

APPENDIX C3:  
Background Information Letter

# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESSES FOR THE ADDITIONAL FOOTPRINT FOR THE ENGIE SANNASPOS SOLAR PROJECT, FREE STATE PROVINCE

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION LETTER

February 2022

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Engie Sannaspos Solar Project (Pty) Ltd requires an additional footprint for the construction and operation of a PV facility and grid connection. The project is known as the Engie Sannaspos Solar Project (Pty) and is located on Portion 0 of Farm 1808 Besemkop and Portion 0 of Farm 2962 Lejwe, situated in the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality in the Free State Province. The project has been selected as a Preferred Bidder project under Round 5 of the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producers Procurement Programme (REIPPPP). A development footprint of 150 ha in extent is already authorised for the facility but in order to implement the project, an additional footprint of 50ha is required. Both the additional footprint and the authorized area are located within the boundary of 1808 of Besemkop and Farm 2962 of Lejwe. The additional footprint is immediately adjacent to the authorised area.

The nature and extent of the Solar PV development and the additional footprint are explored in more detail in this Background Information Letter (BIL). An Environmental Impact Assessment process is being undertaken in order to obtain Environmental Authorisation (EA) for the additional footprint. The public participation processes for the additional footprint will be undertaken concurrently, providing the public with an opportunity to comment on the project simultaneously. The project details for the additional footprint are as follows:

| <b>Applicant:</b>               | <b>Project Name:</b>           |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Engie Sannaspos Solar (Pty) Ltd | Engie Sannaspos Solar Facility |

### AIM OF THIS BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT

This document aims to provide you, as an interested and/or affected party (I&AP), with:

- » An overview of the proposed solar PV facility and associated infrastructure.
- » An overview of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes and specialist studies being undertaken to assess the additional footprint.
- » Details of how you can become involved in the EIA processes, receive information, or raise comments that may concern and/or interest you.

## OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

In response to the electricity demand and need for supply within South Africa, the need to promote renewable energy and sustainability in the Free State Province, as well as the country's targets for renewable energy, the development of a 90MW solar PV facility is proposed. The development of the solar PV facility will add additional capacity and new grid connection infrastructure to the national electricity grid network.

The proposed facility will have a contracted capacity of 75MW (90MW installed capacity) and will include the following infrastructure:

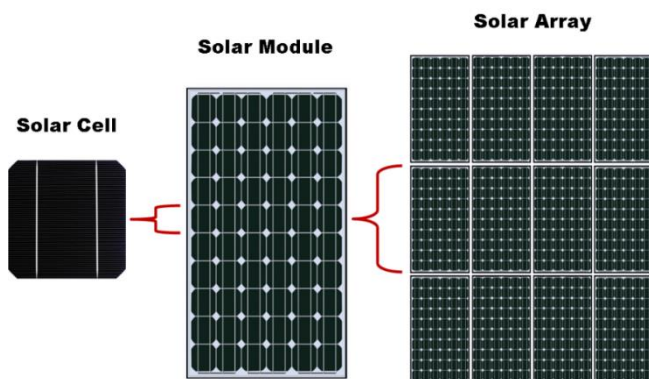
- » PV arrays and inverters
- » Cabling between project components, laid underground as far as possible
- » An on-site 132kV Independent Power Producer (IPP) substation to facilitate the grid connection
- » Internal access roads.
- » Guard house
- » Laydown, Campsite, and assembly area.
- » Office and Control centre.

## MORE ABOUT SOLAR PV TECHNOLOGY

Solar energy facilities use energy from the sun to generate electricity through a process known as the **Photovoltaic Effect**. This effect refers to photons of light colliding with electrons, and therefore placing the electrons into a higher state of energy to create electricity. The solar fields of the PV facilities will comprise the following components:

### Photovoltaic Cells:

A photovoltaic (PV) cell is made of silicone that acts as a semiconductor used to produce the photovoltaic effect. PV cells are arranged in multiples/arrays and placed behind a protective glass sheet to form a PV panel. Each PV cell is positively charged on one side and negatively charged on the opposite side, with electrical conductors attached to either side to form a circuit. This circuit captures the released electrons in the form of an electric current (i.e., Direct Current (DC)).



Overview of a PV cell, module, and array/panel (Source: pveducation.com)

A solar PV module is made up of individual solar PV cells connected together, whereas a solar PV array is a system made up of a group of individual solar PV modules electrically wired together to form a much larger PV installation. The PV panels will be fixed to support structures to maximise exposure to the sun.

PV panels are designed to operate continuously for more than 20 years, mostly unattended and with low maintenance.

**Inverters:**

Inverters are used to convert electricity produced by the PV cells from Direct Current (DC) into Alternating Current (AC) to enable the facility to be connected to the national electricity grid. Numerous inverters will be arranged in several arrays to collect and convert power produced by the facilities.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

In accordance with the EIA Regulations, 2014 (as amended) published in terms of Section 24(5) of the National Environmental Management Act (No. 107 of 1998) (NEMA), the applicant requires an EA from the National Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment (DFFE) in consultation with the Free State Agriculture, Environmental Affairs, Rural Development and Land Reform.

The proposed project and additional footprint is located outside of the Renewable Energy Development Zones (REDZ) and Strategic Transmission Corridors formally gazetted in South Africa for the purpose of developing solar and wind energy generation facilities. In line with the gazetted process for projects located outside of the REDZ and transmission corridors, and in line with the main relevant activity triggered by the additional footprint (Activity 15 of GNR 325 of Listing Notice 2 of the EIA Regulations, 2014 as amended the clearance of an area of 20 hectares or more of indigenous vegetation), the proposed additional footprint is subject to a full Scoping & EIA Process and a decision-making period of 107 days, in terms of the National Environmental Management Act (Act 107 of 1998, as amended) (NEMA) and the 2014 NEMA EIA Regulations (as amended) promulgated in GN R982, R983, R984 and R985 on 8 December 2014. An EIA Process in terms of Appendix 1 of the 2014 NEMA EIA Regulations (as amended) is therefore being undertaken for the additional footprint.

