Visual Impact Assessment (Appendix E5)	Visual impact of construction activities of the solar facility	Negative Low	Negative Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good housekeeping to reduce impacts that could cause a nuisance.</li> <li>Dust suppression</li> <li>proper waste collection</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clean and neat site camp/office</li> <li>• shade net to block views towards site camp/office</li> <li>• Retain the vegetation, especially along the boundary of the site</li> </ul>
Traffic Impact Assessment (appendix E9)	Increase in traffic volumes, for both light and heavy vehicles, influencing traffic congestion and road safety	Negative Low	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All operations and maintenance vehicles must be roadworthy, and drivers must have the relevant licences for the type of vehicles they are operating, and</li> <li>• All vehicle drivers need to strictly adhere to the rules of the road.</li> </ul>
Social Impact Assessment (Appendix E6)	The creation of local employment, business opportunities, and opportunities for skills development and on-site training.	Positive High	Positive High	<p>Enhancement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The enhancement measures suggested in the construction phase should have already been implemented prior to the implementation phase.</li> <li>• Skills development programmes and training should be provided and implemented to maximise the number of employment opportunities for the local communities.</li> <li>• The project proponent together with the Local Municipality should explore the option for establishing a Community Development Trust.</li> <li>• The project proponent and the local municipalities, together with the Tourism Centre, need to explore the possibility of establishing a visitor centre for the proposed project.</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The potential opportunities for local content, procurement as well as community shareholding should be explored and maximised.</li> </ul>
	The potential up- and downstream economic opportunities for the impacted community.	Positive medium	Positive medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The enhancement measures suggested in the construction phase presented earlier should have already been implemented prior to the implementation phase.</li> <li>The project proponent together with the Local Municipality should explore the option for establishing a Community Development Trust.</li> <li>The project proponent and the local municipalities, together with the Tourism Centre, need to explore the possibility of establishing a visitor centre for the proposed project.</li> <li>The potential opportunities for local content, procurement as well as community shareholding should be explored and maximised.</li> </ul>
	The establishment of renewable energy infrastructure and the generation of clean, renewable energy.	Positive medium	Positive medium	<p>Enhancement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The establishment of a renewable energy facility like the proposed Witfontein SEF can be regarded as a mitigation measure itself in terms of the country's high energy demand.</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Utilise the proposed Witfontein SEF to promote and possibly increase the country's contributions towards renewable energy to supply the national energy grid.</li> <li>Implementation of training and skills development programmes by the project proponents for the local communities to maximise the amount of local people employed during the operational phase.</li> <li>Maximise the exposure of the proposed Witfontein SEF to the public through extensive communication, advertisement and the establishment of a visitor centre</li> </ul>
	The generation of additional land use income for landowners	Positive low	Positive medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lease agreements between the project proponent and the affected landowners should be implemented.</li> </ul>
	The potential positive impacts associated with the establishment of a Community Trust.	Positive medium	Positive medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The potential trustees to sit on a Community Trust need to be identified with the assistance of the Local Municipality. The structure of this trust and the trustees also need to be established to ensure that the Trust is also not mismanaged.</li> <li>There should be clear criteria for the identification and funding of projects/initiatives in the area; the benefits of projects should be aimed at the whole community.</li> <li>There must be strict financial management controls in place to manage the funds generated for a Community Trust for the proposed SEF financial management controls that could be implemented can include annual audits.</li> </ul>



	Impact on tourism	Negative low	Positive low	Negative low	Positive low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The recommendations contained in the Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) report should be consulted and implemented during the operational phase.</li> <li>The project proponents should also consider the establishment of a visitor centre for the proposed Witfontein SEF.</li> </ul>
	Visual and sense of place impacts	Positive medium		Positive medium		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The recommendations contained in the Visual Impact Assessment (VIA) report should be consulted and implemented during the operational phase. The measures aimed at addressing the impact of aviation lights at night should specifically also be addressed</li> </ul>
	Potential loss of productive farmland.	Negative low		Negative low		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The proposed mitigation measures for the construction phase should have been implemented.</li> <li>The project proponents should consider the establishment of a rehabilitation fund. This fund can be utilised for the rehabilitation of the proposed SEF in the decommissioning phase.</li> </ul>

### **6.3.3 Impacts During the Decommissioning Phase**

The physical environment will benefit from the closure of the solar facility since the site will be restored to its natural state. Table 6.5 provides a summary of the impacts during the decommissioning phase. The decommissioning phase will however potentially result in impact on soils, pressure on existing service infrastructure, surface water and the loss of permanent employment. Skilled staff will be eminently employable, and a number of temporary jobs will also be created in the process. Decommissioning of a PV facility will leave a positive impact on the habitat and biodiversity in the area as the area will be rehabilitated to its natural state.

**Table 6.5:** Impacts and the mitigation measures during the decommissioning phase

SPECIALIST STUDY	IMPACT	PRE-MITIGATION RATING	POST MITIGATION RATING	SUMMARY OF MITIGATION MEASURES
Wetland Impact Assessment (Appendix E3)	Disturbance of aquatic habitat; water quality impacts	Negative medium	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The recommended buffers between the delineated aquatic ecosystems and all the proposed project activities should be maintained.</li> <li>• Clearing of indigenous vegetation should not take place within the aquatic features and the recommended buffers.</li> <li>• The existing road infrastructure should be utilised as far as possible to minimise the overall disturbance.</li> <li>• During the decommissioning phase, site management must be undertaken. This should specifically address on-site stormwater management and prevention of pollution from any potential pollution sources during activities such as hydrocarbon spills.</li> <li>• Any stormwater that does arise within the site must be handled appropriately to trap sediments and reduce flow velocities.</li> </ul>
Visual Impact Assessment (Appendix E5)	Alteration to the visual quality of the residents staying on the farms surrounding the study site	Negative low	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good housekeeping to reduce impacts that could cause a nuisance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Dust suppression</li> <li>○ Proper waste collection</li> <li>○ Neat stockpiling of material.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Vegetate the areas that were exposed during the construction phase</li> </ul>

