



ENVIRONAMICS

Environmental Consultants

BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Basic Assessment for the proposed Mercury Power Line near Viljoenskroon, Free State Province

1. Introduction

The activity entails the development of grid connection infrastructure which consists of 132kV single/double-circuit overhead power line (with the associated infrastructure) to enable the connection and evacuation of the generated electricity of the authorised Paleso Solar Power Plant (DFFE ref.: 14/12/16/3/3/1/2365), Siyanda Solar Power Plant (DFFE ref.: 14/12/16/3/3/1/2369) as well as the Ngwedi Solar Power Plant (DFFE ref.: 14/12/16/3/3/1/2535), to the national grid network. A 200m wide on average (and up to 800m in some instances) and 11km long grid connection corridor is being assessed for the placement of the power line route. The power line is proposed to connect into the existing Eskom Mercury Substation. A service road associated with the power line is also proposed to be developed. The grid connection corridor is approximately 27km north-west from the town of Viljoenskroon and falls within the Moqhaka Local Municipality of the Fezile Dabi District Municipality, Free State Province (refer to the attached locality map).

Various properties are affected by the grid connection corridor, which includes:

The farms Pretorius Kraal No. 53 (Portion 23, 24 & RE), Grootdraai No. 468 (RE of Portion 1 & Portion 1), Mispah No. 274, Kleinfontein No. 472, Chrystalkop No. 69, RE Doornkom-West No. 446, Edom No. 277, Moab No. 279, Zuiping No. 394 (Portion 1, 3,4, 5, RE) and Zaaiplaats No. 190 (Portion 2 & 3).

The purpose of this background information document (BID) is to provide interested and affected parties (I&APs) with:

- Information on the need for a Basic Assessment (BA);

- An overview of the proposed infrastructure;
- An overview of the Basic Assessment process and specialist studies being conducted to explain the potential impacts associated with the proposed power line; and
- Details of how I&APs may become involved in the process, receive information, or raise issues, which may concern and/or interest them.

2. The need for a BA

The EIA Regulations, 2014 (GN. R.326 as amended in 2017) published in terms of the National Environmental Management Act (Act No. 107 of 1998) determine that an environmental authorisation is required for certain listed activities, which might have detrimental impacts on the environment. The following activities have been identified with special reference to the proposed development and are listed in the EIA Regulations:

- Activity 11(i) (GN.R. 327): “The development of facilities or infrastructure for the transmission and distribution of electricity outside urban areas or industrial complexes with a capacity of more than 33 but less than 275 kilovolts.”
- Activity 28 (ii) (GN.R. 327): “Residential, mixed, retail, commercial, industrial or institutional developments where such land was used for agriculture or afforestation on or after 1998 and where such development (ii) will occur outside an urban area, where the total land to be developed is bigger than 1 hectare.”
- Activity 12 (b)(i)(ii)(iv) (GN.R. 324): “The clearance of an area of 300 square metres or more of indigenous vegetation...(b) in the Free State (i) within any critically endangered or endangered ecosystem listed in terms of section

52 of the NEMBA or prior to the publication of such a list, within an area that has been identified as critically endangered in the National Spatial Biodiversity Assessment 2004, (ii) within critical biodiversity areas identified in bioregional plans.”

Being listed under Listing Notice 1 and 3 (GN.R. 327 & 324) implies that the development is considered as potentially having a significant impact on the environment. Based on the activities triggered, the Application for Environmental Authorisation is subject to the completion of a Basic Assessment (BA) Process as described in Regulation 19. The BA process involves the identification and assessment of environmental impacts through specialist studies, the recommendation of appropriate mitigation measures as well as public participation.

3. Project description

The activity entails the development of grid connection infrastructure which consists of 132kV single/double-circuit overhead power line (with the associated infrastructure). The power line is proposed to connect into the existing Eskom Mercury Substation.

4. Specialist studies to be conducted

There are a number of environmental impacts, both positive and negative that are associated with photovoltaic solar energy facilities. Specialist studies will be conducted to identify and assess these potential impacts. Specialist studies will be guided by existing information, field observations and input from the public participation process. For these projects, the following specialist studies have been identified as relevant:

- Heritage Impact Assessment
- Ecological Fauna and Flora Habitat Survey
- Visual Impact Assessment
- Soil, Land Capability and Agricultural Potential Study
- Avifaunal Study
- Palaeontological Impact Assessment

5. The BA process and timeline for the projects

Public participation is an integral part of the BA process and aims to involve Interested and Affected Parties (I&APs) in the process by notifying them of the proposed

project and encouraging them to voice their issues and concerns. The process undertaken will be transparent and allow I&APs to comment on the project or raise concerns, which will be included and considered in the BA Report. Table 1 indicates the key steps of the BA process and the timelines for the project.

Table 1: Key steps of the BA process

Activity	Prescribed timeframe	Timeframe
Public participation (BID)	30 Days	05 Aug. – 07 Sept. 2022
Conduct specialist studies	6 Weeks	July - Ag 2022
Submit application form and Draft BAR	-	Sept. 2022
Public participation (DBAR)	30 Days	Sept. – Oct. 2022
Submit Final BAR	90 Days	Oct. 2022
Decision	57 Days	Dec. 2022
Public participation (decision) & submission of appeals	20 Days	Dec. 2022/Jan. 2023

6. Your involvement

I&APs include individuals, communities or groups whose interest may be positively or negatively affected by the proposed development. You may get involved in the public participation process by:

- Registering as an I&AP.
- Submitting your issues, concerns and questions in writing on the attached comments and response form or sending an email to chrstia@environamics.co.za.
- Attending any public meetings which may be held during the course of the BA process. As a registered I&AP you will automatically be invited to attend these meetings.
- Reviewing and commenting on the report within the stipulated public review periods.

7. Comments and queries

All comments and queries may be directed to the following contact person:

Contact person: Christia van Dyk
Telephone: 078 470 5252 (Cell)
Electronic mail: participation@environamics.co.za