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Final EIA Report

14/12/16/3/3/2/2283

**PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216, VENTERSBURG RD, AND CONNECTING 132kV POWERLINE, MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, FREE STATE PROVINCE**

Short name: Virginia 4 Solar Park

31 July 2023

Commissioned by: Lupus Energy (Pty) Ltd  
Document version: 2.0 – Final  
Compiled: A von Well



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216, VENTERSBURG RD, AND CONNECTING 132KV POWERLINE,  
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**Short name: Virginia 4 Solar Park**

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31 July 2023

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Lupus Energy (Pty) Ltd is proposing the development of a Photovoltaic (PV) Solar Energy Facility and associated infrastructure located approximately 17 km southeast of Virginia town in the Free State Province. The proposed PV facility will be located on the farm Blomskraal 216, Ventersburg RD. The connecting power line will be located on Blomskraal 216, Ventersburg RD; De Dam 27; Tevrede 361; Biddulph 329; Remainder of Le Roux 766; Portion 1 & 4 of Florida 633, within Matjhabeng Local Municipality, Lejweleputswa District. Free State Province.

The proposed development area is approximately 450 ha and the Photovoltaic (PV) Power Plant, and its connection infrastructure consists of the installation of the following equipment:

- PV modules (mono-crystalline, poly-crystalline, mono or bi-facial modules) with maximum generation capacity up to 210 MW.
- Mounting systems for the PV arrays (single-axis horizontal trackers or fixed structures) and related foundations
- Internal cabling and string boxes
- Medium voltage stations, hosting DC/AC inverters and LV/MV power transformers
- Medium voltage receiving station(s)
- Workshops & warehouses
- One on-site high-voltage substation with high-voltage power transformers, stepping up voltage from 22 kV (or 33 kV) to 132 kV, and one 132k V busbar with metering and protection devices (switching station).
- A new 132 kV power line (double circuit), approximately 13.36 km long for the connection of the on-site substation to the Florida 132kV/400kV Substation, planned to be located on Portion 1 of the Farm Florida 633, Ventersburg RD (this 132kV/400kV substation is not part of the current EIA process)
- Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), with a Maximum Export Capacity up to 210 MW and up to 6-hour storage capacity of 1 260 MWh), with a footprint of 20 ha, next to the on-site high-voltage substation, within the PV plant footprint / fenced areas.
- Electrical system and UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply) devices
- Lighting system
- Grounding system
- Access point from the regional road R70
- Internal roads
- Fencing of the site and alarm and video-surveillance system
- Water access point, water supply pipelines, water treatment facilities
- Patented Sewage system

## Evaluation of the Virginia 4 Solar PV facility

The following chapters of the Draft EIA Report together with the specialist studies contained in Annexures E – R provide a detailed assessment of possible impacts the proposed Virginia 4 Solar PV facility and power line may have on the environment. This chapter contains the environmental assessment of the solar PV facility and power line by providing a summary of the results and conclusions of the assessment of both the project site and development footprint. In so doing, it draws on the information gathered as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, knowledge gained by environmental specialists and EAP and presents a combined and informed opinion of environmental impacts associated with the proposed development.

No environmental fatal flaws or unacceptable impacts were identified by environmental specialists, provided that recommended mitigation measures are implemented during construction and operational phases. Mitigation measures include, amongst others, the avoidance of sensitive areas within the development footprint.

The potential environmental impacts associated with the Virginia 4 Solar PV facility identified and assessed through the EIA process include:

- Impacts on Terrestrial Biodiversity, vegetation and animals;
- Impacts on Wetlands, Drainage Channels and Aquatic Ecology;
- Impacts on Avifauna;
- Visual Impacts;
- Socio-economic Impacts;
- Impacts on Land Use, Soil and Agricultural Potential;
- Impacts on Heritage Resources and Palaeontological Resources
- Impacts of Civil Aviation aspects
- Radio Frequency Interference
- Impacts on Traffic.

### Impacts on Ecology

A Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment was conducted to describe the ecology (fauna and flora) present in the site, to assess its ecological sensitivity and to indicate the most suitable areas for the proposed development.

A survey was conducted during November 2022 to identify specific fauna habitats, and to compare these habitats with habitat preferences of the different fauna groups (birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians) occurring in the quarter degree grid.

The sensitivity of the solar park footprint varies between low – medium. Most of the power line route is also classified as low-medium except where the powerline will cross drainage channels and pans. The proposed development should avoid sensitive areas such as wetlands and riverine areas, while also allowing corridors of indigenous grassland on areas outside the development footprint to be preserved. Where sensitive areas of natural vegetation cannot be avoided, a few mitigation measures have been recommended to minimise and/or offset impacts (licence application for removal of protected species.).

Negative impacts can be minimised by strict enforcement and compliance with an Environmental Management Programme (EMPr) which considers recommendations for managing impacts detailed above.

According to the Ecological Specialist, provided that the proposed development and layout plans is consistent with the sensitivity map and take all mitigation measures into consideration, the planned development can be supported.

### **Impacts on Aquatic Ecology**

Vegetation associated with water courses and wetlands has a high sensitivity with a high conservation priority. No major alteration of drainage areas is recommended, especially considering it to form part of an important catchment. The potential to impact on the habitat is high and therefore a sufficient buffer zone of 32m is applicable for the development site or the flood line zone.

All construction and maintenance activities should be conducted in such a way that minimal damage is caused to drainage features on site.

No development can be done within the flood line zone without a Water Use Licence, except if outside the 1:100-year flood line or 100 meters from the delineated riverine areas or 500 meters from wetlands.

### **Impacts on Avifauna**

An Avifaunal Assessment was conducted to determine whether the proposed development would have negative impact on avifauna.

One hundred and twenty-nine (129) bird species were recorded in and around the project area of influence, with 95 species recorded from point counts and an additional 34 species recorded as incidental sightings. The field survey was conducted on 12-15 December 2022.

The assessment area consisted of four avifauna habitats; transformed areas, degraded grassland, grassland and bushclumps. These habitats are still mainly in a natural state except for areas disturbed by livestock grazing and transformed due to anthropogenic activities. Three species of conservation concern were confirmed in the assessment area (Blue Korhaan (*Eupodotis caerulescens*), Lanner Falcon (*Falco biarmicus*) and Secretarybird (*Sagittarius serpentarius*). Some high-risk avifauna species were recorded in the project area and surrounds, including raptors and water birds.

Based on the high receptor resilience and medium biodiversity importance, the assessment area was given low site ecological importance, with transformed areas having a very low site ecological importance (SEI).

The development will also lead to sensory disturbance, collision and electrocution risks. Even though the latter three impacts can be effectively mitigated, the loss of habitat cannot be mitigated. Considering the number of applications and current solar plant developments in the area the cumulative impact is regarded as being high.

Very few sensitive features were identified for the project along the proposed power line. It is the opinion of the specialist that the project may be considered for approval, but all prescribed mitigation measures and monitoring must be considered by the issuing authority. Bird diverters, guards, and spirals must be placed along the proposed powerline to reduce fatalities, as large terrestrial birds and raptors occur across the entire proposed powerline. Any power lines to be developed must be extensively mitigated.

### **Visual Impacts**

A Visual Impact Assessment (Annexure K) was conducted by Mitha Cilliers an independent visual Specialist to determine visual impact of the proposed solar park.

In the light of the mixed agro-industrial sense of place and the other characteristics of the receiving environment, the proposed project components will exhibit a medium contrast with the receiving environment. No night-light impact is anticipated. Discussions with the aviation impact consultant revealed that it is very unlikely that glint and glare from the proposed project would interfere with the Approach / Departure flight paths for the three local airports that are located approximately 20km – 40km from the proposed project.

There were no visual receptors with extreme relevance ratings for Virginia 4 Solar Park.

### **Socio-economic Impacts**

The socio-economic impact of the proposed Virginia 4 Solar Project is considered positive and the application is supported, provided that all the mitigation measures proposed by specialist consultants are implemented.

The project is consistent with development policies at the national, provincial and local government levels, although the institutional readiness for a project of this nature will have to be carefully managed at the municipal level.

### **Impacts on Land Use, Soil and Agricultural Potential**

Based on Part 1 of the Regulation of the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act, 1983 (Act No. 43 of 1983), the proposed development area, can be classified as having Moderate potential soils for dry land croplands.

The nature of the vegetation at the farm is also moderate for extensive livestock production.

### **Impacts on Heritage and Palaeontological Resources**

No human burials were located during the site assessment and impact on burial sites is not anticipated during preconstruction, construction, and operation phases of the project.

The study documented a square stone feature, possibly an irrigation dam dating to the Historical Period (**Site VS4-HP01 – Figure 14**). The feature is situated in the Virginia 4 project area and impacts on the site will require mitigation and management. Should impact on site prove inevitable, an application for a destruction permit must be submitted to SAHRA (Built Environment Unit) prior to commencement of the construction phase.

If the site will be retained, a 20m buffer should be demarcated and later implemented during construction and operation phases.

A settlement area dating to the Historical Period was noted in the proposed power line corridor (**Site VS4-HP02 – Figure 15**). Construction of transmission lines are typically low impact activities, but excavation holes may expose artefacts, sites or human remains and site monitoring by an informed ECO will be required during the construction phase.

The absence of significant archaeological resources documented in the project area and in its immediate surroundings implies low-severity short and long-term impacts on the heritage landscape.

Palaeontological Impact Assessments were conducted by Prof Marion Bamford for the PV area and connecting powerline. The study area is situated in the Main Karoo Basin of the Free State province. The farm is underlain by Late Permian rocky deposits of the Adelaide Subgroup of the Lower Beaufort Group of the Karoo Supergroup. These Karoo rocks are overlain by Quaternary alluvial deposits (soil) which are covered by vegetation.

The area is very highly sensitive for a large part of the farm for the Adelaide Subgroup and the rest is moderately sensitive for the Quaternary sands and alluvium. The site for development is in the Adelaide Subgroup and in the Daptocephalus Assemblage Zone (Smith at al., 2020).

There were no rocky outcrops in the area and no fossils of bones or plants were present on the land surface. The soils appeared to be fairly deep and covered by secondary grassland (Figure 7). The area has been used in the past for agriculture so has been cleared for ploughing or for grazing. There were NO FOSSILS visible on the land surface and no rocky outcrops in site that could potentially preserve any fossils.

### **Impacts on Civil Aviation**

Evidence from the assessment and the technical drawings show clearly that the Virginia 4 Project will not interfere or impact the Obstacle Limit Surfaces and Approach/Departure Surfaces of Harmony Mine and Beatrix Mine airports.

### **Impacts on Traffic**

Access to the proposed development will be via Virginia Road.

Several sections of the relevant section of Virginia Road are in a poor condition and need rehabilitation. Poor conditions relate to potholes, road surface cracking, faded road markings and overgrown shoulders.

The relevant section of Virginia Road where the Proposed Development is to be located is in a rural setting with limited farming activity in the area, and as determined from the 12-hour manual traffic counts has a low volume of vehicle traffic along the relevant section of Virginia Road. The impact of the existing vehicle traffic volumes on Virginia Road and other existing developments is negligible in all aspects of road-related impacts.



The relevant section of Virginia Road under investigation currently has a very low sensitivity in terms of factors used for assessment and would remain very low with the Proposed Development.

The proposed access intersection to provide access from and to the Proposed Development from Virginia Road (point A in Figure 16) is anticipated to have a very low sensitivity with proposed mitigating measures (intersection geometry with reference to dedicated right turn and left turn deceleration lanes) as recommended in the traffic report.

## **Conclusion**

Impacts with a rating of Medium-high or High are impacts which are regarded as potentially significant, rated without any mitigation measures. In this impact assessment, NO impacts were regarded as potentially significant impacts.

It is the opinion of the EAP that the environmental impacts associated with the proposed development were identified and that the mitigation measures proposed to mitigate the negative impacts will decrease the environmental negative impacts to acceptable levels.

The EAP respectfully requests that the Environmental Authorization be issued for the proposed Virginia 4 Solar Park.

## Table of contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	vi
ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS .....	xvi
1 OBJECTIVE OF THE EIA PROCESS .....	1
2 DETAILS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PRACTITIONER (EAP) ..	2
3 LOCATION OF ACTIVITY .....	2
3.1 SURVEYOR GENERAL 21 DIGIT CODES OF PV DEVELOPMENT AREA.....	2
3.2 PHYSICAL ADDRESS AND FARM NAME .....	2
4 LOCALITY OF THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY .....	6
5 SCOPE OF THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY .....	7
5.1 LISTED ACTIVITIES TRIGGERED IN TERMS OF NEMA.....	7
5.2 DESCRIPTION OF ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES AND INFRASTRUCTURE RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT.....	8
5.3 LAYOUT OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND STRUCTURES ON SITE .....	11
5.4 PRIMARY COMPONENTS .....	14
5.4.1 Project functioning.....	14
5.4.2 Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) .....	18
5.4.3 Access road and internal roads.....	20
5.4.4 TRAFFIC IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT .....	22
5.4.5 Lighting system .....	22
5.4.6 Stormwater collection system.....	22
5.4.7 Water requirements.....	23
5.4.8 Sewerage.....	25
5.4.9 Refuse removal .....	25
5.5 TEMPORARY CONSTRUCTION CAMP.....	26
5.5.1 Phase I .....	27
5.5.2 Phase II .....	27
5.5.3 Phase III.....	27
5.5.4 Phase IV.....	27
5.5.5 Earthworks .....	28
6 LEGAL AND POLICY REQUIREMENTS.....	29
6.1 REGULATORY AUTHORITIES.....	29
6.1.1 National Authorities .....	29
6.1.2 Provincial Authorities.....	29
6.1.3 Local Authorities.....	29
6.2 LEGISLATION, REgulations and Guidelines.....	30
7 NEED/DESIRABILITY OF THE PROJECT .....	33
7.1 Future need and desirability .....	34
8 MOTIVATION FOR PREFERRED DEVELOPMENT FOOTPRINT IN THE PREFERRED SITE .....	35
8.1 THE CHOICE OF THE FREE STATE PROVINCE AND SITE LOCATION.....	35
9 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES .....	36
9.1 DETAILS OF ALTERNATIVESs CONSIDERED .....	36
9.1.1 SITE ALTERNATIVES .....	36
9.1.2 TECHNOLOGY ALTERNATIVES .....	37
9.1.3 NO-GO ALTERNATIVE / "DO-NOTHING" ALTERNATIVE .....	38
9.2 DETAILS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS UNDERTAKEN .....	40
9.2.1 Further steps in Public Participation Process .....	41
9.2.2 RESuLts FrOM THE Public Participation Process.....	41
9.3 SUMMARY OF ISSUES RAISED BY INTERESTED AND AFFECTED PARTIES.....	43
9.4 ENVIRONMENTAL ATTRIBUTES ASSOCIATED WITH PROPOSED PV solar park .....	92
9.4.1 PROPERTY DESCRIPTION AND CURRENT LAND USE .....	92
9.4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES .....	94
9.4.3 WIND AND SOLAR DEVELOPMENTS WITH ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORISATION OR APPLICATIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION WITHIN 30 KM OF STUDY AREA.....	96
9.4.4 CLIMATE.....	98
9.4.5 TOPOGRAPHY AND DRAINAGE.....	99
9.4.6 SOILS AND GEOLOGY .....	99
9.4.7 GEOTECHNICAL REPORT .....	100
9.4.8 ECOLOGY (FAUNA & FLORA).....	102
9.4.9 VISUAL .....	118
9.4.10 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT .....	120
9.4.11 AGRICULTURAL POTENTIAL.....	122
9.4.11.2 Agro-Enterprise and Land Capability.....	126
9.4.11.3 Alternative development footprint assessment on low or medium sensitivity areas	

9.4.11.4	Site micro-siting and allowable development limits .....	128
9.4.12	CULTURAL AND HERITAGE RESOURCES .....	129
9.4.13	PALAEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES .....	133
9.4.14	TRAFFIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT .....	134
9.4.15	RADIO FREQUENCY INTERFERENCE (RFI) ASSESSMENT .....	135
9.4.16	CIVIL AVIATION IMPACT REPORT .....	136
9.5	IMPACTS AND RISKS IDENTIFIED .....	138
9.5.1	DEGREE TO WHICH THE IMPACTS CAN BE REVERSED .....	141
9.5.2	DEGREE TO WHICH IMPACTS MAY CAUSE IRREPLACEBLE LOSS OF RESOURCES ...	141
9.5.3	DEGREE TO WHICH IMPACTS CAN BE AVOIDED, MANAGED OR MITIGATED .....	141
9.6	HIGH LEVEL RISK ASSESSMENT FOR BESS TECHNOLOGY .....	141
9.7	METHODOLOGY USED IN RANKING THE NATURE, SIGNIFICANCE, CONSEQUENCES, EXTENT, DURATION AND PROBABILITY OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH ALTERNATIVES .....	146
9.8	ASSESSMENT CRITERIA .....	148
9.9	CUMULATIVE IMPACTS .....	149
9.10	POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS THAT THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY AND ALTERNATIVES WILL HAVE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE COMMUNITY .....	151
9.11	POSSIBLE MITIGATION MEASURES AND RESIDUAL RISK .....	151
9.12	CONCLUDING STATEMENT INDICATING THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE AND LOCATION OF ACTIVITY .....	151
10	DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROCESS TO IDENTIFY AND RANK ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS THAT THE ACTIVITY, ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES AND INFRASTRUCTURE WILL IMPOSE ON THE PREFERRED LOCATION THROUGH THE LIFE OF THE ACITIVITY .....	152
10.1	DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND RISKS IDENTIFIED DURING THE EIA PROCESS .....	152
10.2	IMPACTS & MITIGATION MEASURES OF CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATIONAL PHASE ....	153
10.2.1	ATMOSPHERIC POLLUTION AND NOISE .....	153
10.2.2	LAND AND SOILS .....	154
10.2.3	GROUNDWATER AND SURFACE WATER POLLUTION .....	156
10.2.4	WATER USE / WATER QUANTITY .....	158
10.2.5	ARCHAEOLOGICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FEATURES .....	159
10.2.6	IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT ON ECOLOGY (FAUNA & FLORA) OF THE AREA .....	160
10.2.7	VISUAL IMPACTS .....	163
10.2.8	SAFETY, HEALTH, SECURITY AND FIRE HAZARDS .....	164
10.2.9	TRAFFIC AND ROAD SAFETY .....	166
10.2.10	SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT .....	167
10.3	ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS AND RISKS .....	169
11	SUMMARY AND FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF SPECIALIST REPORTS AND HOW FINDINGS HAVE BEEN INCLUDED IN THE ASSESSMENT REPORT .....	169
12	ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT .....	176
12.1	SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS OF THE EIA .....	176
13	FINAL PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES RESPONDING TO IMPACT MANAGEMENT MEASURES, AVOIDANCE AND MITIGATION MEASURES IDENTIFIED IN ASSESSMENT .....	176
14	ASPECTS WHICH WERE CONDITIONAL TO THE FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT BY THE EAP OR SPECIALISTS WHICH ARE TO BE INCLUDED AS CONDITIONS OF AUTHORISATION .....	176
15	ASSUMPTIONS UNCERTAINTIES AND GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE .....	177
16	REASONED OPINION FOR AUTHORISATION OF ACTIVITY AND CONDITIONS IN RESPECT OF THAT AUTHORISATION .....	177
17	PERIOD OF ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORISATION AND DATE OF CONCLUSION OF ACTIVITY .....	178
18	UNDERTAKING UNDER OATH OR AFFIRMATION BY THE EAP .....	179
19	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	180

## List of figures

Figure 1. Locality map.....	6
Figure 2. Proposed Layout Plan of the Virginia 4 Solar Park .....	13
Figure 3. Lateral views of PV arrays mounted on fixed mounting systems .....	15
Figure 4. Frontal view of PV arrays mounted on fixed mounting systems.....	15
Figure 5. Simulation views of the PV arrays mounted on 1-axis horizontal tracker.....	16
Figure 6. Front views of the PV arrays mounted on horizontal 1-axis tracker .....	16
Figure 7. Steel monopole structure for a 132 kV powerline (double circuit) .....	18
Figure 8. Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) .....	19
Figure 9. Access from the regional road R70 .....	21
Figure 10. Map of Wind and Solar developments with an approved Environmental Authorisation or applications under consideration within 30 km of the proposed area .....	97
Figure 11. Soil Form Map.....	100
Figure 12. Vegetation Unit Map of the proposed development area (From Biodiversity report) .....	105
Figure 13. Ecological Sensitivity Map .....	109
Figure 14. Cumulative habitat loss in the area.....	114
Figure 15. Land capability Map of the project area.....	127
Figure 16. Heritage archaeological sites located within the Virginia Solar 4 Park project area .....	131
Figure 17. Heritage archaeological sites located within the connecting powerline corridor .....	132
Figure 18. Proposed access point (A) for the PV Park .....	134
Figure 19. Flight paths for Virginia 4 project .....	137

## List of tables

Table 1. Site location - Surveyor-general 21-digit site code: .....	2
Table 2. Properties crossed by Virginia 4 132kV Powerline – SG 21-digit site code: .....	3
Table 3. Geographical coordinates of the Virginia 4 PV plant footprint .....	3
Table 4. Geographical coordinates of Virginia 4 BESS and construction camp .....	4
Table 5. Geographical coordinates of the Virginia 4 on-site substation .....	4
Table 6. Geographical coordinates of the Virginia 4 132kV powerline .....	4
Table 7. Listed Activities in terms of EIA Regulations dated 7 April 2017 triggered by the proposed development:.....	7
Table 8. Technical details of the proposed PV facility and connecting powerline .....	9
Table 9. List of maps and drawings included as Annexure B .....	11
Table 10. Water consumption during the construction phase of the project.....	24
Table 11. Water consumption during the operational phase of the project .....	25
Table 12. Geographical coordinates of the construction camp & laydown areas.....	26
Table 13. Review of relevant legislation .....	30
Table 14 Site location and Property details .....	92
Table 15 Properties crossed by the proposed powerline alignment .....	92
Table 16 Environmental Screening Tool Table.....	94
Table 17. List of Wind and Solar developments with an approved Environmental Authorisation or applications under consideration within 30 km of the proposed area.....	96
Table 18. List of Wind and Solar developments with an approved Environmental Authorisation or applications under consideration within 30 km of the proposed area .....	96
Table 19. List of Solar developments with an on-going Environmental Authorisation process under consideration within 30 km of the proposed area .....	98
Table 20. Land types, geology, and dominant soil types of the proposed development site .....	99
Table 21. Declared weeds and invader plants of the study area .....	108
Table 22. Total cumulative habitat loss.....	114
Table 23. Red data list of potential fauna for the study area .....	115
Table 24. Allowable development limits for solar developments generating 20MW or more. ....	128
Table 25. List of identified heritage sites.....	130
Table 26. Consequence and likelihood formulas .....	146
Table 27. Consequence and likelihood values .....	147
Table 28. Significance ratings (Plomp 2004) .....	147
Table 29. Impact Assessment Criteria .....	148

## **LIST OF ANNEXURES**

**Annexure A - Site Sensitivity Verification Report**

**Annexure B - Locality maps, layout and technical drawings of Virginia 4 PV Power Plant and connection infrastructure**

**Annexure C - Photos of the project site**

**Annexure D - Public Participation Process – Comments & Responses Report**

**Annexure E - Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment**

**Annexure F - Avifaunal Assessment**

**Annexure G - Wetland Riparian and Aquatic Assessment**

**Annexure H - Agricultural Agro-ecosystem Assessment**

**Annexure I - Archaeological Impact Assessment**

**Annexure J - Palaeontological Impact Assessment**

**Annexure K - Visual Impact Assessment**

**Annexure L - Traffic Impact Assessment Report**

**Annexure M - Radio Frequency Interference (RFI) Assessment**

**Annexure N - Socio-Economic Assessment**

**Annexure O - Fire Management Plan**

**Annexure P - Environmental Screening Reports**

**Annexure Q - Aviation Impact Assessment**

**Annexure R - Geotechnical Assessment**

**Annexure S - Environmental Management Programme (EMPr) – PV Solar Park**  
**Generic EMPr – Powerline**  
**Generic EMPr – On site substation**

**Annexure T - Curriculum Vitae (EAP)**

**Annexure U - Specialist Declarations**

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AGES	Africa Geo-Environmental and Engineering Services (Pty) Ltd
BID	Background Information Document
CO	Carbon Monoxide
CO <sub>2</sub>	Carbon Dioxide
CSP	Concentrated Solar Power
DALRRD	Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development
DFFE	National Department Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment,
DMRE	Department of Mineral Resources and Energy
DWS	Department of Water and Sanitation
EAP	Environmental Assessment Practitioner
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EIR	Environment Impact Assessment Report
EMPr	Environmental Management Programme
ESS	Environmental Scoping Study
GHG	Green House Gases
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GN	Government Notice
GWh	Giga Watt hour
I&AP	Interested and Affected Party
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
IEM	Integrated Environmental Management
IPP	Independent Power Producer
kV	kilovolt
MW	Mega Watt
MWp	Mega Watt peak
NEMA	National Environmental Management Act - Act no. 107 of 1998
NERSA	National Energy Regulator of South Africa
NHRA	National Heritage Resources Act - Act no. 25 of 1999
NWA	National Water Act - Act no. 36 of 1998
PoS	Plan of Study
Project site	Farm Blomskraal 216 Ventersburg RD (Matjhabeng Local Municipality, Lejweleputswa District Municipality, Free State Province)
PV	Photovoltaic
RFP	Request for Qualification and Proposals for New Generation Capacity under the IPP Procurement Programme
REIPPPP	Renewable Energy IPP Procurement Programme
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resources Agency
SANRAL	South African National Roads Agency Limited
SANS	South African National Standard
UPS	Uninterruptible Power Supply
Lupus Energy	Lupus Energy (Pty) Ltd (applicant)



## 1 OBJECTIVE OF THE EIA PROCESS

According to the EIA Regulations 2017, Regulation No R 326 of 07 April 2017, Appendix 3, Section 2, the objective of the EIA process is to, through a consultative process —

- (a) determine the policy and legislative context within which the activity is located and document how the proposed activity complies with and responds to the policy and legislative context;
- (b) describe the need and desirability of the proposed activity, including the need and desirability of the activity in the context of the development footprint on the approved site as contemplated in the accepted scoping report;
- (c) identify the location of the development footprint within the approved site as contemplated in the accepted scoping report based on an impact and risk assessment process inclusive of cumulative impacts and a ranking process of all the identified development footprint alternatives focusing on the geographical, physical, biological, social, economic, heritage and cultural aspects of the environment;
- (d) determine the—
  - (i) nature, significance, consequence, extent, duration and probability of the impacts occurring to inform identified preferred alternatives; and
  - (ii) degree to which these impacts—
    - (aa) can be reversed;
    - (bb) may cause irreplaceable loss of resources, and
    - (cc) can be avoided, managed or mitigated;
- (e) identify the most ideal location for the activity within the development footprint of the approved site as contemplated in the accepted scoping report based on the lowest level of environmental sensitivity identified during the assessment;
- (f) identify, assess, and rank the impacts the activity will impose on the development footprint on the approved site as contemplated in the accepted scoping report through the life of the activity;
- (g) identify suitable measures to avoid, manage or mitigate identified impacts; and
- (h) identify residual risks that need to be managed and monitored.

**2 DETAILS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PRACTITIONER (EAP)**

Name of EAP: AGES Limpopo – Anton von Well

Contact details of EAP:

Physical Address: 120 Marshall Street,  
Polokwane, 0699

Telephone number: 015 291 1577

Expertise of EAP: The EAP is registered as an Environmental Assessment Practitioner at EAPASA and has 22 years of experience with management and conducting of EIA's. Curriculum Vitae of EAP is included in Annexure T.

**3 LOCATION OF ACTIVITY**

**3.1 SURVEYOR GENERAL 21 DIGIT CODES OF PV DEVELOPMENT AREA**

Table 1. Site location - Surveyor-general 21-digit site code:

F	0	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	6	0	0	0	0	0
1	2			3				4			5									

**3.2 PHYSICAL ADDRESS AND FARM NAME**

**LUPUS ENERGY (PTY) LTD** is proposing the establishment of a **renewable energy generation facility (Photovoltaic Power Plant)** with associated infrastructure and structures on:

- The Farm BLOMSKRAAL 216, Ventersburg RD

The connecting 132kV power line will traverse the following properties, according to the proposed powerline alignment, within the Powerline Study Corridor:

- Farm Blomskraal 216, Ventersburg RD (the project site);
- Farm De Dam 27, Ventersburg RD;
- Farm Tevrede 361, Ventersburg RD;
- Farm Biddulph 329, Ventersburg RD;
- Remainder of the Farm Le Roux 766, Ventersburg RD;
- Portions 1 and 4 of the Farm Florida 633, Ventersburg RD;

located within the Matjhabeng Local Municipality, Lejweleputswa District Municipality, Free State Province.

The name of the facility will be **VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK**.

Table 2. Properties crossed by Virginia 4 132kV Powerline – SG 21-digit site code:

F	0	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	6	0	0	0	0	0
F	0	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	7	0	0	0	0	0
F	0	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	6	1	0	0	0	0	0
F	0	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2	9	0	0	0	0	0
F	0	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	6	6	0	0	0	0	0
F	0	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	3	3	0	0	0	0	1
F	0	3	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	3	3	0	0	0	0	4
<b>1</b>				<b>2</b>				<b>3</b>				<b>4</b>				<b>5</b>				

Footprint (fenced area) of proposed PV development is approximately **450ha in extent.**

Table 3. Geographical coordinates of the Virginia 4 PV plant footprint

Virginia 4 Development Area (PV plant footprint)		
Point	Longitude	Latitude
P01	26° 59' 09.21" E	28° 14' 04.48" S
P02	26° 59' 00.22" E	28° 14' 23.51" S
P03	26° 59' 04.84" E	28° 14' 26.01" S
P04	26° 59' 14.53" E	28° 14' 28.57" S
P05	26° 59' 21.57" E	28° 14' 29.87" S
P06	26° 59' 30.41" E	28° 14' 30.33" S
P07	26° 59' 39.44" E	28° 14' 26.30" S
P08	26° 59' 54.16" E	28° 14' 22.76" S
P09	26° 59' 54.76" E	28° 14' 19.73" S
P10	26° 59' 48.68" E	28° 14' 20.68" S
P11	26° 59' 49.19" E	28° 14' 18.00" S
P12	26° 59' 50.82" E	28° 14' 16.59" S
P13	26° 59' 53.89" E	28° 14' 15.18" S
P14	26° 59' 57.87" E	28° 14' 14.27" S
P15	27° 00' 03.08" E	28° 14' 14.33" S
P16	27° 00' 10.48" E	28° 14' 10.63" S
P17	27° 00' 42.03" E	28° 14' 20.49" S
P18	27° 01' 07.68" E	28° 14' 23.53" S
P19	27° 01' 08.54" E	28° 14' 13.39" S
P20	27° 01' 07.85" E	28° 13' 43.04" S
P21	27° 01' 12.85" E	28° 13' 10.70" S
P22	27° 01' 14.21" E	28° 13' 09.15" S
P23	27° 01' 13.29" E	28° 13' 08.51" S
P24	27° 01' 12.37" E	28° 13' 09.55" S
P25	27° 00' 33.57" E	28° 13' 23.54" S
P26	27° 00' 26.31" E	28° 13' 33.35" S
P27	27° 00' 12.29" E	28° 13' 47.35" S
P28	26° 59' 55.27" E	28° 13' 50.35" S
P29	26° 59' 38.70" E	28° 14' 01.76" S
P30	26° 59' 35.96" E	28° 14' 01.04" S
P31	26° 59' 41.10" E	28° 13' 55.69" S
P32	26° 59' 48.78" E	28° 13' 50.14" S
P33	26° 59' 47.78" E	28° 13' 45.29" S
P34	26° 59' 27.38" E	28° 13' 45.94" S
P35	26° 59' 09.50" E	28° 13' 51.05" S
<b>Overall footprint</b>	<b>450 ha</b>	

Table 4. Geographical coordinates of Virginia 4 BESS and construction camp

Virginia 4 BESS		
Point	Longitude	Latitude
P01	26° 59' 16.33" E	28° 13' 53.98" S
P02	26° 59' 16.33" E	28° 13' 57.63" S
P03	26° 59' 21.40" E	28° 13' 57.63" S
P04	26° 59' 21.40" E	28° 13' 53.20" S
P05	26° 59' 43.55" E	28° 13' 53.21" S
P06	26° 59' 48.16" E	28° 13' 49.94" S
P07	26° 59' 47.31" E	28° 13' 45.81" S
P08	26° 59' 27.48" E	28° 13' 46.44" S
P09	26° 59' 10.06" E	28° 13' 51.42" S
P10	26° 59' 10.01" E	28° 13' 53.98" S
<b>Overall footprint</b>		<b>20 ha</b>

Table 5. Geographical coordinates of the Virginia 4 on-site substation

Virginia 4 On-site substation and 132kV switching station		
Point	Longitude	Latitude
P01	26° 59' 14.70" E	28° 13' 57.43" S
P02	26° 59' 14.76" E	28° 13' 54.59" S
P03	26° 59' 10.16" E	28° 13' 54.51" S
P04	26° 59' 10.10" E	28° 13' 57.35" S
<b>Overall footprint</b>		<b>1.1 ha</b>

Table 6. Geographical coordinates of the Virginia 4 132kV powerline

Virginia 4 132kV powerline		
Point	Longitude	Latitude
P01 Virginia 4 On-site substation	26° 59' 10.30" E	28° 13' 55.65" S
P02	26° 59' 08.59" E	28° 13' 55.65" S
P03	26° 59' 03.37" E	28° 13' 49.97" S
P04	26° 58' 20.58" E	28° 13' 28.04" S
P05	26° 58' 24.07" E	28° 12' 59.65" S
P06	26° 58' 20.00" E	28° 12' 55.91" S
P07	26° 58' 21.11" E	28° 12' 47.13" S
P08	26° 56' 20.95" E	28° 11' 40.52" S
P09	26° 55' 37.60" E	28° 11' 32.16" S
P10	26° 54' 35.31" E	28° 11' 01.30" S
P11	26° 52' 49.59" E	28° 10' 48.10" S
P12 Florida 132kV/400kV substation	26° 52' 47.45" E	28° 10' 31.91" S
<b>Overall length</b>		<b>13.36 km</b>

Access to the Virginia 4 Solar Park will be the regional road R70 running from the N1, North-East of Aldam, in the direction of Meloding and Virginia. This road crosses the Farm BLOMSKRAAL 216 passing along the north-eastern corner of the development area of Virginia 4.

In order to develop the facility, Lupus Energy must undertake an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process and acquire environmental authorization from the *National Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE)*, in consultation with the *Free State Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (DESTEA)*, in terms of the EIA Regulations, 2014 published on 4 December 2014, as amended under section 24(5) and 44 of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998).

**Lupus Energy** is the applicant for Virginia 4 Solar Park (the proposed project) which will be connected to a **new 132kV/400kV substation and 400kV switching station** (the “**Florida 132kV/400kV Substation**”), through a new 132 kV powerline **13.36 km long** (the “**Virginia 4 132 kV Powerline**”).

The Florida 132kV/400kV Substation is planned to be located on Portion 1 of the Farm Florida 633 and will be connected to **Eskom Theseus Main Transmission Substation (MTS)** through a new 400 kV powerline 6.0 km long (the “**Florida 400 kV Powerline**”).

**Virginia 4 132 kV Powerline** forms part of this EIA process, but **Florida 132kV/400kV Substation** and **Florida 400 kV Powerline** will form part of an EIA process of Florida Solar Park, proposed by **Piscis Energy (Pty) Ltd** (DFFE Ref No.: 14/12/16/3/3/2/2322)).

This Florida 132kV/400kV Substation and the Florida 400 kV Powerline will be shared by several projects (*i.e.* the Virginia 4, Corona, Quagga and Florida PV Solar Parks), but the applicant in terms of the environmental process is **Piscis Energy (Pty) Ltd**. Once built, this shared 400kV connection infrastructure will be owned and operated by **Eskom**.

The **Eskom Theseus Main Transmission Substation (MTS)** is located 18.8 km North-West of the north-western corner of project site.