Traffic Impact Assessment (Appendix E9)	Increase in traffic influencing traffic congestion and road safe	Negative Low	Negative Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All decommissioning vehicles must be roadworthy, and drivers must have the relevant licenses for the types of vehicles they are operating, and</li> <li>• All vehicle drivers need to strictly adhere to the rules of the road.</li> </ul>
Social impact Assessment (Appendix D8)	The loss of employment opportunities and associated income	Negative medium	Negative low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retrenchment packages should be provided to all retrenched staff when the Witfontein SEF is decommissioned. This information must also be included in the staff's contracts and communicated in advance.</li> <li>• An Environmental Rehabilitation Trust Fund should be established to cover all the costs associated with the decommissioning phase and the rehabilitation of the impacted areas. The funds should be funded by a percentage of the revenue generated from the sale of the energy to the national grid over the 20–25 years lifespan of the proposed SEF.</li> <li>• All related infrastructures associated with the proposed Witfontein SEF should be dismantled and transported off-site.</li> </ul>

### 1.1.1 Impacts Associated with the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)

**Table 6.6:** Impacts associated with the BESS

SPECIALIST STUDY	IMPACT	PRE-MITIGATION RATING	POST MITIGATION RATING	SUMMARY OF MITIGATION MEASURES
General Environment (risks associated with BESS)	<p>Mechanical breakdown / Exposure to high temperatures</p> <p>Fires, electrocutions and spillage of toxic substances into the surrounding environment.</p> <p>Spillage of hazardous substances into the surrounding environment.</p> <p>Soil contamination – leachate from spillages which could lead to an impact of the productivity of soil forms in affected areas.</p>	Negative medium	Negative low	<p>Operators are trained and competent to operate the BESS. Training should include the discussion of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Potential impact of electrolyte spills on groundwater;</li> <li>○ Suitable disposal of waste and effluent;</li> <li>○ Key measures in the EMPr relevant to worker’s activities;</li> <li>○ How incidents and suggestions for improvement can be reported.</li> <li>○ Training records should be kept on file and be made available during audits.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Battery supplier user manuals safety specifications and Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) are filed on site at all times.</li> <li>● Compile method statements for approval by the Technical/SHEQ Manager for the operation and management and replacement of the battery units / electrolyte for the duration of the project life cycle. Method statements should be kept on site at all times.</li> <li>● Provide signage on site specifying the types of batteries in use and the risk of exposure to hazardous material and electric shock. Signage should also specify how electrical and chemical fires should be dealt with by first responders, and the potential risks to first responders (e.g. the inhalation of toxic fumes, etc.).</li> <li>● Firefighting equipment should readily be available at the BESS area and within the site.</li> <li>● Maintain strict access control to the BESS area.</li> </ul>

	<p>Water Pollution – spillages into surrounding watercourses as well as groundwater.</p> <p>Health impacts – on the surrounding communities, particularly those relying on watercourses (i.e. rivers, streams, etc) as a primary source of water.</p> <p>Generation of hazardous waste</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure all maintenance contractors / staff are familiar with the supplier’s specifications.</li> <li>• Undertake daily risk assessment prior to the commencement of daily tasks at the BESS. This should consider any aspects which could result in fire or spillage, and appropriate actions should be taken to prevent these.</li> <li>• Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) should be made available by the Supplier to ensure that the batteries are handled in accordance with required best practices.</li> <li>• Spill kits must be made available to address any incidents associated with the flow of chemicals from the batteries into the surrounding environment.</li> <li>• The assembly of the batteries on-site should be avoided as far as possible. Activities on-site for the BESS should only be limited to the placement of the container wherein the batteries are placed.</li> <li>• Undertake periodic inspections on the BESS to ensure issues are identified timeously and addressed with the supplier where relevant.</li> <li>• The applicant in consultation with the supplier must compile and implement a Leak and Detection Monitoring Programme during the project life cycle of the BESS.</li> <li>• Batteries must be strictly maintained by the supplier or suitably qualified persons for the duration of the project life cycle. No unauthorised personnel should be allowed to maintain the BESS.</li> <li>• Damaged and used batteries must be removed from site by the supplier or any other suitably qualified professional for recycling or appropriate disposal.</li> <li>• The applicant should obtain a cradle to grave battery management plan from the supplier during the planning and design phase of the system. The plan must be kept on site and adhered to.</li> </ul>
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○ **SUMMARY OF IMPACTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SPECIALIST STUDIES**

To address the key issues highlighted in the previous section the following specialist studies and processes were commissioned:

- Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment – The Biodiversity Company (see Appendix E2)
- Wetland Impact Assessment – Toni Belcher (see Appendix E3)
- Agricultural Compliance Statement – The Biodiversity Company (see Appendix E1)
- Avifaunal Site Sensitivity Verification The Biodiversity Company (see Appendix E4)
- Visual Impact Assessment – Green Tree Environmental Consulting (see Appendix E5)
- Heritage Impact Assessment – CTS Heritage (see Appendix E7)
- Traffic Impact Assessment – Bvi Consulting (See Appendix E9)
- Social Impact Assessment – Solis-Environmental (see Appendix E6)
- Palaeontological Impact Assessment – CTS Heritage (see Appendix E8)

The following sections summarise the main findings from the specialist reports in relation to the key issues raised during the impact assessment.

▪ **Heritage and archaeological impacts**

South Africa's heritage resources comprise a wide range of sites, features, objects and beliefs. According to Section 27(18) of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), No. 25 of 1999, no person may destroy, damage, deface, excavate, alter, remove from its original position, subdivide or change the planning status of any heritage site without a permit issued by the heritage resources authority responsible for the protection of such site. In accordance with Section 38 of the NHRA, an independent heritage consultant was therefore appointed to conduct a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) to determine if any sites, features or objects of cultural heritage significance occur within the proposed site. The main question which needs to be addressed is:

*“Will the proposed development impact on any heritage or archaeological artefacts?”*

The HIA survey proceeded with no major constraints and limitations, and the project area was comprehensively surveyed for heritage resources, and a number of significant archaeological material remains were documented. The significant heritage resources identified within the development area relate to the agricultural past and burial grounds and graves.

Based on the nature of the project, surface activities may impact upon the fossil heritage if preserved in the development footprint. The geological structures suggest that the rocks are either much too old to contain body fossils or too young and friable to preserve fossils. Furthermore, the material to be excavated are soils and sands and they do not preserve fossils. Since there is an extremely small chance that fossils from below ground may be disturbed, a Fossil Chance Find Protocol has been added



to this report. Taking account of the defined criteria, the potential impact to fossil heritage resources is extremely low.

