

MERCURY CLUSTER PV PROJECT

DFFE Pre-Application Meeting: **FINAL** Minutes

Teams Meeting Held on 5 April 2022, 10:00

1. ATTENDANCE

Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE)

- Ms Olivia Letlalo
- Mr Mahlatse Shubane
- Mr Thando Boo
- Mr Makhosi Yeni
- Ms Mmatlala Rabothata

Mulilo Renewable Project Developments (Pty) Ltd (“Mulilo”)

- Mr Andrew Pearson
- Mr Ryan David-Andersen
- Mr Johan Janse van Rensburg

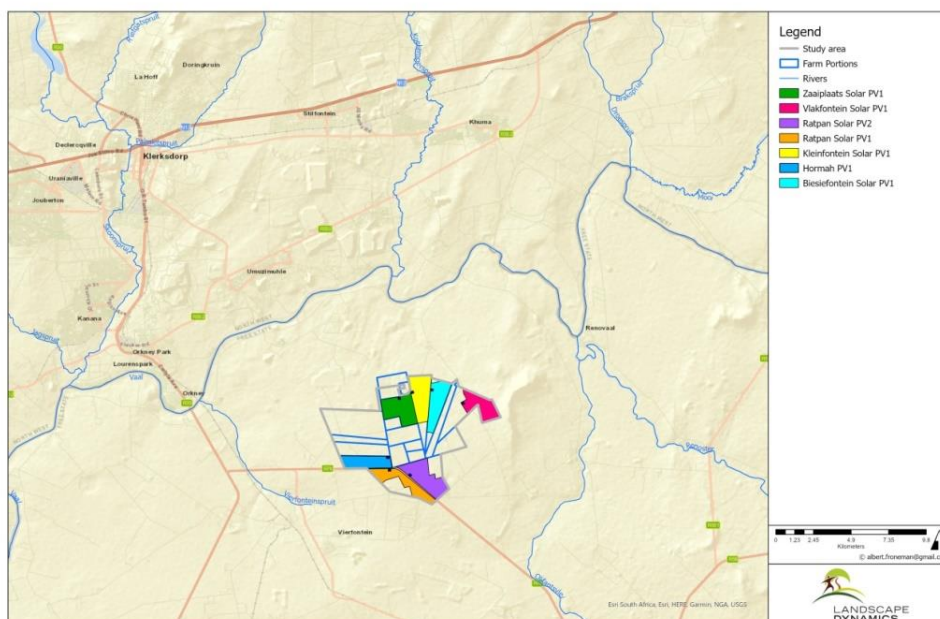
Landscape Dynamics Environmental Consultants (Pty) Ltd (LDEC)

- Ms Susanna Nel
- Ms Annelize Grobler
- Ms Megan Janse van Rensburg

2. PROJECT INFORMATION COMMUNICATED WITH THE ATTENDEES

The proposed development of Photo Voltaic (PV) solar facilities is planned on privately owned land in the vicinity of Viljoenskroon in the Free State Province, together with associated grid connections (power lines) to connect the solar farms to the existing Eskom Mercury Main Transmission Substation (MTS).