The independent Environmental Assessment Practitioners (EAPs) which have been appointed for the undertaking of the detailed environmental studies in compliance with the 2014 EIA Regulations, as amended, are AGES Limpopo (Pty) Ltd (**AGES**).

With the aim of identifying and assessing all potential environmental impacts related to the development as well as suggesting possible mitigation measures and alternatives, AGES has appointed specialist sub-consultants to compile detailed reports and to study the activities necessary for the assessment of the specific impacts related to their field of expertise.

AGES and the other specialist consultants are in a position of independency from Lupus Energy and not subsidiaries or affiliated to the latter. AGES and the specialist consultants have no secondary interest connected with the development of this project or of other projects which may originate from the authorization of the project.

The characteristics, the technology and the extent of the Virginia 4 Solar Park is defined and evaluated in this EIA Report and its annexures.

### 4 LOCALITY OF THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY

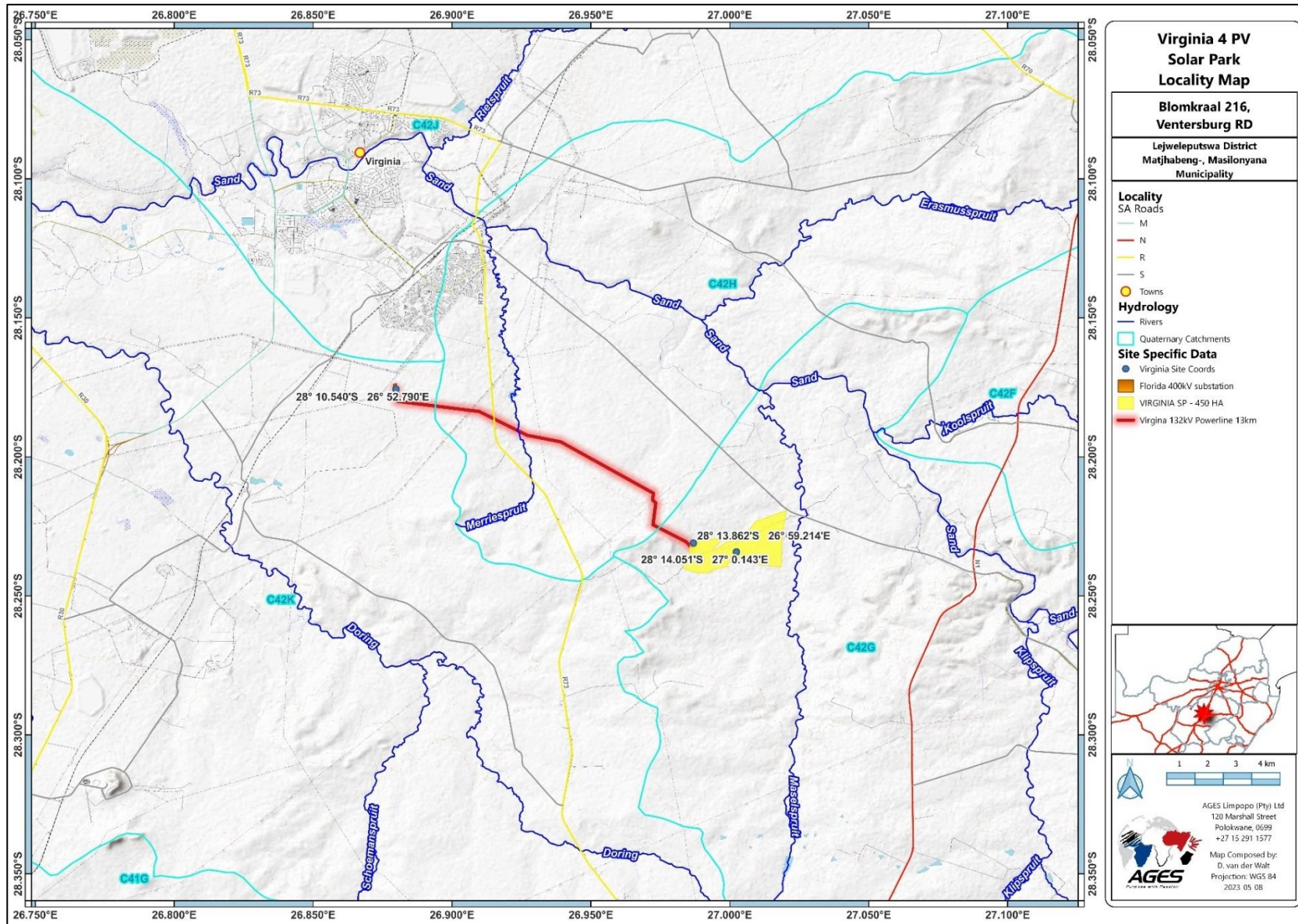


Figure 1. Locality map



## 5 SCOPE OF THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY

### 5.1 LISTED ACTIVITIES TRIGGERED IN TERMS OF NEMA

The “listed activities” in terms of sections 24 and 24D of NEMA, included in **Listing Notices 1, 2 & 3 of the EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended**, involved (or *potentially* involved) in the proposed development, are detailed in table below.

Table 7. Listed Activities in terms of EIA Regulations dated 7 April 2017 triggered by the proposed development:

Listed activity	Activity description
<p><b>GN R.327 Item 11 (i)</b>  <b>The development of facilities or infrastructure for the transmission and distribution of electricity -</b>  <b>(i) outside urban areas or industrial complexes with a capacity of more than 33 but less than 275 kilovolts.</b></p>	<p>Connection of Virginia 4 Solar Park to Eskom grid will be according to Eskom connection solution and may require:</p> <p>(i) One on-site high-voltage substation with high-voltage power transformers, stepping up voltage from 22 kV (or 33 kV) to 132 kV, and one 132 kV busbar with metering and protection devices. On-site high-voltage substation will be equipped with control buildings and one 132 kV busbar with metering and protection devices (“switching station”).</p> <p>(ii) One 132kV powerline (double circuit), approximately 13.36 km long, for connection of on-site substation to 132kV busbar of new Florida 132kV/400kV Substation, is planned on Portion 1 of the Farm Florida 633.</p> <p>Connection infrastructure is located outside urban areas or industrial complexes.</p>
<p><b>GN R.327, Item 12 (ii)(c)</b>  <b>The development of –</b>  <b>(ii) infrastructure or structures with a physical footprint of 100sq.m. or more</b>  <b>(c) within 32m of a watercourse, measured from the edge of a watercourse</b></p>	<p>The proposed Virginia 4 132kV Powerline, 13.36 km long, will intercept wetlands and drainage channels that have been identified as per the delineation of the appointed wetland specialist. Some of the poles may be constructed within 32m from these features.</p>
<p><b>GN R.327, Item 19</b>  <b>The infilling or depositing of any material of more than 10 cubic metres into, or the dredging, excavation, removal or moving of soil, sand, shells, shell grit, pebbles or rock of more than 10 cubic metres from a watercourse</b></p>	<p>The proposed Virginia 4 132kV Powerline, 13.36 km long, will cross wetlands and drainage channels that have been identified as per the delineation of the appointed wetland specialist. The interception of these wetlands and drainage channels will entail, during the construction phase, the movement of soil with a volume of more than 10 m<sup>3</sup>.</p>
<p><b>GN R.327, Item 24 (ii)</b>  <b>The development of -</b>  <b>(ii) a road with a reserve wider than 13,5m, or where no reserve exists where the road is wider than 8m</b></p>	<p>Access to the Virginia 4 Solar PV will be from the provincial R70 tar road between Virginia and the N1.</p> <p>During the construction phase, the access point and some internal roads will have a reserve wider than 13.5 m to allow transportation of abnormal goods (e.g., power transformers, etc.).</p>
<p><b>GN R.327, Item 28 (ii)</b>  <b>Residential, mixed, retail, commercial, industrial or institutional developments where such land was used for agriculture or afforestation on or after 01 April 1998 and where such development:</b></p>	<p>The Virginia 4 Solar Park can be regarded as an industrial development, where the total area to be transformed (footprint) will be bigger than 1 ha (up to 450 ha).</p> <p>The project site is currently being used for livestock grazing and agriculture.</p>

(ii) will occur outside an urban area, where the total land to be developed is bigger than 1 ha	
<b>GN R.325 Item 1</b> <b>The development of facilities or infrastructure for the generation of electricity from a renewable resource where the electricity output is 20 MW or more, excluding where such development of facilities or infrastructure is for photovoltaic installations and occurs within an urban area.</b>	<p>The proposed Virginia 4 Solar PV facility consists of the construction, operation and maintenance of a Photovoltaic (PV) Power Plant with a maximum generation and storage capacity up to 210 MW at the point of connection (Maximum Export Capacity).</p> <p>The proposed solar photovoltaic facility, as well as the associated on-site high-voltage substation and Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), will be located on Farm Blomskraal 216, Ventersburg RD.</p>
<b>GN R.325 Item 15</b> <b>The clearance of an area of 20 ha or more of indigenous vegetation</b>	<p>The construction of the Virginia 4 Solar PV facility will require clearance of indigenous vegetation, where the total area to be transformed (footprint of the PV plant) will be up to 450 ha.</p>
<b>GN R.324, Item 12 (b) (i) (iv)</b> <b>The clearance of an area of 300 m<sup>2</sup> or more of indigenous vegetation:</b> <b>(b) In Free State province:</b> <b>(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.</b> <b>(iv) Areas within a watercourse/wetland or within 100 m from the edge of a watercourse/wetland.</b>	<p>Only the connecting powerline will traverse small areas of indigenous vegetation, classified as an endangered ecosystem (Vaal-Vet Sandy Grasslands) in terms of section 52 of the NEMBA.</p> <p>The footprint of the Virginia 4 Solar Park and portions of the Virginia 4 132kV Powerline will be developed within 100m from the edge of wetlands.</p>

## 5.2 DESCRIPTION OF ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES AND INFRASTRUCTURE RELATED TO THE DEVELOPMENT

The project envisages the establishment of a solar power plant with a maximum generation capacity at the delivery point (Maximum Export Capacity) of up to 210 MW.

The construction timeframe is estimated to be approximately 24 months.

The preferred technical solutions envisage:

- **mono/polycrystalline PV modules, mono or bi-facial.**
- **fixed mounting systems or horizontal 1-axis trackers.**

The estimated annual energy production is calculated in approximately:

- **2,100 kWh/kWp/year** (load factor = 0.240), in the case of PV modules mounted on fixed mounting systems; or
- **2,450 kWh/kWp/year** (load factor = 0.280) in the case of bi-facial PV modules mounted on trackers.

Therefore, the Virginia 4 Solar Park will generate:

- **689.1 GWh per year** in the case of PV modules mounted on fixed mounting systems; or
- **803.9 GWh per year** in the case of PV modules mounted on trackers.

The Global Horizontal Irradiation of the site is 2,104 kWh/m<sup>2</sup>/year (source: <https://solargis.info/imaps/>).

The energy generated by the Virginia 4 Solar Park will reduce the quantity of pollutants and greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere. The reduced amount of CO<sub>2</sub> will be the emissions that would have been generated by a thermal power plant using fossil fuels for producing the same quantity of energy that it is produced by the Virginia 4 Solar Park.

The quantity of the avoided CO<sub>2</sub> is calculated as follows: the energy produced by the Virginia 4 Solar Park (up to 689.1 GWh/y or 803.9 GWh/y) is multiplied by the Eskom’s average emission factor which is 1.015 t CO<sub>2</sub>/MWh (source: Energy Research Centre, University of Cape Town. (2009 Carbon accounting for South Africa).

In the case of Virginia 4 Solar Park, the avoided CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are approximately 678,879 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year in the case of PV modules mounted on fixed mounting systems, or 792,026 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year in the case of PV modules mounted on trackers.

Considering that 1 kg of coal generates approximately 3.7 kWh (supposing a caloric value of 8000 kcal/kg and a coal plant efficiency of 40%), the coal saved by the Virginia 4 Solar Park will be approximately 186,233 tons of coal/year in the case of PV modules mounted on fixed mounting systems, or 217,272 tons of coal/year in the case of PV modules mounted on trackers.

The detailed description of the characteristic and functioning of the PV plant and its connection are summarised in table 8 and detailed in paragraphs 5.4 to 5.5.5 below.

Table 8. Technical details of the proposed PV facility and connecting powerline

Component	Description/Dimensions
Technology	Solar Photovoltaic
Capacity of the facility	Maximum Export Capacity (@ the point of connection): up to <b>210 MW</b> Installed power capacity - DC side (PV modules): up to 328.1 MWp Installed power capacity - AC side (inverters): up to 262.5 MW
Height of PV structures	1.0 - 4.5 m above ground
Surface area to be covered (including associated infrastructure like roads)	Project footprint / fenced area is up to <b>450 ha</b> . Surface area (within the project footprint) covered by PV modules, internal roads, MV stations, HV substation and BESS is up to 225 ha (cover ratio up to 0.5)
Area occupied by both permanent and construction laydown areas	Project footprint / fenced area is up to <b>450 ha</b> . Surface area (within the project footprint) covered by PV modules, internal roads, MV stations, HV substation and BESS is up to 225 ha (cover ratio up to 0.5) The construction camp (temporary) will be up to 20 ha in extent, within the project footprint, and will correspond to the area used for the BESS.
Number of inverters required	Each Medium voltage station will be equipped with DC/AC inverters that convert Direct Current (DC) into Alternate Current (AC) at a low voltage (typically 600 V). There will be 87 medium voltage stations of 3.0 MW each throughout the proposed development, plus one medium voltage station of 1.5 MW. PV technology is in constant and rapid evolution, this means that the final choice of the type (e.g. central inverters or string inverters) and model of inverter can be taken at the time of the commission date, on the basis of the availability of inverters of the worldwide market and of the cost-efficiency curve. In any case, the total installed capacity of the

	inverters (AC side) will be up to 300 MWac.
Area occupied by inverter/transformer stations/substations	There will be 88 medium voltage stations throughout the proposed development. Each will have an area of approximately 30 m <sup>2</sup> . Therefore, the combined area of the medium voltage stations will be 2640 m <sup>2</sup> .
Control rooms	The substation and switching station will be equipped with 2 control rooms. The control rooms will have a length of 30 m and a width of 11 m. Therefore, each of the control room will have an area of 330 m <sup>2</sup> : 660 m <sup>2</sup> in total.
Workshops/Warehouses	Three warehouses / workshops will be constructed within close proximity to the on-site substation and switching station. The three warehouses will have an area of approximately 300 m <sup>2</sup> each: 900 m <sup>2</sup> in total.
On-site substation	The on-site 22kV (or 33kV)/132kV step-up substation and 132kV switching station will host two 250 MVA 22kV (or 33kV)/132kV transformers (one as spare). On-site substation and switching station occupy a footprint of approx. 11,250 m <sup>2</sup> . This area includes the control buildings.
Areas occupied by buildings	Medium-voltage stations occupy a footprint of to 2,640 m <sup>2</sup> .  On-site substation and switching station occupy a footprint of approx. 11,250 m <sup>2</sup> . This area includes the control buildings.  Workshops & Warehouses occupy a footprint of approx. 300 m <sup>2</sup> each. In total, 3 warehouses are foreseen: 900 m <sup>2</sup> in total.  Therefore, the total area occupied by buildings (MV stations, HV substation, Workshop & Warehouse) amounts to approx. <b>14,790 m<sup>2</sup> (1.5 ha)</b> .  The Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) will be located in the area where the camp site will be for the purpose of the construction phase. This area will be approximately <b>20 ha</b> in size.
Number of 132kV powerlines	One (1) overhead 132kV powerline (double circuit) ( <b>Virginia 4 132 kV Powerline</b> ) ± <b>13.36 km long</b> , connecting on-site HV substation and switching station of Solar Park to a new 132kV/400kV substation and 400kV switching station (Florida 132kV/400kV Substation).  Virginia 4 132 kV Powerline forms part of this EIA process, but Florida 132kV/400kV Substation will form part of the EIA process of the Florida Solar Park, proposed by Piscis Energy (Pty) Ltd (DFFE Ref No. 14/12/16/3/3/2/2322).
Voltage of overhead powerline	132 kV
Servitude of overhead powerline	36 m (18 m from each side of the centre line)
Height of overhead powerline	up to 25 m above the ground level
Type of powerline structures	Steel monopole (double circuit)
Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)	Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) of <b>210 MW / 1260 MWh</b> (6-hour storage), with a footprint up to <b>20 ha</b> within the Project footprint / fenced area
Access road	The development area will have direct access from <b>regional road R70</b> running from the N1, North-East of Aldam, in the direction of Meloding and Virginia. This road crosses BLOMSKRAAL 216 passing along the north-eastern corner of the development area of Virginia 4.
Length of internal roads	Approximately 40,000 m
Width of internal roads	Up to 8.0 m, with a road reserve up to 13.5 m

Height of fencing	3.0 m
Type of fencing	Wire mesh fencing with video-surveillance system

### 5.3 LAYOUT OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND STRUCTURES ON SITE

The layout of the proposed development is the result of a comparative study of various layout alternatives and is defined while considering results of specialist studies conducted during the Scoping and EIA phases. The PV plant is designed and designed to minimize visual and noise impacts, to operate safely and to assure a high level of reliability, with low water consumption and the need for easy and quick maintenance and repair for  $\pm 35$  to 40 years. **The footprint (fenced area) of the Virginia 4 Solar Park will be up to 450 ha.**

The main drives of the proposed layout are:

- to maximize energy production and reliability of the PV plant, by choosing proven solar technologies; mono or bi-facial mono/polycrystalline solar modules mounted on single-axis horizontal trackers (SAT) or fixed mounting systems.
- to develop the PV power plant in the southern section of the farm, avoiding high potential agricultural land and natural areas.
- to avoid the Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBAs).

Only the connecting powerline will traverse small areas of indigenous vegetation, an endangered ecosystem (Vaal-Vet Sandy Grasslands) in terms of section 52 of NEMBA.

The footprint of Virginia 4 Solar Park and portions of the Virginia 4 132kV Powerline will be developed within 100m from the edge of wetlands.

The proposed layout plan (attached as Annexure B and shown in Figure 2 below) was drawn using PV modules mounted on trackers. If PV modules are mounted on fixed mounting systems, layout plans will not change, except for the orientation of PV arrays: East-West instead of North-South.

The required footprint - corresponding on the fenced area - will be the same: up to 450 ha, and maximum height of structures (PV modules and support frames) will be  $\pm 4.5$  m above ground level. Impacts and mitigation measures will remain the same. The project layout and plant components are detailed in the following drawings also attached in Annexure B:

Table 9. List of maps and drawings included as Annexure B

#	Code	Title
01	VR4SP_00_LM1_r2	Locality Map (3 maps)
02	VR4SP_00_LM2_r1	PV Park Sensitivity Map (2 maps)
03	VR4SP_00_LM3_r1	Powerline Alignment and Sensitivity Map (3 maps)
04	VR4SP_00_LM4_r0	Cumulative Map
05	VR4SP_00_LM5_r0	Development Area and CBAs Map
06	VR4SP_01_r1	Layout plan – PV power plant up to 210 MW
07	VR4SP_02_r0	Mounting System, Option 1 (fixed)
08	VR4SP_03_r0	Mounting System, Option 2 (Trackers)
09	VR4SP_04_r0	Medium-Voltage Stations
10	VR4SP_05_r0	Control Building and MV receiving station
11	VR4SP_06_r0	On-site substation and switching station
12	VR4SP_07_r0	132 kV Steel monopole structure

13	VR4SP_08_r0	Warehouse (2 drawings)
14	VR4SP_09_r0	Florida 400kV substation (*)
15	VR4SP_10_r0	400kV Tower – Eskom Specs (*)



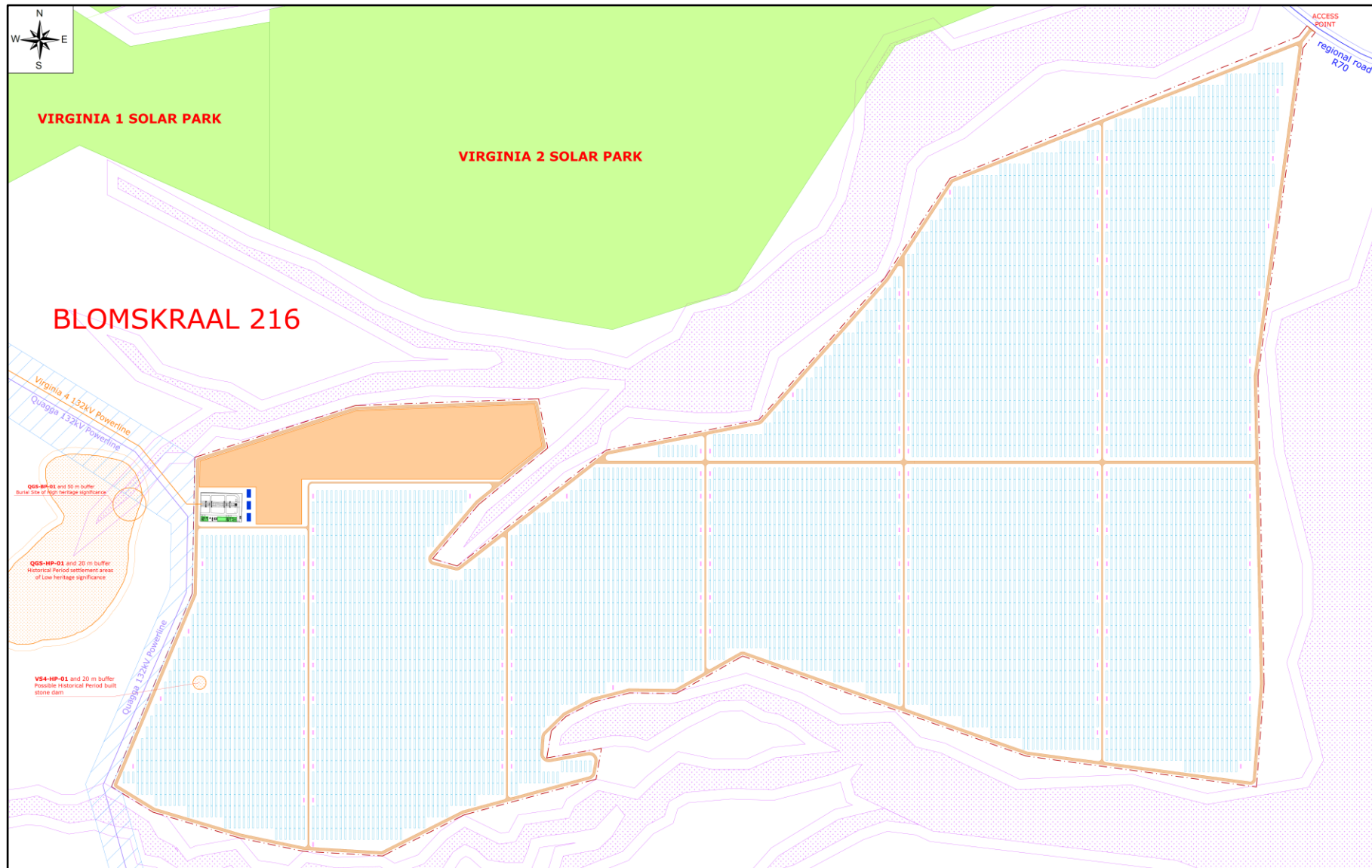


Figure 2. Proposed Layout Plan of the Virginia 4 Solar Park

## 5.4 PRIMARY COMPONENTS

The proposed development (PV Power Plant and connection infrastructure) consists of the installation of the following equipment:

- PV modules (mono-crystalline, poly-crystalline, mono or bi-facial modules) with maximum generation capacity up to 210 MW.
- Mounting systems for the PV arrays (single-axis horizontal trackers or fixed structures) and related foundations.
- Internal cabling and string boxes.
- Medium voltage stations, hosting DC/AC inverters and LV/MV power transformers.
- Medium voltage receiving station(s).
- Workshops & warehouses.
- One on-site high-voltage substation with high-voltage power transformers, stepping up voltage from 22 kV (or 33 kV) to 132 kV, and one 132k V busbar with metering and protection devices (switching station).
- A **new 132 kV power line (double circuit)**, approximately **13.36 km long** for the connection of the on-site substation to the Florida 132kV/400kV Substation, planned to be located on Portion 1 of the Farm Florida 633, Ventersburg RD (this 132kV/400kV substation is not part of the current EIA process)
- **Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)**, with a Maximum Export Capacity up to 210 MW and up to 6-hour storage capacity of 1 260 MWh), with a footprint of 20 ha, next to the on-site high-voltage substation, within the PV plant footprint / fenced areas.
- Electrical system and UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply) devices.
- Lighting system.
- Grounding system.
- Access point from the regional road R70.
- Internal roads.
- Fencing of the site and alarm and video-surveillance system.
- Water access point, water supply pipelines, water treatment facilities.
- Patented Sewage system.

### 5.4.1 PROJECT FUNCTIONING

Solar energy facilities using PV technology convert sun energy to generate electricity through a process known as the Photovoltaic Effect, which consists of the generation of electrons by photons of sunlight to create electrical energy.

The preferred technical solutions are:

- Mono / bi-facial mono / polycrystalline modules, mounted on:
- fixed mounting systems or mounted on horizontal 1-axis trackers, which at present represent the best performing options in terms of reliability and costs/efficiency.

PV technology is in constant and rapid evolution, and the final choice of the type of solar modules (mono-crystalline or polycrystalline, mono or bi-facial) and mounting system (fixed or tracker) can be taken at the time of the commission date, based on availability of PV modules and mounting systems, of the worldwide market and the cost-efficiency curve.

The required footprint - corresponding on the fenced area - will not exceed 450 ha, and the maximum height of the structures (PV modules and support frames) will be approximately 4.5m above the ground level. Therefore, the impacts and mitigation measures will not change, regardless of the technology to be applied as described above.

PV modules will be assembled on zinc-coated steel or aluminium frames, to form PV arrays. The metal frames that sustain PV arrays are set to the ground by fixed support poles.

**A) In the case of PV modules mounted on fixed mounting systems:**

Each mounting frame will host several PV modules along two or more parallel rows consisting of PV modules placed side by side, with the position of the PV arrays northwards and at an optimized tilt. The rows are mounted one on top of the other, with an overall mounting structure height up to 4.5 meters above ground level.

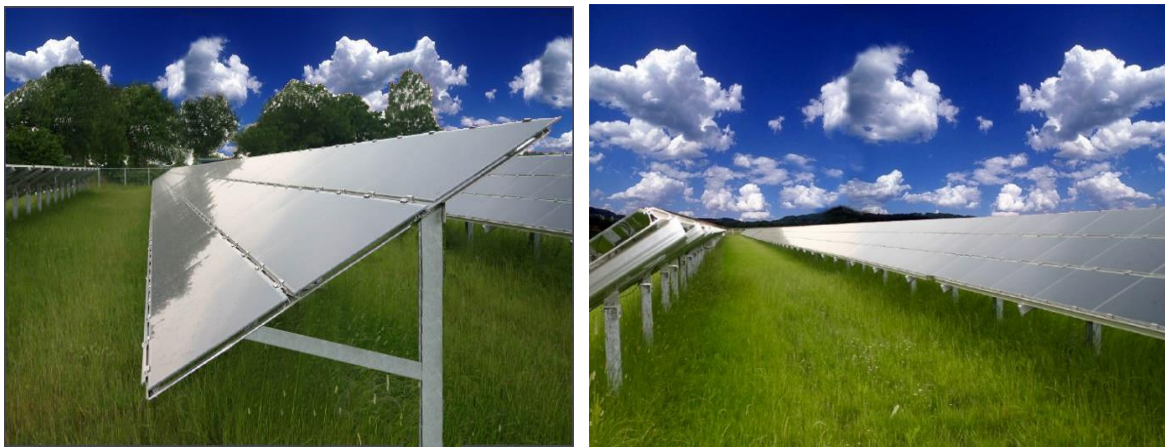


Figure 3. Lateral views of PV arrays mounted on fixed mounting systems



Figure 4. Frontal view of PV arrays mounted on fixed mounting systems

For further details, please refer to the figures 3 and 4 above and to the drawings included in Annexure B.

**B) In the case of PV modules mounted on trackers:**

Each PV array is composed of several PV modules disposed along one or more parallel rows consisting of PV modules placed side by side. Each tracker is composed of several PV arrays North-South oriented and linked by a horizontal axis, driven by a motor. The horizontal axis allows the rotation of PV arrays toward the West and East direction, in order to follow the daily sun path.

The maximum mounting structure height will be up to 4.5 meters above ground level.



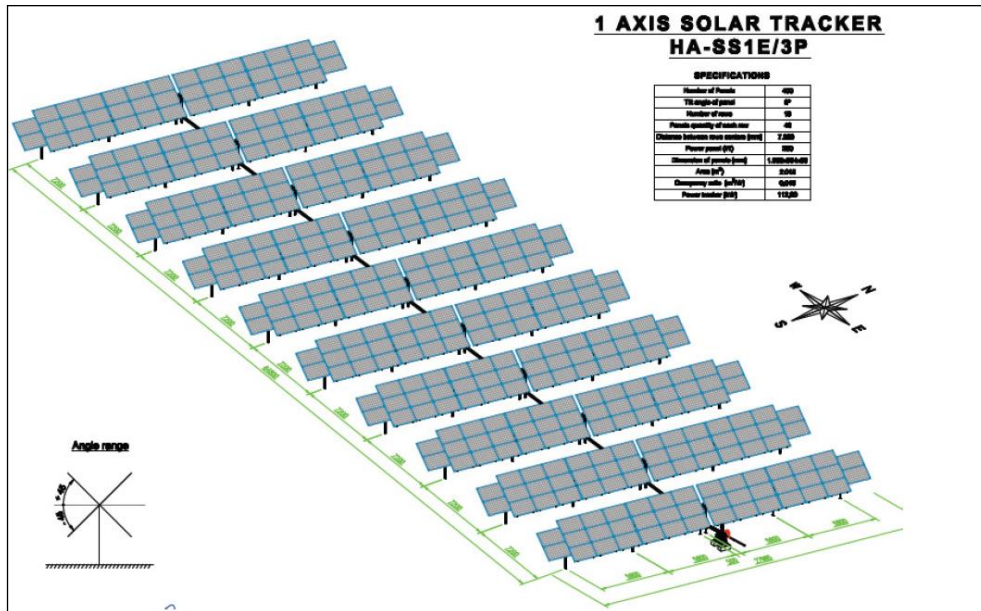


Figure 5. Simulation views of the PV arrays mounted on 1-axis horizontal tracker



Figure 6. Front views of the PV arrays mounted on horizontal 1-axis tracker

For further details, see the drawing in Annexure B:

**C) In both cases:**

PV modules are series-connected outlining PV strings made of several modules, so that the PV string voltage fits into the voltage range of the inverters. PV strings are set up to be connected to DC-connection boxes. Each String Box allows the parallel connection of several PV strings (called “PV sub-field”).

String Boxes monitor the currents in photovoltaic modules and can promptly diagnose faults. String boxes are also designed with a circuit breaker in order to disconnect the photovoltaic sub-fields from the inverters.

The PV sub-fields are thought to be linked to central inverters, located in medium voltage stations. Each station comprises prefabricate buildings designed to host DC/AC inverters and a medium voltage power transformer. The DC/AC inverters are deemed to convert direct current (DC) into alternate current (AC) at low voltage (270 V); subsequently the AC will pass through a medium-voltage transformer in order to increase the voltage up to 22kV (or 11 kV). The medium-voltage stations are detailed in the drawing in Annexure B.

The energy delivered from the medium voltage stations will be collected into one (or more) medium voltage receiving station(s), parallel connecting all the PV fields of the PV generator. From the medium voltage receiving station, the energy will be delivered to two high-voltage power transformers (250 MVA each, plus one as spare), which will step up the electric energy from the medium voltage level (22 kV or 33 kV) to the required connecting voltage (*i.e.*, 132kV). The power transformers will be connected to an on-site 132kV busbar (the so-called “switching station”), to be equipped with protection and metering devices.

New on-site HV substation will be equipped with circuit breakers upstream and downstream, to disconnect the PV power plant and/or power line in case of failure or grid problems. The layout of the on-site high-voltage substation and switching station as well as of the control building are detailed in the drawings included in Annexure B.

Virginia 4 Solar Park will connect to a **new 132kV/400kV substation and 400kV switching station (Florida 132kV/400kV Substation)**, through a new 132 kV powerline **13.36 km long (Virginia 4 132 kV Powerline)**. The new 132 kV powerline (double circuit) will consist of a series of steel or aluminium monopole structures to be installed approximately 200–260 m apart, with supporting electrical cables. The proposed structures will be **between 18 m and 25 m** high, and the basement of each pole will have a footprint of approximately 0.6 m<sup>2</sup>.

The construction phase of the powerline will last  $\pm$  9 months and will involve a team of 10-15 people. Monopole structures installation will not require the establishment of a permanent construction site, but will be done step-by-step, to affect small stretches of corridor for a short time.

An access road (dirt road),  $\pm$  4.0 m wide, may be constructed in the power line servitude, for construction and maintenance activities. At the turning points, the road reserve will be up to 14 m in order to allow the transportation of abnormal loads (steel monopoles).

Site preparation will consist of the clearing of a powerline servitude and vegetation removal will be done within the servitude, for the minimum width required by installation activities and by the Eskom security rules. Vegetation should not interfere with the high-voltage cables.

The proposed 132 kV powerline (double circuit) may be built by Lupus Energy (Pty) Ltd and/or Eskom but will be owned and operated by Eskom Distribution. This will depend on a Eskom grid code in relation to IPP's (Independent Power Producers) and Connection Agreement to be finalized prior to or simultaneously with the conclusion of a PPA (Power Purchase Agreement) regarding options for retaining ownership of the connection once built.

The Virginia 4 132kV Powerline will traverse the following properties, according to the proposed powerline alignment, within the Powerline Study Corridor:

- Farm Blomskraal 216, Ventersburg RD (the project site);
- Farm De Dam 27, Ventersburg RD;
- Farm Tevrede 361, Ventersburg RD;
- Farm Biddulph 329, Ventersburg RD;
- Remainder of the Farm Le Roux 766, Ventersburg RD;
- Portions 1 and 4 of the Farm Florida 633, Ventersburg RD;

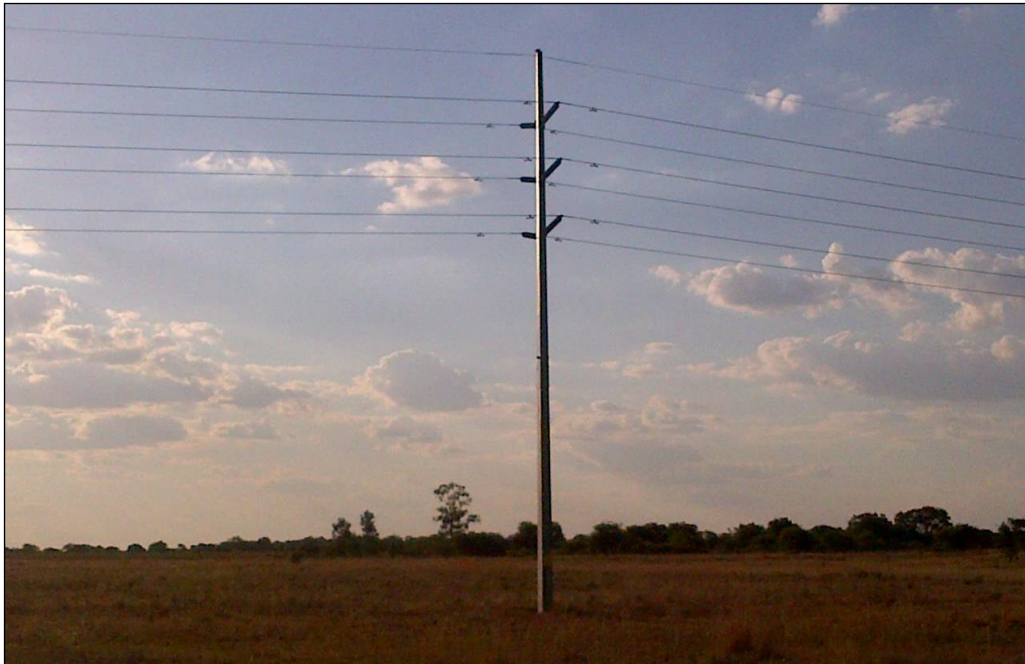
located within the Matjhabeng Local Municipality, Lejweleputswa District Municipality, Free State Province.