▪ **Terrestrial Biodiversity Impacts**

The potential impact of the proposed development on flora and fauna known to occur in the Free State Province had to be determined. The main question which needs to be addressed is:

*“How will the proposed development impact on the ecology?”*

The project area has been altered both currently and historically. The current agricultural and livestock as well as other land uses have had an impact on both the fauna and the flora in the area with the ridge and sandy woodland habitat still present being impacted on in some way or another.

The main expected impacts of the proposed infrastructure will include the following:

- Habitat loss and fragmentation;
- Degradation of surrounding habitat;
- Disturbance and displacement caused during the construction and maintenance phases; and
- Direct mortality during the construction phase.

The PV project is expected to have an overall low residual impact. If mitigation measures as described in this report are implemented, it will reduce the significance of the risk to an acceptable level.

This denotes that avoidance mitigation wherever possible must be implemented. This includes changes to project infrastructure design to limit the amount of habitat impacted. The maintenance of basal vegetation cover beneath the solar panels will contribute to achieving avoidance, so complete clearance is not recommended. Project planning and layout considered provides favourable avoidance mitigation. The overall low cumulative residual impact does not present a fatal flaw for the development, and in accordance with the Biodiversity Offset Guideline (2022) will not incur a listed (and notable) change to the land and resource. Considering the above-mentioned information, no fatal flaws are evident for the proposed project. It is the opinion of the specialists that the proposed project, may be favourably considered on condition that all prescribed mitigation measures and supporting recommendations are implemented.

▪ **Wetland and Aquatic Impacts**

The potential impact of the proposed development on wetlands and riparian areas had to be determined. The main question which needs to be addressed is:

*“How will the proposed development impact on wetlands?”*

According to the Wetland and Aquatic Impact Assessment (Appendix E3), the aquatic features occurring within the site comprise a minor watercourse and seasonal seep wetlands that have been largely to seriously modified and are of moderate to low ecological importance and sensitivity. Most of the potential aquatic ecosystem impacts of the proposed activities are likely to take place during the construction phase. The potential aquatic biodiversity impacts of the proposed activities are likely to be very low in terms of any potential impact on aquatic habitat, biota, water quality, or flow for all phases of the proposed developments if mitigated as recommended. A low potential aquatic



ecosystem impact is likely if it is only the PV modules and minor support infrastructure (upgrade to existing road, fencing or internal electrical reticulation) placed within these areas that has limited disturbance, is adequately mitigated to reduce surface and subsurface flows and is rehabilitated after the disturbance activities. No hard structures with foundations should be placed in these areas.

Construction of the Witfontein Solar PV 1 Facilities and associated infrastructure will require disturbance of the surface area and some removal of vegetation cover for the preparation of the various project component footprints at the site. Only a limited amount of water is utilised during construction. Concrete foundations will need to be constructed. A construction camp with a temporary laydown area and the concrete batching plant would likely need to be placed within the site for the construction works. There is thus also the potential for some water quality impacts associated with the batching of concrete from hydrocarbon spills or associated with the other construction activities on the site. The location of the works should be located sufficiently far from the delineated aquatic features (outside the recommended setback areas) that they do not pose any significant risk to the aquatic features.

During the operation phase, the PV Facility will operate largely unattended and with low maintenance required for more than 20 years. The hard surfaces created by the developments may lead to increased runoff, in particular on surfaces with a steeper gradient. This may lead to increased erosion and sedimentation of the downslope areas. A localised long-term impact (more than 20 years) of low intensity could be expected that would have a very low overall significance post-mitigation in terms of its impact on the identified aquatic ecosystems in the area. The only potentially toxic or hazardous materials which would be present in relatively small amounts would be lubricating oils and hydraulic and insulating fluids. Therefore, contamination of surface or groundwater or soils is highly unlikely. There are low to no water consumption impacts associated with the operation of the proposed PV infrastructure.

Removal of the Witfontein Solar PV1 Facilities and associated infrastructure will result in some disturbance of the site. There is thus also the potential for some water quality impacts associated with decommissioning and rehabilitation of the site. The location of the works should be located sufficiently far from the delineated aquatic features (outside the recommended setback areas) that they do not pose any significant risk to the aquatic features.

Based on the findings of the wetland and aquatic biodiversity assessment report, there should be no reason why the proposed PV facilities and their associated activities, with the recommended mitigation, cannot be approved from an aquatic ecosystem point of view if mitigated as recommended.

- **Visual Impacts**

Due to the extent of the proposed photovoltaic solar plant it is expected that the plant will result in potential visual impacts. The main question which needs to be addressed is:

*“To what extent will the proposed development be visible to observers and to what extent will the landscape provides any significant visual absorption capacity”.*

The Visual Impact Assessment (Appendix E5) has confirmed that the existing visual condition of the landscape that may be affected by the proposed Project has been described. The study areas scenic quality has been rated moderate within the context of the sub-region and sensitive viewing areas and

landscape types identified and mapped indicating potential sensitivity to the proposed development within a 10 km radius of the project site (Zone of potential Influence).

Impacts to views are the highest when viewers are identified as being sensitive to change in the landscape, and their views are focused on and dominated by the change. Visual impacts occur when changes in the landscape are noticeable to viewers looking at the landscape from their homes or travel routes, and important cultural features and historic sites, especially in foreground views. Sensitivity to the project was considered to be high primarily due to the distance of the viewers to the project, and the change it will bring in their immediate foreground views.

The proposed project will be contrasting to the existing land use and will not be absorbed by the surrounding landscape. It will therefore be in the foreground view of residents staying along the north-eastern, west and southern boundary of the project site and the visibility and the intrusion of the project was considered to be high for these sensitive viewers. Viewers that are not located within the direct vicinity (0–3km) of the project site will not experience a high visual impact since the topography and the vegetation in the surrounding area will partially obstruct views towards the project site. The project will be visible from elevated areas.

During construction the significance of visual impact will be negative low and will increase to negative moderate as the Project enters the operational phase. The significance during the construction period could however become moderate if the mitigation measures are not implemented, this is mainly due to the nuisances that are created by vehicles driving up and down, dust, waste on site and the site or construction yard. The negative moderate impact experienced during the operational phase can be reduced to negative low, should the mitigation measures be implemented successfully. During the decommissioning phase the structures will be removed, and rehabilitation will take place. The impact will be negative low during the decommissioning but could result in a low positive impact, should rehabilitation be successful.

Mitigation measures are viable and includes measures such as good housing keeping and retaining the dense vegetation cover, especially along the boundary of the project area. Therefore, with the mitigation measures in place the significance of the visual impact will be of an acceptable level.

