

COMMENTS AND RESPONSES REPORT (CRR)

SUPPORTING THE

DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR THE PROPOSED SKYWALK PROJECT AT GOD'S WINDOW, BLYDE RIVER CANYON, WITHIN THE THABA CHWEU LOCAL MUNICIPALITY (TCM), IN THE EHLANZENI DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

Prepared for:

Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (in collaboration with the IDC)

Private Bag Gateway

X11338

1200



Prepared by:

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS (PTY) LTD

P.O. Box 74785

LYNNWOOD RIDGE

0040

Tel No.: +27 12 349 1307

Fax. No.: +27 12 349 1229

E-mail: sef@sefsa.co.za



S · E · F

STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS

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Table 1: Comments on the Draft Scoping Report

COMMENT RAISED	I& AP	DATE& METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	RESPONSE
1. ISSUES RELATED TO INFRASTRUCTURE MANAGEMENT			
<p>The enhancement of the current guest services and creation of the visitor's facilities and Skywalk concept with associated walkways, viewpoints and car park will assist in the controlling the large numbers of visitors to this area.</p>	<p>Mr J.J. Eksteen Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency - MTPA (Acting Senior Manager)</p>	<p>18 September 2013 Fax</p>	<p>Comments Noted</p>
<p>All disturbances should be limited to existing disturbed footprint area only. Water supply is very limited (water saving principles should apply). Sewage disposal require special attention. Runoff management required away from escarpment. Aesthetics (underground powerlines, etc.). Building design (no cut-and-fill, poor weather conditions). Main access to consider visibility on misty days.</p>	<p>Mr Frik Bronkhorst MTPA</p>	<p>4 and 5 September 2013 Email and Comments Sheet</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Skywalk Complex will have a suspended floor slab to limits its overall footprint on the environment. The existing parking area will form a large part of the area to be developed thereby minimising the footprint 2. The building will host a rainwater harvesting tank. Water will be supplied through the existing two boreholes on site and existing stream abstraction (if need be) 3. Sewerage disposal will be dealt with by an on-site treatment package plant (Ampac Modular Sewerage Treatment) 4. A specific stormwater management plan has been prepared to deal with stormwater accumulation. The report will be updated again once the detailed design drawings has been finalised. Polluted run-off

			<p>must be prevented by storm water control measures including attenuation ponds, diversion swales and other outlet and energy dissipaters.</p> <p>5. The aesthetics of the building has carefully been designed as to cause minimal visual intrusion. The building will have a green roof and material will be carefully chosen as to not be reflective, cause glare etc.</p>
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2. ISSUES RELATED TO THE SCOPING REPORT AND SPECIALIST STUDIES

<p>God's Window is not on the ridge of the Blyde River Canyon as mentioned in the Background Information Document (BID). God's Window is located on the rim of the Mpumalanga Escarpment; the Canyon is situated 25-30 km's north of this point. This is quite a serious flaw concerning the proposal.</p>	<p>Mr Frik Bronkhorst MTPA</p>	<p>4 and 5 September 2013 Email and Comments Sheet</p>	<p>According to Department of Environmental Affairs, the site is situated within 3 km of the Blyde River Nature Reserve.</p>
<p>The proposed site of the Skywalk is within an area that lies on the edge of a Critical Biodiversity Irreplaceable area (MBSP, Lotter, 2013) but in an existing footprint.</p>	<p>Mr J.J. Eksteen MTPA (Acting Senior Manager)</p>	<p>18 September 2013 Fax</p>	<p>As part of the specialist investigation phase, the following specialist have been appointed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geotechnical Study (Core Drilling will be undertaken prior to construction to ensure geotechnical suitability) • Geo-hydrological Study • Ecological Study (Fauna and Flora including avi-faunal)) • Although short sward grassland was recorded close to the study area, no suitable habitat for
<p>With regards to the baseline biophysical studies the terms of reference should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geology with specific reference to stability of the proposed site • Plant study • Avifauna study • Lepidoptera study • Fish study 			