The Florida 132kV/400kV Substation, where the Virginia 4 Powerline will be connected to, is planned to be located on Portion 1 of the Farm Florida 633, Ventersburg RD and will be connected to the **Eskom Theseus Main Transmission Substation (MTS)** via a new 400 kV powerline 6.0 km long (the “**Florida 400 kV Powerline**”).

Virginia 4 132 kV Powerline forms part of this EIA process, while the Florida 132kV/400kV Substation and the Florida 400 kV Powerline will form part of the EIA process of the Florida Solar Park, applied for by Piscis Energy (Pty) Ltd (DFFE Ref No. 14/12/16/3/3/2/2232). This Florida 132kV/400kV Substation and the Florida 400 kV Powerline will be shared by several projects (*i.e.* the Virginia 4, Corona, Quagga and Florida Solar Parks), but the applicant in terms of the environmental process is **Piscis Energy (Pty) Ltd**. Once built, this shared 400kV connection infrastructure will be owned and operated by **Eskom**.

The **Eskom Theseus Main Transmission Substation (MTS)** is located 18.8 km North-East of the north-western corner of project site.

**The power generation capacity at the delivery point (Maximum Export Capacity) will be up to 210 MW.**



**Figure 7. Steel monopole structure for a 132 kV powerline (double circuit)**

#### **5.4.2 BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM (BESS)**

A Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) with an output capacity up to **210 MW** and a storage capacity up to **1 260 MWh** (6-hour storage) will be installed next to an on-site step-up substation and switching station, in the footprint and fenced area of Virginia 4 PV Park.

The lithium-ion batteries will store energy at times of low energy demand and release the energy to the grid at times of peak demand. The battery energy storage system can also provide other grid services (if required by Eskom) aimed to improve grid stability and power quality, by turning on and off in fractions of a second, such as “Fast Frequency Response” (FFR).



The Battery Storage Facility will have a footprint of **up to 20ha** and will comprise of the following equipment:

- Up to 252 containers (each up to 40m<sup>2</sup>), each with a storage capacity up to 5 MWh on a concrete platform. These will house the batteries, management system and auxiliaries.
- Up to 126 transformer stations (up to 35m<sup>2</sup> each).
- Up to an additional 10 m<sup>2</sup> per container for cooling units.
- Internal access roads up to 8.0 m wide between rows of containers.
- BESS will be connected:
  - to the PV plant by means of DC/DC inverters, and
  - to the 22 kV (or 33 kV) bus-bay of the on-site step-up substation by means of kiosk transformers, medium-voltage overhead lines and/or underground cables.

Batteries to be installed in containers will be Lithium-ion and battery cells will be pre-assembled at the supplier prior to delivery. NO electrolytes will be transported to and handled on site.

The Battery System will be able to store electrical energy and charge and discharge electrical energy when connected to a Power Conversion Unit (PCU), which performs the current conversion from LV DC to MV AC (and *vice versa*). The battery is connected at AC MV level to a Renewable Power Plant for HV conversion and grid interconnection.

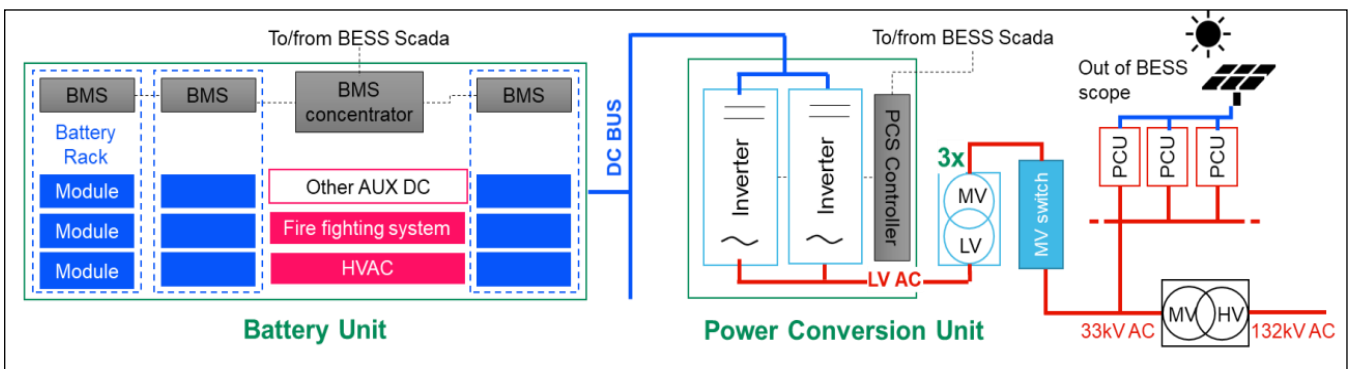


Figure 8. Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)

Battery Storage in combination to solar power plants is capable to provide multiple services to the plant and to the power transmission network adding flexibility to the system. Possible applications include amongst others: renewable generation time shifting, unbalancing reduction, curtailment avoidance, frequency regulation, voltage support, spinning reserve. A Fire Management Plan has been compiled for the BESS and PV Park and is attached to the EMP.

### 5.4.3 ACCESS ROAD AND INTERNAL ROADS

Access to the Virginia 4 Solar Park will be from the **regional road R70** running from the N1, North-East of Aldam, in the direction of Meloding and Virginia. This road crosses the Farm BLOMSKRAAL 216 (the project site) passing along the north-eastern corner of the development area of Virginia 4.

Access point from the R70 road is located at: **28°13' 08.6" S ; 27° 01' 14.2" E.**

During construction phase, the access point from R70 will have a road reserve wider than 13.5 m (up to 16.0 m) to allow the transportation of abnormal goods like power transformers, etc.

During operation, the access point will be up to 8 m wide with a road reserve up to 13.5 m.

Internal roads will consist of gravel roads designed in accordance with engineering standards. The roads will have a width of 4.0 m allowing for the slow-moving heavy vehicles. During construction phase, some of the internal roads will have a road reserve wider than 13.5 m (up to 16.0 m) to allow the transportation of abnormal goods (e.g. power transformers, etc.).

Once the solar farm is in operation, the internal roads will mainly be used for maintenance and inspections. The vertical alignment of the roads will not present significant challenges due to the flatness of the terrain. The entire development will be contained inside a fenced area and the roads are not intended for public use.



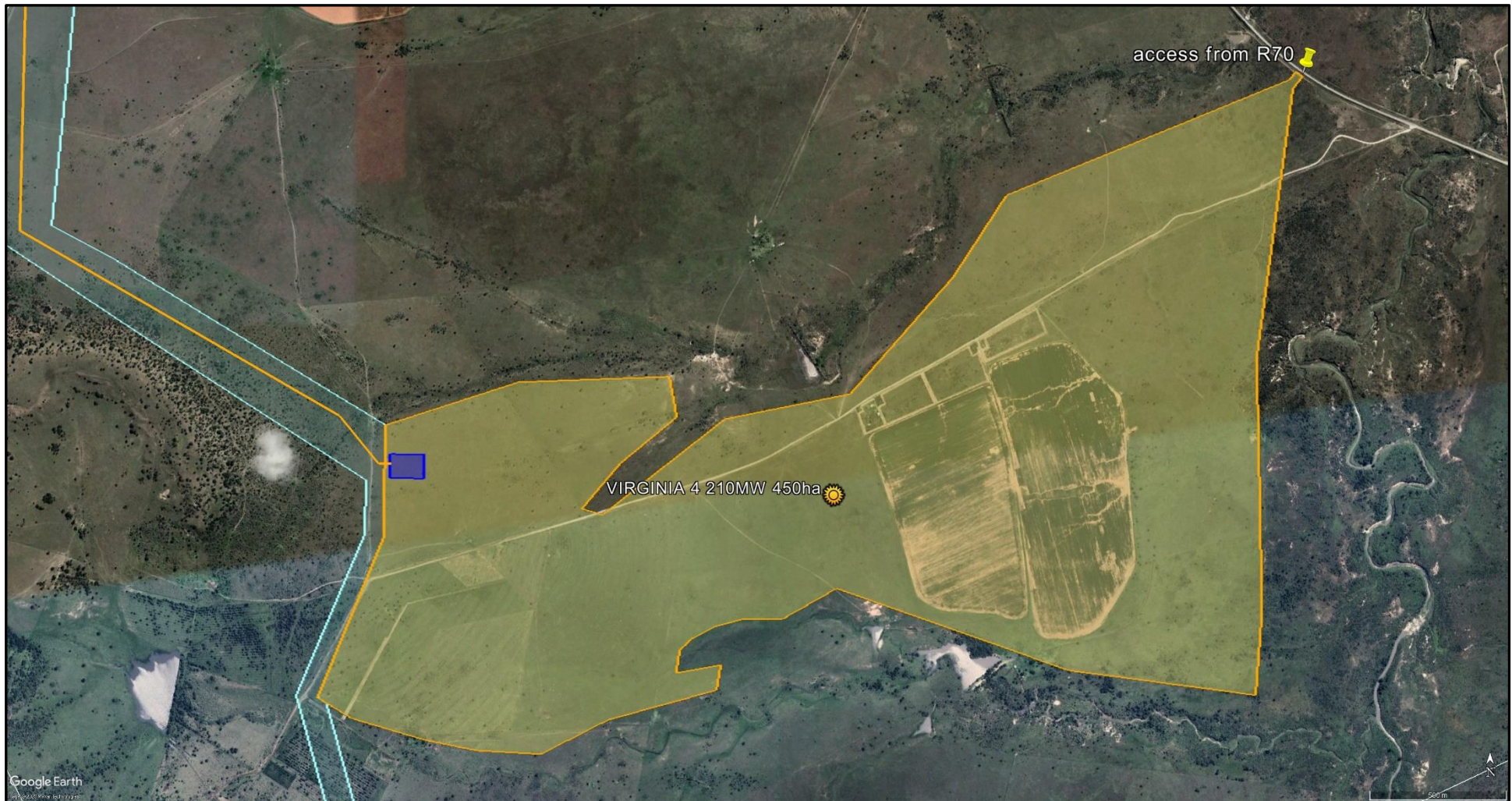


Figure 9. Access from the regional road R70

## **5.4.4 TRAFFIC IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT**

### **5.4.4.1 Traffic impact – construction phase**

Approximately 150 people are expected to be employed during the construction period (24 months).

As indicated in Table 2.6 of the Traffic Impact Assessment, the expected number of vehicle trips to and from the site during working days peak hour will be 18 during the construction period and 15 during operation.

Medium and heavy trucks will access / leave the site only during the working days (Monday to Friday), during daytime. The provision of a fuelling area on the work site could reduce the load of heavy vehicles on public roads. The installation of one steel fuel tanks (capacity of <30 000 litres) is recommended.

### **5.4.4.2 Traffic impact – operation phase**

The traffic impact during the operation phase will be insignificant, considering that about 35 people will work daily on the PV facility, in the following manner:

- During the daytime approximately 17 people.
- During the night-time, approximately 8 people.

As indicated in Table 2.7 of the Traffic Impact Assessment, the expected number of vehicle trips to and from the site during peak hour will be 15 during the operational phase.

## **5.4.5 LIGHTING SYSTEM**

The lighting system will consist of the following equipment:

- Floodlight-towers: maximum 10 meters high, with directional lamps (LED type) of 120 W, installed around the HV loop-in loop-out substation. Normal lighting: 15 lux; up to 40 lux in case of emergency.
- Street lighting along internal roads, for the stretch from the access point up to the HV substation inside the property: 1 streetlamp, maximum 5.5 meters high, every 20 meters, having a LED lamp of 120 W.
- 2x120 W spotlights (LED type) mounted on the top of medium-voltage stations.

The lighting of the MV stations and of the on-site HV substation will be on only in case of intrusion/emergency or necessity to reach the MV stations / HV substation during the night. During the night, the video-surveillance system will use infra-red (or micro-wave) video-cameras, which do not need a lighting system (which could reduce the functioning).

## **5.4.6 STORMWATER COLLECTION SYSTEM**

Given the low rainfall, flat topography and low flow speed of run-off, no formal storm water structures are required as the proposed gravel roads will be developed at ground level so as not to disturb the natural flow of storm water. This means that run-off will not be concentrated, and the existing drainage patterns will be left undisturbed.

## 5.4.7 WATER REQUIREMENTS

### 5.4.7.1 Water requirements during the construction phase

The construction phase will last approximately 24 months.

#### a) Construction of internal gravel roads

- Water is necessary for the construction of internal gravel roads, in order to get the gravel compacted to optimum moisture content (OMC).
- The surface of internal gravel roads will be approximately 180 000 m<sup>2</sup>.
- 50 liters of water / m<sup>2</sup> of internal of roads will be required.
- Water consumption for internal roads will be: 180,000 m<sup>2</sup> x 50 l/m<sup>2</sup> = 9,000 m<sup>3</sup>.

#### b) Workers

- Approximately 150 people are expected to be employed during the construction period, although this number can increase to 300 for short spaces of time during peak periods. This number can be higher in the case the Project Company - once being selected as Preferred Bidder by the DMRE and having finalized the Connection Agreement with Eskom, where in particular it is agreed the envisaged connection timeline - evaluates to build the Virginia 4 Solar Park in a timeframe shorter than 24 months (*i.e.* 528 working days). For example, in the case the construction works are planned to last only 18 months (*i.e.* 396 working days), the average number of workers required on site during construction is 200.
- Each worker needs 50 liters / 8 working hours for sanitary use.
- Water consumption will be:
  - 150 people x 50 l/person x 528 working days = 3 960 m<sup>3</sup> over 24 months, or:
  - 200 people x 50 l/person x 396 working days = 3 960 m<sup>3</sup> over 18 months.

#### c) Concrete production

- Concrete is necessary for the basements of the medium-voltage stations, the high-voltage loop-in loop-out substation, the control building, the warehouse and workshop, the basement of the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and for the foundations of the mounting systems. The overall amount of concrete to be produced will be *approximately* 30 000 m<sup>3</sup>.
- 200 litres of water are needed for 1 cubic meter of concrete.
- Water consumption will be: 30 000 m<sup>3</sup> x 200 liters / m<sup>3</sup> = **6 000 m<sup>3</sup>**.

#### d) Vehicle cleaning

As mitigation measure, the cleaning of vehicles like excavators, mechanical diggers and pile rammers will be done once or twice per month and not during working days, also in order to not increase the water requirement during construction activities. In order not to waste a large amount of water, high pressure cleaners will be used. Overall, the water requirement for cleaning activity is very low.

Overall and average water consumption during construction is detailed in the following table.

Table 10. Water consumption during the construction phase of the project

WATER REQUIREMENT DURING THE CONSTRUCTION PHASE OF THE PROJECT		
DESCRIPTION	UNIT	TOTAL
Timeframe of the construction activities	<i>months</i>	24
Timeframe of the construction activities - calendar days	<i>days</i>	760
Overall water consumption for internal roads	<i>m<sup>3</sup></i>	9,000
Overall water consumption for sanitary use	<i>m<sup>3</sup></i>	3,960
Overall water consumption for concrete production	<i>m<sup>3</sup></i>	6,000
<b>OVERALL WATER CONSUMPTION</b>	<b><i>m<sup>3</sup></i></b>	<b>18,960</b>
<b>Daily water consumption (average over 760 calendar days)</b>	<b><i>m<sup>3</sup>/day</i></b>	<b>26.3</b>

Storage tanks will be sized to provide a reserve of water approximately **200 m<sup>3</sup>**.

#### 5.4.7.2 Water requirements during the operational phase

During operation, water is only required for the operational team on site (sanitary use), as well as for the cleaning of the solar panels. Further water consumption must be only for routine washing of vehicles and other similar uses.

##### a) Water for sanitary use

Approximately 40 people will be employed during the operation phase of the PV power plant, which will have a lifetime of approximately 35-40 years.

Virginia 4 Solar Park will be in operation 7 days per week; therefore, personnel will operate in shifts. The surveillance team will be present during daytime, night-time, and weekends. The average number of people working on site will be of 17 people daytime and 8 people at night. The average daily water consumption for sanitary use is estimated to be 150 litres/day/person for 25 people (17 people daytime and 8 people at night). The daily water consumption will be approximately 3 750 litres/day.

##### b) Water consumption to clean the PV modules

The cleaning activities of the solar panels will take place twice per year. It is assumed that up to 1.0 litre per m<sup>2</sup> of PV panel surface will be needed. Therefore, the amount of water for cleaning is up to 1 530 m<sup>3</sup> per cleaning cycle and 3 060 m<sup>3</sup>/year.

PV modules cleaning activity can last less than 1 month. If the cleaning activity lasts approximately 2 weeks (24 working days), the daily water consumption will be approximately **63 750 liters/day, over 24 days**.

#### 5.4.7.3 CONCLUSION

The daily water requirement will be approximately **3 750 liters/day** over 12 months for sanitary use (i.e. **112 500 l/month** and **1 370 m<sup>3</sup>/year**). The water consumption will increase to up to **67 500 liters/day** during the cleaning of the solar modules (63 750 liters/day for cleaning activity and 3 750 for sanitary use), which will last less than a month and will occur twice a year during the dry period. PV modules are conceived as self-cleaning with rain.

It is further proposed that **90,000 l** of water will be stored in **storage tanks** for fire, emergency and washing of panels twice a year. The overall and average water consumption during operation is detailed in the table below



Table 11. Water consumption during the operational phase of the project

<b>WATER REQUIREMENT DURING THE OPERATIONAL PHASE</b>		
<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>UNIT</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Average daily water consumption for sanitary use	<i>l/day</i>	3,750
Average daily water consumption during cleaning activity (*)	<i>l/day</i>	67,500
Average monthly water consumption for sanitary use (over 30 days)	<i>l/month</i>	112,500
<b>Annual water consumption for sanitary use</b>	<b><i>m<sup>3</sup>/year</i></b>	<b>1,370</b>
<b>Annual water consumption for PV modules cleaning activities (twice/year)</b>	<b><i>m<sup>3</sup>/year</i></b>	<b>3,060</b>
<b>Annual water consumption during operation</b>	<b><i>m<sup>3</sup>/year</i></b>	<b>4,430</b>
<b>Daily water consumption during operation (average over 365 days)</b>	<b><i>m<sup>3</sup>/day</i></b>	<b>12.14</b>

(\*) over 12 working days, twice per year

#### 5.4.7.4 Water provision during construction and operation

Water needs for the construction phase (18 960 m<sup>3</sup> over approximately 24 months) and the operational phase (4 430 m<sup>3</sup>/year) will be obtained from on-site boreholes. A Water Use License Application will be submitted to DWS.

#### 5.4.8 SEWERAGE

Considering that the proposed development will not include formal residential properties there is no need to connect to the municipal sewer reticulation system. Sewer reticulation will be handled by a suitable patented and commercially available wastewater treatment system. The sewer system will consist of an installation to serve the offices of the control building. The system will be installed in line with the requirements of the manufacturer. Typical systems consist of a conservancy tank (built underground on site), and a patented digester. Most systems require electricity to power the pumps and fans used in aeration process, although some systems use wind power (whirlybird). The system could require chlorine tablets available commercially.

Effluent from the wastewater treatment system will be suitable for irrigation or re-used in buildings as water for flushing of toilets, or fire-fighting purposes. This could reduce the water requirement of the development substantially. During construction, chemical toilets will be positioned across the construction area at a ratio of 1 toilet for every 15 workers.

Once the project has been awarded Preferred Bidder Status and it is confirmed that the project is going to proceed, a Water Use License Application will be submitted to the Department of Water and Sanitation for all water uses triggered in terms of Section 21 of the National Water Act, 1998 (Act No. 36 of 1998).

#### 5.4.9 REFUSE REMOVAL

During the construction phase, solid waste will mainly consist of vegetation material because of the clearance of vegetation. Other type of solid waste will include, amongst others, wood from packaging, boxboards, expanded polystyrene and household waste. Vegetation material from clearing activity can be recycled to be re-used as organic fertilizer. Other solid wastes will be recycled as much as possible. Non-recyclable waste will be delivered to the closest legal landfill site.

During the operational phase (approx. 35 to 40 years), solid waste will mainly consist of household waste from the operational team. Other type of solid waste will come from the maintenance activity in case of failure of some components. At the end of the project lifetime, the PV plant will be decommissioned. Silicon of the PV modules and cables (copper and/or aluminium conductor) will be recycled, as well as the aluminium (or zinc steel) frames and piles of the mounting systems.

Virginia 4 Solar plant will enter into an agreement with the Matjabeng Local Municipality for the PV plant’s refuse at the nearby municipal refuse site. No refuse will be buried or incinerated on site. Measures to manage waste are included in the attached Draft EMP.

**5.5 TEMPORARY CONSTRUCTION CAMP**

**The construction camp (± 20ha) will be located on the area planned for the BESS.** The BESS is installed right at the end of the development period and is acquired as a complete unit with components. Once the construction camp area has been cleared and cleaned up the BESS will be established on the exact same site as the construction camp.

Table 12. Geographical coordinates of the construction camp & laydown areas

Virginia 4 Construction Camp (temporary)		
Point	Longitude	Latitude
P01	26° 59' 16.33" E	28° 13' 53.98" S
P02	26° 59' 16.33" E	28° 13' 57.63" S
P03	26° 59' 21.40" E	28° 13' 57.63" S
P04	26° 59' 21.40" E	28° 13' 53.20" S
P05	26° 59' 43.55" E	28° 13' 53.21" S
P06	26° 59' 48.16" E	28° 13' 49.94" S
P07	26° 59' 47.31" E	28° 13' 45.81" S
P08	26° 59' 27.48" E	28° 13' 46.44" S
P09	26° 59' 10.06" E	28° 13' 51.42" S
P10	26° 59' 10.01" E	28° 13' 53.98" S
<b>Overall footprint</b>		<b>20 ha</b>

The site’s location has been dictated by the nature of the works to be undertaken, specialist studies, site restrictions, town planning intended uses and access. The area identified for the construction site will meet the following requirements:

- sufficient size;
- proximity to existing roads;
- availability of water and energy;
- low environmental and landscape value;
- sufficient distance from residential areas; and
- proximity to the worksite.

To ensure environmental compatibility, the following factors have been considered:

- restrictions on land use (landscape, archaeological, natural, hydrological, etc.);
- terrain morphology;
- presence of high environmental value areas (e.g. wetlands); and
- sand & stone supply.

The establishment of the construction site will be divided into four phases. Steps included here do not follow a time sequence but considered overlapping and simultaneous events.

### **5.5.1 PHASE I**

The area will be fenced to prevent intrusion of animals and to protect against materials theft within the site. A video surveillance system will be provided.

### **5.5.2 PHASE II**

During the fencing operation as described in Phase I, tree species will be cut down and transferred to facilities for wood processing or compost.

### **5.5.3 PHASE III**

At completion of works defined in Phases I and II, the following step will be site clearing and construction of internal roads. An internal road network should ensure two-way traffic of heavy goods vehicles to minimize trips. The road system is planned with a width of 8m (access road) and 4m (internal roads). Roads will comprise of dry and compacted materials. The facility will require constant access control, a weighbridge for heavy trucks, removable structures for storage of tools and temporary storage areas. During Phase III, installation of MV/LV transformers connected to the Eskom grid is planned and laying of underground electrical cables.

### **5.5.4 PHASE IV**

Temporary storage areas of materials and workshops will be constructed and used for:

- temporary storage of photovoltaic modules;
- temporary storage for frames and piles of the mounting systems of the PV arrays;
- storage and processing of building material for construction (sand, gravel, concrete batching and mixing plant, steel, etc.);
- drinking water storage for human consumption;
- worker care facilities and site management buildings,
- prefabricated housing modules for workers who will require accommodation inside the site (only key personnel will be allowed to stay overnight);
- technical cabins and management offices;
- medical care unit in a prefabricated module, in order to allow immediate first aid and minor surgical emergency;
- recreation area and canteen (prefabricated modules);
- parking lots for employees (located close to the staff housing), for visiting staff (located close to the offices area), and for trucks and work vehicles during inactivity;
- workshop and storage facilities on the site for contractors;
- electrical network for living units, offices and service structures;
- water supply for living units through polyethylene pipes connected to storage;
- wastewater treatment system. Treated water will be used for dust suppression.
- temporary chemical toilets; and
- solid waste collection point.

### 5.5.5 EARTHWORKS

Clearing activity is required to remove shrubs and trees from the planned footprint ( $\pm 450$  ha). Due to the flatness of the development area, limited earthworks are envisaged for the installation of the PV module mounting systems. The mounting systems will consist of metallic frames to be assembled on-site, supported by pre-bored cast-in-situ concrete piles. Concrete ballasted footing foundations are also possible.

Earthworks will be required during the construction of internal roads and access road / access point. The vertical alignment of the roads will not present any significant challenges due to the flatness of the terrain so that no deep cuts or fills will be required. Considering a road pavement thickness of 300 mm and an overall road surface approximately 180,000 m<sup>2</sup>, the amount of cut or fill is estimated to be approximately 54,000 m<sup>3</sup>. Underground cables will be laid down along the internal roads.

Given the low rainfall, flat topography and low flow speed of run-off - no formal storm water structures are required as the proposed gravel roads will be developed at ground level, so as not to disturb the natural flow of storm water. This means that run-off will not be concentrated, and the existing drainage patterns will be left undisturbed.

Small earthworks will be required for the installation of the medium-voltage stations and of the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS). None of these activities should require earthworks in excess of 500 mm cut or fill. Only the foundation plate for the small high-voltage substation may require earthworks in excess of 500 mm cut or fill (the footprint will be up to 11,000 m<sup>2</sup>). The topsoil stripping will result in temporary spoils heaps which must be spread over the site upon completion of the project.

The concrete necessary for the basements of the medium-voltage stations, the high-voltage substation, the control building and the warehouse will be provided from commercial sources in the vicinity of the development. Gravel needed for construction of internal roads will be obtained from commercial sources in the area.



## 6 LEGAL AND POLICY REQUIREMENTS

The legislative and regulatory framework of reference for the solar power plant project includes statutory and non-statutory instruments by which National, Provincial and Local authorities exercise control throughout the development of the same project.

The development and the environmental assessment process of a solar power plant project involve various authorities dealing with the different issues related to the project (economic, social, cultural, biophysical etc.).

### 6.1 REGULATORY AUTHORITIES

#### 6.1.1 NATIONAL AUTHORITIES

At national level, the main regulatory authorities and agencies are:

- *Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE)*: the Department is competent and responsible for all policies related to energy, including renewable energy. Solar energy is contemplated and disciplined under the White Paper for Renewable Energy and the Department constantly conducts research activities in this respect.
- *National Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, (DFFE)*: the Department is competent and responsible for all environmental policies and is the controlling authority under the terms of NEMA and EIA Regulations. The DFFE is also the competent authority for the proposed project and is entrusted with granting the relevant environmental authorization.
- *National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA)*: the Regulator is competent and responsible for regulating all aspects dealing with the electricity sector and, in particular, issues the licence for independent power producers.
- *South African National Roads Agency Limited (SANRAL)*: the Agency is responsible for all National Road routes.

#### 6.1.2 PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES

At provincial level, the main regulatory authority is the Free State Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Environment and Tourism (DESTEA); this Department is responsible for environmental policies and is the Provincial authority in terms of NEMA and the EIA Regulations and is also the commenting authority for the proposed project.

#### 6.1.3 LOCAL AUTHORITIES

At a local level, the local and municipal authorities are the principal regulatory authorities responsible for planning, land use and the environment. In the Free State Province, Municipalities and District Municipalities are involved in various aspects of planning and the environment related to solar energy facilities development. The Local Municipality is Matjhabeng which is part of the Lejweleputswa District Municipality.

Under the terms of the Municipal System Act (Act no. 32 of 2000), all municipalities are deemed to go through an Integrated Development Planning (IDP) process to devise a five-year strategic development plan for the area of reference.

Identification of priority areas for conservation and their positioning within a planning framework of core, buffer, and transition areas is the subject of bioregional planning. Priority areas are individuated and defined with reference to visual and scenic resources and their identification and protection is granted through visual guidelines drafted for the area included in bioregional plans.

Local authorities also provide specific by-laws and policies to protect visual and aesthetic resources with reference to urban edge lines, scenic drives, special areas, signage, communication masts etc.

Finally, there are also various non-statutory bodies and environmental groups, who are involved in the definition of various aspects of planning and the protection of the environment, which may influence in the development of the proposed project.

## 6.2 LEGISLATION, REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES

A review of the relevant legislation involved in the proposed development is detailed in table 5 below.

Table 13. Review of relevant legislation

National Legislation	Sections applicable to the proposed project
Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act no. 108 of 1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bill of Rights (S2)</li> <li>• Rights to freedom of movement and residence (S22)</li> <li>• Environmental Rights (S24)</li> <li>• Property Rights (S25)</li> <li>• Access to information (S32)</li> <li>• Right to just administrative action (S33)</li> </ul>
Fencing Act (Act no. 31 of 1963)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Notice in respect of a boundary fence (S7)</li> <li>• Clearing bush for boundary fencing (S17)</li> <li>• Access to land for boundary fencing (S18)</li> </ul>
Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act (Act no. 43 of 1983)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prohibition of the spreading of weeds (S5)</li> <li>• Classification of categories of weeds &amp; invader plants and restrictions in terms of where these species may occur (Regulation 15 of GN R0148)</li> <li>• Requirement and methods to implement control measures for alien and invasive plant species (Regulation 15E of GN R0148)</li> </ul>
Environment Conservation Act (Act no. 73 of 1989)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Noise Control Regulations (GN R154 dated 10 January 1992)</li> </ul>
National Water Act (Act no. 36 of 1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entrustment of the National Government to the protection of water resources (S3)</li> <li>• Entitlement to use water (S4) - Schedule entitles a person to use water (reasonable domestic use, domestic gardening, animal watering, fire-fighting and recreational use)</li> <li>• Duty of Care to prevent and remedy effects of water pollution (S19)</li> <li>• Procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency incident which may impact on water resources (S20)</li> <li>• Definition of water use (S21)</li> <li>• Requirements for registration of water use (S26 and S34)</li> <li>• Definition of offences in terms of the Act (S151)</li> </ul>
National Forests Act (Act no. 84 of 1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protected trees</li> </ul>

<p>National Environmental Management Act (Act no. 107 of 1998)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Definition of National environmental principles (S2): strategic environmental management goals and objectives of the government applicable within the entire RSA to the actions of all organs of state, which may significantly affect the environment</li> <li>• <b>NEMA EIA Regulations 2014 (GN R. 982, 983, 984, 985 of 4 December 2014), as Amended</b></li> <li>• Requirement for potential impact on the environment of listed activities to be considered, investigated, assessed and reported on to the competent authority (S24 - Environmental Authorisations)</li> <li>• Duty of Care (S28): requirement that all reasonable measures are taken in order to prevent pollution or degradation from occurring, continuing and recurring, or, where this is not possible, to minimise and rectify pollution or degradation of the environment</li> <li>• Procedures to be followed in the event of an emergency incident which may impact on the environment (S30)</li> </ul>
<p>National Heritage Resources Act (Act no. 25 of 1999)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SAHRA, in consultation with the Minister and the MEC of every province must establish a system of grading places and objects which form part of the national estate (S7)</li> <li>• Provision for the protection of all archaeological objects, paleontological sites and material and meteorites entrusted to the provincial heritage resources authority (S35)</li> <li>• Provision for the conservation and care of cemeteries and graves by SAHRA, where this is not responsibility of any other authority (S36)</li> <li>• List of activities which require notification from the developer to the responsible heritage resources authority, with details regarding location, nature, extent of the proposed development (S38)</li> <li>• Requirement for the compilation of a Conservation Management Plan and permit from SAHRA for presentation of archaeological sites for promotion of tourism (S44)</li> </ul>
<p>National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (Act no. 10 of 2004)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision for the MEC for Environmental Affairs/Minister to publish a list of threatened ecosystems and in need of protection (S52)</li> <li>• Provision for the MEC for Environmental Affairs/Minister to identify any process or activity which may threaten a listed ecosystem (S53) Provision for the Member of the Executive Council for Environmental Affairs/Minister to publish a list of critical endangered species, endangered species, vulnerable species and protected species (S56(1) - see Government Gazette 29657</li> <li>• Three government notices have been published up to date: GN R150 (Commencement of Threatened and Protected Species Regulations, 2007), GN R151 (Lists of critically endangered, vulnerable and protected species) and GN R152 (Threatened Protected Species Regulations)</li> </ul>
<p>National Environmental Management: Air Quality Act (Act no. 39 of 2004)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision for measures in respect of dust control (S32)</li> <li>• Provision for measures to control noise (S34)</li> </ul>
<p>National Environmental Management: Waste Management Act (Act no. 59 of 2008)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waste management measures</li> <li>• Regulations and schedules</li> <li>• Listed activities which require a waste licence</li> </ul>
<p>Occupational Health and Safety Act (Act No. 85 of 1993)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and safety of all involved before and after construction must be protected.</li> </ul>

Guideline Documents	Sections applicable to the proposed project
South African National Standard (SANS) 10328, Methods for environmental noise impact assessments in terms of NEMA no. 107 of 1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact of noise emanating from a proposed development may have on occupants of surrounding land by determining the rating level</li> <li>• Noise limits are based on the acceptable rating levels of ambient noise contained in SANS 10103</li> </ul>
Draft Guidelines for Granting of Exemption Permits for the Conveyance of Abnormal Loads and for other Events on Public Roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Guidelines outline rules and conditions related to transport of abnormal loads and vehicles on public roads and detailed procedures to be followed for the grant of exemption permits</li> </ul>
Policies and White Papers	Sections applicable to the proposed project
The White Paper on the Energy Policy of the Republic of South Africa (December 1998)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The White Paper supports investment in renewable energy initiatives, such as the proposed solar power plant project</li> </ul>
The White Paper on Renewable Energy (November 2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The White Paper outlines the Government's vision, policy, principles, strategic goals and objectives for the promotion and the implementation of renewable energy in SA</li> </ul>
<p>Integrated Resource Plan (IRP1)</p> <p>Integrated Resources Plan 2010-2030 (IRP 2010).</p> <p>Update of the Integrated Resources Plan 2010-2030 (IRP 2019).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first Integrated Resource Plan (IRP1) was released late 2009. Subsequently the DoE decided to undertake a detailed process to determine South Africa's 20-year electricity plan, the Integrated Resources Plan 2010-2030 (IRP 2010).</li> <li>• The IRP1. IRP 2010 and IRP 2019 outline the Government's vision, policy and strategy in matter of the use of energy resources and the current status of energy policies in South Africa.</li> <li>• In the <b>IRP 2019</b>, published in October 2019, provision has been made to procure an additional <b>6 000 MW</b> of solar PV and <b>14 400 MW</b> of wind between <b>2022</b> and <b>2030</b>.</li> </ul>
Renewable Energy IPP Procurement Programme (REIPPPP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The IPP Procurement Programme, issued on 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2011 by the DoE.</li> </ul>
Equator Principles (July 2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Equator Principles provide that future developments with total project capital costs of US\$10 million or more shall be financed only if socially and environmentally sustainable</li> </ul>

## 7 NEED/DESIRABILITY OF THE PROJECT

South Africa's electricity supply still heavily relies upon coal power plants, whereas the current number of renewable energy power plants is still limited. In the last few years, the demand for electricity in South Africa has been growing at a steady rate.

These factors, if coupled with the rapid advancement in community development, have determined the growing consciousness of the significance of environmental impacts, climate change and the need for sustainable development. The use of renewable energy technologies is a sustainable way in which to meet future energy requirements.

In the **IRP 2019**, issued by the Department of Energy (now **Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE)**) under Notice No. 1360 dated 18 October 2019 in *Government Gazette* 42784, pursuant to the Electricity Regulation Act, provision has been made to procure an additional **6 000 MW** of solar PV and 14 400 MW of wind between **2022** and **2030**.

The purpose of the proposed Virginia 4 Solar PV is to add new capacity for the generation of renewable electric energy to the national electricity supply in compliance with the Renewable Energy IPP Procurement Programme (REIPPPP) and to meet the "sustainable growth" of the Free State Province.

