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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN AN ENVIRONMENTAL
AUTHORISATION (BASIC ASSESSMENT) PROCESS**

**BASIC ASSESSMENT FOR THE PROPOSED REDEVELOPMENT OF THE SODWANA BAY BEACH NODE,
WITHIN THE iSIMANGALISO WETLAND PARK, KWAZULU-NATAL
(DEA EIA: 14/12/16/3/3/1/722)**

The iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority (iSimangaliso) is in the process of redeveloping the Park in a section by section approach and is nearing completion with the Eastern Shores, Western Shores and uMkhuze sections. Rehabilitation and improving ecosystem functioning are important components of this and are well advanced in these sections.

Sodwana Bay is an integral and highly valued part of iSimangaliso, both from an ecological perspective (including that it contains some of the most rare forests types and species in the country), and from a tourism perspective. EIA authorisation is in place for the building of the new Sodwana Bay Entrance gate on the Park boundary. It is now iSimangaliso's intention to rehabilitate and redevelop the Sodwana section of the Park, specifically to address ecological issues in and around the Sodwana Beach Node, modernise day-visitor facilities with a view to improving the visitor experience, and optimising economic opportunities and job creation.

The sensitive and dynamic dune system within the public recreation node at Sodwana Bay, from south of Jesser Point to the northern side of the existing Sodwana Bay entrance gate, is currently showing signs of accelerated dune erosion, which poses a threat to the ecological functioning of the primary dune belt, north-south connectivity within the coastal corridor and the structural integrity of infrastructure in these areas. Much of the infrastructure within the Sodwana Bay Beach Node, constructed in the 1970s, was, in hindsight inappropriately positioned and the area was planted with *Casuarina equisetifolia* (commonly referred to as casuarinas) in the 1960s to aid in dune stabilisation. Apart from inappropriate positioning, the infrastructure is now outdated and does not cater adequately for visitors to Sodwana. While in the short term it may be considered that the casuarinas stabilised the dunes, these trees have had a long-term effect on sand budgets along this stretch of coast. They are extremely good at trapping sand in some areas and, by doing so, result in sand starvation in other areas. This disrupts the natural sand movement conveyor belt effect along the coast and can result in erosion extremes in localised areas when tidal, wave and wind conditions combine. In order to address these issues, iSimangaliso is planning a phased redevelopment of the Sodwana Bay Beach Node to lessen impacts on the ecological integrity of the area and the sensitive dune environment, including the removal of casuarinas to restore dune functioning, and to provide new and improved visitor facilities and services.

Presently, the Sodwana Bay Beach Node consists of the south beach parking areas, north beach access ramp near the north beach parking area, craft market, beach ablution facilities, southern beach access ramp near Jesser Point, a restaurant, surf shop and cylinder refill station on Jesser Point, as well as ablution facilities. Infrastructure within the Sodwana Beach Node is dotted throughout the beach area with little to no connectivity between the various components. In order to reduce impacts on the sensitive primary dunes, iSimangaliso is proposing to realign existing infrastructure in order to create focus areas, which will cater for the various user groups making use of Sodwana Bay while, at the same time, limiting anthropogenic impacts on the primary dunes. Casuarinas will be removed from the primary dune and the area rehabilitated with the aim of re-establishing the natural functioning of the dune system. Techniques will include using local indigenous plant species where appropriate, along with brush packing and screening.

It is anticipated that the redevelopment of the Sodwana Beach Node will aid in the rehabilitation and restoration of disturbed areas at Jesser Point and within the beach and primary dune belts, while simultaneously relieving congestion within the beach node by providing focus areas for infrastructure and the movement of visitors.

iSimangaliso proposes to reduce impacts on Jesser Point by relocating the existing dive shop to south of the main beach parking area. The cylinder refill station will be relocated from Jesser Point and a cylinder transfer station will be provided near the main beach. Further, infrastructure at the Sodwana Bay Main Beach will also be redeveloped to include a restaurant/food outlets, beach/dive shop, craft market and additional parking. These changes will create well-defined visitor nodes at Sodwana Bay behind the primary dune belt and will alleviate congestion during peak tourism periods.

The proposed redevelopment will include the following project components:

- Upgrade of parking areas and beach access points. Activities to be undertaken include the formalisation of beach access points to limit pressures on the primary dune, rehabilitation and promotion of vegetation recovery/growth on the primary dune and the formalisation of car parks to prevent erosion and creep into the surrounding vegetation.
- Removal of the existing gate house and other unwanted buildings. This will take place when the new Sodwana Entrance Gate has been constructed and this infrastructure is no longer required.
- Creation of new food and retail outlets within the north Beach parking area, while retaining or relocating the restaurant on Jesser Point.
- Relocation of the retail shop on Jesser Point to the Sodwana Bay north Beach parking area.
- Relocation of the cylinder refill stations at Jesser Point to an appropriate location either in the car park area or offsite at the caravan storage area.



M = Main Beach Parking Area	C = Craft Market
E = Sodwana Entrance Gate	R = Beach Restaurant
A = Beach Access Ramps	J = Jesser Point
S = Beach Shop	G = Cylinder Refill Station

Sodwana Beach Node

- Rebuilding and upgrading of the craft market to align with the proposed new parking areas and to ensure appropriate facilities.
- Building and upgrading of ablution facilities near the car park (possibly with the construction of additional toilets).
- Placement of interpretive, directional and compliance signage (signboards) and park furniture (refuse bins, tables and braai areas) in the beach node.
- Provision of a Park marketing point.
- Provision of a site for a community safety and first aid facilities at the main beach parking area during peak tourism periods.
- Phased removal of casuarinas from the primary dune at Jesser Point and the rehabilitation of this area.
- Planting of the primary dunes with local indigenous species; packing of vegetation and screening, where appropriate, to promote dune stabilisation and natural dune functioning.

In terms of the amended EIA Regulations published under the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998) (NEMA), as amended, the proposed redevelopment of the Sodwana Beach Node triggers a number of listed activities in terms of Listing Notice 1 (No. R. 544 of June 2010) and Listing Notice 3 (No. R. 546 of June 2010), in terms of section 24(2) and 24D of NEMA, which require environmental authorisation via the undertaking of a Basic Assessment.

As the iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority, the Protected Area Manager, is an organ of state, the competent authority for issuing environmental authorisation is the national Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA). ACER (Africa) Environmental Management Consultants (ACER) has been appointed by iSimangaliso as its Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) to undertake the Basic Assessment and associated public participation, and to submit the required application and supporting documentation to DEA for consideration and decision-making.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you, as an Interested and/or Affected Party (I&AP), background information and to invite you to submit concerns, issues or suggestions regarding the proposed redevelopment. These will inform the assessment and application to the competent authority. I&APs will be afforded the opportunity to review the Basic Assessment Report prior to its submission to DEA.

Please complete the enclosed comment sheet and return it to the ACER Public Participation Office by **26 November 2012 (contact details are provided on the comment sheet)**.

Your participation is valued and would be appreciated.

Please contact the Public Participation Office should you require further information.

Yours sincerely,



ACER (Africa) Environmental Management Consultants

Giles Churchill
Environmental Assessment Practitioner