- **Traffic Impacts**

Large developments are normally associated with an increase in construction vehicle traffic. The main question which needs to be addressed is:

*“How will the proposed development impact on the traffic on main delivery routes to the site?”*

According to the Traffic Impact Assessment (Appendix E9), The existing traffic volumes on the transportation routes were sourced from permanent count stations only, as this is the most reliable and accurate data that was available. The impact of the construction, operation, and decommissioning trip generation, on the future background traffic volumes near the Witfontein SPP and along transportation routes, are expected to be low. Two possible ports of entry have been identified from where the solar panel technology and large electrical components will be transported, namely: Durban and Richards Bay. Based on the shortest travel distance and attractiveness based on travel time, it is recommended that the Port of Durban be the preferred port of entry. All construction materials and solar modules will be transported via normal loads. Transformer and substation components will be

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transported via abnormal loads. The access point to the site is situated off the R76. The formalisation of this access point, to the standard, might be a requirement as part of the wayleave approval of the Moqhaka Local Municipality. All internal roads considered should conform to the geometric and pavement design parameters as indicated on the design standard certificate. Adequate traffic accommodation signage must be erected and maintained on either side of the access, on the R76, throughout the construction phase of the Witfontein Solar PV 1. In addition, traffic accommodation signage should also be erected at affected major intersections on the transportation routes. The direct impact and significance of the Witfontein Solar PV 1 is considered negative low. Therefore, the development of the Witfontein Solar PV 1, can be supported from a traffic perspective.

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## 7 CUMULATIVE EFFECTS ASSESSMENT

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This section aims to address the following requirements of the regulations:

**Appendix 1. (3)(i) A BAR (...) must include-**

(j) an assessment of each identified potentially significant impact and risk, including- (i) cumulative impacts.

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The EIA Regulations (as amended, 2017) determine that cumulative impacts, *“in relation to an activity, means the past, current and reasonably foreseeable future impact of an activity, considered together with the impact of activities associated with that activity, that in itself may not be significant, but may become significant when added to the existing and reasonably foreseeable impacts eventuating from similar or diverse activities.”* Cumulative impacts can be incremental, interactive, sequential or synergistic. EIAs have traditionally failed to come to terms with such impacts, largely as a result of the following considerations:

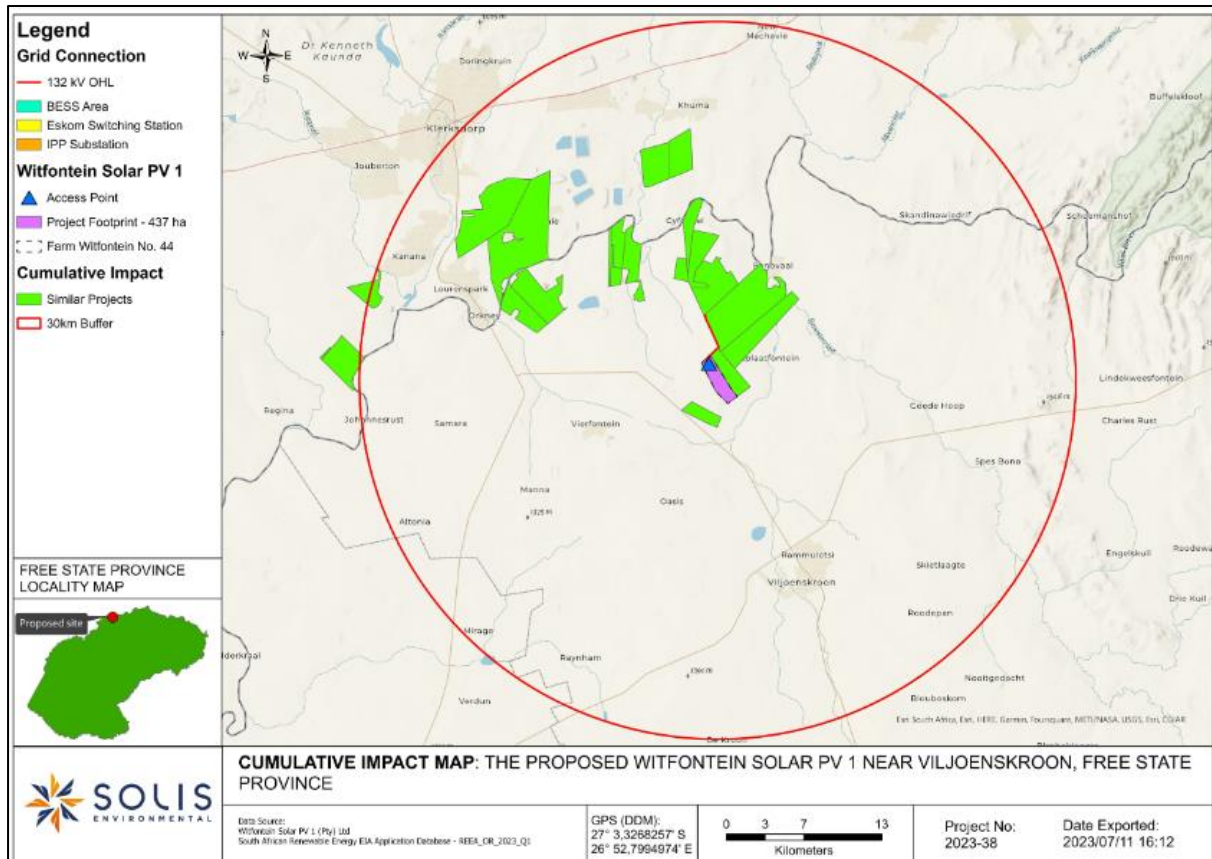
- Cumulative effects may be local, regional or global in scale and dealing with such impacts requires coordinated institutional arrangements;
- Complexity - dependent on numerous fluctuating influencing factors which may be completely independent of the controllable actions of the project or communities; and
- Project level investigations are ill-equipped to deal with broader biophysical, social and economic considerations.

Despite these challenges, cumulative impacts have been afforded increased attention in this Basic Assessment Report and for each impact a separate section has been added which discusses any cumulative issues, and where applicable, draws attention to other issues that may contextualise or add value to the interpretation of the impact (refer to Appendix E). This chapter analyses the proposed project’s potential cumulative impacts in more detail by: (1) defining the geographic area considered for the cumulative effects analysis; (2) providing an overview of relevant past and present actions in the project vicinity that may affect cumulative impacts; (3) presenting the reasonably foreseeable actions in the geographic area of consideration; and (4) determining whether there are adverse cumulative effects associated with the resource areas analysed.