The applicant (Lupus Energy (Pty) Ltd) intends to participate with the Virginia 4 Solar Park to the next Round of the Renewable Energy IPP Procurement Programme (REIPPPP), to be issued by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy (DMRE).

The use of solar radiation for power generation is considered a non-consumptive use and a renewable natural resource which does not produce greenhouse gas emissions. The generation of renewable energy will contribute to the growth of South Africa's electricity market, which has been primarily dominated up to this date by coal-based power generation. With specific reference to photovoltaic energy, and the proposed project, it is important to consider that South Africa has one of the highest levels of solar radiation in the world.

The proposed solar park will assist the Eskom grid to meet the high energy demand related to the farming and hospitality activities conducted outside of Virginia town. The purpose of the proposed **Virginia 4 Solar PV Plant** is to add new capacity for the generation of electrical energy to the national electricity supply, in compliance with the Minister of Energy's Determinations and to meet the "electricity consumptions' growth" of the Free State Province.

The use of solar radiation for power generation is considered as a non-consumptive use and a renewable natural resource which does not produce greenhouse gas emissions. The generation of renewable energy will contribute to the growth of South Africa's electricity market, which has been primarily dominated up to this date by coal-based power generation. With specific reference to photovoltaic energy, and the proposed project, it is important to consider that South Africa has one of the highest levels of solar radiation in the world.

The reasons for the location of the project in the selected area are as follows:

- low requirement for municipal services;
- compliance with national and provincial energy policies and strategies;
- no impact on people health and wellbeing;
- minimum waste and noise;
- no impact on air quality;
- compatibility with the ecosystem and the surrounding landscape; and
- likelihood of social and economic development of marginalized, rural communities.

## **7.1 FUTURE NEED AND DESIRABILITY**

In 20-30 years' time certain of the infrastructure of the solar facility will probably be not be functioning with the same effectivity as when newly constructed. The energy requirements of the country will certainly not become less, but instead will become more dependent on renewable sources like solar and wind energy. It will be the same in this case. Virginia 4 Solar Park will most probably never decommission completely as the country and area around it will be dependent on its energy generation. It will rather upgrade then or constantly go through a process of upgrading of technology so that the facility stays abreast of technology and energy needs and requirements in the area.

## 8 MOTIVATION FOR PREFERRED DEVELOPMENT FOOTPRINT IN THE PREFERRED SITE

### 8.1 THE CHOICE OF THE FREE STATE PROVINCE AND SITE LOCATION

The Virginia 4 Solar PV will be located near the city of Virginia, in the Free State Province. During the previous Rounds of the REIPP Procurement Programme, very few projects were selected by the Department of Energy (now Department of Mineral Resources and Energy) in the Free State Province, compared to Northern and Eastern Cape. The macro-area where the project is planned never received the benefits - in terms of socio-economic development and local content, arising from the previous Rounds of the REIPP Procurement Programme.

The Free State Province and in particular the Matjabeng Local Municipality (Welkom & Virginia area) has been identified by Lupus Energy (Pty) Ltd as an ideal area for establishing a solar PV plant on the basis of several important considerations:

- there are few green projects currently operating in the Free State Province and it is clear that the “green energy quota” can be achieved mainly by means of solar projects, considering the high solar resources and the availability of lands with low ecological and agricultural value;
- the presence of several mines in the Welkom and Virginia area which require green energy;
- available Eskom grid capacity; and
- other infrastructure nearby to develop a renewable energy project.

In addition to these favourable conditions in terms of desirability of renewable solar energy projects in the Free State Province, the site of the Virginia 4 Solar PV has been chosen based on several elements:

- The chosen site is suitable for the installation of a photovoltaic (PV) power plant due to its appropriate morphologically (flat terrain).
- The favourable radiation conditions allow for a high rate of electric energy production, as a combination of latitude-longitude and climatic conditions.
- The low to medium ecological sensitivity of the proposed project site (unused fields, degraded / modified land).
- Available Eskom grid connectivity.

Furthermore, In the **Generation Connection Capacity Assessment 2023 (GCCA 2023)** published in June 2021, Eskom indicated that the current Transmission Network in the Welkom area and the Theseus MTS is available for the connection of new renewable projects for up to 1260 MW at 132 kV. Since, during the last Round 6 of the REIPP Procurement Programme, **240 MW** has been already allocated to the Virginia 1, 2 and 3 Solar Parks, **1020 MW are still available for connection at Distribution Level (132kV).**

## 9 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVES

### 9.1 DETAILS OF ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended, Section 28(1)(c) and NEMA, Section 24(4), require investigation and consideration of feasible and reasonable alternatives for a proposed development as part of the EIA process. A number of possible alternatives for accomplishing the same objectives must be identified and investigated. In particular:

- the property on which, or location where, it is proposed to undertake the activity;
- the location within the current identified site;
- the type of activity to be undertaken;
- the design or layout of the activity;
- the technology to be used in the activity;
- the operational aspects of the activity (schedule, process);
- the sustainability of other alternatives, and
- the option of not implementing the activity (No-Go Alternative).

#### 9.1.1 SITE ALTERNATIVES

In 2021 when the applicant applied for the development of solar parks on the farm Blomskraal, the area where Virginia 4 is proposed was one of the alternatives investigated for development.

There were still lions in captivity on the area now proposed for Virginia 4 and the applicant and landowner opted to cluster Virginia 1, 2 & 3 SPs in the northern portion of the farm. During 2022 the lions were removed, and the landowner agreed that this area can be developed because existing croplands have only marginal potential for dryland cultivation. The soil specialist also confirmed that the soils on the proposed development site are classified as class 4, which suggest that climatic conditions are marginal for rain-fed arable agriculture (Table 2 of the Agricultural Agro-Ecosystem Impact Assessment – Annexure H).

There are no palaeontological sensitive sites on the proposed footprint and only a stone dam with medium-low heritage value that will be excluded from the development.

The biodiversity specialist (Annexure E) concluded that most of the natural grassland and woodland have a **Medium Sensitivity** and development can be supported in the area provided certain mitigation measures are implemented. The secondary grassland has a **Medium-low Sensitivity** due to the state of succession and degradation in the area, the degraded grasslands, croplands, and exotic bush clumps have a **low sensitivity** and unlimited development can be supported in these areas.

The wetlands (including valley bottoms and pans) and riparian zones have a high sensitivity and have been excluded together with buffer zones from the development footprint.

Because no fatal flaws were raised, a decision was taken that only this site will be investigated.



The Generation Connection Capacity Assessment 2023 (GCCA 2023) published in June 2021, Eskom indicated that the current Transmission Network in the Welkom area and the Theseus MTS is available for the connection of new renewable projects for up to 1260 MW at 132 kV. Since, during the last Round 6 of the REIPP Procurement Programme, 240 MW has been already allocated to the Virginia 1, 2 and 3 Solar Parks, **1020 MW are still available for connection at Distribution Level (132kV).**

## 9.1.2 TECHNOLOGY ALTERNATIVES

### PV Plant and Solar Thermal Power Plant

The alternative to PV for producing energy from the sun is the thermal solution. There are different forms including linear Fresnel, parabolic trough or tower. These technologies can be with or without thermal storage and they can use diathermic oils or, the more sophisticated ones can use water and/or molten salts. The final choice is the PV option because these kinds of project result in:

- lower construction costs;
- lower operating and maintenance costs (O&M);
- it is a simpler, quicker and more experienced technology; and
- lower environmental impact, considering that, a PV solution requires little water.

### Wind Power Plant

Another alternative to PV for producing energy from the sun is electrical energy form wind. A wind energy facility has a significant visual impact especially where it is located in a relative flat topographical area. Most important, the project site is not windy enough to be considered suitable for a wind farm. The PV option is thus still a better choice than wind energy based on the same reasons given above.

### Alternatives for the Mounting System of the PV Modules

Preferred technical solutions for the proposed solar park entail PV modules mounted on fixed mounting systems (alternative option 1) or horizontal single-axis trackers (alternative option 2). The tracking solution is the best performing in terms of efficiency because its energy production is approximately 20% more if compared with fixed systems. This type of technology is characterized by higher technical complexity and higher installing and maintenance costs, if compared with the fixed mounting solution. The selected tracking system is the horizontal single-axis tracker (SAT), which doesn't differ from the fixed system, except for the presence of the tracking devices and the orientation of the rows of the PV arrays (north - south instead of west – east direction).

The technology of mounting systems is under continuous evolution. The final decision about the mounting system technology will be taken at commissioning. The selection of fixed mounting system or horizontal single-axis trackers will not affect the layout of the PV power plant or imply any additional visual or environmental impacts that will necessitate specific or different mitigation measures. The development will not exceed the planned footprint (450 ha) and the height of the structures (PV modules and support frames) will be maximum 4.5 m above ground level. Both fixed and horizontal single-axis tracking solutions grant the reversibility of the development in respect of the terrain's morphology, geology and hydrogeology. At the end of the PV plant's lifetime, the site can easily be returned to its status prior to the establishment of the PV plant.

## **BESS Technology alternatives and the Risk/Benefit of using Lithium-ion Batteries**

Batteries store electrical energy in chemical form. The range of electrochemical technologies include:

- a) batteries with solid electrolyte, as Lithium-ion battery;
- b) batteries with liquid electrolyte, as Na–S battery, Lead–Acid (PbA) battery, nickel - cadmium (Ni–Cd) battery or other types of liquid metal battery

The preferred technology for the Battery Energy Storage System (“BESS”) is **Lithium-ion battery cells**, which will be pre-assembled at the supplier factory and installed in the containers prior to delivery to the site. Lithium-ion cells technology offers the highest energy density (compared to the other cell technologies), does not suffer from memory effect and is low maintenance. Typical lithium-ion cells used for BESS hold a solid rechargeable electrolyte (the energy accumulator), therefore they don’t hold any liquid or gas.

*The main benefit of solid ceramic electrolytes is that there is no risk of leaks, which is a serious safety issue for batteries with liquid electrolytes.*

A BESS does not emit any gas to the atmosphere during construction and/or normal operation. The containers of the batteries are equipped with a firefighting system conceived to effectively detect smoke and high temperatures and automatically activate the extinguishers to prevent fire. Furthermore, the external metallic surface of the cells is conceived to resist to fire.

**The preferred technology is therefore Lithium-ion battery cells with solid rechargeable electrolyte.**

Batteries with liquid electrolytes are not preferred for the risk of leakage and consequent potential impacts on environment.

### **9.1.3 NO-GO ALTERNATIVE / “DO-NOTHING” ALTERNATIVE**

#### **9.1.3.1 No-go alternative – negative impacts**

The no-go alternative is the option of **not** establishing a Photovoltaic Power Plant on the site, or any of its alternatives. The environment will remain in its current state (status quo). This will have a negative effect of not creating any new employment opportunities, and therefore the anticipated economic benefits of the project will accrue to the study area (see the paragraph 6.4 *Socio-Economic Environment*).

Should this alternative be selected the socio-economic and environmental benefits related to the use of renewable energy resources will not be realised with prejudice to the development of the area.

The main negative impact of the project not proceeding is the potential for renewable energy not being utilized. The electrical infrastructure in South Africa is under great pressure and the demand for energy and electricity is increasing. If the project is not developed, there will be no contribution to the development of the renewable energy sector in South Africa.

The benefits related to the establishment of a renewable energy power plant (which will not happen if the project does not go ahead) are for example analysed in detail in the REFIT Regulatory Guideline published by NERSA (March 2009):

- Enhanced and increased energy security:
- Resource economy and saving:
- Support of new technologies and new industrial sectors:
- Exploitation and capitalization of South Africa's renewable resources:
- Employment creation and career opportunities:
- Pollution reduction:
- Contrast to Global warming and climate mitigation:
- Protection of natural foundations of life for future generations:
- Acceptability to society and community:
- Commitment to and respect of international agreements:

#### **9.1.3.2 No-go alternative – positive impacts**

Should the No-go alternative be selected then the natural area will not be transformed or cleared from natural vegetation or crops and will still be available for agriculture should it be needed. The positive impact will relate mainly to the terrestrial biodiversity that will not be disturbed and agricultural sector which could be further developed in this area if the "Do-Nothing" alternative is applied.

## 9.2 DETAILS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS UNDERTAKEN

All relevant I&AP's have been identified and involved in the public participation process from the start of the project as per sections 54, 55, 56 and 57 of the EIA regulations 2014, as amended. The process offers an opportunity to become actively involved through constant sharing of information. Main purpose of the public participation process is to ensure that:

- all relevant information in respect of the application is made available to I&APs for their evaluation and review;
- reasonable opportunity is given to I&AP's to comment and to submit queries related to the proposed project;
- comments and queries by the I&APs to the Draft Scoping and to the EIA Reports are submitted and evaluated in a reasonable timeframe and in predetermined terms.

The initial stage of the public participation was conducted from 17 November 2022 until 17 January 2023.

In the enclosed Annexure D, there is a list of all components of the public participation process. The public was informed of the project by means of:

- Site notices, which were put up at the proposed development site;
- Background Information Documents (BID) sent to all adjacent landowners;
- A Notice was published in a local newspaper, which is distributed locally;
- Sending of BIDs to other possible interested and affected parties/stakeholders.

An I&AP Register was created and opened which is maintained and added to as required.

Site notices were put up on site on 18 November 2022.

After a Deed Search was done on the surrounding properties a Background Information Document was sent to the adjacent landowners. Proof of this is attached in Annexure D. A number of these documents were also distributed to the relevant governmental departments including *inter alia* Department of Water and Sanitation, Department of Agriculture, Land Reform & Rural Development, etc. Other identified interested and/or affected parties/stakeholders include Eskom, the Local municipalities, the district municipality etc. Proof of all correspondence is included in Annexure D.

A newspaper advertisement was published in the 17 November 2022 edition of the Vista Newspaper, which is a local newspaper, distributed locally.

Several people registered as I&APs but no comments were received from adjacent landowners and/or I&APs during the initial public participation process.

- Draft Scoping Report was made available for a 30-day commenting period for comments and was also provided as hard copy on request. The commenting period on the Draft Scoping Report was from 20 January 2023 until 1 March 2023.
- The Final Scoping Report and the Plan of Study for EIA was submitted to the DFFE for review and approval on 6 March 2023. It was accepted by the competent authority on 19 April 2023.
- The Draft EIA Report was made available for a commenting period of 30 days from 5 June 2023 until 5 July 2023.
- Notifications were sent to inform registered I&APs and governmental organizations that the Draft EIA Report was submitted and is available for comments.

### **9.2.1 FURTHER STEPS IN PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

To ensure a transparent and complete public participation process the following steps are still to be taken during the rest of the EIA process:

- Comments received on the Draft EIA Report are included in the Final EIA Report.
- The Final EIA Report will be submitted to the DFFE for review and Authorisation.
- Registered I&APs and governmental organizations will be notified about the submission of the Final EIA Report to DFFE.
- Registered I&APs and governmental organizations will be notified about the final decision of the DFFE (Environmental Authorisation granted or not).

### **9.2.2 RESULTS FROM THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS**

Comments were received from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment and from the Department of Water and Sanitation on the Draft EIAR. Comments were also received from the Biodiversity Conservation Directorate of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment.

The following comments were received from the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (**DFFE**):

- Comments from all other developers and surrounding the development must be obtained and included in the Final EIAR.
- Recommendations received from specialists must be incorporated into the Final EIAR.
- The Final EIAR must provide the technical details for the proposed facility in a table format as well as their description and/or dimensions.
- Cumulative impact assessment must be addressed for all other similar projects within a 30km radius of the proposed development.
- The EMPR must include all recommendations and mitigation measures recorded in the EIAR and the specialist studies. It must also consist of an environmental sensitivity map indicating the environmentally sensitive areas. Measures to protect hydrological features must be described in the EMPR.
- The Final EIAR must include the period for which the Environmental Authorisation is required.

The Department of Water and Sanitation (**DWS**) does not have any objection regarding the proposed development on condition that that the following aspects are considered prior to commencement of the project:

- Water use licenses must be in place if necessary.
- Sanitary facilities for convenience may not be sited at least 100m from the nearest watercourse.
- Soil erosion control and storm water management must be put in place.
- Adhere to all the sections of the National Environmental Management: Waste Act (Act 59 of 2008) regarding the disposal of waste.
- Any pollution incidents originating from this activity shall be reported to the Department of Water and Sanitation Provincial office within 24 hours.
- All the commitments stipulated in the various parts of the report must be adhered to.

The following comments were received from the Biodiversity Conservation Directorate of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (**DFFE: Biodiversity**):

- The Central Free State Grassland vegetation type occurs in the Free State Province and this vegetation community is considered Least Concern.
- The development footprint avoids all identified highly sensitive environmental features within the project site and no environmental fatal flaws or impacts of very high significance were identified to be associated with the development. Therefore, the proposed development would have an overall medium to low significance rating.
- The following recommendations must be considered in the final report:
  - A pre-construction walk-through of the final development footprint must be undertaken in order to locate and identify Species of Conservation Concern that can be translocated.
  - Sensitive habitats in close proximity to the development footprint must be avoided or demarcated as No-Go area.
  - Permits from relevant authorities must be obtained for the removal or disturbance of any TOPs, Red Data listed or provincially protected plant species.
  - Search and rescue plan, Alien Invasive Species Eradication plan and Rehabilitation plan compiled as part of the Draft EMPr must be included in the final report.
  - Suitable bird repelling structures and bird diverters must be considered to avoid collision of birds with the PV facility.
- The final report must comply with all the requirements as outlined in the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) guideline for renewable energy projects and the Best Practice Guideline for Birds & Solar Energy for assessing and monitoring the impact of solar energy facilities on birds in Southern Africa.

**9.3 SUMMARY OF ISSUES RAISED BY INTERESTED AND AFFECTED PARTIES**


DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
<p>18/11/2022 CONRAD VAN BILJON EMAIL ABERDARE</p>	<p>To Whom it may concern</p> <p>Aberdare Cables is a local level 1 BEE manufacturer of electrical cables and a market leader in the renewable sector.</p> <p>We can provide all the necessary cables needs for this proposed solar facility and will appreciate it if we can obtain more information regarding the proposed plant in order for us to assist were possible.</p> <p>Below are all my contact details should you have any enquiries.</p> <p>Thanking You</p>	<p>18/11/2022 EMAIL AGES</p> <p>Thank you for your email.</p> <p>Unfortunately, AGES are only appointed to conduct an environmental Impact assessment for the solar parks. They have not been approved yet, and we are not involved in any construction.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>
<p>18/11/2022 EMAIL KATHRYN WINSTANLEY G7ENERGIES</p>	<p>Dear Hiadee,</p> <p>I trust you are well.</p> <p>Could you please confirm that Caryn Clarke with e-mail address eia@g7energies.com is registered as an I&amp;AP for these 5 proposed solar projects: Virginia 4 SP, Quagga SP, Corona SP, Florida 1 &amp; 2 SP.</p> <p>Thank you very much. With kind regards,</p>	<p>10/01/2023 EMAIL AGES</p> <p>Dear Kathryn</p> <p>Confirmed. eia@g7energies.com is also receiving emails. The Draft Reports will be forwarded as soon as they are available.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>
<p>23/11/2022 EMAIL BOITUMELO MELATO DEPARTMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION</p>	<p>Good day Hiadee,</p> <p>Hope this mail finds you well.</p> <p>Kindly send the below notification as per the details below so that it can be allocated to the relevant case officer.</p> <p>ntilit@dws.gov.za lenongp@dws.gov.za kumaloz@dws.gov.za and copy musekenen2@dws.gov.za regards,</p>	<p>17/01/2023 EMAIL AGES</p> <p>Dear Melato,</p> <p>Thank you for your email. I did send the emails to the relevant officers, but to date no-one has responded with a case officers' details.</p> <p>The Draft Scoping Report will go out for comments shortly, so I will forward the link to all the above.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>

DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
<p>19/01/2023 EMAIL</p>	<p>Good day Hiadee,</p> <p>Kindly take note that I am the case officer for this project. Attached is the completed form to register the Department as an interested and affected Party. I will await the submission of the Draft Scoping Report.</p> <p>Regards,</p>	<p>19/01/2023 EMAIL AGES Dear Boitumelo Melato Thank you so much for your registration. The draft Scoping report will be sent to you shortly. Kind regards</p>
<p>23/01/2023 EMAIL</p>	<p>Good day,</p> <p>Hope this mail finds you well.</p> <p>Kindly send me the Draft Scoping Report for the Department's comments as follows. Attention: Dr T Ntli Department of Water and Sanitation Corner Charlotte Maxeke and East Burger 2nd Floor: Bloem Plaza Building Bloemfontein Regards,</p>	
<p>28/11/2022 EMAIL MELANIE MILES DEPUTY HOD PROJECTS LEADS 2 BUSINESS</p>	<p>Good day</p> <p>Please could you forward me a BID document and register me as an interested and affected party for the following 5 projects:</p> <p>Virginia 4 Solar Park Quagga Solar Park Florida 1 &amp; 2 Solar Parks Corona Solar Park</p> <p>I look forward to your response. Kind Regards</p> <hr/> <p>Thank you so much :) Kind Regards</p>	<p>28/11/2022 EMAIL AGES Dear Melanie Thank you for your registration. I have added you to the I&amp;AP register. Attached please find the BID for your information. Kind regards</p>



<p>30/11/2022 EMAIL NOKUKHANYA GASA ARC. AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH COUNCIL</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FLORIDA 1 &amp; 2, CORONA, VIRGINIA 4 and QUAGGA SOLAR PARKS: BACKGROUND INFORMATION DOCUMENT – NOVEMBER 2022</b></p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>RESPONSE FORM FLORIDA 1 &amp; 2, CORONA, VIRGINIA 4 and QUAGGA SOLAR PARKS</b></p> <p><b>CONTACT DETAILS:</b>                  Title: MISS                  First Name: NOKUKHANYA                  Surname: GASA                  E-mail: Gasa.N@arcagric.za                  Cell: 073 984 2806                  Telephone: 012 427 9864                  Fax: -                  Organization (if applicable): Agricultural Research Council                  Capacity (e.g. Chairperson, member, etc): Environmental Compliance                  Physical Address: 1134 Park Street                  Town: Hatfield Code: 0083                  Postal Address: P.O. Box 8383                  Town: Pretoria Code: 0001</p> <p><b>YOUR INTEREST IN THE MATTER:</b>                  1. What is your main area of interest with regards to the proposed project?                  To know the progress on the application as it proceeds.                  2. Are there any concerns you would like to raise, at this stage, regarding the proposed project?                  None at this stage.                  3. Are there any additional role-players whom we should involve in the process?                  If "yes", please provide us with their contact details (Name, address &amp; telephone numbers):                  No</p> <p><b>THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME Please add more pages if necessary</b></p>	<p>30/11/2022 EMAIL AGES</p> <p>Dear Nokukhanya</p> <p>Thank you for your registration. You have been added to the I&amp;AP list and we will keep you informed as the process proceeds.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>
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DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
<p>02/12/2022 EMAIL THOMAS WILSON SENIOR ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGER SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT HARMONY GOLD MINING COMPANY LIMITED</p>	<p>Dear Haidee,  I trust you are well.  Please provide us with a plan that we can understand where this site is located, to determine where this is relative to our operations.  @ Harmony Team – please take note.  Regards.</p>	<p>14/12/2022 EMAIL AGES  Dear Thomas  I have attached the kmz files so that you can see how this will affect Harmony. It would seem as if it will only be the powerlines that will be adjacent to Harmony’s property (along with the existing powerlines).  Please confirm that the properties in question are Millo 639 remainder and portion 1 that belong to Harmony?  Kind regards</p> <hr/> <p>11/01/2023 EMAIL AGES Hi Thomas As per my email below, please confirm that the properties in question are Millo 639 remainder and portion 1 that belong to Harmony? Kind regards</p>
<p>14/12/2022 EMAIL DEBBIE WESSELS CONTENT REGULATOR LEADS2BUSINESS</p>	<p>Hi Haidee Hope you are well I was looking at the background document for the 5 solar parks in the Free State and was curious.....what does the RD stand for that is listed behind the town’s name?  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Portions 1 and 4 of Farm FLORIDA 633 and Remaining Extent of the Farm LE ROUX 766, VENTERSBURG RD;</li> <li>▪ Farms BIDDULPH 329, DE DAM 27 and TEVREDE 361, VENTERSBURG RD;</li> <li>▪ Farm BLOMSKRAAL 216, VENTERSBURG RD;</li> <li>▪ Farm DELAPORTE 887 and Farm QUAGGAFONTEIN 3, WINBURG RD;</li> </ul> <p>Never seen that before and wondered what it meant? Kind Regards</p> </p>	<p>17/12/2022 EMAIL AGES  Hi Debbie  I think it’s just for REGISTRATION DIVISION. A map reference.  Kind regards</p>

DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
09/02/2023 EMAIL	<p>Hi Haidee</p> <p>Thanks so much and compliments of the season.</p> <p>Kind Regards</p>	
23/01/2023 EMAIL BOITUMELO MELATO DWS	<p>Good day,</p> <p>Hope this mail finds you well.</p> <p>Kindly send me the Draft Scoping Report for the Department's comments as follows. Attention: Dr T Ntuli Department of Water and Sanitation Corner Charlotte Maxeke and East Burger 2nd Floor: Bloem Plaza Building Bloemfontein</p> <p>Regards,</p>	<p>08/02/2023 COURIERED JKJ Hard Copy of DSR couriered.</p> 
22/02/2023 EMAIL BOITUMELO MELATO LETTER: DR T NTILI PROVINCIAL HEAD: FREE STATE DWS	<p>Good day,</p> <p>Kindly find the attached copy of comments for your further attention.</p> <p>Regards,</p>	<p>22/02/2023 EMAIL AGES Limpopo</p> <p>Dear Boitumelo</p> <p>Thank you very much for your comments, they will be brought to the attention of the applicant and incorporated into the EIA Report.</p>

DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
	<p>Dear Sir/Madam</p> <p><b>DRAFT SCOPING REPORT: PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216, VENTERSBURG RD, AND CONNECTING POWELINE, MATJHABENG &amp; MASILONYANA LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT, FREE STATE PROVINCE</b>  <b>AGES REF: L22 106 E</b>  <b>DFFE REF: 2022-12-0021</b></p> <p>Reference is hereby made to the document submitted to this Department dated January 2023 for the above-mentioned project as presented to this Department by AGES Limpopo (Pty) Ltd.</p> <p>This office has evaluated the Draft Scoping Report and the comments are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The applicant must take note that any development within 500m from the boundary of any wetland requires to be authorised according to the Department's regulation. The authorisation must be obtained prior commencement of the project.</li> <li>• In page 35 under 4.2.7.3: Water provision during construction and operation, it is mentioned water for the project can be obtained from on-site boreholes and it is noted that this office will be consulted to obtain the necessary authorisation in terms of Section 21(a): "Taking water from a water resource" of the National Water Act, Act 36 of 1998.</li> <li>• The responsibility lies with the applicant to identify all the water uses associated with this project and to obtain the necessary water use authorisation prior commencement of the project.</li> <li>• Erosion and stormwater management must be put in place through all stages of the project.</li> <li>• Sanitary conveniences which causes or is likely to cause pollution of a water resource should not be located within the 1:50 year flood line or 100m of any watercourse or borehole.</li> <li>• All fuel and lubricants must be stored in sealed containers at least 100m from the nearest water course and all reasonable precautions must be taken to prevent any possible pollution.</li> <li>• All sections of the National Environmental Act: Waste Act (Act 59 of 2008) pertaining to the disposal of waste must be adhered to.</li> <li>• The applicant shall further note that in terms of Section 19(1) of the National Water Act: Act 36 of 1998 it is stated that: <i>An owner of land, a person in control of land or a person who occupies or uses the land on which – (a) any activity or process is or was performed or undertaken, or (b) any other situation exists, which causes, has caused or likely to cause pollution to a water resource must take all reasonable measures to prevent any such pollution from occurring, continuing or recurring</i>". Therefore, any pollution incident(s) originating from this project shall be reported to Department of Water Sanitation: Free State Operations within 24 hours.</li> <li>• All the commitments stipulated in the various parts of this report must be adhered to and any deviations must be reported to this Department.</li> <li>• Further comments, if any, will be provided during the Environmental Impact Assessment process.</li> </ul> <p>You are welcome to contact Ms B Melato at telephone: 051 405 9000 or on e-mail: melatob@dws.gov.za should you have any enquiries.</p> <p>Yours sincerely,</p>	<p>Kind regards</p>

DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
<p>24/01/2023 EMAIL DR JACK ARMOUR COMMERCIAL MANAGER FREE STATE AGRICULTURE</p>	<p>Hi Hiadee</p> <p>Can you please send the .KZM files for the sites.</p> <p>Thanks</p> <p>Jack</p> <hr/> <p>Dankie Hiadee</p> <p>Ek kan nie van omgewings probleme dink nie – meer krag kan net positief wees! Die oprigting moet net nie die plaaslike paaie vernietig nie, brand gevaar inhou (fire plan NB to be addressed with Matjhabeng Fire Protection Officer Johan Terblanche johanrusmysiel@gmail.com ) en werkers nie moeilikheid maak nie (farm safety concerns on neighbouring farms as a result of activity on project site).</p> <p>Die maar bassies ons standaard insette. Sterkte,</p> <p><i>TRANSLATED: Thank you Hiadee</i></p> <p><i>I can't think of environmental problems - more power can only be positive! The construction must not destroy the local roads, pose a fire risk (fire plan NB to be addressed with Matjhabeng Fire Protection Officer Johan Terblanche johanrusmysiel@gmail.com ) and not cause trouble for workers (farm safety concerns on neighboring farms as a result or activity on project site). This is basically our standard inputs.</i></p>	<p>24/01/2023 EMAIL AGES Limpopo</p> <p>Dear Jack</p> <p>As requested, please find attached the KMZ files for the 3 PROPOSED Solar Parks and their powerlines.</p> <p>Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any comments or concerns?</p> <p>Kind regards</p> <hr/> <p>Hi Jack</p> <p>Baie dankie vir u positiewe kommentaar, ons sal u bekommernisse en kommentaar in die Konsep Omgewings Impakstudie (Draft Environmental Impact Assessment) -verslag aanspreek.</p> <p>Vriendelike groete</p> <p>TRANSLATED:</p> <p><i>Thank you very much for your positive comments, we will address your concerns and comments in the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment report.</i></p> <p><i>Friendly greetings</i></p>



DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
<p>24/01/2023 EMAIL SITYHILELO NGCATSHA SAHRA</p>	<p>Good afternoon,</p> <p>Please note that all development applications are processed via our online portal, the South African Heritage Resources Information System (SAHRIS) found at the following link: <a href="http://sahra.org.za/sahris/">http://sahra.org.za/sahris/</a> . We do not accept emailed, posted, hardcopy, faxed, website links or DropBox links as official submissions.</p> <p>Please create an application on SAHRIS and upload all documents pertaining to the Environmental Authorisation Application Process. As per section 24(4)b(iii) of NEMA and section 38(8) of the National Heritage Resources Act, Act 25 of 1999 (NHRA), an assessment of heritage resources must form part of the process and the assessment must comply with section 38(3) of the NHRA.</p> <p>Please note that a fee is required as from 1 January 2023 for all development applications submitted on SAHRIS. Please see the following link: <a href="https://sahris.sahra.org.za/content/what-are-sahra-processing-fees-and-banking-details">https://sahris.sahra.org.za/content/what-are-sahra-processing-fees-and-banking-details</a></p> <p>Please pay the required amount of R 2000.00 for each section 38(8) development application. Please upload the proof of payment (PoP) to the respective development application case. Once all documents including all appendices and the PoP are uploaded to the case application, please ensure that the status of the case is changed from DRAFT to SUBMITTED. Please ensure that all documents produced as part of the EA process are submitted as part of the application.</p> <p>Regards</p>	<p>24/01/2023 EMAIL AGES Limpopo</p> <p>Dear Sityhilelo Ngcatsha</p> <p>Thank you for your response. Our heritage specialist will submit the necessary documents onto the SAHRIS system. We as consultants are obliged to send a notification to all the I&amp;APs.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>
		<p>24/01/2023 EMAIL Tobie du Toit AVIATION CONSULTANT</p> <p>Dear Winnie,</p> <p>PHOENIX ENERGY (PTY) LTD (PTY) LTD, is proposing the establishment of a renewable energy generation facilities (Photovoltaic Power Plants) with associated infrastructure and structures, and a power line which will</p>

DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
		<p>connect the proposed facilities with the existing Eskom Theseus Main Transmission Substation (MTS) which is located within the Matjabeng Local Municipality, Lejweleputswa District Municipality, in the Free State Province.</p> <p>The proposed location of the Virginia 4 Photovoltaic Power Plant is on the Farm BLOMSKRAAL 216, located within the Matjabeng Local Municipality, Lejweleputswa District Municipality, Free State Province.</p> <p>AGES (Africa Geo-Environmental Engineering and Science) is contracted to do the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and myself, TCA (Tappas Aviation Consultant), is subcontracted to do the Aviation Impact Assessment and all other requirements and influences regarding aviation on this project.</p> <p>I therefore apply for approval from ATNS through the obstacle committee for approval to continue with the Virginia 4 Solar Park and Powerline project. Attached find a drawing showing the points and numbers of the pylons as well as the corner points and numbers of the solar park. Attached find the amended form received from you with all the coordinates and elevations of the solar park corners and the powerline pylons.</p> <p>An as-built application will be sent to you by the contractors with the actual positions of the pylons and corner points of the solar park after the project is completed.</p> <p>Thank you for your assistance.</p>
<p>03/02/2023  <b>JOHN GEERINGH</b>                  SENIOR CONSULTANT                  ENVIRONMENTAL                  MANAGEMENT                  GRID PLANNING: LAND                  AND RIGHTS                  ESKOM TRANSMISSION                  DIVISION</p>	<p>Please send me a KMZ file of the affected properties, proposed layout and proposed grid connection. Please find attached Eskom requirements for work at or near Eskom infrastructure and servitudes, as well as a renewable energy setbacks guideline.</p> <p>Kind regards</p> <p>Thanks                  John</p>	<p>03/02/2023                  EMAIL                  AGES Limpopo                  Dear John                  Attached please find the KMZ of ALL the new proposed PV plants in this area, (including the Virginia 4) as well as the Virginia 4 SP and Corona SP layout. The others will follow shortly.</p> <p>Please let me know if this is sufficient, or if you require more detail?                  Kind regards</p>



DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
<p>15/02/2023 EMAIL JOHN GEERINGH (PR SCI NAT) REG. EAP (EAPASA) SENIOR CONSULTANT ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT GRID PLANNING: LAND AND RIGHTS ESKOM TRANSMISSION DIVISION</p>	<p>Please find attached Eskom requirements for work at or near Eskom infrastructure and servitudes, as well as a setbacks guideline for renewable energy projects.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>	<p>27/02/2023 EMAIL AGES Limpopo</p> <p>Dear John</p> <p>Thank you for your response.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>
<p>17/02/2023 MS MILICENT SOLOMONS ACTING CHIEF DIRECTOR: INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORISATIONS DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT SIGNED BY: MR COENRAD AGENBACH DESIGNATION: DEPUTY DIRECTOR: PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE PROJE</p>	<p>Good day.</p> <p>Please find herein the attached letter for the above mentioned.</p> <p>Please do not respond to this mailbox with any queries related to the decision been issued. All queries on the attached decision must be directed to official whose contact details is listed as enquiries.</p> <p>I hope you find all in order.</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p>Kind Regards, Lydia Kutu</p> <hr/> <p>Dear Mr Von Well</p> <p><b>COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT SCOPING REPORT FOR THE PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216 AND CONNECTING POWERLINE, MATJHABENG AND MASILONYANA LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, FREE STATE PROVINCE</b></p>	<p><b>FINAL SCOPING REPORT FOR THE PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216 AND CONNECTING POWER LINE, MATHABENG AND MASILONYANA MUNICIPALITIES, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, FREE STATE PROVINCE</b></p> <p>Your letter dated 17 February 2023 refers.</p>

DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
	<p>The Application for Environmental Authorisation and the draft Scoping Report (SR) dated January 2023 and received by the Department on 20 January 2023, refer.</p> <p><u>This letter serves to inform you that the following information must be included to the final SR:</u></p> <p><b>(a) Specific Comments</b></p> <p>(i) The screening tool report generated for the Virginia 4 Powerline (Annexure P.2) displays the incorrect application category, namely Transformation of land/Indigenous vegetation. A new screening tool report must be generated that has selected the correct application category which is Utilities Infrastructure =&gt; Electricity =&gt; Distribution and Transmission =&gt; Powerline. It is imperative to select the correct application category when generating the screening tool report to accurately screen the proposed activity against the site and analyse the land use suitability for the proposed development. It is also used to guide the applicant on what assessments are required based on the proposed activity and the attributes of the site. The updated screening tool report with the correct application category must be included in the final SR.</p> <p>(ii) The co-ordinates in the SR must be specific to each activity and infrastructure that is proposed on the site. The co-ordinates for each corner of the solar field, substations and BESS must be included in the report, i.e., we require that you provide us with the specific development footprints for each development parameter, and not an area outlining the entire site.</p> <p>(iii) Please provide a concise, but complete, summary and bullet list of the project description and associated infrastructure (or project scope). This must include a list of all development components and associated infrastructure.</p> <p>(iv) Kindly ensure the development footprints (hectares/square metres) and specifications of all proposed infrastructure and associated infrastructure during all phases are included in the final SR.</p>	<p><b>(a) Specific Comments</b></p> <p>(i) The screening tool report has been generated with the correct application category and is attached as Annexure P.2. The area environmental sensitivities remained the same and the identified additional specialist assessments (agricultural, avian, civil, RFI and geo-tech have been conducted and are attached to the FSR)</p> <p>(ii) The co-ordinates of each activity and infrastructure are included in the FSR where the specific activities are described (Sections, 4.2.1 – 4.2.3 &amp; 4.3).</p> <p>(iii) The summary required is included in Section 1.3 of the FSR.</p> <p>(iv) Development footprints are indicated in the FSR in Sections, 4.2.1 – 4.2.3 &amp; 4.3.</p>

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	<p>(v) Kindly take note that when finalising the layout plan the position of all proposed infrastructure and linear activities, which includes but not limited to the following must be illustrated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Solar fields;</li> <li>➤ Construction camp laydown areas;</li> <li>➤ Substations;</li> <li>➤ Internal roads;</li> <li>➤ Battery energy storage systems (BESS);</li> <li>➤ Operation and maintenance buildings; and,</li> <li>➤ Powerlines.</li> </ul> <p>(vi) The final SR must clearly provide a detailed section which addresses the site sensitivity verification requirements where a specialist assessment is required but no specific assessment protocol has been prescribed, as well as the site sensitivity verification and minimum report content requirements for all specialist assessments undertaken, which were included in the screening tool report.</p> <p>(vii) Under Section 10: List of Appendices the applicant has selected "Yes" that the proposed development is a Strategic Infrastructure Project. However, under Appendix 5 none of the SIPs were selected. Kindly take note that, if the project is a SIP, then It is mandatory to provide proof of confirmation for SIP applications from the relevant sector representative. Should no proof be provided, the application will be considered as a normal EIA Application. A letter of confirmation for SIP applications can be obtained from the following relevant sector representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Alvino Wild Schutt-Prins: AlvinoW@idc.co.za/ Alvino@presidency.gov.za; or</li> <li>➤ Tshepo Chuene: TshepoCh@idc.co.za</li> </ul> <p><b>(b) Listed Activities</b></p> <p>(i) Please ensure that all relevant listed activities are applied for, are specific and that it can be linked to the development activity or infrastructure as described in the project description.</p>	<p>(v) The proposed layout plans in Figures 2 &amp; 3 and Annexure A indicates the requested infrastructure.</p> <p>(vi) All identified SSV and specialist studies identified by the screening tool report were conducted and this is indicated in Table 12 in the FSR.</p> <p>(vii) The initial indication that the project will be a SIP was an error. Confirmation was requested from the relevant sector representatives and once this confirmation has been received, it will be forwarded to the Department. In the meantime, please consider the application as a normal EIA Application.</p> <p><b>(b) Listed Activities</b></p> <p>(i) All relevant listed activities are applied for and linked to development activities in Table 4, in the FSR.</p>

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	(ii) The listed activities represented in the EIAR and the application form must be the same and correct.	(ii) The Listed activities are correct as reflected in the EIA Application form and the FSR. If there are any changes, this will reflect in the EIA Report and if needed an amended application form will be submitted.
	(iii) If the activities applied for in the application form differ from those mentioned in the final SR, an amended application form must be submitted. (iv)	(iii) In case any activities applied for in the application form differ from those mentioned in the FSR, an amended application form will be submitted.
	(v) Please note that the Department's application form template has been amended and can be downloaded from the following link <a href="https://www.dffe.gov.za/documents/forms">https://www.dffe.gov.za/documents/forms</a> .	(iv) The latest template on the website was used, dated April 2021.
	<b>(c) <u>Layout &amp; Sensitivity Maps</u></b>  (i) The final SR must provide coordinate points for the proposed development site (note that if the site has numerous bend points, at each bend point coordinates must be provided) as well as the start, middle and end point of all linear activities.	<b>(b) <u>Layout &amp; Sensitivity Maps</u></b>  (i) Coordinates are provided in tables 5 & 8 of the FSR.
	(ii) Please provide a layout map which indicates the following: a) A clear indication of the envisioned area for the proposed solar fields; b) Position of the solar panels; c) Powerlines; d) Internal roads; e) All supporting onsite infrastructure such as laydown area, guard house and control room etc. (existing and proposed); f) Substations, transformers, switching stations and inverters; g) Battery Energy Storage System; h) Connection routes (including pylon positions) to the distribution/transmission network; i) All existing infrastructure on the site, especially railway lines and roads; and j) Buildings, including accommodation.	(ii) A layout map is provided in Annexure A and figure 2 of the FSR.
	(iii) Please provide an environmental sensitivity map which indicates the following: a) The location of sensitive environmental features identified on site, e.g.	(iii) Sensitivity maps are included in the different specialist reports.

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	<p>CBA's, protected areas, heritage sites, wetlands, drainage lines etc. that will be affected by the facility and its associated infrastructure;</p> <p>b) Buffer areas; and</p> <p>c) All "no-go" areas.</p> <hr/> <p>(iv) The above layout map must be superimposed (overlain) with the sensitivity map and a cumulative map which shows neighbouring and existing infrastructure.</p> <p>(v) Google maps will not be accepted.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(d) Alternatives</b></p> <p>(i) Please provide a description of any identified alternatives for the proposed activity that are feasible and reasonable, including the advantages and disadvantages that the proposed activity or alternatives will have on the environment and on the community that may be affected by the activity as per Appendix 2 of GN R.982 of 2014 (as amended).</p> <p>(ii) Alternatively, you should submit written proof of an investigation and motivation if no reasonable or feasible alternatives exist in terms of Appendix 2.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(e) Public Participation Process</b></p> <p>(i) Comments must be obtained from this Department's Biodiversity Conservation Directorate at <a href="mailto:BCAdmin@dffe.gov.za">BCAdmin@dffe.gov.za</a>.</p> <hr/> <p>(ii) Please ensure that all issues raised, and comments received during the circulation of the SR from registered I&amp;APs and organs of state which have jurisdiction in respect of the proposed activity are adequately addressed in the final SR, including comments from this Department, and must be incorporated into a Comments and Response Report (CRR).</p>	<hr/> <p>(iv) Layout maps overlain with sensitivity maps indicating buffer areas is provided in Annexure A of the FSR for solar park and power line.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(d) Alternatives</b></p> <p>The reasons for selection of the preferred alternative are explained in section 5.1.1 of the FSR.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(e) Public Participation Process</b></p> <p>(i) The DSR was submitted to the Biodiversity Conservation Directorate and proof that the report was downloaded is provided in the FSR Comments and Responses Report. Comments have not been received yet. However, the Draft EIA Report will be sent to this directorate again in order to obtain comments. If comments are received on the DSR, it will be forwarded to the official managing the application, immediately.</p> <hr/> <p>(ii) All issues raised, and comments received during the circulation of the DSR from registered I&amp;APs and organs of state are included in the CRR.</p>



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	(iii) Proof of correspondence with the various stakeholders must be included in the final SR. Should you be unable to obtain comments, proof should be submitted to the Department of the attempts that were made to obtain comments.	(iii) Proof of all correspondence with stakeholders are included in the CRR.
	(iv) The Public Participation Process must be conducted in terms of Regulation 39, 40, 41, 42, 43 and 44 of the EIA Regulations 2014, as amended.	(iv) The Public Participation Process was conducted in terms of Regulation 39, 40, 41, 42, 43 and 44 of the EIA Regulations 2014, as amended.
	(v) A comments and response trail report (C&R) must be submitted with the final SR. The C&R report must incorporate all historical comments for this development. The C&R report must be a separate document from the main report and the format must be in the table format as indicated in Annexure 1 of this comments letter. Please refrain from summarising comments made by I&APs. All comments from I&APs must be copied verbatim and responded to clearly. Please note that a response such as "Noted" is not regarded as an adequate response to I&AP's comments.	(v) All comments and responses are included in the CRR in the format required.
	(vi) The final SR must provide evidence that all identified and relevant competent authorities have been given an opportunity to comment on the proposed development.	(vi) Proof that all relevant and competent authorities have been given an opportunity to comment on the BID and DSR is included in the CRR as appended to the FSR.
	<b>(f) Specialist Assessments</b>	<b>(f) Specialist Assessments</b>
	(i) The specialists undertaking the Desktop Geotechnical Study (Annexure I) failed to submit a signed Specialist Declaration of Interest form. All Specialist Declaration of Interest forms must be signed by the relevant specialists and attached to the final SR. The forms are available on the Department's website (please use the Department's template).	(i) Signed Specialist Declarations are attached to the FSR as Annexure R.
	(ii) The Plan of Study failed to mention the undertaking of a Traffic Impact Assessment for the proposed Solar Park. It is imperative to undertake a Traffic Impact Assessment to determine the traffic impacts of the proposal on the transportation network and whether such development can be accommodated by the current transportation system.	(ii) A scope of work has been included in the Plan of Study and the Traffic Impact Assessment will be included in the Draft EIA Report.

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	<p>(iii) The EAP must ensure that the terms of reference for all the identified specialist studies include the following:</p> <p>a) A detailed description of the study's methodology; indication of the locations and descriptions of the development footprint (solar field) and all other associated infrastructures that they have assessed and are recommending for authorisation.</p> <p>b) Provide a detailed description of all limitations to the studies. All specialist studies must be conducted in the right season and providing that as a limitation will not be allowed.</p> <p>c) Please note that the Department considers a 'no-go' area, as an area where no development of any infrastructure is allowed; therefore, no development of associated infrastructure including access roads is allowed in the 'no-go' areas.</p> <p>d) Should the specialist definition of 'no-go' area differ from the Department's definition; this must be clearly indicated. The specialist must also indicate the 'no-go' area's buffer if applicable.</p> <p>e) <b>Bird specialist studies must have support from Birdlife South Africa.</b></p> <p>f) <b>All specialist studies must be final, and provide detailed/practical mitigation measures for the preferred alternative and recommendations, and must not recommend further studies to be completed post EA.</b></p> <p>g) Should a specialist recommend specific mitigation measures, these must be clearly indicated.</p>	<p>(iii) Because most of the specialist studies have already been conducted, all these details are included in section 9.6 of the FSR and the specialist reports. The requirements are listed in the Plan of Study for the outstanding specialist studies in section 9.6 of the FSR.</p> <p>(b) Limitations to the studies and time of season are addressed in the various specialist studies and all specialist studies were conducted in the right season.</p> <p>(c) No-go areas were identified in the area and the footprint of the solar plant has been designed outside any no-go areas. A buffer area has been drawn around the heritage area (old dam) and is excluded from the development.</p> <p>(d) This is not applicable as none of the specialists' definition of a 'no-go' area differs from the Departments' definition.</p> <p>(e) The project was completed in consideration of the BirdLife SA (BLSA) best practice guidelines for solar energy. Information provided by BLSA is included in the report, with reference to threatened species, Important Bird Areas and Eskom's Red Data book on birds. Information from the South African Bird Atlas Project 2 (SABAP2) database has also been included in the report. The report states that information from the monitoring plan must be provided to the BirdLife Renewable Energy Programme. There is continuous liaising with BLSA during the EIA process.</p> <p>(f) All specialist studies attached to this FSR are final and provide detailed mitigation measures.</p>



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	<p>(iv) Should the appointed specialists specify contradicting recommendations, the EAP must clearly indicate the most reasonable recommendation and substantiate this with defensible reasons; and were necessary, include further expertise advice.</p> <hr/> <p>(v) Please ensure that all mitigation recommendations are in line with applicable and most recent guidelines.</p> <hr/> <p>(vi) It is further brought to your attention that Procedures for the Assessment and Minimum Criteria for Reporting on identified Environmental Themes in terms of Sections 24(5)(a) and (h) and 44 of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998, when applying for Environmental Authorisation, which were promulgated in Government Notice No. 320 of 20 March 2020 (i.e. "the Protocols"), and in Government Notice No. 1150 of 30 October 2020 (i.e. protocols for terrestrial plant and animal species), have come into effect. Please note that specialist assessments must be conducted in accordance with these protocols.</p> <hr/> <p>(vii) As such, the Specialist Declaration of Interest forms must also indicate the scientific organisation registration/member number and status of registration/membership for each specialist.</p> <hr/> <p>(viii) Please also ensure that the final SR includes the Site Verification Report as required by the relevant environmental themes and assessments.</p> <hr/> <p>(ix) Please note further that the protocols, if applicable, require certain specialists' to be SACNASP registered. Please ensure that the relevant specialist certificates are attached to the relevant reports.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(g) Cumulative Assessment</b></p> <p>(i) Should there be any other similar projects within a 30km radius of the proposed development site, the cumulative impact assessment for all identified and assessed impacts must be refined to indicate the following:</p> <p>a) Identified cumulative impacts must be clearly defined, and where possible the size of the identified impact must be quantified and indicated, i.e., hectares of cumulatively transformed land.</p>	<p>(g) Mitigation measures recommended by specialists will be included in the EIA report.</p> <hr/> <p>(iv) No contradicting recommendations were specified by any specialists.</p> <hr/> <p>(v) This will be considered during the EIA phase while the EIA report is compiled.</p> <hr/> <p>(vi) The aforementioned protocols are implemented throughout the EIA process.</p> <hr/> <p>(vii) The required information is included in Specialist Declaration forms, attached to the specialist studies.</p> <hr/> <p>(viii) All specialist studies were conducted for the relevant environmental themes and assessments, in the environmental screening tool report.</p> <hr/> <p>(ix) All SACNASP registrations, where required, are included in Specialist Declarations, attached to the relevant specialist studies.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(g) Cumulative Assessments</b> Cumulative assessments are defined in the different specialist reports. This will be further addressed in the EIA report.</p>

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	<p>b) Detailed process flow and proof must be provided, to indicate how the specialist's recommendations, mitigation measures and conclusions from the various similar developments in the area were taken into consideration in the assessment of cumulative impacts and when the conclusion and mitigation measures were drafted for this project.</p> <p>c) The cumulative impacts significance rating must also inform the need and desirability of the proposed development.</p> <p>d) A cumulative impact environmental statement on whether the proposed development must proceed.</p> <p><b>(h) General</b>                      You are further reminded to comply with Regulation 21(1) of the NEMA EIA Regulations 2014, as amended, which states that:  <i>"If S&amp;EIR must be applied to an application, the applicant must, within 44 days of receipt of the application by the competent authority, submit to the competent authority a scoping report which has been subjected to a public participation process of at least 30 days and which reflects the incorporation of comments received, including any comments of the competent authority".</i></p> <p>You are further reminded that the final SR to be submitted to this Department must comply with all the requirements in terms of the scope of assessment and content of Scoping reports in accordance with Appendix 2 and Regulation 21(1) of the EIA Regulations 2014, as amended.                      Further note that in terms of Regulation 45 of the EIA Regulations 2014, as amended, this application will lapse if the applicant fails to meet any of the timeframes prescribed in terms of these Regulations, unless an extension has been granted in terms of Regulation 3(7).</p> <p>You are hereby reminded of Section 24F of the National Environmental Management Act, Act No. 107 of 1998, as amended, that no activity may commence prior to an Environmental Authorisation being granted by the Department.</p>	<p>b. Cumulative impacts will be assessed in the EIA Report.</p> <p>c. This will be further addressed in the EIA Report.</p> <p>d. No fatal flaws were raised by any specialist regarding the possible cumulative impacts of the proposed solar park and power line.</p> <p><b>(h) General</b>                      All timeframes will be adhered to as prescribed in the EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended. The scoping report was compiled according to Appendix 2 of the EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended. If a timeframe cannot be complied to, the applicant will apply for an extension of the timeframe in terms of Regulation 3(7) of the EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended.</p> <p>The applicant has been informed that no activity may commence prior to an Environmental Authorisation being granted by the Department.</p> <p>I trust you find this in order.</p> <p>Yours sincerely</p>

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	<p>Yours sincerely</p> <p><b>Annexure 1</b> Format for Comments and Response Report</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Date of comment, format of comment name of organisation/I&amp;AP,</th> <th>Comment</th> <th>Response from EAP/Applicant/Specialist</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>27/03/2021 Email Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment: Priority Infrastructure Projects (Joe Soap)</td> <td>Please record C&amp;R trail report in this format. Please update the contact details of the provincial environmental authority.</td> <td>EAP: (Noted)The C&amp;R trail report has been updated into the desired format, see Appendix K. EAP: Details of provincial authority have been updated, see page 16 of the Application form.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Date of comment, format of comment name of organisation/I&AP,	Comment	Response from EAP/Applicant/Specialist	27/03/2021 Email Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment: Priority Infrastructure Projects (Joe Soap)	Please record C&R trail report in this format. Please update the contact details of the provincial environmental authority.	EAP: (Noted)The C&R trail report has been updated into the desired format, see Appendix K. EAP: Details of provincial authority have been updated, see page 16 of the Application form.	
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<p>27/02/2023 EMAIL MASHUDU MUDAU BIODIVERSITY MAINSTREAMING &amp; EIA DEP OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT ENVIRONMENT HOUSE</p>	<p>Good day Hiadee.</p> <p>I trust you are well.</p> <p>Kindly note that we have not provided comments due to we did not receive notification for this project.</p> <p>May you kindly send to us your proof of submission.</p>	<p>27/02/2023 EMAIL AGES Limpopo</p> <p>Dear Biodiversity admin</p> <p>Do you have any idea when we can expect comments from your section? We would like to submit our Final Scoping report and EIA section would like comments from BIODIVERSITY.</p>						
<p>01/03/2023 EMAIL MASHUDU MUDAU</p>	<p>Good day Hiadee.</p> <p>I trust you are well.</p> <p>I do acknowledge that we have downloaded the DSR on the 20th February, unfortunately am not able to give you the exact date of when we will be able to provide comments, as this depends on whether the case officer(s) (cc'd above) will</p>	<p>27/02/2023 EMAIL AGES Limpopo</p> <p>Dear Mashudu Mudau</p>						

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	<p>be able to provide you with comments as soon as possible as we only received the notification on the 20th.</p> <p>I hope you find this in order.</p>	<p>I'm not sure what happened... I think there was some or other glitch in my emails on 23 January 2023 when the original DSR was sent out, as I cannot find the sent email.</p> <p>I sent another link on 20 February via wetransfer of the DSR, which BCADMIN downloaded on 20 February 2023 (see attached email PROOF)</p> <p>I realise that I should have followed up, and I apologise for asking this, I would just like to know when I can expect the comments, so that I can let EIAs know that the comments are imminent.</p> <p>Again apologies</p>
<p>01/03/2023 EMAIL MS MMATLALA RABOTHATA DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT</p>	<p>Dear Hiadee,</p> <p>Based on the email below and the time that is allocated to me to provide the comments on the DSR, kindly be informed that I will not be able to provide the comments by Friday. It will be appreciated to submit the DEIR to Directorate BC and I will provide the comments on it.</p> <p>Trust that you find this is order.</p>	<p>01/03/2023 EMAIL AGES Limpopo</p> <p>Dear Ms Mmatlala Rabothata</p> <p>Thank you so much for your email.</p> <p>We will indicate this to Department of, Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment: Chief Director: Integrated Environmental Authorisations when submitting the Final Scoping Report.</p> <p>We will send you the Draft EIAR and await comments on that report.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>

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<p>01/03/2023 KAMOGELO MATHETJA DFFE BIODIVERSITY</p>	<p>Dear Sir/Madam</p> <p>DFFE Directorate: Biodiversity Conservation hereby acknowledge receipt of the invitation to review and comment on the project mentioned on the subject line. Kindly note that the project has been allocated to Mrs M Rabothata and Mr K Mathetja (Both copied on this email). In addition, kindly share the shapefiles of the development footprints/application site with the Case Officers.</p> <p>Please note: All Public Participation Process documents related to Biodiversity EIA review and any other Biodiversity EIA queries must be submitted to the Directorate: Biodiversity Conservation at Email: BCAdmin@environment.gov.za for attention of Mr Seoka Lekota</p> <p>Regards,</p>	
<p>07/03/2023 EMAIL LYDIA KUTU INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORISATIONS: PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENTS</p>	<p>Dear Sir/Madam</p> <p><b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF RECEIPT OF THE FINAL SCOPING REPORT AND AMENDED APPLICATION FORM FOR THE PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216, AND CONNECTING POWERLINE, MATJHABENG &amp; MASILONYANA LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT, FREE STATE PROVINCE.</b></p> <p>The Department confirms having received the Final Scoping Report and Amended Application Form for the abovementioned project on 06 March 2023. You have submitted these documents to comply with the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998) and the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations, 2014, as amended.</p> <p>You are hereby reminded of Section 24F of the National Environmental Management Act 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998), as amended, that no activity may commence prior to an Environmental Authorisation being granted by the Department.</p> <p>Kind Regards,</p>	



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<p>19/04/2023 EMAIL MR SABELO MALAZA CHIEF DIRECTOR: INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORISATIONS DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT SIGNED BY: MR COENRAD AGENBACH DESIGNATION: DEPUTY DIRECTOR: PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS</p>	<p><b>ACCEPTANCE OF THE SCOPING REPORT FOR THE PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216 AND CONNECTING POWER LINE IN THE MATJHABENG AND MASILONYANA LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY IN THE FREE STATE PROVINCE</b></p> <p>The final Scoping Report (SR) and the Plan of Study for Environmental Impact Assessment dated February 2023 and received by the Department on 06 March 2023, refer.</p> <p>The Department has evaluated the submitted final SR and the Plan of Study for Environmental Impact Assessment dated February 2023 and is satisfied that the documents comply with the minimum requirements of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations, 2014, as amended. The final SR is hereby accepted by the Department in terms of Regulation 22(1)(a) of the EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended.</p> <p>You may proceed with the environmental impact assessment process in accordance with the tasks contemplated in the Plan of Study for Environmental Impact Assessment as required in terms of the EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended.</p> <p>In addition, the following amendments and additional information are required for the EIAR:</p> <hr/> <p><b>(a) Specific Comments</b></p> <p>i The co-ordinates in the EIAR must be specific to each activity and infrastructure that is proposed on the site. The co-ordinates for each corner of the solar fields, the substations, BESS, power line route, and laydown areas must be included in the EIAR, i.e., we require that you provide us with the specific development footprints for each development parameter, and not an area outlining the entire site.</p> <hr/> <p>ii Please provide a concise, but complete, summary and bullet list of the project description and associated infrastructure (or project scope) to be included</p>	<p><b>DRAFT EIA REPORT FOR THE PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216 AND CONNECTING POWER LINE, MATHABENG AND MASILONYANA MUNICIPALITIES, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, FREE STATE PROVINCE</b></p> <p>Your Scoping approval letter dated 19 April 2023 refers.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(a) Specific Comments</b></p> <p>(i) The coordinates of the PV plant footprint, construction camp that will become the BESS, on-site substation and connecting powerline are included in the DEIAR in tables 3 - 6.</p> <hr/> <p>(ii) The summary required is included in Section 5.4 of the EIAR.</p>

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	<p>in the decision (or as it should appear in the decision), should a positive Environmental Authorisation be granted. This must include a list of all development components and associated infrastructure.</p> <hr/> <p>iii Please provide a detailed description as well as any associated assessments related to the technology required for the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS).</p> <hr/> <p>iv The EIAr must clearly provide a detailed section which addresses the site sensitivity verification requirements where a specialist assessment is required but no specific assessment protocol has been prescribed, as well as the site sensitivity verification and minimum report content requirements for all specialist assessments undertaken, which was included in the screening tool report. Kindly take note that this should be in the form of a report and should either confirm or dispute the sensitivity ratings for each theme identified by the screening tool report. Please refer to 1. Site sensitivity verification and minimum report content requirements of the Protocol document.</p> <p><b>(b) Listed Activities</b></p> <p>i The listed activities applied for in the application form have been quoted incorrectly, as they do not correlate with the listed activities in the EIA Regulations 2014, as amended. The following discrepancies were noted with regards to the activities applied for in the application form:</p> <hr/> <p>➤ "Activity 12 (xii)(c) of Listing Notice 1"- These sub activities have been changed with the recent amendments to the EIA Regulations made in 2017. The Activity should be referenced as "Activity 12 (ii)(c) of Listing Notice 1".</p> <hr/> <p>➤ "Activity 12 (i)(ii)(iii) of Listing Notice 3"- Is quoted incorrectly and failed to apply for the applicable province the activity occurs in, "b. Free State" and not "a. Eastern Cape." Furthermore, the sub activity (iii) refers to "On land, where, at the time of the coming into effect of this Notice or thereafter such land was zoned open space, conservation or had an equivalent zoning;" and this does not correlate to</p>	<hr/> <p>(iii) See Section 5.4.2 of the EIAr.</p> <hr/> <p>(iv) All identified SSV and specialist studies identified by the screening tool report were conducted as indicated in Table 16 in the EIAr.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(b) Listed Activities</b></p> <p>(i)</p> <hr/> <p>➤ Corrected in Table 7 of the EIAr and attached amended application form.</p> <hr/> <p>➤ Corrected in Table 7 of the EIAr and attached amended application form. No CBAs are traversed because of the shorter powerline route and Activity 12 (b)(ii) has been removed.</p>



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	<p>the description provided in the Scoping Report and application form. The Activity should be quoted as "Activity 12 (b)(i)(ii) of Listing Notice 3"</p> <p>Kindly ensure all activities applied for in the application form and the EIAr are applicable to the proposed development and are quoted correctly as per the EIA Regulations 2014, as amended.</p> <p>ii. The listed activities and the description of the activities applied for in the application form and the final SR are not the same. Kindly ensure the listed activities and the description of activities represented in the EIAr and the application form are the same and correct.</p> <p>iii. The EIAr must provide an assessment of the impacts and mitigation measures for each of the listed activities applied for.</p> <p>iv. The listed activities represented in the EIAr and the application form must be the same and correct.</p> <p>v. The EIAr must assess the correct sub listed activity for each listed activity applied for.</p> <p><b>(c) Public Participation</b></p> <p>i Please ensure that comments from all relevant stakeholders are submitted to the Department with the EIAr. This includes but is not limited to the Free State Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, the Matjhabeng Local Municipality, the Masilonyana Local Municipality, the Lejweleputswa District Municipality, the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment: Directorate Biodiversity and Conservation.</p> <p>ii Please ensure that all issues raised, and comments received during the circulation of the draft SR and draft EIAr from registered I&amp;APs and organs of state which have jurisdiction in respect of the proposed activity are adequately addressed in the final EIAr. Proof of correspondence with the various stakeholders</p>	<p>Noted.</p> <p>ii. Corrected in Table 7 of the EIAr and attached amended application form.</p> <p>iii. Noted.</p> <p>iv. Noted.</p> <p>v. Noted.</p> <p><b>(c) Public Participation Process</b></p> <p>(i) All comments and responses are included in Section 9.3 of the DEIAr and Annexure C. Please take note that due to the shorter powerline, none of the components of this application falls within the jurisdiction of Masilonyana Local Municipality.</p> <p>(ii) All issues raised, and comments received during the circulation of the DSR from registered I&amp;APs and organs of state are included in the CRR (Annexure C). Proof that all relevant and competent</p>

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	<p>must be included in the final EIAr. Should you be unable to obtain comments, proof should be submitted to the Department of the attempts that were made to obtain comments.</p> <p>iii A Comments and Response trail report (C&amp;R) must be submitted with the final EIAr. The C&amp;R report must incorporate all comments for this development. The C&amp;R report must be a separate document from the main report and the format must be in the table format as indicated in Annexure 1 of this comments letter. Please refrain from summarising comments made by I&amp;APs. All comments from I&amp;APs must be copied verbatim and responded to clearly. Please note that a response such as "noted" is not regarded as an adequate response to I&amp;AP's comments.</p> <p>iv Comments from I&amp;APs must not be split and arranged into categories. Comments from each submission must be responded to individually.</p> <p>v The Public Participation Process must be conducted in terms of Regulation 39, 40, 41, 42, 43 and 44 of the EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended.</p> <p><b>(d) <u>Layout &amp; Sensitivity Maps</u></b></p> <p>i The EIAr must provide coordinate points for the proposed development site and all proposed infrastructure (note that if the site has numerous bend points, at each bend point coordinates must be provided) as well as the start, middle and end point of all linear activities.</p> <p>ii The EIAr must provide a copy of the final preferred layout map. All available biodiversity information must be used in the finalisation of the layout map. Existing infrastructure must be used as far as possible e.g., roads. The layout map must indicate the following:</p> <p>a) A clear indication of the envisioned area for the proposed solar fields.                      b) Internal roads.                      c) All supporting onsite infrastructure such as laydown area, guard house and control room etc.</p>	<p>authorities have been given an opportunity to comment on the BID and DSR is included in the CRR as appended to the EIAr.</p> <p>(iii) All comments and responses are included in the CRR in the format required.</p> <p>(iv) Responses to comments were made individually as indicated in Section 9.3 of the DEIAr and Annexure C.</p> <p>(v) The Public Participation Process was conducted in terms of Regulation 39, 40, 41, 42, 43 and 44 of the EIA Regulations 2014, as amended.</p> <p><b>(d) <u>Layout &amp; Sensitivity Maps</u></b></p> <p>(i) Coordinate points are provided in tables 3 - 6 of the DEIAr.</p> <p>(ii)                      Layout maps are provided in Annexure A.</p>

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	<p>d) Substations, transformers, switching stations and inverters.                      e) Battery Energy Storage System.                      f) Power line route (including pylon positions) to the distribution/transmission network; and                      g) All existing infrastructure on the site, especially railway lines and roads.</p> <hr/> <p>iii. Please provide an environmental sensitivity map which indicates the following:</p> <p>a) The location of sensitive environmental features identified on site, e.g. CBAs, protected areas, heritage sites, wetlands, drainage lines etc. that will be affected by the facility and its associated infrastructure;                      b) Buffer areas; and                      c) All "no-go" areas.</p> <hr/> <p>iv. The above layout map must be superimposed (overlain) with the sensitivity map and a cumulative map which shows neighbouring and existing infrastructure.</p> <hr/> <p>(v) Google maps will not be accepted.</p>	<p>(iii)</p> <p>Sensitivity maps are included in the different specialist reports.</p> <hr/> <p>iv. Layout maps overlain with sensitivity maps for solar park and power line, indicating buffer areas are provided in Annexure A.</p> <hr/> <p>v. Noted</p>
	<p><b>(e) Specialist assessments</b></p> <p>i Page 45 of the final SR stipulates that a Traffic Impact Assessment would be conducted and included in the draft EIAR, however Page 105 of the final SR does not list a Traffic Impact Assessment as one of the specialist studies to be undertaken in the EIA phase. Kindly confirm whether this study would be undertaken and ensure the information provided throughout the EIAR is consistent and uniform.</p> <hr/> <p>ii The EAP must ensure that the terms of reference for all the identified specialist studies must include the following:</p> <p>a) A detailed description of the study's methodology; indication of the locations and descriptions of the development footprint, and all other associated infrastructures that they have assessed and are recommending for authorisation.</p>	<p><b>(e) Specialist Assessments</b></p> <p>(i) A Traffic Impact Assessment has been conducted and is attached as Annexure K of the Draft EIAR.</p> <hr/> <p>(ii) :</p> <p>(a) All these details are included in the specialist reports attached as annexures.</p>

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	<p>b) Provide a detailed description of all limitations to the studies. All specialist studies must be conducted in the right season and providing that as a limitation will not be allowed.</p> <hr/> <p>c) Please note that the Department considers a 'no-go' area, as an area where no development of any infrastructure is allowed; therefore, no development of associated infrastructure including access roads is allowed in the 'no-go' areas.</p> <hr/> <p>d) Should the specialist definition of 'no-go' area differ from the Department's definition; this must be clearly indicated. The specialist must also indicate the 'no-go' area's buffer if applicable.</p> <hr/> <p>e) <b>All specialist studies must be final, and provide detailed/practical mitigation measures for the preferred alternative and recommendations, and must not recommend further studies to be completed post EA.</b></p> <hr/> <p>f) Should a specialist recommend specific mitigation measures, these must be clearly indicated.</p> <hr/> <p>iii Should the appointed specialists specify contradicting recommendations, the EAP must clearly indicate the most reasonable recommendation and substantiate this with defensible reasons; and where necessary, include further expert advice.</p> <hr/> <p>iv It is further brought to your attention that Procedures for the Assessment and Minimum Criteria for Reporting in identified Environmental Themes in terms of Sections 24(5)(a) and (h) and 44 of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998, when applying for Environmental Authorisation, which were promulgated in Government Notice No. 320 of 20 March 2020 (i.e. "the Protocols") and in Government Notice No. 1150 of 30 October 2020 (i.e. protocols for terrestrial plant and animal species), have come into effect. <b>Please note that specialist assessments must be conducted in accordance with these protocols.</b></p>	<p>(b) All specialist studies were conducted in the right season and limitations are listed where applicable.</p> <hr/> <p>(c) No-go areas were identified, and the footprint of the solar plant has been designed outside any no-go areas. Buffer areas have been drawn around the heritage area (old dam) and drainage channels that are excluded from the development. These buffer areas are indicated on the maps in Annexure A.</p> <hr/> <p>(d) This is not applicable as none of the specialists' definition of a 'no-go' area differs from the Department's definition.</p> <hr/> <p>(e) All specialist studies attached to this draft EIA are final and provide detailed mitigation measures.</p> <hr/> <p>(f) Mitigation measures recommended by specialists are included in Section 10.2 of the draft EIA and the EMP.</p> <hr/> <p>(iii) No contradicting recommendations were specified by any specialists.</p> <hr/> <p>(iv) The protocols are implemented throughout the EIA process.</p>

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	<p>v Please also ensure that the EIAr includes the Site Verification Report and Compliance Statements (where applicable) as required by the relevant themes.</p> <hr/> <p>vi Please note further that the protocols, if applicable, require certain specialists' to be SACNASP registered in the field of expertise of the specialist study being undertaken e.g. An aquatic assessment must be prepared by a specialist registered with SACNASP, with expertise in the field of aquatics sciences. Please ensure that the relevant specialist certificates are attached to the relevant reports.</p> <hr/> <p>vii <u>As such, the Specialist Declaration of Interest forms must also indicate the scientific organisation registration/member number and status of registration/membership for each specialist.</u></p> <hr/> <p>viii The following Specialist Assessments will form part of the EIAr:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment;</li> <li>➤ Avifaunal Assessment;</li> <li>➤ Wetland and Riparian Delineation &amp; Aquatic Biodiversity Report;</li> <li>➤ Archaeological Impact Assessment;</li> <li>➤ Palaeontological Impact Assessment for Solar Park;</li> <li>➤ Desktop Geotechnical Investigation;</li> <li>➤ Preliminary Visual Impact Assessment;</li> <li>➤ Agricultural Agro-Ecosystem Impact Assessment Report;</li> <li>➤ Civil Aviation Assessment Report;</li> <li>➤ Radio Frequency Interference Impact Assessment;</li> <li>➤ Socio-Economic Impact Assessment;</li> <li>➤ Palaeontological assessment for the power line route; and</li> <li>➤ Visual Impact Assessment</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>ix Please ensure that each specialist study has the correct and same project description and layout to assess.</p>	<p>(v) All specialist studies were conducted for the relevant environmental themes and assessments as identified in the environmental screening tool report.</p> <hr/> <p>(vi) All SACNASP registrations, where required, are included in Specialist Declarations.</p> <hr/> <p>(vii) The required information is included in Specialist Declaration forms.</p> <hr/> <p>(viii) <i>The following Specialist Assessments will form part of the EIAr:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ All these studies are attached as Annexures to the draft EIAr.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>(ix) That is the case.</p>



