

Executive Summary

Project Background and Project Overview

The applicant, San Miguel Fruits SA (Pty) Ltd, is proposing the expansion of existing citrus cultivation operations on the farm known as River Bend Citrus near Addo in the Sundays River Valley Municipality. Subject to the outcome of the specialist studies to be undertaken as part of the EIA process, the applicant proposes to clear a minimum of 300 ha of land over a period of four years for additional citrus cultivation. The project is proposed to take place on three adjoining properties which form part of the existing River Bend Citrus farming operations, namely:

- Remainder of Farm 82 Wolve Kop (~908 ha),
- Portion 1 of Farm 77 Wellshaven (~22ha), and
- Portion 3 of Farm 77 Honeyvale (~128ha).

The three adjoining properties measure approximately 1 058 hectares in combined extent. It is important to note that the Remainder of Farm 82 Wolve Kop measures 908 ha, however, 448 ha of this erf forms part of the River Bend Concession area with South African National Parks (SANParks) and is not being considered for the expansion of citrus production in line with the concession agreement with SANParks (land east of the Zuurberg road). In addition, approximately 110 ha of the Remainder of Farm 82 Wolve Kop (west of Zuurberg road) is currently being actively farmed for citrus production. This assessment process will therefore focus on the remaining 500 ha of undeveloped land which is being considered for the expansion of agricultural activities.

Included in the project proposal is the construction of a new balancing dam for irrigation purposes, estimated to be 40 000m³. The expansion of the existing agricultural activities will include the following project activities:

Preconstruction

- Book and purchase block seed from a certified agency
- Seeds are germinated in a certified nursery and allowed to grow to sapling stage (approximately 2 years)

Construction

A period of approximately 12 months is required for site preparation which entails the following:

- Clearing of approximately 300 hectares of indigenous vegetation
- Leveling and shaping the area for orchards
- Construction of a storage dam (approximately 40 000 m³) for irrigation water
- Installation of water reticulation and irrigation infrastructure
- Construction of gravel surfaced internal access roads

Site preparation needs to be completed to coincide with the planting of the crop, which occurs annually in the last quarter of the year between December and January. San Miguel Fruits SA proposes a three phased crop planting period towards the end of each year, as follows:

- Phase 1 – 2013/14, approximately 120 hectares
- Phase 2 – 2014/15, approximately 120 hectares
- Phase 3 – 2015/16, approximately 100 hectares

The capital investment prior to the harvesting and exporting of the crop is estimated to be approximately R68 million. This can be broken down to approximately R75 000 per ha for the value of the land and approximately R125 000 per ha for site preparation (bush clearing, infrastructure development, irrigation infrastructure etc).

Operation

Once suitably prepared the site is proposed to be used for the cultivation of various citrus varieties for international export. Project activities during the operational phases of the project will entail:

- Equipment required for the new operations will be stored in the storage sheds associated with the existing operations.

- Water for the development will be supplied from the Sundays River Water Users Association's canals which will be reticulated via the balancing dam.
- It is estimated 325 additional seasonal and 25 permanent employment opportunities will be created by the project.
- It is proposed that existing infrastructure at the farm be used to provide technical and logistical support to the expanded farming operation.

Site Description

The farm has established farming infrastructure such as offices; workshops; storage sheds; and workers rest-areas as well as ablution facilities. The remainder of Farm 82 Wolve Kop is bisected into a west and east portion by the gravel Zuurberg Road (R335). Only the western half forms part of this assessment as the eastern half currently forms part of the Addo Elephant National Park concession area. The study area is also divided into a northern and southern section by the already existing orchards that have been planted on either side of the Coerney River which flows in an east-west direction through the middle of RE/82 Wolve Kop.

The sections of the property that are being assessed in the Scoping and EIA process are covered largely by indigenous vegetation (Sundays Thicket), which is intersected by a variety of cut-lines, animal paths, and internal vehicle tracks; attesting to past agricultural use of the property. In addition, the undeveloped portion of land in the southern section of RE/82 Wolve Kop includes a number of labourers' dwellings within a fenced compound.

Legal Framework

In terms of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998) as amended ("NEMAA") and the NEMA EIA regulations, 2010, GN R 543, 544, 545 and 546 published in Government Gazette 33306 on the 2 August 2010 (as amended), the project requires Scoping and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) because it includes, amongst others, the following listed activity in GN R 545:

16. The physical alteration of virgin soil to agriculture, or afforestation for the purposes of commercial tree, timber or wood production of 100 hectares or more.

Other listed activities triggered by the project are:

GN R544: Listing Notice 1 Activities: 11.(iv); 18. (i) and 42

GN R546: Listing Notice 3 Activities: 2.(a) iii (dd) & (ff); 4.(a) ii (ee) & (gg); 12.(a); 13.(a) & (c) ii (ff); 14.(a) I; 23.(a) ii (gg)

The decision making authority is the Provincial Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Cacadu Region. The environmental assessment needs to show the responsible authority (DEDEAT), and the project proponent, San Miguel Fruits SA (Pty) Ltd, what the consequences of their choices will be in biophysical, social and economic terms.

Identification of Issues

Issues and concerns identified for inclusion in the Scoping Report that require specialist assessment in the environmental assessment phase of the EIA have been identified using the following methods:

- Specialist Site Visit
- Desktop review of regional planning documentation and frameworks
- Scoping of issues and concerns with I&APs through correspondence received (emails, comment forms) in response to the project announcement
- Scoping of issues with authorities (affected organs of state)

Based on issues identified thus far in the process, the following specialist studies / input needs to be obtained:

- Biophysical Assessment including vegetation / habitat sensitivity mapping, identification of species of special concern, and faunal assessment

- Wetlands & Drainage Lines study to identify and delineate wetlands and drainage lines; and determine the potential aquatic sensitivity of these features.
- Paleontological Assessment in order to determine the type and location of fossils that may be present within the study area.
- Phase 1 Archaeological Assessment
- Soil Suitability Assessment to establish the suitability of the soil for the proposed orchards.
- Technical input with regards to irrigation water supply and storage, as well as the design and configuration of internal roads, and irrigation infrastructure.
- The terms of reference for the specialist studies to be undertaken in the EIA phase of the assessment have been included in the Plan of Study for EIA (Chapter 6 of the Final Scoping Report).

Current Stage in the Process

This EIA process is currently at the stage where the Final Scoping Report, including the Plan of Study for EIA, has been submitted to the DEDEAT for their decision-making. I&APs have been given an additional 21 day comment period on the Final Scoping Report. Any comments I&APs may have on the Final Scoping Report must be submitted directly to the DEDEAT and a copy thereof sent to Public Process Consultants. All comments received from I&APs during the review of the Draft Scoping Report have been included in the Final Scoping Report. The next stage in the process will entail undertaking the specialist studies in line with the approval for the Plan for Study for EIA; followed by the release of the Draft EIA for a 30 day I&AP comment period. All comments will be included in the Final EIA prior to submission to the DEDEAT for their decision making.