The term "Cumulative Effect" has for the purpose of this report been defined as: the summation of effects over time which can be attributed to the operation of the project itself, and the overall effects on the ecosystem of the project area that can be attributed to the project and other existing and planned future projects.

## 7.2 GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF EVALUATION

The geographic area of evaluation is the spatial boundary in which the cumulative effects analysis was undertaken. The spatial boundary evaluated in this cumulative effects analysis generally includes an area of a 30 km radius surrounding the proposed development (refer to Figure 7.1 below).



**Figure B:** Witfontein Solar PV 1 geographic area of evaluation with utility-scale renewable energy generation sites and power lines

The geographic spread of PV solar projects, administrative boundaries and any environmental features (the nature of the landscape) were considered when determining the geographic area of investigation. It was argued that a radius of 30 km would generally confine the potential for cumulative effects within this particular environmental landscape. The geographic area includes projects located within the Free State Provinces. A larger geographic area may be used to analyse cumulative impacts based on the specific temporal or spatial impacts of a resource. For example, the socio-economic cumulative analysis may include a larger area, as the construction workforce may draw from a much wider area. The geographic area of analysis is specified in the discussion of the cumulative impacts for that resource where it differs from the general area of evaluation described above.

## 7.3 TEMPORAL BOUNDARY OF EVALUATION

A temporal boundary is the timeframe during which the cumulative effects are reasonably expected to occur. The temporal parameters for this cumulative effects analysis are the anticipated lifespan of the proposed project, beginning in 2024 and extending out at least

20 years, which is the minimum expected project life of the proposed project. Where appropriate, particular focus is on near-term cumulative impacts of overlapping construction schedules for proposed projects in the area of evaluation.

#### 7.4 OTHER PROJECTS IN THE AREA

##### 7.4.1 Existing projects in the area

According to the DFFE’s database, 17 solar PV facility applications have been submitted to the Department within the geographic area of investigation (refer to Table 7.1).

**Table 7.1:** A summary of related projects that may have a cumulative impact, in a 30 km radius of the Witfontein Solar PV 1 site.

Site name	Distance from study area	Proposed generating capacity	DFFE reference	EIA process	Project status
Noko solar plant near Orkney, North West Province	28km	20MW	14/12/16/3/3/1/2474	BAR	Approve
Nyarhi solar power plant near Viljoenskroon, Free State Province	7km	100MW	14/12/16/3/3/1/2533	BAR	Approve
Paleso solar power plant near Viljoenskroon situated within the Moqhaka local municipality, the Greater Fezile Dabi District Municipality in the Free State Province	13km	150MW	14/12/16/3/3/1/2365	BAR	Approved
The remaining extent of portion 1 of the farm Grootdraai 468, registration division Viljoenskroon situated within Moqhaka local	12km	150MW	14/12/16/3/3/2/1/2369	BAR	Approved

municipality and the Greater Fezile FS					
Buffels Solar PV 1 Solar Energy Project on a site near Orkney, North West Province	15km	75MW	14/12/16/3/3/2/777	Scoping and EIA	Approved
Portion 5 and 57 within the City of Matlosana Local Municipality.	15km	100MW	14/12/16/3/3/2/778	Scoping and EIA	Approved
South West of Orkney within The City of Matlosana L Min the North West Province	29.9km	100MW	14/12/16/3/3/2/954	Scoping and EIA	Approved
Grootvaders Bosch No. 592 and Anglo No. 593, Registration Division Viljoenskroon, Free State Province	9.5km	150MW	14/12/16/3/3/1/2476	Scoping and EIA	Approved
Portion 23 of the Farm Pretorius Kraal No. 53, Registration Division Viljoenskroon, Free State Province	14km	150MW	14/12/16/3/3/1/2535	Scoping and EIA	Approved
Portion 3 of the Farm Tweepunt No. 14, Registration Division Viljoenskroon, Free State Province	1,5km	129MW	14/12/16/3/3/1/2543	Scoping and EIA	Approved

Portion 1 of the Farm Waterford No. 53, Registration Division Viljoenskroon, Free State Province	6km	300MW	14/12/16/3/3/1/2698	Scoping and EIA	Approved
Portion 2 of the Farm Waterford No. 53, Registration Division Viljoenskroon, Free State Province	3.5km	200MW	14/12/16/3/3/1/2705	Scoping and EIA	Approved
The Remaining Extent of the Farm Cijfervlei 6 and Portion 1 of the Farm La Reys Kraal Zuid 165	6.5km	250MW	14/12/16/3/3/1/2707	Scoping and EIA	Approved
Paradys Solar PV Project 1	1km	220MW	To be confirmed	Scoping and EIA	In process
Utopia Solar PV Project 1	4.5km	224MW	To be confirmed	Scoping and EIA	In process
Mooiwater Solar PV Project 1	0km	140MW	To be confirmed	Scoping and EIA	In process
Rudolph Solar PV Project 1	5km	175 MW	To be confirmed	Scoping and EIA	In process

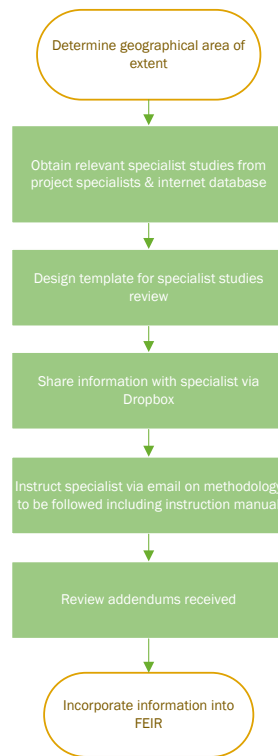
It is unclear whether other projects not related to renewable energy is or has been or will be constructed in this area. In general, development activity in the area is focused on industrial development, mining and agriculture. Agriculture in the area is primarily associated with cattle grazing. The next section of this report will aim to evaluate the potential for solar projects for this area in the foreseeable future.

## 7.5 SPECIALIST INFORMATION ON CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

In line with the Terms of Reference (ToR) provided as part of the scoping report, specialists were asked to, where possible, take into consideration the cumulative effects associated with the proposed development and other projects which are either developed or in the process of being developed in the local area (refer to Figure 7.2 for process flow). The following sections present their findings.







