

HWC PROCEDURE: CHANCE FINDS OF PALAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

June 2016

Introduction

This document is aimed to inform workmen and foremen working on a construction and/or mining site. It describes the procedure to follow in instances of accidental discovery of palaeontological material (please see attached poster with descriptions of palaeontological material) during construction/mining activities. This protocol does not apply to resources already identified under an assessment undertaken under s. 38 of the National Heritage Resources Act (no 25 of 1999).

Fossils are rare and irreplaceable. Fossils tell us about the environmental conditions that existed in a specific geographical area millions of years ago. As heritage resources that inform us of the history of a place, fossils are public property that the State is required to manage and conserve on behalf of all the citizens of South Africa. Fossils are therefore protected by the National Heritage Resources Act and are the property of the State. Ideally, a qualified person should be responsible for the recovery of fossils noticed during construction/mining to ensure that all relevant contextual information is recorded.

Heritage Authorities often rely on workmen and foremen to report finds, and thereby contribute to our knowledge of South Africa's past and contribute to its conservation for future generations.

Training

Workmen and foremen need to be trained in the procedure to follow in instances of accidental discovery of fossil material, in a similar way to the Health and Safety protocol. A brief introduction to the process to follow in the event of possible accidental discovery of fossils should be conducted by the designated Environmental Control Officer (ECO) for the project, or the foreman or site agent in the absence of the ECO

It is recommended that copies of the attached poster and procedure are printed out and displayed at the site office so that workmen may familiarise themselves with them and are thereby prepared in the event that accidental discovery of fossil material takes place.

Actions to be taken

One person in the staff must be identified and appointed as responsible for the implementation of the attached protocol in instances of accidental fossil discovery and must report to the ECO or site agent. If the ECO or site agent is not present on site, then the responsible person on site should follow the protocol correctly in order to not jeopardize the conservation and well-being of the fossil material.

Once a workman notices possible fossil material, he/she should report this to the ECO or site agent.

Procedure to follow if it is likely that the material identified is a fossil:

- i. The ECO or site agent must ensure that all **work ceases** immediately in the vicinity of the area where the fossil or fossils have been found;
- ii. The ECO or site agent must **inform HWC of the find immediately**. This information must include photographs of the findings and GPS co-ordinates;
- iii. The ECO or site agent must compile a **Preliminary Report and fill in the Fossil Discoveries: HWC Preliminary Record Form** within 24 hours without removing the fossil from its original position. The **Preliminary Report** records basic information about the find including:
 - The date
 - A description of the discovery
 - A description of the fossil and its context (e.g. position and depth of find)
 - Where and how the find has been stored
 - Photographs to accompany the preliminary report (the more the better):
 - A scale must be used
 - Photos of location from several angles
 - Photos of vertical section should be provided
 - Digital images of hole showing vertical section (side);
 - Digital images of fossil or fossils.

Upon receipt of this **Preliminary Report**, HWC will inform the ECO or site agent whether or not a rescue excavation or rescue collection by a palaeontologist is necessary.

- v. **Exposed finds must be stabilised where they are unstable and the site capped, e.g. with a plastic sheet or sand bags.** This protection should allow for the later excavation of the finds with due scientific care and diligence. HWC can advise on the most appropriate method for stabilisation.
- vi. If the find cannot be stabilised, **the fossil may be collect with extreme care** by the ECO or the site agent and put aside and protected until HWC advises on further action. Finds collected in this way must be safely and securely stored in tissue paper and an appropriate box. Care must be taken to remove the all fossil material and any breakage of fossil material must be avoided at all costs.

No work may continue in the vicinity of the find until HWC has indicated, in writing, that it is appropriate to proceed.

FOSSIL DISCOVERIES: HWC PRELIMINARY RECORDING FORM

| | | |
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| Name of project: | | |
| Name of fossil location: | | |
| Date of discovery: | | |
| Description of situation in which the fossil was found: | | |
| Description of context in which the fossil was found: | | |
| Description and condition of fossil identified: | | |
| GPS coordinates: | Lat: | Long: |
| If no co-ordinates available then please describe the location: | | |
| Time of discovery: | | |
| Depth of find in hole | | |
| Photographs (tick as appropriate and indicate number of the photograph) | Digital image of vertical section (side) | |
| | Fossil from different angles | |
| | Wider context of the find | |
| Temporary storage (where it is located and how it is conserved) | | |
| Person identifying the fossil | Name: Contact: | |
| Recorder | Name: Contact: | |
| Photographer | Name: Contact: | |