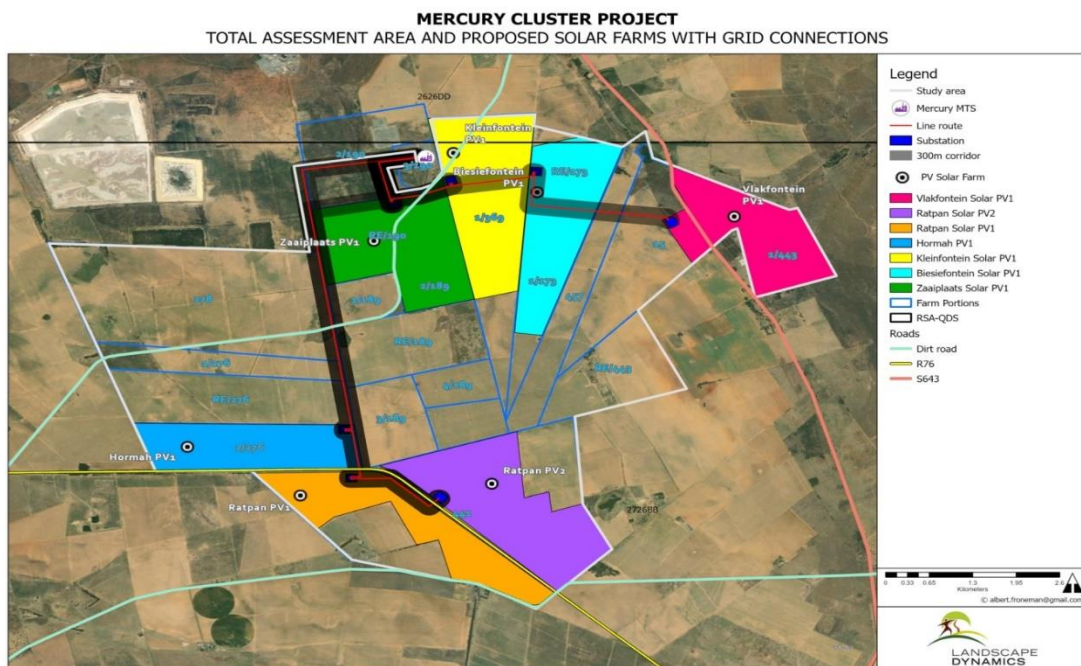
MERCURY CLUSTER PROJECT: LOCALITY MAP



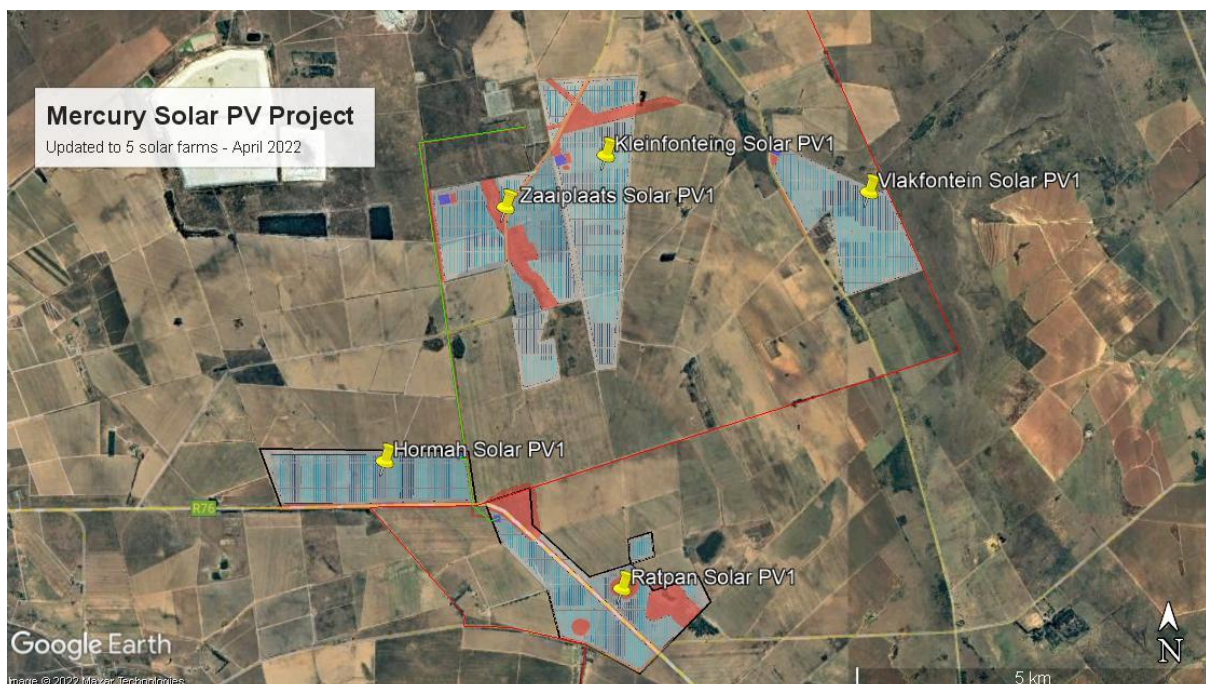
A feasibility/ screening process was followed over a total initial assessment area of approximately 3 400ha. Key considerations in initially identifying seven potential solar farm sites were the following:

- Agricultural Potential of the Land
- Terrestrial Ecology
- Aquatic Ecology
- Avifauna
- Landowners/Farmers input
- Economic Viability – confirmed by Mulilo

The figure below shows the seven potential PV project sites identified within the larger potential screening area (white outlined polygon).