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	<p>x Please include a table that shows the proposed studies and the relevant specialists carrying out the study. In addition, a summary should be included of the specialist's recommendations in terms of the alternatives that are preferred based on the findings of their study.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(f) Cumulative Assessment</b></p> <p>(i) As there are other similar projects within a 30km radius of the proposed development site, a cumulative impact assessment for all identified and assessed impacts must be conducted and must indicate the following:</p> <p>a) Identified cumulative impacts must be clearly defined, and where possible the size of the identified impact must be quantified and indicated, i.e. hectares of cumulatively transformed land.</p> <hr/> <p>b) Detailed process flow and proof must be provided, to indicate how the specialist's recommendations, mitigation measures and conclusions from the various similar developments in the area were taken into consideration in the assessment of cumulative impacts and when the conclusion and mitigation measures were drafted for this project.</p> <hr/> <p>c) The cumulative impacts significance rating must also inform the need and desirability of the proposed development.</p> <hr/> <p>d) A cumulative impact environmental statement on whether the proposed development must proceed.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(g) General</b></p> <p>i The EIAr must provide the technical details for the proposed facility in a table format as well as their description and/or dimensions. A sample for the minimum information required is listed under Annexure 2 below.</p>	<p>(x) Table included under Section 11 of the draft EIAr.</p> <hr/> <p><b>f. Cumulative Assessments</b></p> <p>(i) a. Cumulative assessments are defined in the different specialist reports. The significance of cumulative impacts is assessed and rated in the tables in Section 10.2 of the draft EIAr.</p> <hr/> <p>b. The significance of cumulative impacts is assessed and rated in the tables in Section 10.2 of the draft EIAr.</p> <hr/> <p>c. All the cumulative impacts have been rated between low-medium and medium without mitigation measures.</p> <hr/> <p>d. No fatal flaws were raised by any specialist regarding the possible cumulative impacts of the proposed solar park and power line and all cumulative impacts can be mitigated to low, medium-low and medium impacts – section 10.2.</p> <hr/> <p><b>g. General</b></p> <p>i. Technical details listed in Table 8 of draft EIAr.</p>

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	<p>ii The EAP must provide landowner consent for all farm portions affected by the proposed project i.e., all farm portions where the access road, solar field and associated infrastructure are to be located.</p> <hr/> <p>iii A construction and operational phase EMPr that includes mitigation and monitoring measures must be submitted with the final EIAR, including the Generic EMPr for substations and power lines.</p> <hr/> <p>The applicant is hereby reminded to comply with the requirements of Regulation 45 of GN R982 of 04 December 2014, as amendment, with regard to the time period allowed for complying with the requirements of the Regulations.</p> <p>You are hereby reminded of Section 24F of the National Environmental Management Act, Act No. 107 of 1998, as amended, that no activity may commence prior to an environmental authorisation being granted by the Department.</p> <p>Yours faithfully</p>	<p>(ii) Landowner's consent is attached to the amended application form.</p> <hr/> <p>(iii) EMPr's are attached as Annexure R.</p> <hr/> <p>The applicant has been informed that no activity may commence prior to an Environmental Authorisation being granted by the Department.</p> <p>Please note that the Listed Activities have been amended and an amended EIA application form is therefore attached.</p> <p>I trust you will find this in order.</p> <p>Yours sincerely</p>
<p>06/06/2023 EMAIL LUFUNO SITHOMOLA LAND USE OFFICER: AGRO ECOSYSTEM LAND USE MANAGEMENT DIRECTORATE: LAND AND SOIL MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, LAND REFORM &amp; RURAL DEVELOPMENT</p>	<p>Good day</p> <p>Kindly provide the tittle deed and power of attorney if you are applying on behalf of the farm owner in order for the Department to comment on proposed Renewable Energy Generation Project.</p> <p>Regards</p>	<p>03/07/2023 EMAIL AGES LIMPOPO</p> <p>Dear Lufuno Sithomola</p> <p>AGES Limpopo are applying for the Environmental Authorisation for this project from DFFE.</p> <p>The town planner will apply for the change in land use zoning etc in another process. i.e., they will submit the requested documentation as part of the APPLICATION process.</p> <p>AGES would like your department's comments on the Environmental Process to be submitted to DFFE only as part of the EIA process.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>



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<p>06/06/2023 EMAIL YANGA NOFUMA OBSTACLE ADMINISTRATOR   COO - AIR TRAFFIC SERVICES BRUMA</p>	<p>Good day Hiadee, RE: Proposed Solar PV Facility</p> <p>This is to acknowledge that ATNS has received your query.</p> <p>Below is the criteria for obstacle evaluation according to the regulations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the Solar PV installation is equal to or bigger than 5000 square meters.</li> <li>• If the Solar PV installation falls within a 8km radius around any aerodrome/airstrip or helipad;</li> <li>• If the Solar PV installation falls within the Approach and Departure area of any aerodrome/airstrip or helipad and</li> <li>• If the Solar PV installation falls within 3km radius of any aerodrome/airstrip or helipad a glint and glare assessment is required from the applicant.</li> </ul> <p>*Please Note the above is requirements for aviation purposes but if your development does fall outside of the above and you still need approval or letter based on other departments within the EIA process, you will still need to apply for assessments before we or the CAA can issue this approval or letter.</p> <p>Kindly note that ATNS charge for the assessment, and before the process start our Business Development department will forward a proposal to the client. The proposal and payment process are as follows if applicable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You will receive the proposal from our Business Development department, it will contain the work that will be done as well as what it will cost.</li> <li>• They will provide you with all the information needed to make payment. For this reason, please provide a billing address and the details of the person to whom the proposal should be addressed.</li> <li>• We will start with the assessments when our Business Development department received an accepted and signed proposal back from the client.</li> </ul> <p>We will conduct an assessment to evaluate whether the proposed structures will affect the safety of flight for aerodromes in close vicinity as well as communication, navigation, and surveillance (CNS) equipment.</p>	<p>30/06/2023 EMAIL AGES Limpopo</p> <p>Dear Yanga Nofuma</p> <p>Our aviation consultant Tobie du Toit is in consultation with the ATNS (Winnie) for this application.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>

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	<p>Please see required information below before we can proceed with our assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevation above mean sea level</li> <li>• Coordinate list for each structure - WGS84 (degrees, min and sec –S302515.32 E0180102.52)</li> <li>• A KMZ file with the positions of the proposed structures.</li> <li>• We also require the dimensions/specs of the structures.</li> <li>• Height to the top of structure.</li> <li>• A Glint and Glare assessment report (if it is within the 3km radius of any aerodrome/airstrip or helipad).</li> <li>• If there will be power lines erected, and/or a substation the position and heights for each structure (Pole/substation) must be provided.</li> </ul> <p>This whole process can take up to 120 working days' minimum that will commence after the proposal is accepted, signed and received by our Business Development department.</p> <p>Please note that ATNS also liaise with the South Africa Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) and will provide the client with the conditional/final approval from the SACAA.</p> <p>The client will have to liaise with SACAA to finalise the "As build" and for any queries with the lighting.</p> <p>Regards,</p>	
<p>08/06/2023 EMAIL SITYHILELO NGCATSHA SAHRA</p>	<p>Good day,</p> <p>Please note that all development applications are processed via our online portal, the South African Heritage Resources Information System (SAHRIS) found at the following link: <a href="https://sahris.sahra.org.za/">https://sahris.sahra.org.za/</a> . We do not accept emailed, posted, hardcopy, faxed, website links or DropBox links as official submissions.</p> <p>Please create an application on SAHRIS and upload all documents pertaining to the Environmental Authorisation Application Process. As per section 24(4)b(iii) of NEMA and section 38(8) of the National Heritage Resources Act, Act 25 of 1999</p>	<p>30/06/2023 EMAIL AGES Limpopo</p> <p>Dear Sityhilelo Ngcatsha</p> <p>Thank you for your response. The Heritage Specialist – Neels Kruger will upload all the relevant documents.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>

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	<p>(NHRA), an assessment of heritage resources must form part of the process and the assessment must comply with section 38(3) of the NHRA.</p> <p>Please note that a fee is required as from 1 January 2023 for all development applications submitted on SAHRIS. Please see the following link: <a href="https://sahris.sahra.org.za/content/what-are-sahra-processing-fees-and-banking-details">https://sahris.sahra.org.za/content/what-are-sahra-processing-fees-and-banking-details</a> and pay the required amount of R2000 for each section 38(8) development application. Please upload the proof of payment (PoP) to the respective development application case.</p> <p>Once all documents including all appendices and the PoP are uploaded to the case application. Please ensure that the status of the case is changed from 'DRAFT' to 'SUBMITTED' and ensure that all documents produced as part of the EA process are submitted as part of the application.</p> <p>Regards</p>	
<p>27/06/2023 EMAIL LEON MARX</p> <hr/> <p>30/06/2023 EMAIL LEON MARX</p>	<p>Hallo Hiadee</p> <p>Please make the download link available again.</p> <p>Thanks</p> <hr/> <p>Thanks</p>	<p>30/06/2023 LINK SENT FROM WE TRANSFER</p> <hr/> <p>30/06/2023 EMAIL AGES LIMPOPO</p> <p>Dear Leon.</p> <p>I sent a link from WeTransfer.</p> <p>Please download the link as soon as possible as it is only valid for 7 days.</p> <p>Kind regards</p> <hr/> <p>07/07/2023 LINK NOT DOWNLOADED</p>

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<p>28/06/2023 EMAIL MR SABELO MALAZA CHIEF DIRECTOR: INTEGRATED ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORISATIONS DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT SIGNED BY: MR COENRAD AGENBACH DESIGNATION: DEPUTY DIRECTOR: PRIORITISED INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS</p>	<p><b>COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR THE PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216 AND CONNECTING POWER LINE IN THE MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY IN THE FREE STATE PROVINCE</b></p> <p>The Application for Environmental Authorisation and the Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR) received by the Department on 20 January 2023 and 30 May 2023, respectively, refer.</p> <p>This letter serves to inform you that the following information must be included in the final EIAR:</p> <p><b>(a) Specific comments</b></p> <p>(i) The co-ordinates in the EIAR must be specific to each activity and infrastructure that is proposed on the site. The co-ordinates for each corner of the solar field, the substation, BESS, power line route, and laydown areas must be included in the EIAR, i.e., we require that you provide us with the specific development footprints for each development parameter, and not an area outlining the entire site.</p> <p>(ii) Please provide a concise, but complete, summary and bullet list of the project description and associated infrastructure (or project scope) to be included in the decision (or as it should appear in the decision), should a positive Environmental Authorisation be granted. This must include a list of all development components and associated infrastructure.</p> <p>(iii) Please provide a detailed description as well as any associated assessments related to the technology required for the Battery Energy Storage System (BESS).</p> <p>(iv) The EIAR must clearly provide a detailed section which addresses the site sensitivity verification requirements where a specialist assessment is required but no specific assessment protocol has been prescribed, as well as the site sensitivity verification and minimum report content requirements for all specialist assessments undertaken, which was included in the screening tool report. Kindly take note that this should be in the form of a report and should either confirm or</p>	<p><b>FINAL EIA REPORT FOR THE PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216 AND CONNECTING POWER LINE, MATHABENG AND MASILONYANA MUNICIPALITIES, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, FREE STATE PROVINCE</b></p> <p>Your comments on the DEIAR dated 28 June 2023 refers.</p> <p><b>a) Specific Comments</b></p> <p>The coordinates for each corner of the PV plant footprint, construction camp that will become the BESS, on-site substation and connecting powerline are included in the final EIAR in tables 3 - 6.</p> <p>The summary required is included in Section 5.4 of the FEIAR.</p> <p>See Section 5.4.2 of the FEIAR.</p> <p>All assessments required by the screening tool report were conducted as indicated in Table 16 in the final EIAR. A Site Sensitivity Verification Report was compiled and is included in Annexure A.</p>



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	<p>dispute the sensitivity ratings for each theme identified by the screening tool report. Please refer to 1. Site sensitivity verification and minimum report content requirements of the Protocol document.</p> <hr/> <p>(v) Kindly take note that the project title in the amended application form refers to <i>"The proposed Photovoltaic Virginia 4 Solar Park on the Farm Blomskraal 216 and connecting power line in Matjhabeng and Masilonyana Local Municipality, Lejweleputswa District Municipality in the Free State Province"</i>, however in the Comments and Response Report (Annexure D) on Page 47, it is stated that due to a shorter power line none of the components of this application fall within the jurisdiction of Masilonyana Local Municipality. Please ensure the project title removes Masilonyana Local Municipality as the project does not occur within this municipality.</p> <hr/> <p>(vi) You are further reminded that the final EIAR to be submitted to this Department must comply with all the requirements in terms of the scope of assessment and content of the EIAR in accordance with Appendix 3 of the EIA Regulations, 2014 as amended.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(b) Listed Activities</b></p> <p>i. Please ensure that all relevant listed activities are applied for, are specific and can be linked to the development activity or infrastructure as described in the project description. Only activities applicable to the development must be applied for and assessed.</p> <hr/> <p>ii. If the activities applied for in the application form differ from those mentioned in the final EIAR, an amended application form must be submitted. Please note that the Department's application form template has been amended and can be downloaded from the following link <a href="https://www.dffe.gov.za/documents/forms">https://www.dffe.gov.za/documents/forms</a>.</p> <hr/> <p>iii. It is imperative that the relevant authorities are continuously involved throughout the environmental impact assessment process as the development property possibly falls within geographically designated areas in terms of numerous GN R. 985 Activities. Written comments must be obtained from the</p>	<hr/> <p>Please accept my apology for this omission. Attached is the corrected page 1 of 33 of the application form.</p> <hr/> <p>The attached final EIAR complies with all requirements as listed in Appendix 3 of the EIA Regulations, 2017.</p> <hr/> <p><b>b) Listed Activities</b></p> <p>The activity description in Table 7 of the attached final EIAR link each activity applied for to the specific activity/ies that will be undertaken.</p> <hr/> <p>Care has been taken that the activities in the final EIAR are the same as in the amended application form submitted with the draft EIAR. An incorrect reference to the development footprint as 240ha in the application form submitted with the draft EIAR (GNR 327, 28 (ii)), was corrected to 450ha and the corrected application form page 12 of 33 is attached.</p> <hr/> <p>All relevant authorities have been involved since the beginning of the EIA process. Proof included in the C&amp;R report attached as Annexure D. Graphical representation of the proposed development within the</p>

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	<p>relevant authorities and submitted to this Department. In addition, a graphical representation of the proposed development within the respective geographical areas must be provided.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(c) Public Participation Process</b></p> <p>i. The final EIAr must comply with all the conditions of the acceptance of the SR signed on 19 April 2023 and must address all comments contained in the final SR, the draft EIAr and this letter.</p> <hr/> <p>-The Public Participation Process must be conducted in terms of Regulation 39, 40, 41, 42, 43 and 44 of the EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended.</p> <hr/> <p>ii. Please ensure that comments from all relevant stakeholders are submitted to the Department with the final EIAr. This includes but is not limited to the Free State Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, the Matjhabeng Local Municipality, the Lejweleputswa District Municipality, the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy, and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment: Directorate Biodiversity and Conservation.</p> <hr/> <p>iii. Please ensure that all issues raised and comments received during the circulation of the draft SR and draft EIAr from registered Interested and Affected Parties (I&amp;APs) and organs of state (including this Department's Biodiversity and Protected Area Sections), as listed in your I&amp;APs Database, and others that have jurisdiction in respect of the proposed activity are adequately addressed and included in the final EIAr and are incorporated into a Comments and Response Report (CRR).</p> <hr/> <p>iv. Copies of original comments received from I&amp;APs and organs of state, which have jurisdiction in respect of the proposed activity are submitted to the Department with the final EIAr.</p> <hr/>	<p>respective geographical areas are attached in Annexure B_ "Development_Geographical Areas".</p> <hr/> <p><b>c) Public Participation Process</b></p> <p>The FEIAr complies with all the conditions of the acceptance of the SR and address all comments contained in the final SR, the draft EIAr and your comments letter dated 28 June 2023.</p> <hr/> <p>The Public Participation Process was conducted in terms of Regulation 39, 40, 41, 42, 43 and 44 of the EIA Regulations 2014, as amended. Proof of this is included in Annexure D of the final EIAr.</p> <hr/> <p>All comments and responses are included in Section 9.3 of the final EIAr and Annexure D.</p> <hr/> <p>All issues raised, and comments received during the circulation of the DSR and DEIAR from registered I&amp;APs and organs of state are included in the CRR (Annexure D). Proof that all relevant and competent authorities have been given an opportunity to comment on the DSR and DEIAR is included in the CRR as appended to the FEIAr.</p> <hr/> <p>Copies of original comments are included in the C&amp;RR (Annexure D).</p> <hr/>



DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
	<p>v. Proof of correspondence with the various stakeholders must be included in the final EIAR. Should you be unable to obtain comments, proof should be submitted to the Department of the attempts that were made to obtain comments. In terms of Regulation 41(2)(b) of the EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended, please provide proof of written notice for the availability of the EIAR for comment.</p> <hr/> <p>vi. The CRR report must be a separate document from the main report and the format must be in the table format as indicated in Annexure 1 of this comments letter.</p> <hr/> <p>vii. Please refrain from summarising comments made by I&amp;APs. All comments from I&amp;APs must be copied verbatim and responded to clearly. Please note that a response such as "noted" is not regarded as an adequate response to I&amp;AP's comments.</p> <hr/> <p>viii. Minutes and attendance registers (where applicable) of any physical/virtual meetings held by the Environmental Assessment Practitioner (EAP) with Interested and Affected Parties (I&amp;APs) and other role players must be included in the final EIAR.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(d) <u>Layout &amp; Sensitivity Maps</u></b></p> <p>i. The final EIAR must provide coordinate points for the proposed development site (note that if the site has numerous bend points, at each bend point coordinates must be provided) as well as the start, middle and end point of all linear activities.</p> <hr/> <p>ii. The EIAR must provide a copy of the final preferred layout map. All available biodiversity information must be used in the finalisation of the layout map. Existing infrastructure must be used as far as possible e.g., roads. The layout map must indicate the following: e.g., roads. The layout map must indicate the following: a) A clear indication of the envisioned area for the proposed solar field; b) Internal roads;</p>	<p>Proof included in the C&amp;R report attached as Annexure D.</p> <hr/> <p>The CRR is attached as Annexure D to the final EIAR and is in the table format of Annexure 1.</p> <hr/> <p>All comments have been copied verbatim and responded to as indicated in the C&amp;R.</p> <hr/> <p>There was no need for physical or virtual meetings with I&amp;APs.</p> <hr/> <p><b>d) <u>Layout &amp; Sensitivity Maps</u></b></p> <p>Coordinate points are provided in tables 3 - 6 of the final EIAR.</p> <hr/> <p>Layout maps and technical drawings are provided in Annexure B.</p>

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	<p>c) All supporting onsite infrastructure such as laydown area, guard house and control room etc.;</p> <p>d) Battery Energy Storage System;</p> <p>e) Substations, transformers, switching stations and inverters;</p> <p>f) Power line route (including pylon positions) to the distribution/transmission network;</p> <p>g) All existing infrastructure on the site, especially railway lines and roads; and</p> <p>h) Buildings, including accommodation.</p> <hr/> <p>iii. Please provide an environmental sensitivity map which indicates the following</p> <p>a) The location of sensitive environmental features identified on site, e.g. CBAs, protected areas, heritage sites, wetlands, drainage lines, nesting and roosting sites etc. that will be affected by the facility and its associated infrastructure;</p> <p>b) Buffer areas; and</p> <p>c) All "no-go" areas.</p> <hr/> <p>iv. The above layout map must be superimposed (overlain) with the sensitivity map and a cumulative map which shows neighbouring and existing infrastructure.</p> <hr/> <p>v. Google maps will not be accepted.</p> <hr/> <p><b><u>(e) Cumulative Assessment</u></b></p> <p>i Should there be any other similar projects within a 30km radius of the proposed development site, the cumulative impact assessment for all identified and assessed impacts must be refined to indicate the following:</p> <p>a) Identified cumulative impacts must be clearly defined, and where possible the size of the identified impact must be quantified and indicated, i.e. hectares of cumulatively transformed land.</p> <hr/> <p>b) Detailed process flow and proof must be provided, to indicate how the specialist's recommendations, mitigation measures and conclusions from the various similar developments in the area were taken into</p>	<hr/> <p>Sensitivity maps are included in the different specialist reports as well as in Annexure B.</p> <hr/> <p>Layout maps overlay with sensitivity maps for solar park and power line, indicating buffer areas are provided in Annexure B.</p> <hr/> <p>Google maps are used as a base and when working on the maps but are <u>not</u> included in Annexure B.</p> <hr/> <p><b><u>e) Cumulative Assessments</u></b></p> <p>Cumulative assessments are defined in the different specialist reports. The significance of cumulative impacts is assessed and rated in the various tables in Section 10.2 of the final EIAR.</p> <hr/> <p>The process followed to determine the cumulative impacts is described in Section 9.9 of the final EIAR. The cumulative impacts rating by the specialists are summarised in Section 9 under the various environmental features. The</p>

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	<p>consideration in the assessment of cumulative impacts and when the conclusion and mitigation measures were drafted for this project.</p> <hr/> <p>c) The cumulative impacts significance rating must also inform the need and desirability of the proposed development.</p> <hr/> <p>d) A cumulative impact environmental statement on whether the proposed development must proceed.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(f) <u>Specialist Declaration of Interest</u></b></p> <p>i Specialist Declaration of Interest forms must be attached to the final EIAR. You are therefore requested to submit original signed Specialist Declaration of Interest forms for each specialist study conducted. The forms are available on Department’s website (please use the Department’s template).</p> <hr/> <p>ii It is further brought to your attention that Procedures for the Assessment and Minimum Criteria for Reporting on identified Environmental Themes in terms of Sections 24(5)(a) and (h) and 44 of the National Environmental Management Act, 1998, when applying for Environmental Authorisation, which were promulgated in Government Notice No. 320 of 20 March 2020 (i.e. “the Protocols”), and in Government Notice No. 1150 of 30 October 2020 (i.e. protocols for terrestrial plant and animal species), have come into effect. <b>Please note that specialist assessments must be conducted in accordance with these protocols.</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>(g) <u>Undertaking of an Oath</u></b></p>	<p>significance of these ratings has been determined in the cumulative impacts row of the impact rating tables in Section 10.2 of the final EIAR.</p> <hr/> <p>All the cumulative impacts have been rated between low-medium and medium without mitigation measures. As such, the envisioned impacts are within the limits of acceptable change and the proposed development in its preferred location is supported. It is the opinion of the EAP that the positive impact from this proposed development outweighs its negative impacts, provided all mitigation measures as stipulated by the respective specialists are implement and monitored for the lifespan of the proposed development.</p> <hr/> <p>No fatal flaws were raised by any specialist regarding the possible cumulative impacts of the proposed solar park and power line and all cumulative impacts can be mitigated to low, medium-low and medium impacts – section 10.2.</p> <hr/> <p><b>f) <u>Specialist Declaration of Interest</u></b></p> <p>Specialist declarations are attached as Annexure U to the final EIAR.</p> <hr/> <p>All specialist assessments were conducted according to “the Protocols”.</p> <hr/> <p><b>g) <u>Undertaking of an Oath</u></b></p>

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	<p>i. Please note that the final EIAR must have an undertaking under oath/ affirmation by the EAP.</p> <hr/> <p>ii. Based on the above, you are therefore required to include an undertaking under oath or affirmation by the EAP (administered by a Commissioner of Oaths) as per Appendix 3 of the NEMA EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended, which states that the EIAR must include: <i>“an undertaking under oath or affirmation by the EAP in relation to:</i></p> <p><i>a) the correctness of the information provided in the reports;</i></p> <p><i>b) the inclusion of comments and inputs from stakeholders and I&amp;APs;</i></p> <p><i>c) the inclusion of inputs and recommendations from the specialist reports where relevant; and</i></p> <p><i>d) any information provided by the EAP to interested and affected parties and any responses by the EAP to comments or inputs made by interested and affected parties”.</i></p> <hr/> <p><b>(h) Details and Expertise of the EAP</b></p> <p>i You are required to include the details and expertise of the EAP in the EIAR, including a curriculum vitae, in order to comply with the requirements of Appendix 3 of the NEMA EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(i) Environmental Management Programme</b></p> <p>i The EMPr must also include the following:</p> <p>a) All recommendations and mitigation measures recorded in the EIAR and the specialist studies conducted.</p> <hr/> <p>b) An environmental sensitivity map indicating environmental sensitive areas and features identified during the assessment process.</p> <hr/> <p>c) Measures to protect hydrological features such as streams, rivers, pans, wetlands, dams and their catchments, and other environmental sensitive areas from construction impacts including the direct or indirect spillage of pollutants.</p> <hr/>	<p>Oath signed in Section 18 of the final EIAR.</p> <hr/> <p>The details of the EAP, declaration of interest and undertaking under oath is attached as Annexure V of the final EIAR.</p> <hr/> <p><b>h) Details and Expertise of the EAP</b></p> <p>Expertise and qualifications are included in the condensed curriculum attached as Annexure T to the final EIAR.</p> <hr/> <p><b>i) Environmental Management Programme</b></p> <p>All recommendations and mitigation measures listed in the EIAR and specialist studies have been included in the tables in Section 7 of the EMPr.</p> <hr/> <p>Maps included in figures 2 – 4 of the EMPr.</p> <hr/> <p>Measures are included in the tables of Section 7 under the Ground- and Surface Water Pollution and Ecology sections.</p> <hr/>



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	<p>ii In addition to the above, the EMPr must comply with Appendix 4 of the EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended.</p> <hr/> <p>iii It is drawn to your attention that for substation and overhead electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure, when such facilities trigger activity 11 or 47 of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations Listing Notice 1 of 2014, as amended, and any other listed and specified activities necessary for the realisation of such facilities, the generic Environmental Management Programme, contemplated in the Regulations must be used and submitted with the final report over and above the EMPr for the facility.</p> <hr/> <p><b>(j) General</b></p> <p>The EIAr must provide the technical details for the proposed facility in a table format as well as their description and/or dimensions. A sample of the minimum information required is listed under Annexure 2 of the EIA information required for solar energy facility as requested in the acceptance of the SR.</p> <hr/> <p>Please also ensure that the final EIAr includes the period for which the Environmental Authorisation is required and the date on which the activity will be concluded as per Appendix 3 of the NEMA EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended.</p> <hr/> <p>You are further reminded to comply with Regulation 23(1)(a) of the NEMA EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended, which states that: <i>"The applicant must within 106 days of the acceptance of the scoping report submit to the competent authority -</i>  <i>(a) an environmental impact assessment report inclusive of any specialist reports, an EMPr, a closure plan in the case of a closure activity and where the application is a mining application, the plans, report and calculations contemplated in the Financial Provisioning Regulations, which must have been subjected to a public participation process of at least 30 days and which reflects the incorporation of comments received, including any comments of the competent authority."</i></p> <hr/> <p>Should there be significant changes or new information that has been added to the EIAr or EMPr which changes or information was not contained in the reports or plans consulted on during the initial public participation process, you are required</p>	<p>The EMPr complies with Appendix 4 of the EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended.</p> <hr/> <p>Generic EMPr's for the powerline and substations are attached as Annexure S to the final EIAr.</p> <hr/> <p><b>j) General</b></p> <p>Technical details listed in Table 8 of final EIAr.</p> <hr/> <p>Periods specified in Section 17 of the final EIAr.</p> <hr/> <p>The applicant has been informed that no activity may commence prior to an Environmental Authorisation being granted by the Department.</p> <p>I trust you will find this in order.</p> <p>Yours sincerely</p>

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	<p>to comply with Regulation 23(1)(b) of the NEMA EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended, which states: <i>“The applicant must within 106 days of the acceptance of the scoping report submit to the competent authority – (b) a notification in writing that the documents contemplated in sub regulation 1(a) will be submitted within 156 days of acceptance of the scoping report by the competent authority or where regulation 21(2) applies, within 156 days of receipt of the application by the competent authority, as significant changes have been made or significant new information has been added to the documents, which changes or information was not contained in the original documents consulted on during the initial public participation process contemplated in sub regulation (1)(a), and that the revised documents contemplated in sub regulation 1(a) will be subjected to another public participation process of at least 30 days”.</i></p> <p>Should you fail to meet any of the timeframes stipulated in Regulation 23 of the NEMA EIA Regulations, 2014, as amended, your application will lapse.</p> <p>You are hereby reminded of Section 24F of the National Environmental Management Act, Act No. 107 of 1998, as amended, that no activity may commence prior to an Environmental Authorisation being granted by the Department.</p> <p>Yours sincerely</p>	
<p>03/07/2023 EMAIL BOITUMELO MELATO DWS</p>	<p>Good day, Hiadee.</p> <p>May you kindly share the We Transfer link so that I can access the annexures.</p> <p>Regards,</p> <p>.....</p> <p>WETRANSFER LINK WAS DOWNLOADED</p> <p>.....</p>	<p>03/07/2023 EMAIL AGES LIMPOPO</p> <p>Dear Boitumelo Melato</p> <p>I have sent another link on WeTransfer.</p> <p>Please note the link is ONLY VALID for 7 days, please download it as soon as possible.</p> <p>Kind regards</p> <p>.....</p>



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<p>06/07/2023 EMAIL BOITUMELO MELATO LETTER SIGNED BY DR T NTILI PROVINCIAL HEAD FREE STATE DWS</p>	<p>Good day,  Kindly find the attached comments for your further attention.  Regards, Dear Sir/Madam</p> <p><b>DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT: PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216, VENTERSBURG RD, AND CONNECTING 132KV POWERLINE, MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT, FREE STATE PROVINCE</b> Short name: Virginia 4 Solar Park</p> <p>REF NUMBER: 14/12/16/3/3/2/2283</p> <p>Applicant: Lupus Energy (Pty) Ltd</p> <p>Reference is hereby made to the document submitted to this Department dated May 2023 for the above-mentioned project as presented to this Department by AGES Limpopo (Pty) Ltd.</p> <p>This office has evaluated the Draft Environmental Impact Assessment Report and it has been noted that the comments dated 22 February 2023 that have been sent to your office for the Draft Scoping Report will be addressed.</p> <p>All the commitments stipulated in the various parts of this report must be adhered to and any deviations must be reported to this Department.</p> <p>You are welcome to contact Ms B Melato at telephone: 051 405 9000 or on e-mail: melatob@dws.gov.za should you have any enquiries.</p> <p>Yours sincerely,</p>	<p>10/07/2023 EMAIL AGES LIMPOPO</p> <p>FOR ATTENTION: MS B MELATO</p> <p>Dear Madam,</p> <p><b>DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR THE PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216 AND CONNECTING POWERLINE, MATJHABENG AND MASILONYANA LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, FREE STATE PROVINCE: VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK</b></p> <p>With reference to a letter received from DWS, dated 5 July 2023 regarding the Draft EIA Report, sent for the abovementioned project. All commitments included in both the Scoping and EIA reports will be honoured and adhered to and any deviations will be reported to DWS.</p> <p>For any queries, please contact Mr Johan Botha on jbotha@aqes-group.com</p> <p>Kind Regards,</p>
<p>05/07/2023 EMAIL SENT FROM: MR KAMOGELO MATHETJA BIODIVERSITY &amp; CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT</p>	<p><b>COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORTS FOR THE PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4, CORONA, AND QUAGGA SOLAR PARKS ON THE FARMS BLOMSKRAAL 216, TEVREDE 361, BIDDULPH 329, DE DAM 27, QUAGGAFONTEIN 3, AND DELAPORTE 887, WINBURG RD WITH RESPECTIVE CONNECTING 132 kV POWERLINES, MATJHABENG &amp; MASILONYANA LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT, FREE STATE PROVINCE</b></p>	<p>13/07/2023 EMAIL AGES LIMPOPO</p> <p>For attention: Ms M Rabothata/Mr K Mathetja</p> <p><b>COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORTS FOR THE PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4, CORONA, AND QUAGGA SOLAR PARKS ON THE FARMS BLOMSKRAAL 216, TEVREDE 361, BIDDULPH 329, DE DAM 27,</b></p>

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<p><b>ATTACHED LETTER FROM: MR. SEOKA LEKOTA CONTROL BIODIVERSITY OFFICER GRADE B: BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES &amp; THE ENVIRONMENT LETTER SIGNED BY: MS. P MAKITLA DESIGNATION: CONTROL BIODIVERSITY OFFICER GRADE A</b></p>	<p>Directorate: Biodiversity Conservation reviewed and evaluated the aforementioned report.</p> <p>Based on the information provided in the report, 129 bird species were recorded in and around the the Proposed Area of Interest (PAOI), with 95 species recorded from point counts and an additional 34 species recorded as incidental. These species include 3 avifaunal Species of Conservation Concern (SCC) namely, Secretary bird (<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>), Lanner Falcon (<i>Falco biarmicus</i>) and Blue Korhaan (<i>Eupodotis caerulescens</i>). Two wetland types were identified on the site namely: Valley bottom wetland with channel, Depressions: Exorheic depressions (man-made dams) and Endorheic depressions(pans). The other drainage features on the proposed development footprint sites are classified as channels (rivers) with riparian woodland. The rivers are classified as Floodplain Rivers and Non-perennial drainage channels.</p> <p>Lastly, most of the proposed solar parks and portions of the connection line do overlap with the Priority Focus Areas, as per the National Protected Areas Expansion Strategy (NPAES) namely, Free State Highveld Grasslands. These are areas contributing towards meeting biodiversity thresholds for terrestrial or freshwater ecosystems, maintaining ecological processes or climate change resilience. Therefore, they are given highest priorities for protected area expansion to meet those targets. Furthermore, the Quagga Solar Park overlaps with Optimal Critical Biodiversity Area (CBA 2).</p> <p>Given the above, the Directorate Biodiversity Conservation supports the development provided that all the recommended measures are adhered to including the following:</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overhead cables/lines across water resource areas must be fitted with industry standard bird flight diverters to make the lines as visible as possible to collision-susceptible species.</li> </ul>	<p><b>QUAGGAFONTEIN 3, AND DELAPORTE 887, WINBURG RD WITH RESPECTIVE CONNECTING 132 kV POWERLINES, MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT, FREE STATE PROVINCE</b></p> <p>Your comments dated 5 July 2023 are appreciated. Please see our response in italics below each recommendation.</p> <hr/> <p><i>The bird specialist recommended that the design of the proposed transmission line must be of a type or similar structure as endorsed by the Eskom-EWT Strategic Partnership on Birds and Energy, considering the mitigation guidelines recommended by Birdlife South Africa (Jenkins et al., 2017). Bird diverters or spirals must be added to the transmission line to</i></p>