Each application is required to be supported by comprehensive, independent environmental specialist studies undertaken in accordance with the EIA Regulations, 2014 (as amended).

An Environmental Impact Assessment is an effective planning and decision-making tool. It allows for potential environmental consequences resulting from a proposed activity to be identified and appropriately managed during the construction, operation, and decommissioning phases of development. It also provides an opportunity for the project applicant to be forewarned of potential environmental issues, allows for the resolution of issue(s) identified and reported on as part of the EIA processes, and provides opportunity for dialogue with key stakeholders and Interested and Affected Parties (I&APs).

Savannah Environmental has been appointed as the independent environmental consultant responsible for managing the applications for EA and undertaking the supporting EIA process required to identify and assess potential environmental impacts associated with the additional footprint, as well as propose appropriate

mitigation and management measures to be contained within the Environmental Management Programmes (EMPrs). I&APs will be actively involved in the EIA processes through the public participation process.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROPOSED ADDITIONAL FOOTPRINT?**

The study area will be assessed by independent environmental specialists to identify the potential for environmental impacts. Specialist studies that are proposed as part of the EIA processes include the following:

- » Biodiversity – includes ecology & freshwater, fauna and flora and assess the potential impact and the associated disturbance of vegetation on the biodiversity (including critical biodiversity areas and broad-scale processes).
- » Avifauna – includes an assessment of impacts on avifaunal habitats and sensitive features.
- » Soils, Land Use, and Agricultural Potential – includes land types and assesses the significance of loss of agricultural land and soil degradation and/or erosion.
- » Heritage (Archaeology and Palaeontology) – which includes archaeology and palaeontology and assesses the potential of disturbance to or destruction of heritage sites and fossils during the construction phase through excavation activities.
- » Visual – which includes the visual quality of the area and assesses the impact of the solar PV facilities and the grid connection solution on the aesthetics within the area.
- » Social – which assesses the positive and negative social impacts.

The independent specialist studies will be undertaken wherein the potentially significant impacts will be identified, assessed and ground-truthed. Practical and achievable mitigation measures will be recommended in order to minimise the significance of the potential impacts identified. These recommendations will be included within an EMPr compiled for the additional footprint.

Specialist studies will be informed by existing information, previous experience in the area, field observations and input from the public participation process. As an I&AP, your input is considered as an important part of the process, and we urge you to become involved.

### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

The sharing of information forms the basis of the public participation process and offers I&APs the opportunity to become actively involved in the EIA processes. Comments and inputs from I&APs are encouraged to ensure that potential impacts are considered throughout the EIA process. The public participation process aims to ensure that:

- » Information containing all relevant facts in respect of the applications are made available to I&APs for review.
- » I&AP participation is facilitated in such a manner that they are provided with reasonable opportunity to comment on the proposed project.
- » Adequate review periods are provided for I&APs to comment on the findings of the EIA Report.

An integrated public participation process will be conducted for the additional footprint. To ensure effective participation, the public participation processes include the following:

- » Identifying I&APs, including affected and adjacent landowners and occupiers of land, and relevant Organs of State, and recording details within a database.
- » Notifying registered I&APs of the commencement of the EIA process and distributing the BIL.
- » Providing access to registered parties to Savannah Environmental' s website, which centralises project information and stakeholder input in a single digital platform.
- » Providing an opportunity for I&APs to engage with the EIA project team.
- » Placing site notices at the affected property/ies.
- » Placing an advertisement in a local newspaper.
- » Notifying I&APs of the release of the Reports for a 30-day review and comment period.

### **YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS AN I&AP**

In terms of the EIA Regulations, 2014 (as amended) and the Public Participation Guidelines, 2014 your attention is drawn to your responsibilities as an I&AP:

- » To participate in the EIA processes, you must register yourself on the I&AP database.
- » You must ensure that any comments regarding the proposed additional footprint are submitted within the stipulated timeframes.
- » You are required to disclose any direct business, financial, personal, or other interest that you may have in the approval or refusal of the applications.

### **HOW TO BECOME INVOLVED**

1. By responding by phone, fax, or e-mail, to the invitation for your involvement.
2. By returning the reply form to the relevant contact person.
3. By contacting the environmental consultant with queries or comments.
4. By reviewing and commenting on the Report within the stipulated 30-day review and comment period. Registered I&APs will automatically be notified of the release of the EIA Report for comment, and the closing dates by which comments must be received.

If you consider yourself an I&AP for the proposed project, we urge you to make use of the opportunities created by the public participation process to provide comment, raise issues and concerns which affect and / or interest you, or request further information. Your input forms a key element of the EIA processes.

By completing and submitting the accompanying reply form, you automatically register yourself as an I&AP for the proposed additional footprint, and are ensured that your comments, concerns, or queries raised regarding the additional footprint will be noted. Please note that all comments received will be included in the project documentation. This may include personal information.

## **COMMENTS AND QUERIES**

Direct all comments, queries, or responses to:

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**Savannah Environmental (Pty) Ltd**

Post: PO Box 148, Sunninghill, Johannesburg, 2157

Tel: 011 656 3237

Mobile: 060 978 8396 (also includes *please call me*)

Fax: 086 684 0547

E-mail: [publicprocess@savannahsa.com](mailto:publicprocess@savannahsa.com)

To view project documentation, visit [www.savannahsa.com/public-documents/energy-generation/](http://www.savannahsa.com/public-documents/energy-generation/)

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