			<p><i>Lepidochrysos irvingi</i> (Irving's Blue) was confirmed within the study. Low butterfly activity was recorded during the survey period and this is likely due to strong wind and mist experienced during the surveys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The need for a Fish Study is not deemed feasible based on the project's locality. No major stream is located on the site and therefore the impact on fish species is negligible. However an appropriate stormwater management plan will be implemented as part of the project so as to avoid any pollutants leaving the site
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3. ISSUES RELATED TO THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

Internationally visited tourist site, should attempt to obtain comments from relevant international operating companies.	Mr Frik Bronkhorst MTPA,	4 and 5 September 2013 Email and Comments Sheet	Comment Noted
Komatiland forests is the adjacent landowner from where water to the site is supplied			

4. COMMENTS ON THE RECEIVING ENVIRONMENT

Narrow endemic (<i>Steptocarpus fenestra-dei</i>) present and should be specifically avoided.	Mr Frik Bronkhorst MTPA	4 and 5 September 2013 Email and Comments Sheet	This has been addressed and forms a part of the mitigation measures in the DEIR and EMP. Refer to the Ecological Study which assessed faunal and floral communities.
The enhancement of the current guest services and creation of the visitor's facilities and Skywalk concept with associated walkways, viewpoints and car park			

<p>will assist in the controlling the large numbers of visitors to this area.</p>	<p>Mr J.J. Eksteen MTPA (Acting Senior Manager)</p>	<p>18 September 2013 Fax</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A specialist Plant Protection Plan has been drawn up and forms part of the mitigation measures of the EMP and EIR. • The long term maintenance of the structure is vital for the project and specific measures has been included in the EMP to deal with this
<p>The important indigenous forests according to the Mpumalanga Bio base Report will not be impacted on. During the construction phase of the new facilities as well as the enhancement of the walkways, special care should be taken not to disturb the surrounding vegetation because it provides habitat for sensitive epiphytic orchids and butterflies.</p>			
<p>Another concern is that the Mpumalanga Biodiversity Sector Plan (MBSP, Lotter, 2013) indicates that the ESA aquatic sub- catchments for both ESA: FEPA sub-catchments and ESA: fish support areas can be affected. Again care should be taken during the construction phase not to pollute or contaminate any seepage lines with silt or pollutants.</p>			
<p>A mitigation plan to deal with the removal of indigenous vegetation and the rescue of protected plants such as the Aloe species should be part of the EMP.</p>			
<p>MTPA is also concerned about the long term maintenance plan for such a foreign structure. The ever encroaching forest plants might become a hazard.</p>			

Table 2: Comments on the Final Scoping Report

COMMENT RAISED	I& AP	DATE& METHOD OF COMMUNICATION	RESPONSE
1. ISSUES RELATED TO THE ECONOMY			
<p>The National Department of Tourism (NDT) is in support of the project. The God's Window Skywalk is part of the prioritised projects for the Mpumalanga Province. The project has a potential to unlock tourism development within the Thaba Chweu Local Municipality and the neighbouring municipalities such as Bushbuckridge and Mbombela municipalities. This can be exploited for the benefit of communities around the area.</p> <p>A positive contribution to the growth of economy for both Mpumalanga and South Africa can be realised through such initiatives. Furthermore, the project will enhance the tourism product portfolio and will advance South Africa's position in Global Tourism. The visitors can also be provided with a unique and pleasantly unforgettable experience.</p> <p>The NDT wishes the MTPA a success on the implementation of the project.</p>	<p>Ms Morongoe Ramphele NDT (Deputy Director General: Domestic Tourism)</p>	<p>28 July 2014 Email</p>	<p>The comment has been noted.</p>
2. ISSUES RELATED TO THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS			
<p>The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR) thanked Strategic Environmental Focus (SEF) for notifying them about the project.</p> <p>The DRDLR further stated that they have noted that SEF has identified the Community Property Associations and the Development Trust affected by the project as key stake holder. They recommended that the Mpumalanga Province: Regional Land Claims Commission (RLCC) is included as a stakeholder since there are issues related to land reform.</p>	<p>Dr N.P. Makgalemele DRDLR (Deputy Director General: Spatial Planning and Land Use Management)</p>	<p>28 May 2014 Email</p>	<p>The comment has been noted. The Mpumalanga Province: RLCC has been included as a stakeholder, as recommended by the DRDLR</p>