**Figure 7.1:** Process flow diagram for determining cumulative effects

### 7.5.1 Soil, Land Capability and Agricultural Potential

According to the Agricultural Compliance Statement (Appendix E1) all of these projects have the same agricultural impacts in an almost identical agricultural environment, and therefore the same mitigation measures apply to all.

This cumulative impact assessment has considered all renewable energy projects within a 30 km radius. In quantifying the cumulative impact, the area of land taken out of agricultural use as a result of all the projects listed in Appendix 4 (total generation capacity of 2364 MW) will amount to a total of approximately 5910 hectares. This is calculated using the industry standards of 2.5 and 0.3 hectares per megawatt for solar and wind energy generation respectively, as per the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) Phase 1 Wind and Solar Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) (2015). As a proportion of the total area within a 30 km radius (approximately 282,700 ha), this amounts to 2.09% of the surface area. This is within an acceptable limit in terms of loss of limited potential agricultural land which is only suitable for grazing, and of which there is no particular scarcity in the country.

It should also be noted that renewable energy development can only be located in fairly close proximity to a substation that has available capacity. This creates cumulative impact in such places. However, this is acceptable because it also effectively protects most agricultural land in the country from renewable energy development because only a small proportion of the country's total land surface is located in close enough proximity to an available substation to be viable for renewable energy development.

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Due to all of the considerations discussed above, the cumulative impact of loss of future agricultural production potential is assessed here as being of low significance and therefore as acceptable. In terms of cumulative agricultural impact, it is recommended that the development be approved.

### 7.5.2 Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment

The Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment (Appendix D1) indicates that the total area within the 30 km buffer around the PV development area amounts to 371053,18 ha, but when considering the transformation (232113,78 ha) that has taken place within this radius, 138939,40 ha of intact habitat remains according to the RLE. Therefore, the area within 30 km of the project has experienced approximately 62.56% loss in natural habitat.

Considering this context, the PV cluster footprint<sup>5</sup> for is 4276.55 ha and similar projects exist in the 30 km region measuring a maximum of 9050.86 ha (as per the latest South African Renewable Energy EIA Application Database) which means that the total amount of remaining habitat lost as a result of the solar project amounts to 9.59% (PV developments as a percentage of the total remaining habitat). Due to the significant (62.56%) amount of the local vegetation type has already been lost, the overall cumulative impact of the proposed cluster project is rated as 'high'. Considering the Witfontein PV, the area is 1246 ha, will contribute 0.90 % in the cumulative impact.

### 7.5.3 Wetland Riparian Impact Assessment

The Wetland Impact Assessment (Appendix D3) indicates that the potential cumulative aquatic ecosystem impacts of the proposed development relate to the combined impact of that development with the incremental impacts of other past, present or reasonably foreseeable future activities on the same aquatic ecosystems (i.e. a small unnamed watercourse and several seeps). These impacts have been assessed within an area of a 30km radius surrounding the proposed development and for the anticipated project lifetime of at least 20 years, where the greatest potential impact is likely to occur for overlapping construction activities. For the study area, from a surface water perspective, the site lies within the catchments of two tributaries of the Vaal River in C24B (unnamed tributaries) and C70K (Olifantsvlei and Renoster) and the greater Vaal River. These aquatic ecosystems are in a moderately to largely modified ecological condition with a moderate to high ecological importance and ecological sensitivities as a result of the current activities and their cumulative impact on them. The REC of these features would be that they at least remain in a moderate or largely modified ecological condition and are rehabilitated where the opportunity occurs. The proposed activities associated with the projects have been mitigated to ensure that there is no further degradation of these aquatic ecosystems and that the Recommended Ecological Condition (REC) is achievable. There would be no net loss of aquatic habitat or functionality as a result of the cumulative impact associated with this project. In terms of the renewable energy projects in a 30km radius, none of these activities would impact further on the mentioned aquatic ecosystems than those activities assessed in this section as they are located far from these aquatic ecosystems and would also not result in any net loss of these aquatic ecosystems.

Due to all of the considerations discussed above, the cumulative impact on aquatic ecosystem habitat, integrity and functionality in the area will not have an unacceptable negative impact. The proposed

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<sup>5</sup> Considering the whole cluster area is developed.

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project is therefore acceptable in terms of its associated cumulative impact, and therefore from this perspective, there is no reason why it should not be approved.

#### **7.5.4 Avifaunal Assessment**

The Avifauna Verification Report (Appendix D4) describes the potential impacts on avifauna associated with the construction, operational and decommissioning phases of the proposed development. During the construction phase vegetation clearing and brush cutting of vegetation for the associated infrastructure will lead to direct habitat loss. Vegetation clearing will create a disturbance and will therefore, potentially lead to the displacement of avifaunal species, such as the African Grass owl Nest that was found along the power line. Increased human presence can lead to poaching and the increase in vehicle traffic may lead to roadkill.

Large passerines are particularly susceptible to electrocution because owing to their relatively large bodies, they are able to touch conductors and ground/earth wires or earthed devices simultaneously. The chances of electrocution are increased when feathers are wet, during periods of high humidity or during defecation. Prevailing wind direction also influences the rate of electrocution casualties.

#### **7.5.5 Social Impact Assessment**

The Social Impact Assessment (Appendix D7) indicates that potential cumulative impacts identified for the project include positive impacts on the economy, business development, and employment, as well as negative impacts such as visual impacts on sense of place.

Witfontein Solar PV 1 and the establishment of other solar power projects within the area has the potential to result in significant positive cumulative impacts, specifically with regards to the creation of a number of socio-economic opportunities for the region, which in turn, can result in positive social benefits. The positive cumulative impacts include creation of employment, skills development and training opportunities, and downstream business opportunities. The cumulative benefits to the local, regional, and national economy through employment and procurement of services are more considerable than that of Witfontein Solar PV alone.

#### **7.5.6 Visual Impact Assessment**

The Visual Impact Assessment (Appendix E5) indicates that construction of the Witfontein Solar PV 1 will have a negative impact on the visual quality of the study area as it is located in close proximity to twelve (16) other proposed solar facilities. The project will change the character and the sense of place of the area, which can still be absorbed within the landscape, but should there be more than just this project, the landscape will not be able to absorb the impact. The addition of more than one Solar PV Plant will bring a complete change and loss of the visual quality in the area. The proposed Project, together with the planned Solar PV Plants, will contribute to a negative cumulative impact that will completely change the visual quality and sense of place of the area.