Further recommendations following the detailed surveys (including site visits) undertaken by the specialists in communication with Mulilo confirmed that **five** solar farms as per map below will be further assessed and submitted for environmental authorisation:-



Project components to be confirmed for each separate application could include the following:

- Solar PV Farm, with on-site Independent Power Producer (IPP) substation)
- Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)
- Diesel Storage Facility of less than 500m³ storage
- Laydown area for the construction period
- Operational & Maintenance Buildings
- Additional infrastructure (Access Roads - new and/or upgrade; stormwater; water pipelines, etc.)
- Eskom self-build infrastructure including 132 kV Grid connections with switching stations for each PV facility (potentially applied for in separate applications for each facility, to allow obtaining of separate EA's for future hand over to Eskom)

3. DISCUSSIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

3.1 Legal Requirement / Study Approach

The following was presented-

- The study area falls within the Klerksdorp Renewable Energy Development Zone (REDZ) as well as the Central Strategic Transmission Corridor (STC).
- A Basic Assessment process will be followed for each of the applications.
- The following is applicable :
 - 5x solar PV farms will be proposed
 - 10x separate applications for authorisation will be submitted – five for the solar farms and 5x for each of the 132kV grid connections within a 300m wide corridor.
 - 10x separate environmental authorisations are required for bidding purposes and also because the grid connections will eventually be transferred to Eskom.
- **It may be possible to obtain SIP letters for the grid connections, which will ensure that the shortened decision making timeframe applies.** SIP letters specific to solar farms are however only given once a project has received Preferred Bidder status. **DFFE undertook to provide the contact details of the relevant contact person.**

3.2 Alternatives and pre-negotiated routes for the grid connections

It was stated that pre-negotiated routes are only applicable when a project is an Electricity Grid Infrastructure (EGI) project. The EGI gazette requirements are only applicable to projects which fall into a Strategic Transmission Corridor (STC), and which trigger Activity 9 of Listing Notice 2. Even though the Mercury grid connections fall within a STC Activity 9 of Listing Notice 2 is not applicable and it therefore does not qualify as an EGI project.

Ms Letlalo stated that motivation must be given should no alternatives for the grid infrastructure be assessed.

3.3 Confirmation of Competent Authority

- It was indicated that the projects will bid through the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement (REIPPP) programme.
- DFFE requested that the information regarding the bidding with REIPPP should be clear in the report to be submitted which will clarify that the Minister will be the CA.
- If the project will not bid through REIPPP, then DFFE will not be the CA.
- Landscape Dynamics confirmed that further investigation will be undertaken and the findings will be provided in the minutes.

3.4 Public Participation Programme

It was stated that the Public Participation Plan for the Mercury Cluster Project was already approved on 26 October 2021. The following actions have already taken place according to that plan:

- The 1st Phase Notification had been completed ; -
 - The Mercury Cluster Solar PV Project has been advertised in its entirety (based on 7x PV facilities)
 - Newspaper advertisements were placed in a local and regional newspaper.
 - Onsite notifications were placed along visible and publicly accessible routes at each of the 7 initially proposed solar farms.
 - A comprehensive list of Interested & Affected Parties had been compiled.
 - A Background Information Document was compiled and distributed for a 30-day commenting period to all the IAPs on the list.
- The number of project applications to be combined during the distribution for comment on the Draft BARs will be determined, based on priorities and potential for delays expected for specific applications
- Even though the state of disaster has been recalled and the PPP Plan is technically no longer relevant, DFFE requested that the plan be followed if the applications are submitted prior to 1 May 2022.

3.5 Specialist Studies

It was communicated that the following specialist studies are currently undertaken:

- Fauna & Flora Impact Assessment
- Aquatic Impact Assessment
- Avi-fauna Impact Assessment & Monitoring
- Bat Impact Assessment Statement Letter
- Heritage Impact Assessment & Palaeontology
- Visual Impact Assessment
- Socio-economic Impact Assessment
- Agricultural Study
- Traffic Impact Assessment
- High Level Risk Assessment
- RFI Assessment Statement Letter

- DFFE requested that the EAPs ensure that the DFFE Screening Tool Report be compiled and assessed for each application to ensure that all relevant specialist input is obtained. This must be included in each of the Draft BARs.
- It was stated by the EAPs that specialist reports for different applications are combined, but clear differentiation, descriptions and separate assessments for each separate application are being made. Each specialist report must talk to each specific project, considering that the environment may not be the same.

3.6 General

- DFFE advised that applicable listed activities and its sub-activities must form part of each report.
- The Generic EMPr for the substation and powerline must be submitted with the relevant reports.
- Mr Booii stated that both the alternative and preferred route(s) must be assessed as per NEMA 2014 EIA Regulations.

4. CLOSURE

The meeting was adjourned at 10:45.

5. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mercury Cluster PV Project

**Minutes approved on behalf of the
Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment**


Landscape Dynamics

DFFE

Name: Annelize Grobler

Name: Ms Olivia Letlalo

Signature: 

Signature: 

Date: 03/05/2022

Date: 03/05/2022