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	<p>Monitoring by an avifauna specialist must be done throughout the development phases. Standard methods as per the species protocols must be followed.</p> <p>Powerline pylons must be located outside the recommended buffer zones.</p> <p>The proposed solar park and connection line overlap with the Priority Focus Areas, as per the National Protected Areas Expansion Strategy (NPAES) (Free State Highveld Grasslands), Comments from the DFFE Directorate: Protected Areas Planning and Management Effectiveness must be obtained at email: <a href="mailto:TNethononda@environment.gov.za">TNethononda@environment.gov.za</a> for attention of Mr. Thivhulawi Nethononda</p> <p>All Public Participation Process documents related to Biodiversity EIA review and any other Biodiversity EIA queries must be submitted to the Directorate: Biodiversity Conservation at Email: <a href="mailto:BCAdmin@environment.gov.za">BCAdmin@environment.gov.za</a> for attention of <b>Mr Seoka Lekota.</b></p> <p>Yours faithfully</p>	<p>reduce fatalities. These recommendations are included in the final EIAR and EMPr.</p> <p>The bird specialist recommended that monitoring should be conducted between September and February so that mitigation measures can be adapted to ensure the development does not have a long-term impact on the SCCs in the area. A follow-up assessment on avian biodiversity and species abundance within the assessment area and surrounding areas must be conducted within one year after the facility has been in operation and should be repeated every 3-5 years. Information obtained from the monitoring must be provided to BirdLife Renewable Energy Programme on <a href="mailto:energy@birdlife.org.za">energy@birdlife.org.za</a>.</p> <p>It is recommended in the final EIAR and EMPr that the pylons must be located outside sensitive areas as far as possible.</p> <p>The Directorate: Protected Areas Planning and Management Effectiveness have been included in the I&amp;AP distribution list since the start of the EIA studies. All reports have been sent via electronic links to Sydney Nkosi and Skumsa Mancotywa as per the contact details provided on the DFFE website, however no comments from this Directorate have been received to date. The reports have now been forwarded to Mr Nethononda for comment. Any comments received from Mr Nethononda herein will be forwarded to <a href="mailto:BCAdmin@environment.gov.za">BCAdmin@environment.gov.za</a> and yourself upon receipt thereof.</p> <p>All correspondence for these projects was sent to <a href="mailto:BCAdmin@environment.gov.za">BCAdmin@environment.gov.za</a> as well as to five other officials.</p> <p>Kind Regards,</p>
<p>13/07/2023 KAMOGELO MATHETJA BIODIVERSITY: DFFE</p>	<p>Well received and the correspondence has been noted, Regards,</p>	

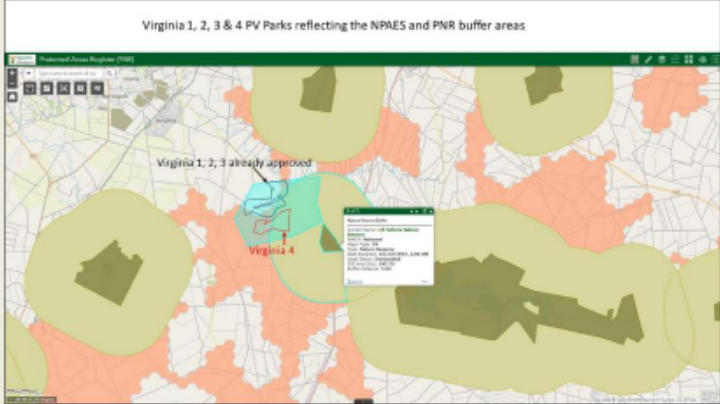
DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
		<p>11/07/2023 AGES LIMPOPO</p> <p>Sent links via WeTransfer to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ms Skumsa Mancotywa</li> <li>• Mr Thivhulawi Nethononda - downloaded.</li> <li>• Mr Sydney Nkosi - downloaded.</li> <li>• Mr Lindokuhle Vilakati - downloaded.</li> <li>• Mr Karl Naude - downloaded.</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>11/07/2023 AGES LIMPOPO</p> <p>EMAIL to Mr Thivhulawi Nethononda</p> <p>Dear Mr Thivhulawi Nethononda,</p> <p>Mr Seoka Lekota from DFFE Biodiversity has requested that we obtain comments from Protected Areas Planning and Management Effectiveness, as the proposed solar parks and connection lines overlap with the Priority Focus Areas, as per the National Protected Areas Expansion Strategy (NPAES) (Free State Highveld Grasslands).</p> <p>We apologise for the late request, as we were only now informed of your involvement in the process. Our previous emails were sent to Sydney Nkosi and Skumsa Mancotywa as per DFFE's website.</p> <p>I have sent you a WETRANSFER link to the Draft EIA Report as the entire report and annexures are too large to email. I have only attached this DEIAR in this email.</p> <p>It would be greatly appreciated if you could provide us with comments.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>



DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
<p>13/07/2023 EMAIL LINDOKUHLE VILAKATI DIRECTORATE: PROTECTED AREAS PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS (PAPME) DFFE</p>	<p>Good day Hiadee,</p> <p>The Directorate: Protected Areas Planning and Management Effectiveness (PAPME), would like to thank you for shared documents and invitation to review the proposed development of a Photovoltaic (PV) Solar Energy Facility and associated infrastructure located near Virginia town in the Free State Province.</p> <p>After conducting the review of the availed documents, we have noted that the proposed development of a solar power plant and grid connection does not take place within any kind of protected area recognized in terms of Section 9 of the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act (NEMPAA), Act No. 57 of 2003.</p> <p>The project however does affect the National Protected Areas Expansion Strategy (NPAES), specifically proportions of farm <b>BIDDULPH 329, TEVREDE 361</b>.</p> <p>The NPAES focus areas for land-based protected area expansion are large, intact, and unfragmented areas of high importance for biodiversity representation and ecological persistence, suitable for the creation of linkages, corridors as well the expansion of protected areas.</p> <p>Focus areas present the best opportunities for meeting the ecosystem-specific protected area targets set in the NPAES and were designed with a strong emphasis on climate change resilience and their current protection levels as well as threat status as depicted by the National Biodiversity Assessment Reports.</p> <p>Adjacent protected Areas include the <b>H. J. Joel Private Nature Reserve, LM Safaris Nature Reserve and Tara Wildlife Safaris</b>. The project does not affect any of the protected areas (nature reserves) or their 5 Km Buffers however a small portion of the NPAES focus areas strategically positioned as a future corridor or linkage in between the PAs is affected. Therefore, the EAP is encouraged to take note of such and also take note that the ecosystem affected is the Central Free State Grassland ecosystem type which is currently classified as (PP) poorly protected by the NPAES 2018.</p>	<p>For attention: Mr Lindokuhle Vilakati</p> <p><b>RESPONSE TO COMMENTS RECEIVED VIA THE DIRECTORATE: PROTECTED AREAS PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS ON THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR THE PROPOSED PHOTOVOLTAIC VIRGINIA 4 SOLAR PARK ON THE FARM BLOMSKRAAL 216, VENTERSBURG RD, AND CONNECTING 132kV POWERLINE, MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, LEJWELEPUTSWA DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, FREE STATE PROVINCE</b></p> <p>Your comments dated 13 July 2023 are appreciated and in response to these comments, the specialist would like to add additional information that needs to be reconsidered by the Directorate: Protected Areas Planning and Management Effectiveness. This is with specific reference to the following comment by the aforementioned directorate:</p> <p><i>“The Directorate does not have any objections to the development, however encroachment into the NPAES focus areas is not supported.”</i></p> <p>The biodiversity specialist acknowledges the area for the proposed Virginia 4 Solar Park lies within a NPAES and the buffer zone of the L.M Safaris Nature Reserve – see map below.</p> <p>The preferred position of Virginia 4 Solar Park (V4SP) was influenced by the small area of croplands, old croplands and areas used for lion breeding in the past in the footprint area and the fact that drainage lines and ridges must be avoided. The footprint of V4SP was also positioned so that the Merriespruit, with a sufficient buffer area, will form a natural border of the 5 km buffer from LM Safari’s Nature Reserve 3.3 km from the V4SP.</p> <p><b><u>The biodiversity study specifically identified corridors for the protection of biodiversity</u></b> as emphasised in the Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment Report and include corridors for Merriespruit east of the V4SP, the drainage channel with buffers north of the V4SP and the hills west of the V4SP.</p>

DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
	<p>The Directorate does not have any objections to the development, however encroachment into the NPAES focus areas is not supported.</p> <p>Kind Regards,</p>	<p>Corridors and linkages of areas with similar habitat are present in the local district where several solar power plants are planned. An important mitigation measure is to leave corridors with indigenous vegetation, natural wetlands/water course and sensitive habitats in between solar plants and their associated infrastructure. This was implemented during the Site Sensitivity Verification (SSV) Process to ensure the lowest potential impact on the terrestrial biodiversity of the area.</p> <p><b><u>After the SSV, the layout plan of the Virginia 4 Solar Park was specifically amended to avoid the network of linked corridors (Rocky ridges, watercourses, and wetlands) to ensure that steppingstone corridors are conserved in the larger landscape, thereby ensuring the protection of local biodiversity. This was highlighted in the terrestrial biodiversity specialist report compiled for the Virginia 4 Solar Park.</u></b></p> <p>Because of the nature of solar plants allowing regrowth of the herbaceous component beneath the solar panels, and few or no emissions and pollutants into air when operational, cumulative impacts to the environment are limited, if compared for example to emissions from fossil fuel burning. Ultimately, solar power plants could relieve the pressures to use fossil fuels that are associated with numerous cumulative impacts and habitat losses.</p> <p>It can therefore be concluded that the development of the Virginia 4 Solar Park appears to be more ideal on a national scale because functional biodiversity corridors will remain. The Solar Park will contribute to power generation in South Africa, without having significant impacts on the terrestrial or aquatic biodiversity of the larger Virginia area. This was considered and implemented for the Virginia 4 Solar Park and surrounding solar plants planned in the area.</p> <p>Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any comments or queries in this regard.</p>



DATE OF COMMENT, FORMAT, NAME OF I&AP	COMMENT	RESPONSE FROM EAP/ SPECIALIST / APPLICANT
		<p>Yours truly,</p> 
<p>13/07/2023 EMAIL SAMANTHA RALSTON-PATON BIRDS AND RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT MANAGER</p>	<p>Many thanks for following up with us. Unfortunately, Birdlife South Africa do not have the capacity to review and comment on the large number of EIAs for renewable energy infrastructure. Please let me know if there are any specific bird-related questions or concerns, and we do our best to advise. Alternatively, if AGES or DFFE are concerned the assessment, a peer review of relevant reports should be commissioned.</p> <p>Kind regards</p>	<p>12/07/2023 EMAIL Ryno Kemp Ecologist / Avifauna Specialist (Pr Sci Nat)</p> <p>Good afternoon to whom it may concern,</p> <p>AGES Consulting has emailed Birdlife requesting comments on the following reports. Would it be to provide comments on the following reports? If Birdlife can't provide any comments. Please let me know so that we can communicate with the authorities.</p> <p>Regards</p>

## 9.4 ENVIRONMENTAL ATTRIBUTES ASSOCIATED WITH PROPOSED PV SOLAR PARK

The receiving environment has been described using a combination of specialist inputs, on-site observations, review of existing literature and utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) planning tools.

### 9.4.1 PROPERTY DESCRIPTION AND CURRENT LAND USE

The proposed PV development site is located ±18 km southeast of Virginia town directly west of the R70 tar road within the Matjhabeng Local Municipality in the Lejweleputswa District of the Free State Province, on the **Farm Blomskraal 216 Ventersburg RD**.

Table 14 Site location and Property details

<b>Site location and Property details</b>	
Farm	<b>BLOMSKRAAL 216, Ventersburg RD</b>
Portion	<b>Portion 0</b>
LPI code	F03500000000021600000
Overall Extent	4246.0575 hectares
Landowner	Forum SA Trading 124 (Pty) Ltd
Diagram deed number	G001861
Title deed number	T622/2002
Registration date	20020118
Current land use	Grazing, game farming and croplands

The connecting power line will traverse the following farms located within the Matjhabeng Local Municipality, Lejweleputswa District Municipality, Free State Province:

Table 15 Properties crossed by the proposed powerline alignment.

<b>Virginia 4 132 kV Powerline: Properties crossed by the proposed powerline alignment</b>	
Farm	<b>Blomskraal 216, Ventersburg RD</b>
Portion	<b>Portion 0</b>
LPI code	F03500000000021600000
Overall Extent	4246.0575 hectares
Landowner	Forum SA Trading 124 (Pty) Ltd
Title deed number	T622/2002
Current land use	Grazing, game farming (project site)
Farm	<b>De Dam 27, Ventersburg RD</b>
Portion	<b>Portion 0</b>
LPI code	F0350000000002700000
Overall Extent	185.0980 hectares
Landowner	Forum SA Trading 124 (Pty) Ltd
Title deed number	T624/2002
Current land use	Grazing, game farming
Farm	<b>Tevrede 361, Ventersburg RD</b>
Portion	<b>Portion 0</b>
LPI code	F03500000000036100000
Overall Extent	417.4780 hectares
Landowner	Forum SA Trading 124 (Pty) Ltd
Title deed number	T624/2002
Current land use	Grazing, game farming

Farm Portion LPI code Overall Extent Landowner Title deed number Current land use	<b>Biddulph 329, Ventersburg RD</b> <b>Portion 0</b> F03500000000032900000 598.7216 hectares Forum SA Trading 124 (Pty) Ltd T624/2002 Grazing, game farming
Farm Portion LPI code Overall Extent Landowner Title deed number Current land use	<b>Le Roux 766, Ventersburg RD</b> <b>Remaining Extent</b> F03500000000076600000 451.3239 hectares PIENAAR ANDRIES BENJAMIN T16446/2011 Grazing, game farming
Farm Portion LPI code Overall Extent Landowner Title deed number Current land use	<b>Florida 633, Ventersburg RD</b> <b>Portion 1</b> F03500000000063300001 709.5842 hectares PIENAAR ANDRIES BENJAMIN T11996/1979 Grazing, game farming
Farm Portion LPI code Overall Extent Landowner Title deed number Current land use	<b>Florida 633, Ventersburg RD</b> <b>Portion 4</b> F03500000000063300004 579.3031 hectares PIENAAR GERTRUIDA THEODORA T8154/2021 Grazing, game farming

The land-use of the proposed development site is livestock, game and dryland maize cultivation. The surrounding areas and powerline corridor are used for cattle, game and crop cultivation.

**9.4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES**

**Environmental Screening Report**

Table 16 Environmental Screening Tool Table

Theme	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Specialist Studies Conducted	Motivation for no Specialist Studies
	X – Solar Park	X – Power line				
Agriculture	X	X			X	
Animal species			X X		X	
Aquatic biodiversity	X X				X	
Archaeological and Cultural Heritage				X X	X	
Avian				X	X	
Civil Aviation		X		X	X	
Defence				X X		SSV not required
Landscape			X		X	
Palaeontology	X X				X	
Plant species				X X	X	
RFI				X	X	
Terrestrial Biodiversity	X X				X	

**A complete Site Sensitivity Verification Report is included in Annexure A.**

The following environmental sensitivities are identified for the project area:

- **Agriculture Theme**

Sensitivity - High land capability.

*The agricultural agro-ecosystem impact assessment (Annexure H) concluded that site should be classified as marginally suitable for arable agriculture due to its physical characteristics.*

*Although the soil texture and depth are suitable for arable agriculture, the climatic conditions (annual rainfall 560mm) render the soils marginal for arable agriculture.*

*The site is moderate potential grazing land, but re-growth of grass under the panels will provide for grazing by small livestock such as game and sheep.*

- **Animal species Theme**

Sensitivity - Medium.

*A sensitivity analyses was conducted, and no red data fauna were found. Suitable habitat of the spotted necked otter will be excluded from the development - Annexure E.*

- **Aquatic Biodiversity Theme**  
Sensitivity - Very High  
*An impact assessment was conducted for the wetlands and riparian zones on site in addition to the mitigation measures recommended to ensure the protection of the riverine ecosystems close to the development area. Specific mitigation measures like buffer areas, etc. need to be implemented in the areas surrounding the riparian zones and water courses to prevent any negative impacts other than the impacts that will be caused during the development – Annexure G.*
- **Avian Species Theme**  
Sensitivity - Low  
*The avifaunal assessment conducted (Annexure F) concluded that very few sensitive features were identified for the project mainly along the proposed power line.*
- **Civil Aviation Theme**  
Sensitivity - Low for Solar Park and High for Power Line (Between 8 and 15 km of other civil aviation aerodrome)  
*Evidence from the assessment and the technical drawings show clearly that the Virginia 4 Project will not interfere or impact the Obstacle Limit Surfaces and the Approach/Departure Surfaces of Harmony Mine and Beatrix Mine airports – Annexure Q. An application for approval will be submitted to the Civil Aviation Authority.*
- **Defence Theme**  
Sensitivity - Low
- **Palaeontological Theme**  
Sensitivity - High  
*According to the Palaeontological Report conducted in 2021 (Annexure I), there are no possible sites within the Solar Park footprint area.*
- **Plant Species Theme**  
Sensitivity - Low  
*The botanist concluded that the development can be supported provided that the mitigation measures and sensitivity map are implemented – Annexure D.*
- **RFI Theme**  
Sensitivity - Low.  
*Radio Frequency Assessment minimum report attached as Annexure L.*
- **Terrestrial Biodiversity Theme**  
Sensitivity - Very High  
*Most of the proposed powerline development footprints represent Degraded Areas and Other natural Areas, while the solar park footprint area represents ESA1 and ESA2. The management objective for this area is to maintain ecosystem functionality and connectivity allowing for limited loss of biodiversity pattern (see Annexure D).*

**9.4.3 WIND AND SOLAR DEVELOPMENTS WITH ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORISATION OR APPLICATIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION WITHIN 30 KM OF STUDY AREA**

The following wind and solar projects, proposed with 30km from the project site, received and/or applied for Environmental Authorisation according to the DFFE database:

Table 17. List of Wind and Solar developments with an approved Environmental Authorisation or applications under consideration within 30 km of the proposed area

No	EIA Reference No	Classification	Status of Application	Distance from the proposed area (km)
1	12/12/20/2669	Solar PV	Approved	18.1
2	12/12/20/2666/A	Solar PV	Approved	22.8
3	12/12/20/2668	Solar PV	Approved	19.4
4	14/12/16/3/3/1/1322	Solar PV	Approved	19.1
5	12/12/20/2666	Solar PV	Approved	22.8
6	12/12/20/2667	Solar PV	Approved	19.4
7	12/12/20/2668	Solar PV	Approved	19.2
8	14/12/16/3/3/2/2099	Solar PV	Approved	1.3 AWARDED IN ROUND 6 OF REIPPPP
9	14/12/16/3/3/2/2100	Solar PV	Approved	0.5 AWARDED IN ROUND 6 OF REIPPPP
10	14/12/16/3/3/2/2101	Solar PV	Approved	1.5 AWARDED IN ROUND 6 OF REIPPPP

Table 18. List of Wind and Solar developments with an approved Environmental Authorisation or applications under consideration within 30 km of the proposed area

No	EIA Reference No	Project Name	Project Capacity [MW]	Date of application
1	12/12/20/2669	Proposed Construction of PV Solar Facility and Associated Infrastructure on Portion 225 of Farm Kalkoenkrans, Beatrix Mine Shaft 4, Oryx Mine in Virginia, Free-State Province	20	2012/08/14
2	12/12/20/2666/A	Construction of the 19.9MW PV Facility for the Generation of Electricity on Portion of Farm Palmietkuil 328, Beatrix Mine Shaft 4, Oryx Mine in Virginia, Free State Province.	19.9	2013/08/12
3	12/12/20/2668	Proposed development and implementation of solar panels (solar photovoltaic project 221) for electricity generation on the farm Leeubult 52 Beatrix Mine Shaft 2, Virginia, Free State	19.9	2012/08/14
4	14/12/16/3/3/1/1322	Proposed construction of Hennenman 5 mw Solar Energy Facility, Hennenman, Free State	5	2014/11/07
5	12/12/20/2666	Proposed development and implementation of solar panels (solar photovoltaic project 221) for electricity generation on portion of the farm Leeubult 52 Beatrix Mine Shaft 2, Virginia	19.9	2012/08/14



No	EIA Reference No	Project Name	Project Capacity [MW]	Date of application
6	12/12/20/2667	Proposed development and implementation of solar panels (solar photovoltaic project 221) for electricity generation on portion of the farm Leeubult 52 Beatrix Mine Shaft 2, Virginia	19.9	2012/08/14
7	12/12/20/2668	Proposed development and implementation of solar panels (solar photovoltaic project 221) for electricity generation on portion of the farm Leeubult 52 Beatrix Mine Shaft 2, Virginia	19.9	2012/08/14
8	14/12/16/3/3/2/2099	Renewable Energy Generation Project on the Farm Blomskraal 216, Ventersburg Rd, located in the Matjhabeng Local Municipality AWARED IN ROUND 6 OF REIPPPP	100	2022/02/01
9	14/12/16/3/3/2/2100	Renewable Energy Generation Project on the Farm Blomskraal 216, Ventersburg Rd, located in the Matjhabeng Local Municipality AWARED IN ROUND 6 OF REIPPPP	100	2022/02/01
10	14/12/16/3/3/2/2101	Renewable Energy Generation Project on the Farm Blomskraal 216, Ventersburg Rd, located in the Matjhabeng Local Municipality AWARED IN ROUND 6 OF REIPPPP	100	2022/02/01

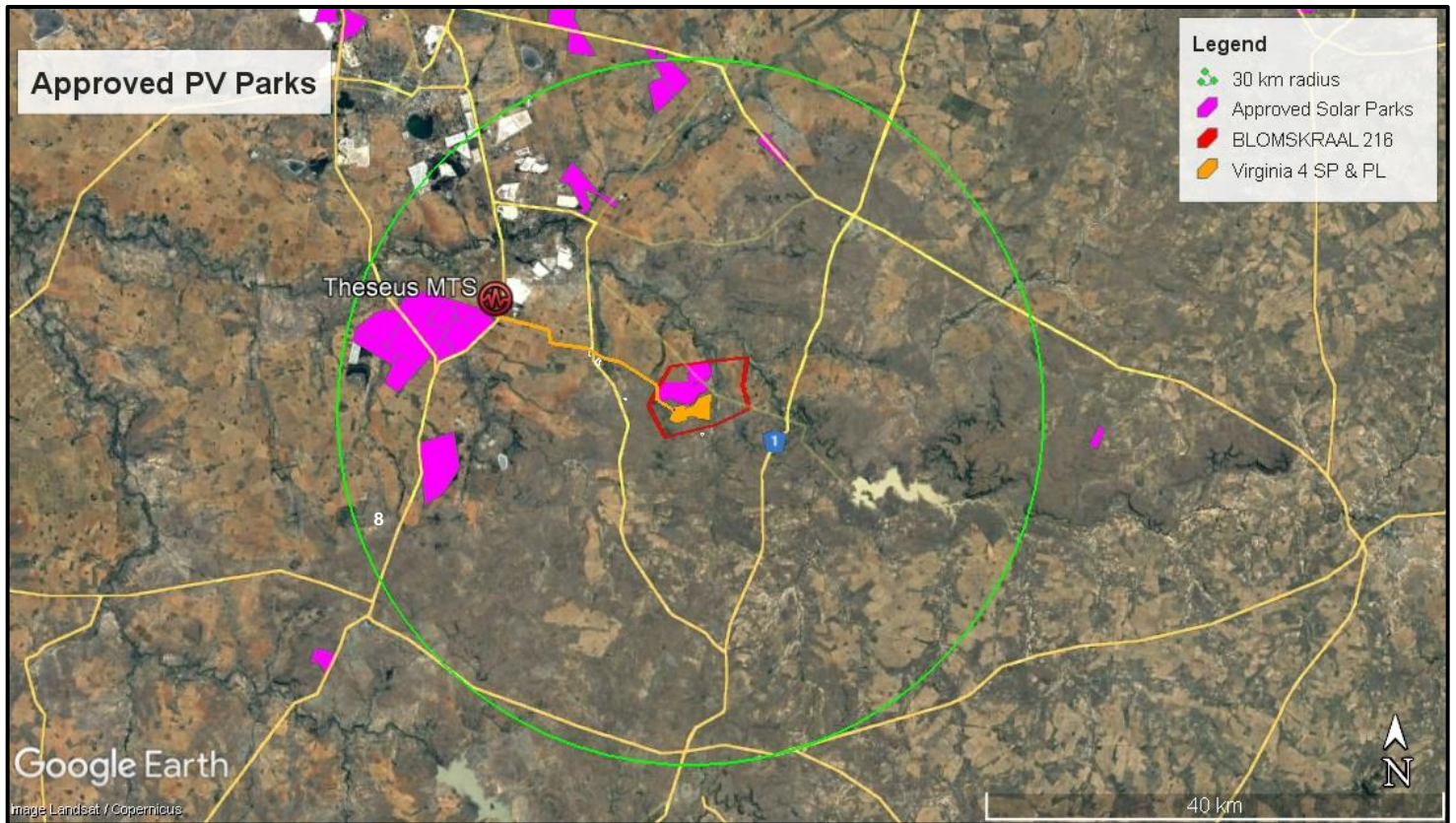


Figure 10. Map of Wind and Solar developments with an approved Environmental Authorisation or applications under consideration within 30 km of the proposed area

During the last Round 6 of the REIPP Procurement Programme, **240 MW** has been already allocated to the Virginia 1, 2 and 3 Solar Parks, **located on the same property** (Farm Blomskraal 216, Ventersburg RD of 4246.0575 ha) **of the Virginia 4 Solar Park.**

The construction phase of the Virginia 1, 2 and 3 projects, within a footprint of approximately **480 ha**, is planned to be started at the beginning of 2024.

With reference to the other projects listed in the tables above, it should be noted that **none of them, applied for, have been built so far.** A number of these applications have lapsed or have been withdrawn. No additional information has been found about these solar projects.

With reference to the wind and solar projects currently under development in the proximity of the proposed Virginia 4 Solar Park, the following solar photovoltaic projects / Environmental Authorisation processes are on-going:

Table 19. List of Solar developments with an on-going Environmental Authorisation process under consideration within 30 km of the proposed area

No	EIA Reference No	Project name (project capacity) and applicant	Status of Application	Distance from the proposed area
1	14/12/16/3/3/2/2299	Quagga Solar Park (240 MW) Indus Energy (Pty) Ltd	Final Scoping Approved	1.5 km
2	14/12/16/3/3/2/2297	Corona Solar Park (240 MW) Corona Energy (Pty) Ltd	Final Scoping submitted	3.0 km
3	14/12/16/3/3/2/2322	Florida Solar Park (170 MW) Piscis Energy (Pty) Ltd	Final Scoping submitted	8.0 km

Please refer to the **Locality Map** and to the **Cumulative Map**, attached as Annexure B, showing the location of the Virginia 4 Solar Park with respect to the **Virginia 1, 2 and 3 Solar Parks** (construction planned in 2024) and to the **Corona, Quagga and Florida Solar Parks** (Environmental Authorisation process ongoing).

#### 9.4.4 CLIMATE

The climate for the region can be described as warm-temperate. In terrestrial environments, limitations related to water availability are always important to plants and plant communities. The study area is situated within the summer and autumn rainfall region with very dry winters and frequent frost that occurs during the colder winter months.

The mean annual precipitation for the region is around 560mm. The mean annual temperature for the area is 15.2°C, and the mean annual frost days is 43 days. Mean Annual Potential Evaporation is 2226mm, with Mean Annual Soil Moisture Stress of 78%.

### 9.4.5 TOPOGRAPHY AND DRAINAGE

The study area lies completely within the Middle Vaal Water Management Area (WMA) and entirely within the Highveld ecoregion (Kleynhans et al., 2005). The topography is characterised by slightly undulating plains with wetlands and / or drainage channels bisecting the area. The topography of the site can be described as generally favourable, when considering that most of the area consists of slopes of less than 1:5. The site is located at an altitude of between 900 and 940 meters above mean sea level (AMSL).

Most properties situated within a 500m radius are being used for livestock and crop cultivation. The proposed development land is used for livestock farming and maize cultivation at present. The natural vegetation of the site is mostly intact.

The site is located within the C42K, C42G and C42H quaternary catchments and is situated in the Middle Vaal Water Management Area. Drainage occurs as sheet-wash into the drainage channels on site that eventually drains into the major river namely the Merriespruit that occur to the west of the site.

### 9.4.6 SOILS AND GEOLOGY

Geology is directly related to soil types and plant communities that may occur in a specific. A Land type unit is a unique combination of soil pattern, terrain and macroclimate, the classification of which is used to determine the potential agricultural value of soils in an area. The land type unit represented within the study area include the Bd20, Dc8 and Dc12 land types (Land Type Survey Staff, 1987) (ENPAT, 2001). The land type, geology and associated soil types is presented in Table 20 below as classified by the Environmental Potential Atlas, South Africa (ENPAT, 2000).

Table 20. Land types, geology, and dominant soil types of the proposed development site

Landtype	Soils	Geology
Bd20	Plinthic catena: eutrophic; red soils not widespread upland duplex and marginalitic soils rare	Shale, mudstone and sandstone of the Ecca and Beaufort Group. Aeolian and possibly colluvial sand overlies the rocks.
Dc8	Prismacutanic and/or pedocutanic diagnostic horizons dominant. In addition, one or more of: vertic melanic red structured diagnostic horizons	Mudstone, shale, sandstone and grit of the Beaufort Group, Karoo Sequence with dolerite sills
Dc12	Prismacutanic and/or pedocutanic diagnostic horizons dominant. In addition, one or more of: vertic melanic red structured diagnostic horizons	Mudstone, shale, sandstone and grit of the Beaufort Group, Karoo Sequence with dolerite sills

Soils associated with the site vary between very sandy on the plateaus and higher lying areas, to dark clayey soils in the low-lying plains and bottomlands. The soils in the Virginia 4 area consist of the Red-yellow apedal soils of the Hutton / Clovelly soil forms, Red-yellow apedal soils of the Avalon soil form, yellowish sandy clay soils of the Oakleaf soil form, vertic clay soils of the Hutton and Arcadia soil forms and grey-brown clayey soils of the Valsrivier / Katspruit / Rensburg soil forms. The soils are very sensitive and prone to erosion. Implementation of a storm water management plan and erosion control will be essential.



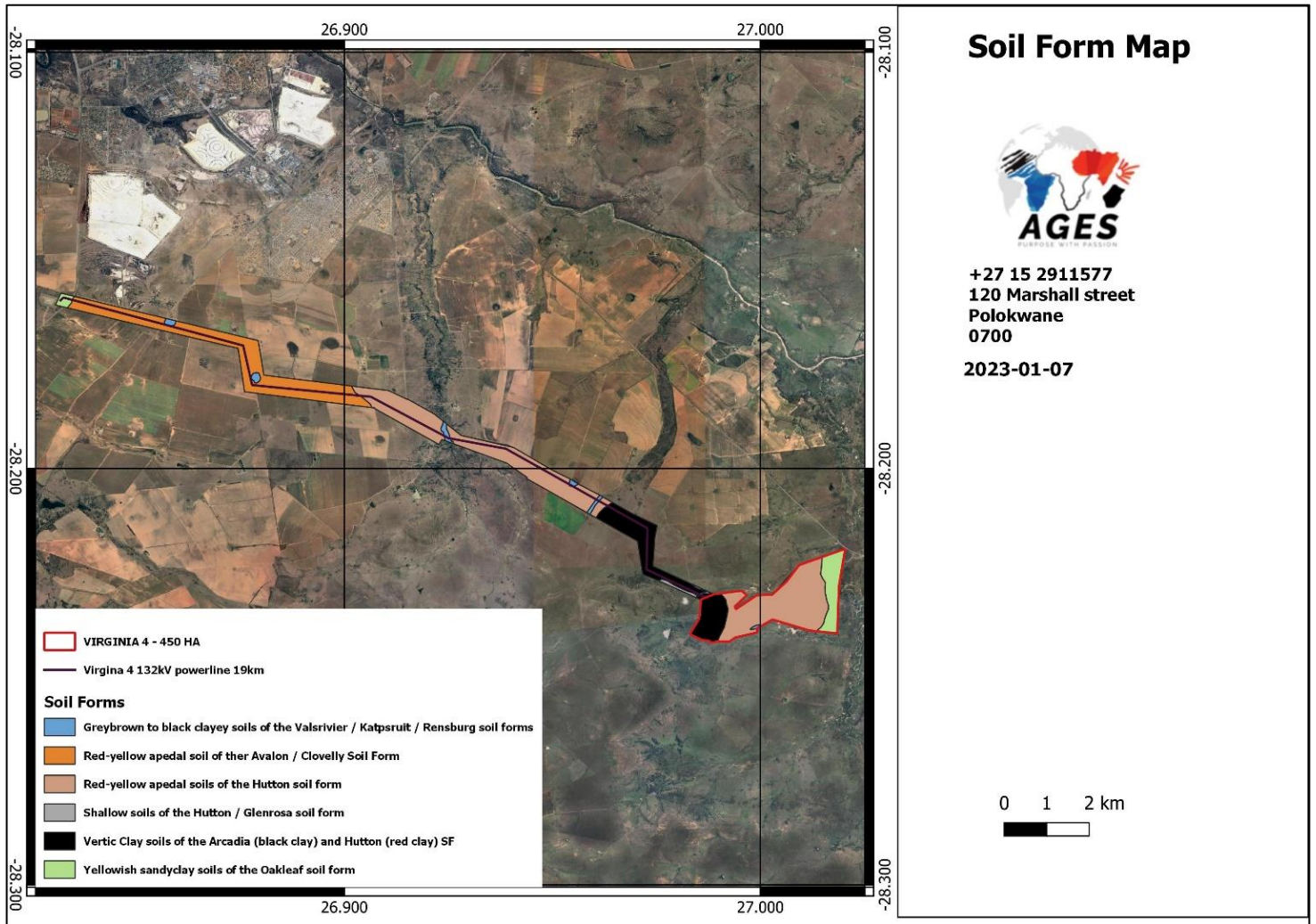


Figure 11. Soil Form Map

### 9.4.7 GEOTECHNICAL REPORT

A desktop Geotechnical Assessment Report is included in Annexure R.

The area is defined as developable with minor precautions due to the relative thin soil profile and the use of specialized foundations for the single axis tracker system. Developable with minor risk with respect to the proposed solar park development. Transported soil has a low to moderate collapse potential and the excavatability is soft to 1,2m, below that depth it is expected to be intermediate to hard. Rammed and or pre-bored rammed mini piles can be considered as practical solutions for the solar arrays. Reinforced strip footings are recommended for the conventional structures.

The following conclusions were made by the specialist:

- The site is underlain by recent aeolian sand calcrete, and Karoo sandstone deposits.
- No geosites have been identified on the site.
- No mining activities past or present are present on the property or will impact the property.

- Due to the climate shallow bedrock conditions is expected.
- Three soil profiles are expected on site:
  - o Profile 1 - Transported aeolian sand overlying weathered sandstone.
  - o Profile 2 – Calcretized deposits close to the drainage features.
  - o Profile 3 – Weathered Karoo sandstone.
- The potential for collapse of side walls of deep excavations is low.
- No shallow groundwater conditions are expected.
- The calcareous soils present on the site may be useful as road construction material.
- Normal strip footing foundations recommended for buildings.
- Pre-bored rammed piles or pre-bored cast in situ piles are recommended for the single axis tracker systems planned.
- The geotechnical risk classification for the project area is F2 due to the shallow bedrock and excavatability risk for profiles 2 and 3. Profile 1 is potentially collapsible.
- Localized soil degradation and erosion is the only environmental impacts identified for the property.
- Considering geotechnical aspects, the proposed development area is suitable for the proposed development of a PV solar facility if these recommendations are adhered to as a minimum requirement.

The following mitigation measures are included in the EMPr:

- Construction activities should be kept to restricted areas and activities should be kept to a minimum where possible.
- Excavation activities should be monitored to prevent over excavation and to ensure the correct placement of soil in controlled stockpiles.
- Rehabilitation of disturbed areas should be undertaken as soon as possible.
- The wetting of soil and the discharge of construction greywater into unspoiled soil should be controlled.
- Where necessary erosion control barriers, such as silt traps sandbags and geosynthetic barriers should be installed where necessary and properly maintained.
- Dedicated natural construction material handling and stockpile areas must be demarcated and adequate dust and erosion measures have to be taken.

## LAND USE CLASSIFICATION

Based on the local geology, topography and weathering profile of the soil and rock formation expected on site, only one land use area has been identified.

The area is defined as **developable with minor precautions and the use of specialized foundations for the single axis tracker system**. Developable with minor risk with respect to the proposed solar park development. Transported soil has a low to moderate collapse potential and the excavatability is soft to 1,2m, below that depth it is expected to be intermediate to hard. Rammed and or pre-bored rammed mini piles can be considered as practical solutions for the solar arrays. Reinforced strip footings are recommended for the conventional structures.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To follow on this desktop scoping study, it is recommended that the following be adopted for the construction phase, if the project is approved:

- A site visit is required to confirm the physical and geotechnical conditions on site. Trial pits should be excavated and profiled to bedrock on order to collect visual information and soil samples for testing to define the foundation conditions and the availability of construction materials.
- Dynamic cone penetrometer test is recommended to define the in-situ shear resistance of the soils and the depth to refusal.
- Geophysical surveys to define the soil resistivity at the proposed substation position and thermal resistivity along the cable routes are recommended.
- Assessment of the potential direct and indirect environmental impacts resulting from the geological and geotechnical conditions on site
- Prepare a specialist geotechnical report detailing the ground conditions possible foundation problems and solutions on site.
- A hydro census and target generation and drilling exercise should be conducted to determine whether sufficient groundwater is available on the property to support the proposed solar park development. Pump test will also be required to verify the yields of the boreholes identified for the construction and long-term water supply for the project.

