

# PLANT RESCUE AND PROTECTION PLAN

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## 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of the McTaggart PV3 Plant Rescue and Protection Plan is to implement avoidance and mitigation measures, in addition to the mitigations included in the EMPr to reduce the impact of the development of the solar facility and associated infrastructure on listed and protected plant species and their habitats during construction and operation. This subplan is required in order to ensure compliance with national and provincial legislation for vegetation clearing and any required destruction or translocation of provincially and nationally protected species within the footprint of the development area.

The Plan first provides some legislative background on the regulations relevant to listed and protected species, under the Northern Cape Conservation Act (2009) and trees protected under the National List of Protected Tree Species. This is followed by an identification of protected species present within the McTaggart PV3 development area and actions that should be implemented to minimise impact on these species and comply with legislative requirements.

## 2. IDENTIFICATION OF SPECIES OF CONSERVATION CONCERN

Plant species are protected at the national level as well as the provincial level and different permits may be required for different species depending on their protection level. At the national level, protected trees are listed by DAFF under the National List of Protected Trees published under the National Forest Act (NFA), which is updated on a regular basis. Any clearing of nationally protected trees requires a permit from DAFF. At the provincial level, all species red-listed under the Red List of South African plants (<http://redlist.sanbi.org/>) as well as species listed under the Northern Cape Nature Conservation Act (No. 9 of 2009) are protected and require provincial permits. The Northern Cape Conservation Act lists a variety of species as protected but also several whole families and genera as protected. Of particular relevance to the current study are the following, which are extracted from the legislation and are not intended to provide a comprehensive list of all protected species, only those which are likely to be encountered in the area. The reader is referred to the schedules of the Act for a full list of species listed under the Act.

## 3. IDENTIFICATION OF LISTED SPECIES

In this section, the listed species observed to occur within the broader area are identified and listed below. Those present and the number affected within the development footprint would be clarified following the pre-construction walk-through. The list is not considered exhaustive and additional species may be observed to be present during the preconstruction walk-through, which should be conducted at a favourable time of year, such that there is a maximal chance of picking up geophytes and other species which may not be easily observed at other times of the year.

Two NFA-protected tree species occur at the site; *Vachellia (Acacia) erioloba* and *Boscia albitrunca*. Both of these species are associated largely with the drainage lines of the development area and a very low number of individual species would be impacted by the proposed development.

The provincially protected *Boscia foetida* subsp. *foetida* is also confirmed present at the site and is fairly widespread across the development area at a moderate density and there would be some unavoidable impact on this species.

Plant species of conservation concern that may be present include *Adenium oleifolium*, *Aloe claviflora* and *Hoodia gordonii*, although none of these species were observed within the development area.

#### **4. MITIGATION & AVOIDANCE OPTIONS**

The primary mitigation and avoidance measure that must be implemented at the preconstruction phase is the Preconstruction Walk-Through of the development footprint following final design. The aim of this would be to define which and how many individuals of listed and protected species are found within the development footprint. This information is required for the DAFF and Northern Cape Nature Conservation permits which must be obtained before construction can commence.

Where listed plant species fall within the development footprint and avoidance is not possible, then it may be required that affected individuals are translocated outside of the development footprint. However, not all species are suitable for translocation as only certain types of plants are able to survive the disturbance. Suitable candidates for translocation include most geophytes and succulents. Although there are exceptions, the majority of woody species do not survive translocation well and it is generally not recommended to try and attempt to translocate such species. Recommendations in this regard would be made following the walk-through of the facility footprint before construction, where all listed and protected species within the development footprint will be identified and located.

#### **5. RESCUE AND PROTECTION PLAN**

##### **5.1. Preconstruction**

- » Identification of all listed species which may occur within the site, based on the SANBI POSA database as well as the specialist BA studies for the site and any other relevant literature.
- » Before construction commences at the site, the following actions should be taken:
  - A walk-through of the final development footprint by a suitably qualified botanist/ecologist to locate and identify all listed and protected species which fall within the development footprint. This should happen during the flowering season at the site which, depending on rainfall, is likely to be during spring to early summer (August-October).
  - A walk-through report following the walk-through which identifies areas where minor deviations to roads and other infrastructure can be made to avoid sensitive areas and important populations of listed species. The report should also contain a full list of localities where listed species occur within the development footprint and the number of affected individuals in each instance, so that this information can be used to comply with the permit conditions required by the relevant legislation. Those species suitable for search as rescue should be identified in the walk-through report.
  - A permit to clear the site and relocate species of concern is required from Northern Cape DENC before construction commences. A tree clearing permit is also required from DAFF to clear protected trees from the site.
  - Once the permits have been issued, there should be a search and rescue operation of all listed species that cannot be avoided, which have been identified in the walk-through report as being suitable for search and rescue within the development footprint. Affected individuals should be

translocated to a similar habitat outside of the development footprint and marked for monitoring purposes.

## **5.2. Construction**

- » Vegetation clearing should take place in a phased manner, so that large cleared areas are not left standing with no activity for long periods of time and pose a wind and water erosion risk. This will require coordination between the contractor and EO, to ensure that the EO is able to monitor activities appropriately.
- » All cleared material should be handled according to the Revegetation and Rehabilitation Plan and used to encourage the recovery of disturbed areas.
- » EO to monitor vegetation clearing at the site. Any deviations from the plans that may be required should first be checked for listed species by the EO and any listed species present which are able to survive translocation should be translocated to a safe site.
- » All areas to be cleared should be demarcated with construction tape, survey markers or similar. All construction vehicles should work only within the designated area.
- » Plants suitable for translocation or for use in rehabilitation of already cleared areas should be identified and relocated before general clearing takes place.
- » Any listed species observed within the development footprint that were missed during the preconstruction plant sweeps should be translocated to a safe site before clearing commences.
- » Many listed species are also sought after for traditional medicine or by collectors and so the EO and ECO should ensure that all staff attend environmental induction training in which the legal and conservation aspects of harvesting plants from the wild are discussed.
- » The EO should monitor construction activities in sensitive habitats such as in dune areas carefully to ensure that impacts to these areas are minimised.

## **5.3. Operation**

- » Access to the site should be strictly controlled and all personnel entering or leaving the site should be required to sign and out with the security officers.
- » The collecting of plants or their parts should be strictly forbidden and signs stating so should be placed at the entrance gates to the site.

## **6. MONITORING & REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

The following reporting and monitoring requirements are recommended as part of the plant rescue and protection plan:

- » Preconstruction walk-through report detailing the location and distribution of all listed and protected species. This should include a walk-through of all infrastructure including all new access roads, cables, buildings and substations. The report should include recommendations of route adjustments where necessary, as well as provide a full account of how many individuals of each listed species will be impacted by the development. Details of plants suitable for search and rescue must also be included.
- » Permit applications to NC-DENC and DAFF. This requires the walk-through report as well as the identification and quantification of all listed and protected species within the development footprint. The permit is required before any search and rescue or vegetation clearance can take place. Where large numbers of listed species are affected, a site inspection and additional requirements may be

imposed by NC-DENC and/or DAFF as part of the permit conditions. All documentation associated with this process needs to be retained and the final clearing permit should be kept at the site.

- » Active daily monitoring of clearing during construction by the EO to ensure that listed species and sensitive habitats are avoided. All incidents should be recorded along with the remedial measures implemented.
- » Post construction monitoring of plants translocated during search and rescue to evaluate the success of the intervention. Monitoring for a year post-transplant should be sufficient to gauge success.