### **7.5.7 Heritage and Paleontological Impact Assessment**

In terms of cumulative impacts to heritage resources, impacts to archaeological and palaeontological resources are sufficiently dealt with on a case by case basis. The primary concern from a cumulative impact perspective, would be to the cultural landscape. The cultural landscape is defined as the interaction between people and the places that they have occupied and impacted. In some places in South Africa, the cultural landscape can be more than 1 million years old where we find evidence of Early Stone Age archaeology (up to 2 million years old), Middle Stone Age archaeology (up to 200 000 years old), Later Stone Age archaeology (up to 20 000 years old), evidence of indigenous herder populations (up to 2000 years old) as well as evidence of colonial frontier settlement (up to 300 years old) and more recent agricultural layers.

The landscape within which the proposed project areas are located, is not worthy of formal protection as a heritage resource and has the capacity to accommodate such development from a heritage perspective. The proposed development is located sufficiently far from significant roads and features that impact is unlikely.

### **7.5.8 Traffic Impact Assessment**

Depending on the timing of the other nearby renewable energy projects, where construction could overlap, traffic impact will increase accordingly. It should be noted that the volume of traffic is related to the specific development stage, logistics planning and development size. The construction period for other renewable energy projects is relatively short (between 12 and 18 months), where traffic flow will vary during the construction period. It is assumed that 50% of these projects' construction periods would likely coincide with the Witfontein SPP construction period since they are most likely to share same access through the R76. This additional traffic, however, will be accommodated on the surrounding road network mainly the R76 link. In addition, the traffic impact of the operational and maintenance periods will be low/ negligible, and it is also unlikely that the decommissioning of these projects will coincide with each other. The cumulative impact and significance of the various nearby renewable energy projects is considered to have a low / negligible impact and therefore no corrective measures will be required.

## **7.6 IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

Following the definitions of the term, the “residual effects on the environment”, i.e., effects after mitigation measures have been put in place, combined with the environmental effects of past, present and future projects and activities will be considered in this assessment. Also, a “combination of different individual environmental effects of the project acting on the same environmental component” can result in cumulative effects.

### **7.6.1 Potential Cumulative Effects**

The receptors (hereafter referred to as Valued Ecosystem Components (VECs) presented in Section 6 (refer to the matrix analysis) have been examined alongside other past, present and future projects for potential adverse cumulative effects.

## 7.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter of the Scoping Report addressed the cumulative environmental effects of the construction, operation and decommissioning project phases to be further assessed as part of the EIA Phase. The information to date has shown that no significant adverse residual impacts are likely. However, cumulative impacts could arise as other similar projects are constructed in the area.

The potential most significant cumulative impacts relate to:

- Cumulative effects during construction phase:
  - Loss of habitat, and disruption of surrounding ecological corridors. As well as the influences of pollution (water, noise, air, etc.).
  - Impact on wetland features
  - Impacts of employment opportunities, business opportunities and skills development
  - Impact with large-scale in-migration of people
  - Visual intrusion
  - Traffic increase
- Cumulative effects during the operational phase:
  - Loss of habitat, and disruption of surrounding ecological corridors. As well as the influences of pollution (water, noise, air, etc.).
  - Visual intrusion
  - Impact on wetland features
- Cumulative effects during the decommissioning phase:
  - Generation of waste

The cumulative impact for the proposed development is high to low, unacceptable impacts related to the project are expected. Considering the extent of the project and information presented in section 7 of this report, it can be concluded that the cumulative impacts will not result in large scale changes and impacts on the environment.

Photovoltaic solar energy technology is a clean technology which contributes toward a better-quality environment. The proposed project will contribute to local economic growth by supporting industry development in line with provincial and regional goals and ensuring advanced skills are drawn to the Free State Province. No cumulative impacts with a high residual risk have been identified.

In terms of the desirability of the development of sources of renewable energy therefore, it may be preferable to incur a higher cumulative loss in such a region as this 1 (where the landscape has already experienced degradation), than to lose land with a higher environmental value elsewhere in the country.



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## 8 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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This section aims to address the following requirements of the regulations:

**Appendix 3.** (3) An BAR (...) must include-

- (l) an environmental impact statement which contains-
  - (i) a summary of the key findings of the environmental impact assessment;
  - (ii) a map at an appropriate scale which superimposes the proposed activity and its associated structures and infrastructure on the environmental sensitivities of the preferred site indicating any areas that should be avoided, including buffers; and
  - (iii) a summary of the positive and negative impacts and risks of the proposed activity and identified alternatives;
- (m) based on the assessment, and where applicable, impact management measures from specialist reports, the recording of proposed impact management objectives, and the impact management outcomes for the development for inclusion in the EMPr;
- (n) any aspects which were conditional to the findings of the assessment either by the EAP or specialist which are to be included as conditions of authorisation;
- (o) a description of any assumptions, uncertainties and gaps in knowledge which relate to the assessment and mitigation measures proposed;
  - (q) a reasoned opinion as to whether the proposed activity should or should not be authorised, and if the opinion is that it should be authorised, any conditions that should be made in respect of that authorisation;

### 8.1 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS AND ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Based on the contents of the report the following key environmental issues were identified, which have been assessed and addressed in this draft BA report. The ratings provided gives an indication of the impact significance with the implementation of the recommended mitigation measures.

➤ Impacts during the construction phase:

- Introduction of Invasive Alien Plant (IAP) species and invasive fauna (- Medium)
- Destruction, loss and fragmentation of habitats (including wetlands and rocky outcrop habitats in certain areas), ecosystems and the vegetation community (including protected plants) (- Very High)
- Displacement of the indigenous faunal community (- Medium)
- Change in the landscape character of the study area (- Medium)
- Change in the sense of place of the area (- Medium)

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- Loss of priority avian species from important habitats ( - Medium)
  - Loss of resident avifauna through increased disturbance (- Medium)
  - Loss of fossil heritage ( - Medium)
  - The creation of local employment and business opportunities, as well as opportunities for skills development and on-site training (+ High)
  - The potential maximising of opportunities to local and regional SMMEs and other businesses for service delivery (+ Medium)
  - Increased risk of potential veld fires (- Medium)

➤ Impacts during the operational phase:

- Destruction, loss and fragmentation of habitats, ecosystems and the vegetation community. (- Medium)
- Introduction of Invasive Alien Plant (IAP) species and invasive fauna (- Medium)
- Displacement of the indigenous faunal community (- Medium)
- Long-term or permanent degradation and modification of the receiving environment resulting to in the loss of important avian habitats (- Medium)
- Loss of fossil heritage (- Medium)
- The creation of local employment and business opportunities, as well as opportunities for skills development and on-site training (+ Medium)
- The potential up- and downstream economic opportunities for the impacted community (+ Medium)
- The establishment of renewable energy infrastructure and the generation of clean, renewable energy (+Medium)
- The potential positive impacts associated with the establishment of a Community Trust (+ Medium)
- Visual impact and impact on sense of place (- Medium)

➤ Impacts during the decommissioning phase:

- The potential loss of employment opportunities and associated income due to the decommissioning of the proposed Witfontein SEF (- Medium)

The cumulative impact for the proposed development is medium to low. Only one cumulative impact of a high significance has been identified and assessed, which relates the cumulative visual impacts within the current landscape. The cumulative impacts will not result in large scale changes and impacts on the environment considering the transformation of the area which has historically been undertaken through agricultural and mining activities

## 8.2 SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS SUMMARY AND SITE-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS

The sensitivity analysis has guided the developer in optimising the final layout of the Witfontein Solar PV Project 1 through identifying specific environmental areas and features present within the site which needs to be avoided through the careful placement of infrastructure as part of the development footprint. Refer to Section 6.4 for the complete sensitivity analysis and Appendix H for the preferred layout map.

Further mitigation measures for the development, as recommended by the independent specialists, have been included in the EMPr(s) for the project as per Appendix F1-F4.

## 8.3 TECHNICAL DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED INFRASTRUCTURE TO BE AUTHORISED

- PV Panel Array - To produce up to 160MW the facility will require numerous linked cells placed behind a protective glass sheet to form a panel. Multiple panels will be required to form the solar PV arrays which will comprise the PV facility.
- Inverters - Sections of the PV array will be wired to inverters. The inverter is a pulse-width mode inverter that converts direct current (DC) electricity to alternating current (AC) electricity at grid frequency.
- Connection to the grid - Connecting the array to the electrical grid requires the transformation of the voltage from 33kV to 132kV. The normal components and dimensions of a distribution-rated electrical substation will be required. A collector substation with a capacity of 33kV/132kV will also be required. Output voltage from the inverter is 480V and this is fed into step up transformers to 132kV. An onsite substation will be required on the site to step the voltage up to 132kV, after which the power will be evacuated into the national grid via the proposed power line. It is expected that generation from the facility will connect to the national grid. Corridor will cover options to connect to the Mercury Substation or the Zaaiplaats Solar PV1 collector substation (a planned substation, under development by Mulilo, that forms part of the Mercury Solar PV cluster).
- Electrical reticulation network – An internal electrical reticulation network will be required and will be laid 1.5m underground as far as practically possible.
- Battery Storage- Facilities with a maximum height of 5m and a capacity of 2500MWh will be installed in a 6-hectare area



- Supporting Infrastructure – The following auxiliary buildings with basic services including water and electricity will be required on site:
  - Operations & Maintenance Building / Office
  - Switch gear and relay room
  - Staff lockers and changing room
  - Security control
  - Offices
  - Ablutions with conservancy tanks
  - Construction camps (on laydown area)
  - Workshop (Part of O&M Buildings)
  - Temporary sanitation facilities during construction
  - Storage Warehouse (Part of O&M Buildings)
- Roads – Access is most likely to be obtained via R76 and R501 Regional Road. This will be confirmed in the Traffic Impact Assessment which has been commissioned. An internal site road network will also be required to provide access to the solar field and associated infrastructure.
- Fencing - For health, safety and security reasons, the facility will be required to be fenced off from the surrounding farms. Fencing with a height of 4 meters will be used.

#### 8.4 RECOMMENDATION OF EAP

The final recommendation by the EAP considered firstly if the legal requirements for the BA process had been met and secondly the validity and reliability of the substance of the information contained in the BA report. In terms of the legal requirements it is concluded that:

- All key consultees have been consulted as required by Chapter 6 of the EIA Regulations (as amended)
- The Basic Assessment process has been conducted as required by the EIA Regulations (as amended), Regulations 19 and Appendix 1.
- The EMPr was compiled in conjunction with the Generic EMPr for the development of the associated substation infrastructure for transmission and distribution of electricity as per Government Notice 435, which was published in Government Gazette 42323 on 22 March 2019.
- The EMPr was compiled for the Witfontein Solar PV 1 as per Appendix 4 of the EIA Regulations (GN.R. 326), published in Government Gazette 40772 on 07 April 2017.

- The proposed mitigation measures will be sufficient to mitigate the identified impacts to an acceptable level.

In terms of the contents and substance of the BA report the EAP is confident that all key environmental issues were identified, assessed and appropriate mitigation measures recommended for the reduction of the impact significance expected to occur. These key issues have been adequately assessed during the BA process to provide the competent authority and registered I&APs with sufficient information to allow them to provide comment and raise any further potential issues.

**The final recommendation of the EAP is that:**

It is the opinion of the independent EAP that the proposed development will have a net positive impact for the area and will subsequently ensure the optimal utilisation of resources and land, specifically in an area which has been transformed through historical agricultural and mining activities. All negative environmental impacts can further be effectively mitigated through the proposed mitigation measures.

Based on the contents of the report it is proposed that an environmental authorisation be issued, which states (amongst other general conditions) that the Witfontein Solar PV 1 and associated infrastructure on the Remaining Extent of the Farm Witfontein No. 444, Viljoenskroon, Free State Province be approved subject to the following conditions:

- Implementation of the proposed mitigation measures set out in the EMPr(s).
- Implementation of the proposed mitigation measures set out in the specialist studies.
- The proposed solar facility must comply with all relevant national environmental laws and regulations.
- All actions and tasks allocated in the EMPr(s) should not be neglected and a copy of the EMPr(s) should be made available onsite at all times.
- A detailed Geotechnical Assessment must be undertaken for the development footprint as part of the micro-siting of the layout.
- Should archaeological sites or graves be exposed during construction work, it must immediately be reported to a heritage practitioner so that an investigation and evaluation of the finds can be made.

We trust that the department finds the report in order and eagerly await your comment and input in this regard.

**Mary-Jane Khanyile**

Solis-Environmental Consultants



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