

BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT

Basic Assessment for Grid Connection Infrastructure for Utopia Solar PL 1 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 on Portion 1 of the Farm Mooiwater No. 408. A 400m wide (including temporary working area), on average and 13.71km 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 powerline is also proposed to be developed. The grid connection corridor is approximately 22km 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:

- Remaining Extent Bresiefontein No.173
- Portion 1 of Kleinfontein No. 369
- Remaining Extent of Uitval No. 457
- RE of Farm Smaldeel No. 157.
- Remaining Extent of Paradys No. 137
- Portion 1 of Jackalsfontein 443
- Remaining Extent of Vlakfontein No. 15
- Remaining Extent of Zaaipplaats No. 190
- Portion 2 of Zaaipplaats No. 190
- Portion 3 of Zaaipplaats No. 190
- Portion 1 of Mooiwater No. 408

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 BA process and specialist studies being conducted to explain the potential impacts associated with the proposed power line;
- 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 (GNR. 517) as amended in 2021) 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:

- GNR. 517 (2021) Listing Notice 1, Activity 11(i): "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."
- GNR. 517 (2021) Listing Notice 1, Activity 24(ii): "The development of a road (ii) with reserve wider than 13,5 meters, or where no reserve exists where the road is wider than 8 meters."
- GNR. 517 (2021) Listing Notice 1, Activity 28(ii): "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.”

- GNR. 517 (2021), Listing Notice 3, Activity 10(b)(i)(ee): *“The development and related operation of facilities or infrastructure for the storage, or storage and handling of a dangerous good, where such storage occurs in containers with a combined capacity of 30 but not exceeding 80 cubic metres (b) in the Free State (i) outside urban areas (ee) Critical Biodiversity Areas as identified in systematic biodiversity plans adopted by the competent authority or in bioregional plans.”*

Being listed under Listing Notice 1 and 3 (GN.R. 517) implies that the development is considered as potentially having a significant impact on the environment. However, since the projects are located in the Klerksdorp Renewable Energy Development Zones (REDZ) a ‘basic assessment (BA) process’ is required as described in Regulation 19 and 20, for each of the developments in order to obtain EA. The Basic Assessment 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 Impact Assessment
- 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	13 July – 14 August 2023
Conduct specialist studies	-	June/July 2023
Submit application form and Draft Basic Assessment Report	-	August 2023
Public participation (Draft BAR)	30 Days	August / September 2023
Submit Final Basic Assessment Report	90 Days	October 2023
Decision	57 Days	December 2024
Public participation (decision) & submission of appeals	20 Days	January 2024

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 by sending an email to paradys@solis-environmental.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 reports within the stipulated public review periods.
- The public review period will run from Thursday 13 July to Monday 14 August 2023

7. Comments and queries

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

Contact person: Austin Sharkey
Telephone: 083 747 6717 (Cell)
Electronic mail: paradys@solis-environmental.co.za