### 9.4.8 ECOLOGY (FAUNA & FLORA)

A Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment (Annexure E) was conducted by AGES to describe the ecology (fauna and flora) present in the site, to assess its ecological sensitivity and to indicate the most suitable areas for the proposed development.

A pre-screening site visit was therefore conducted to determine if the assessment was accurate and if the studies recommended should be conducted. After the site visit the following was concluded:

- The site has a HIGH Sensitivity from a terrestrial biodiversity perspective due to the presence of indigenous grassland with wetlands.
- The site has a Medium Sensitivity from an Animal Species Theme Perspective due to the presence of natural fauna habitats.
- The site has a Medium Sensitivity from a Plant Species Theme Perspective due to the presence of indigenous grassland.

After the assessment, it was concluded that a detailed terrestrial biodiversity, plant species theme and animal species theme assessment should be conducted.

For this purpose, detailed ecological (fauna habitat & flora) surveys were conducted during November 2022 to identify specific fauna habitats, and to compare these habitats with habitat preferences of the different fauna groups (birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians) occurring in the quarter degree grid.



#### 9.4.8.1 Vegetation types

The most recent classification of the area by Mucina & Rutherford (2006) shows that the site is classified as Central Free State Grassland, Highveld Alluvial Vegetation and Vaal-Vet Sandy Grassland.

The landscape of the Central Free State Grasslands is characterised by undulating plains supporting short grassland. Under natural conditions it is dominated by *Themeda triandra* but is dominated by *Eragrostis curvula* and *E. chloromelas* in disturbed habitats. Dwarf Karoo-shrubs establish in severely degraded clayey bottomlands and overgrazed and trampled low-lying areas are prone to *Vachellia karroo* encroachment. From a conservation point of view, this unit is described as Least Concern. Almost a quarter of the area of it being transformed for crop cultivation and building of large dams such as Allemanskraal, Erfenis, Groothoek, Koppies, Weltevrede and Kroonstad Dams. Small portions are conserved in the Willem Pretorius, Rustfontein and Koppies Dam Nature Reserves as well as in some private nature reserves.

The Vaal-Vet Sandy Grasslands vegetation unit is described as plains-dominated landscape with some scattered slightly irregular undulating plains and hills. Mainly low tussock grasslands with an abundant karroid element. *Themeda triandra* is dominant in this vegetation unit. This vegetation type is described as Endangered because approximately 63% of it has been transformed for commercial crop cultivation and grazing pressure from cattle and sheep. Only 0.3% of this vegetation type is statutorily conserved in Bloemhof Dam, Schoonspruit, Sandveld, Faan Meintjies, Wolwespruit and Soetdoring Nature Reserves.

Highveld Alluvial Vegetation is distributed in Free State, Northwest, Mpumalanga and Gauteng Provinces, Lesotho and Swaziland where it occurs along alluvial drainage lines and floodplains along rivers embedded in the Grassland Biome. Vegetation in the Highveld Alluvial Vegetation is characterised by flat topography supporting riparian thickets mostly dominated by *Vachellia karroo*, accompanied by seasonally flooded grassland and disturbed herb lands often dominated by alien plants. Highveld Alluvial Vegetation is classified as Least Threatened, with a conservation target of 31%. Only nearly 10% of the vegetation type is statutorily conserved in Barberspan (a Ramsar site), Faan Meintjies, Sandveld, Schoonspruit, Soetdoring and Wolwespruit Nature Reserves. More than a quarter has been transformed for cultivation and by building of dams (Bloemhof, Erfenis, Krugersdrif, Mockes and Vaalharts Dams). Highveld alluvia are prone to invasion by several weeds, encouraged by the high nutrient status of the soils and ample water supply. Undergrowth of alluvial riparian thickets and the accompanying grasslands suffer from heavy overgrazing in many places (Mucina & Rutherford, 2006).

The proposed development site occurs on a landscape that varies from slightly undulating to flat plains bisected by drainage channels and wetlands. The importance to survey the area to have a better understanding of the ecosystem and potential impact of the solar development on the natural environment was identified as a key factor, and subsequently the footprint areas was completely surveyed. The site forms part of larger farms used for livestock farming and maize cultivation.

The vegetation units on the site vary according to soil characteristics, topography, and land-use. Vegetation units were identified on the footprint development sites and can be divided into 8 distinct vegetation units according to soil types and topography.

The vegetation communities identified on the proposed development site are classified as physiographic physiognomic units, where physiognomic refers to the outer appearance of the vegetation, and physiographic refers to the position of the plant communities in the landscape. The physiographic-physiognomic units will be referred to as vegetation units in the following sections. These vegetation units are divided in terms of the land-use, plant species composition, topographical and soil differences that had the most definitive influence on the vegetation units. Each unit is described in terms of its characteristics and detailed descriptions of vegetation units are included in the following section.

The following vegetation units were identified during the survey.

- *Themeda – triandra – Setaria incrassatae* clay grassland.
- *Themeda triandra – Aristida congesta* secondary grassland.
- Open *Vachellia karroo* woodland.
- *Vachellia karroo – Searsia lancea – Euclea crispa* footslopes.
- Degraded grassland.
- Cultivated land.
- Exotic bushclumps.
- Old slimes dams
- Drainage features:
  - Valley bottom wetlands
  - River channels:
    - Floodplains rivers.
    - Non-perennial channels.
  - Exorheic depressions (dams).
  - Endorheic depressions (pans).

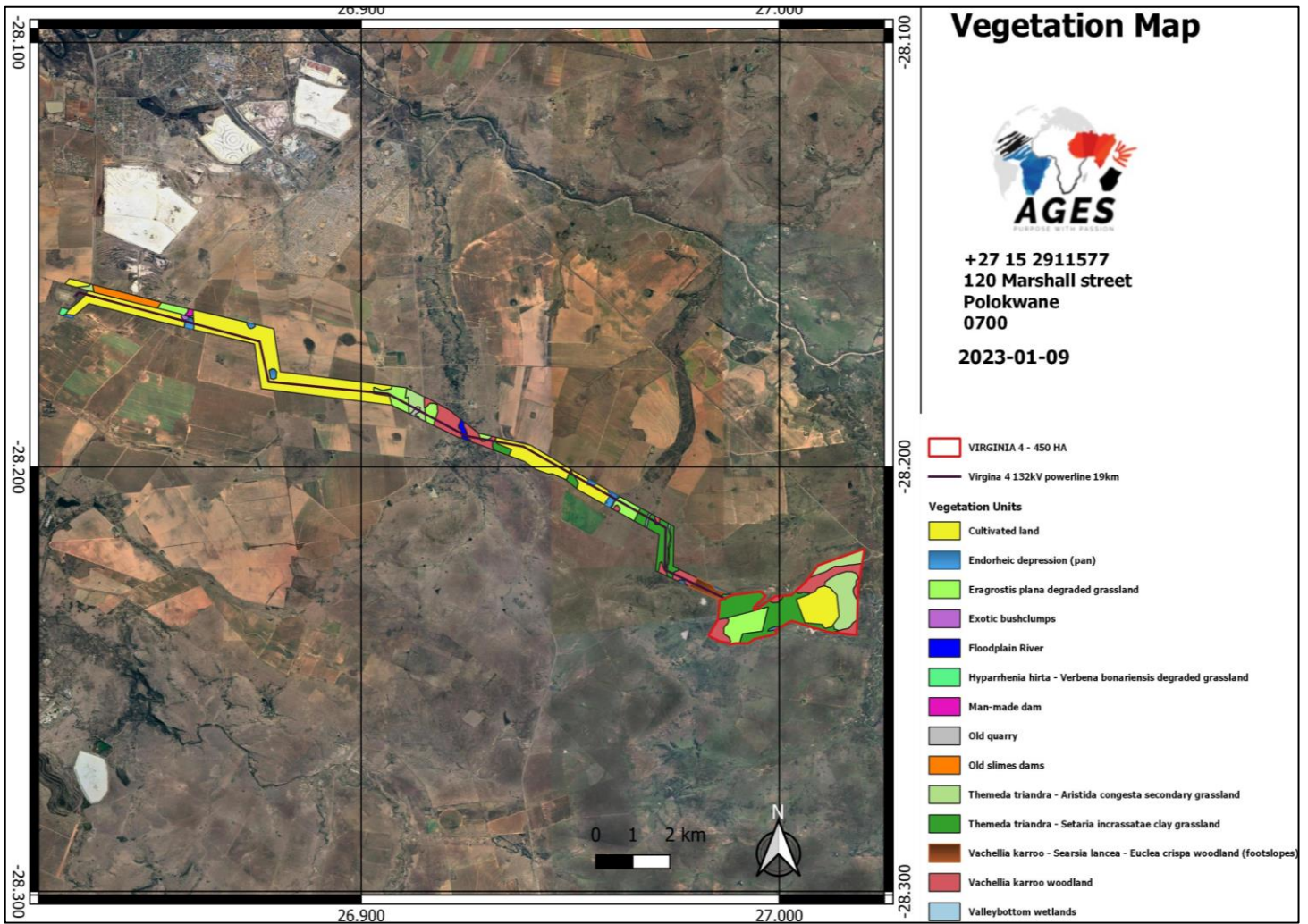


Figure 12. Vegetation Unit Map of the proposed development area (From Biodiversity report)

• ***Themeda triandra – Setaria incrassatae* clay grassland**

This grassland occurs throughout large sections of the project area. The grass layer is well developed and underlied by red apedal soils of the Hutton soil form and dark clayey soils of the Arcadia or Swartland Soil Forms. Grasses that dominate on the clayey soils are species such as *Setaria incrassatae* and *Themeda triandra*. The vegetation structure is tall, closed grassland. No red listed or protected species were documented in the area.

The following specific recommendations for the vegetation unit regarding the proposed development should be adhered to:

- The vegetation unit is classified as having a **medium sensitivity** due to the due to the widespread status through larger project area.
- The development of the solar development is considered suitable in this area.

• ***Themeda triandra – Aristida congesta* secondary grassland**

This vegetation unit occurs on red Hutton soils in the low-lying areas adjacent to the Merriespruit. The vegetation was probably overgrazed in the past that caused the soil to become eroded. The grass layer is in a secondary state of succession at present and dominated by species such as *Themeda triandra*, *Aristida congesta* and *Sporobolus africanus*.

The following specific recommendations for the vegetation unit regarding the proposed development should be adhered to:

- The vegetation unit is classified as having a **medium-low sensitivity** due to the secondary state of succession and degradation evident in the area.
- The removal of protected plant species *Boophane* or *Helichrysum* species would need a permit from local authorities in the Free State.
- The development of the solar development is considered suitable in this area.

- **Open *Vachellia karroo* woodland**

The microphyllous woodland vegetation unit occurs on red apedal soils of the Hutton soil form. The woody layer is dominated by species such as *Vachellia karroo*, *Vachellia tortilis* and *Ziziphus mucronata*. The woody structure varies from open woodland to slightly denser woodland with bushclumps in some areas. The grass layer is in a slightly degraded state due to previous overgrazing and dominated by *Setaria incrassatae*, *Themeda triandra* and *Panicum maximum*.

The following specific recommendations for the vegetation unit regarding the proposed development should be adhered to:

- The vegetation unit is classified as having a **medium sensitivity** due its widespread occurrence in the Grassland Biome.
- The development of the solar development is considered suitable in this area.

- ***Vachellia karroo* – *Searsia lancea* – *Euclea crispa* footslopes**

This mixed woodland vegetation unit occurs along the proposed powerline route on the footslopes of the outcrops on shallowish clayey soils of the Hutton or Glenrosa soil form. The woody layer is dominated by species such as *Vachellia karroo*, *Pappea capensis*, *Searsia lancea*, *Euclea crispa* and *Ziziphus mucronata*. The woody structure varies from being open woodland to slightly denser woodland with bushclumps in some areas. The grass layer is in a slightly degraded state due to previous overgrazing and dominated by *Eragrostis lehmanniana*, *Heteropogon contortus*, *Themeda triandra* and *Panicum maximum*.

The following specific recommendations for the vegetation unit regarding the proposed development should be adhered to:

- The vegetation unit is classified as having a **medium sensitivity** due its widespread occurrence in the Grassland Biome.
- The development of the solar development is considered suitable in this area.

- **Degraded grassland**

A section of the proposed development footprint represents degraded grassland on red-yellow apedal soils of the Hutton soil form or Clovelly soil form. According to the soil types and previous land use, the vegetation represents degraded grassland (primary old fields) dominated by *Cynodon dactylon* and *Eragrostis plana*. The grass layer is well developed and dominated by species such as *Hyparrhenia hirta*, *Cynodon dactylon*, *Eragrostis plana*, *Eragrostis chloromelas* and various exotic weeds such as *Verbena bonariensis*.

The following specific recommendations for the vegetation unit regarding the proposed development should be adhered to:

- The vegetation unit is classified as having a **low sensitivity** due the degraded state of the herbaceous layer.
- The development of the solar development is considered suitable in this area.

- **Cultivated land**

The croplands in the project area form ploughed fields on sandy soils. Exotic weeds and pioneer grasses often colonize the areas surrounding the croplands.

- **Exotic bushclumps**

A small section of the project area is characterised by homogenous stands of exotic trees such as *Eucalyptus camaldulensis*. Exotic weeds and pioneer grasses often colonize the areas surrounding these bushclumps. This area has a **low sensitivity**.

- **Old slimes dams**

The western section of the power line is partially along completely degraded old slimes dams. This area is not active any longer and the area colonised by various alien invasive species such as Tamarisk chinensis and other exotic weeds. Due to the completely modified state of the vegetation the area has a **low sensitivity**.

- **Drainage features (valley bottom wetland with channel, river channels & floodplains, exorheic and endorheic depressions)**

All rivers and streams with their associated riparian vegetation in the project area are ecologically sensitive, forming important, limited, and specialised habitats for several plant and fauna species. The species composition is unique and relatively limited in distribution and coverage. These habitats also form linear corridors linking different open spaces. The drainage channels of the project area eventually flow into the Sand River that occurs to the North-east of the project area.

The riverine woodland would be important dry season refuge areas for many fauna species in their natural state. It is also a centre of floral diversity. Riparian areas have been identified as important dry season refuge areas for a variety of large mammal species.

Impacts on the sensitive riparian ecosystems, regardless of the source, need to be restricted. Impacts on this system include erosion, habitat loss and degradation and the associated impacts on faunal and floral diversity, dewatering of marshes and wetlands, water abstraction as well as increased sedimentation. Continued impacts on the riverine ecosystems may also ultimately reduce the capacity of this system to absorb dramatic flooding events. The band of trees that occurs along the channel can be classified as riparian vegetation. This vegetation is very important for connectivity with adjacent vegetation as well as a migratory route for riparian animals.

**9.4.8.2 Red Data Species**

No red data species was documented during the surveys in the study area. Ecological monitoring should however still be implemented during the construction phase and specific sensitive habitats (riparian) needs to be avoided to ensure that any potential red data species potentially missed during the field surveys are preserved and not potentially impacted on.

**9.4.8.3 Protected Species (Free State Nature Conservation Ordinance)**

Plant species are protected in the Free State according to the Free State Nature Conservation Ordinance. According to this ordinance, no person may pick, import, export, transport, possess, cultivate, or trade in a specimen of a specially protected or protected plant species. The Appendices to the ordinance provide an extensive list of species that are protected, and there is a number of flora expected to occur on site. A permit is required for all these species if they are expected to be affected by the proposed project.

After a detailed survey was conducted during November 2022, the listed species *Boophane disticha* and *Helichrysum nudifolium* confirmed for the site. The species can be relocated from its current locations if needed through a rescue and relocation programme should the development activities impact on populations.

**9.4.8.4 Protected Trees Species (NFA)**

The National Forest Act, 1998 (Act No.84 of 1998) (NFA) provides a list of tree species that are considered important in a South African perspective because of scarcity, high utilization, common value, etc. In terms of the NFA, these tree species may not be cut, disturbed, damaged, destroyed and their products may not be possessed, collected, removed, transported, exported, donated, purchased or sold – except under license granted by Forestry (or a delegated authority). Obtaining relevant permits are required prior to any impact on these individuals. Taking cognizance of the data obtained from the field surveys, **no protected tree species** occur in the area.

**9.4.8.5 Alien Invasive Species**

The following alien invasive and exotic plant species were recorded on site during the surveys as stipulated in the Alien and Invasive Species Regulations (GNR 599 of 2014).

Table 21. Declared weeds and invader plants of the study area.

Species	Category
<i>Argemone ochroleuca</i>	1b
<i>Cestrum laevigatum</i>	1b
<i>Datura stramonium</i>	1b
<i>Eucalyptus camaldulensis</i>	1b
<i>Morus alba</i>	3
<i>Opuntia ficus-indica</i>	1b
<i>Opuntia imbricata</i>	1b
<i>Tamarisk chinensis</i>	1b
<i>Verbena brasiliensis</i>	1b
<i>Xanthium strumarium</i>	1b



According to the amended regulations (No. R280) of March 2001 of the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act 1983 (Act no. 43 of 1983), it is the legal duty of the land user/landowner to control invasive alien plants occurring on the land under their control.

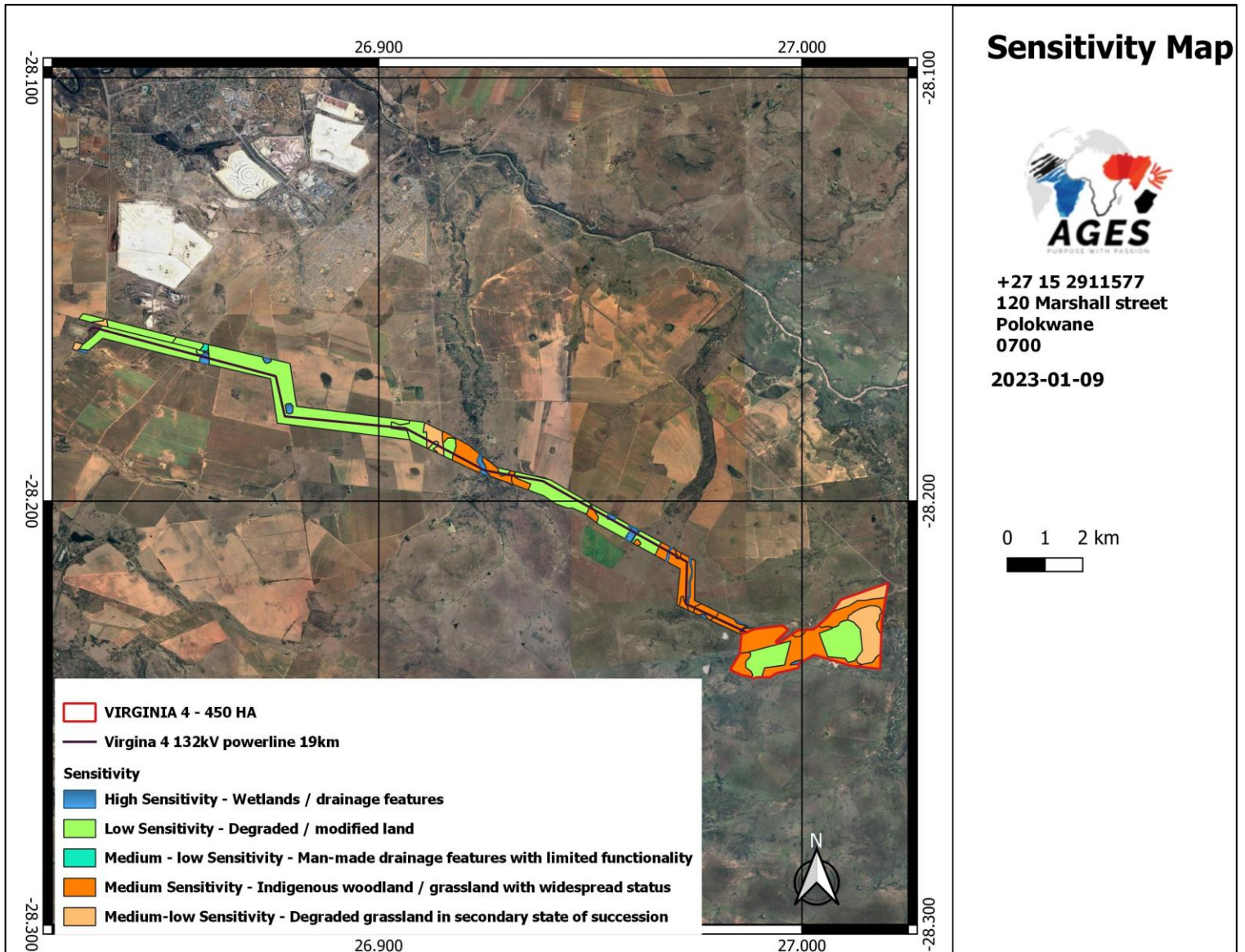


Figure 13. Ecological Sensitivity Map

#### 9.4.8.6 Cumulative impacts

It is unclear whether other projects not related to renewable energy is or has been constructed in this area, and whether other projects are proposed. In general, development activity in the area is focused on agriculture and mining. It is quite possible that future solar farm development may take place within the general area.

Regionally landscape fragmentation could create barriers to the movement of species and their genes (Saunders et al., 1991). The answer to the width and extent of corridors depends on the conservation goal and the focal species (Samways, 2005). Corridors for mammalian species are especially important for migratory species (Mwalyosi, 1991; Pullin 2002). For an African butterfly assemblage this is about 250m when the corridor is for movement as well as being a habitat source (Pryke and Samways 2003). Hill (1995) found a figure of 200m for dung beetles in tropical Australian forest. In the agricultural context, and at least for some common insects, even small corridors can play a valuable role (Samways, 2005). Published information about cumulative effects, metapopulations and fragmentation of landscapes is in general scarce, especially for local and regional areas.

Corridors and linkages of areas with similar habitat are present in the area where several solar power plants are planned. Watercourses and wetlands are avoided by the proposed footprints so that steppingstone corridors (pans) and a network of linked corridors (active channels with riparian zones) remain. No habitats of threatened species that could easily be isolated (for example beetles with flightless females) are known to be impacted locally in the larger study area.

Because most of the Virginia area appears to be ideal to avoid very sensitive habitats such as larger pristine wetlands and highly sensitive habitat pockets of threatened species, the development of a several solar plants appear to be more ideal on a national scale than at many other areas. Therefore, an important mitigation measure is to leave corridors with indigenous vegetation in between solar plants and their associated infrastructure.

Overall, because of the restricted nature of solar plants and few or no emissions and pollutants into air when operational, soil and water cumulative impacts to the environment are limited (if compared for example to emissions from fossil fuel burning). Ultimately power plants could relieve the pressures to use fossil fuels that are associated with numerous cumulative impacts and habitat losses.

#### 9.4.8.7 Conclusions

The importance of rehabilitation and implementation of mitigation processes to prevent negative impacts on the environment during and after the construction phase of the solar development should be considered a high priority. The proposed site for the development varies from being in a completely modified to slightly degraded state.

The protected plant species *Boophane disticha* and *Helichrysum nudifolium* occur on the site and specific mitigation measures (permit applications, avoidance, relocation) should be implemented to avoid negative impacts on the species.

#### 9.4.8.8 Fauna

A survey was conducted during November 2022 to identify specific fauna habitats, and to compare these habitats with habitat preferences of the different fauna groups (birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians) occurring in the quarter degree grid. During the site visits mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians were identified by visual sightings through random transect walks. In addition, mammals were also recognized as present by means of spoor, droppings, burrows or roosting sites.

##### 9.4.8.8.1 Mammals

The Highveld Ecoregion contains a higher number of mammals, although only the orange mouse (*Mus orangiae*) is restricted to the ecoregion, and the rough-haired golden mole (*Chrysospalax villosa*) is near-endemic. The ecoregion also supports populations of several large mammal species, some of which are rare in southern Africa (Stuart and Stuart 1995). Among these are the brown hyena (*Hyaena brunnea*), African civet (*Civettictis civetta*), leopard (*Panthera pardus*), pangolin (*Manis temminckii*), honey badger (*Mellivora capensis*), striped weasel (*Poecilogale albinucha*), aardwolf (*Proteles cristatus*), oribi (*Ourebia ourebi*), and mountain zebra (*Equus zebra hartmannae*).

Predators that still roam freely in the area include larger predators such brown hyena, while smaller predators such as caracal, serval and honey badger are common throughout the larger area. Antelope species such as duiker and steenbok will roam freely through the area and are not restricted by game fences. Smaller mammal species such as honey badgers and serval can become habituated to anthropogenic influences, while other species such as brown hyena will rather move away from the construction activities and will seldom use the area.

Spotted-necked otters (listed by the EIA screening tool) are aquatic and require permanent and continuous waterways. They prefer clear water with rocks. They are found in lakes, swamps, rivers, and may be found in mountain streams at higher elevations. They are absent in turbid rivers and shallow alkaline lakes. They live in dens, which are found near these sources of water.

The otter's fur is highly prized, being used as a cure for eye and/or nose infections. The spotted-necked otters are in decline due to changes in their environment and human interference. One problem is the increased use of nylon fishing nets, in which the otters get tangled in and die. Erosion of soil near the source of the rivers is also a threat. Fish-farmers and fur-trappers are also playing a part in the decline of the spotted-necked otter.

**Probability of occurrence on site: MODERATE** due to the presence of suitable habitat on the proposed development footprint, although no population of the species occur on site.

**Probability of impact during vegetation clearance: MODERATE**, no populations documented although some habitat considered suitable at wetland crossings and dams.

The connectivity 1 of the project site to the remainder of the larger area is Moderate due to other surrounding areas representing natural grassland and wetlands. Of significance is the role of the wetlands and indigenous grasslands as zoogeographical dispersal corridors.

Most mammal species are highly mobile and will move away during construction of the solar development. The most important corridors that need to be preserved for free-roaming mammal species in the area include the wetlands and indigenous grasslands.

#### 9.4.8.8.2 Avifauna

An Avifaunal Assessment (Annexure F) was conducted by Ryno Kemp (*Pr.Sci.Nat.*) to determine whether the proposed development would have negative impact on avifauna.

One hundred and twenty-nine (129) bird species were recorded in and around the project area of influence, with 95 species recorded from point counts and an additional 34 species recorded as incidental sightings. The field survey was conducted on 12 -15 December 2022.

The assessment area consisted of four avifauna habitats; transformed areas, degraded grassland, grassland and bushclumps. These habitats were mainly in a natural state except for the regions disturbed by livestock grazing and transformed due to anthropogenic activities. Three species of conservation concern were confirmed in the assessment area (Blue Korhaan (*Eupodotis caerulescens*), Lanner Falcon (*Falco biarmicus*) and Secretarybird (*Sagittarius serpentarius*). Some high-risk avifauna species were recorded from the project area and surrounding, including raptors and water birds.

The project will result in habitat loss and degradation of avifaunal habitats. The development will lead to the clearing of vegetation and an alteration in the undeveloped nature of the area. Based on the high receptor resilience and medium biodiversity importance, the assessment area was given low site ecological importance, with transformed areas having a very low site ecological importance (SEI). Although, the overall sensitivity is considered low, the specialist strongly suggests a follow-up survey to confirm the low sensitivity at the end of the wet season. The development will also lead to sensory disturbance, collision and electrocution risks. Even though the latter three impacts can be effectively mitigated, the loss of habitat cannot be mitigated. Considering the number of applications and current solar plant developments in the area the cumulative impact is regarded as being high.

The mitigation hierarchy implemented in this report is based on section 2(4)(a)(i) of NEMA and the policy on Environmental offsetting (Biodiversity Offset Guidelines, section 24(J) of NEMA, Sept 2021). The mitigation hierarchy includes first avoiding the impact, then minimising it, then rehabilitation, and then offsetting. Where a residual impact, even after mitigation, is high, then offsetting must be considered. In this case, no impacts are high post-mitigation and according to available data, offsets will not be required. Mitigation measures have reduced most impacts to a Moderate or Low, which is considered within the limits of acceptable change.

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<sup>1</sup> **Connectivity (habitat connectivity)** - Allowing for the conservation or maintenance of continuous or connected habitats, so as to preserve movements and exchanges associated with the habitat.

The significance of potential impacts on avifauna are assessed in Tables 7-1 to 7-4 of the Avifaunal Assessment.

**Mitigation measures are included in Table 8-1 of the Avifaunal Assessment and the EMPr.**

Considering the above-mentioned information, very few sensitive features were identified for the project mainly along the proposed power line. It is the opinion of the specialist that the project may be considered for approval, but all prescribed mitigation measures and monitoring must be considered by the issuing authority.

Bird diverters, bird guards, and spirals must be placed along the entire proposed powerline to reduce fatalities, as these large terrestrial birds and raptors do occur across the entire proposed powerline. Any power lines that may be developed must be extensively mitigated.

**Cumulative Impacts**

Cumulative impacts are assessed in context of the extent of the proposed assessment area; other developments in the area; and general habitat loss and transformation resulting from other activities in the area.

The impacts of projects are often assessed by comparing the post-project situation to a pre-existing baseline. Where projects can be considered in isolation this provides a good method of assessing a project's impact. However, in areas where baselines have already been affected, or where future development will continue to add to the impacts in an area or region, it is appropriate to consider the cumulative effects of development. This is similar to the concept of shifting baselines, which describes how the environmental baseline at a point in time may represent a significant change from the original state of the system. This section describes the potential impacts of the project that are cumulative for avifauna.

Localised cumulative impacts include the cumulative effects from operations that are close enough to potentially cause additive effects on the environment or sensitive receivers (such as nearby solar farm activities within the area). These include dust deposition, noise and vibration, disruption of corridors or habitat, groundwater drawdown, groundwater and surface water quality, and transport.

Based on the number of known and planned PV sites and their associated powerlines in the area the cumulative impact is expected to be moderate. These would collectively result in a large area of habitat loss, and it increases the risk of collisions and electrocutions for avifauna. This risk is especially high as a few species expected and recorded is in a high-risk category for collisions and electrocutions.

A total area of 30 km surrounding the project area was used to assess the total habitat loss in the area and subsequently the cumulative impact. To determine the intact remnant habitat the NBA (2018) remnant spatial data was utilised. The future renewable energy projects were also considered by utilising the REEA Q3 (2022) spatial dataset. In order to remove any duplication, only the areas that overlap with the remnant areas were considered. The total cumulative loss was found to be 46.3%.



Table 22. Total cumulative habitat loss

Total Area of 30 km buffer	Intact Remnant Habitat	REEA area that overlaps with undisturbed areas	Total Disturbed/Transformed habitat	Percentage area lost
282 265 ha	149 324 Ha	11 544 Ha	119 379 Ha	46.3 %

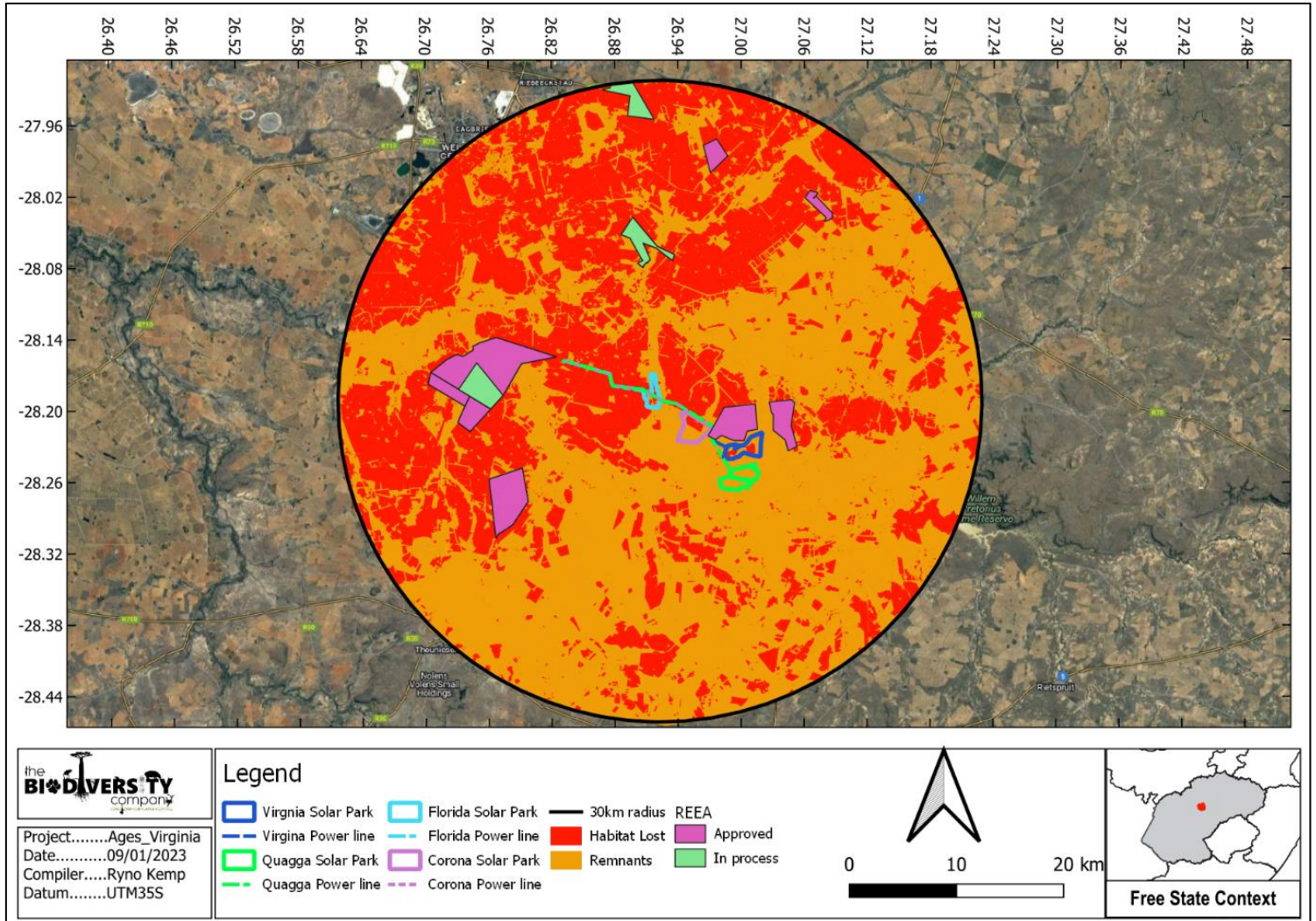


Figure 14. Cumulative habitat loss in the area

### 9.4.8.8.3 Herpetofauna

Twenty-nine amphibians occur within the ecoregion, but none are endemic (Passmore and Carruthers 1995). Breeding habitat of frogs and toads can be found mostly in the permanent wet zone of the wetlands and dams in the larger area. Amphibian species potentially occurring in the larger area include Common River Frog, Natal Sand Frog, Gutteral Toad, Raucous Toad and Bubbling Kassina. These species are non-threatened and widespread, and as such the development will not have any impact on amphibian conservation within the region.



Relatively few reptile species occur within the Highveld Ecoregion, mainly due to its cool climate. However, the ecoregion supports some of Africa’s most characteristic reptile species, including Nile crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*), African rock-python (*Python sebae*), water monitor (*Varanus niloticus*) and veld monitor (*Varanus exanthematicus albigularis*). There are also two strict endemic reptiles: giant girdled lizard (*Cordylus giganteus*), and *Agama distanti* (Branch 1998). Several additional reptile species are near endemics, including Drakensberg rock gecko (*Afroendura niravia*), giant spinytail lizard (*Cordylus giganteus*), and Breyer's whiptail (*Tetradactylus breyeri*) (Branch 1998).

In the presence of dead termitaria, the small geckos listed are probably found on the site. A few terrestrial lizards (Yellow-throated Plated Lizard, Variegated Skink), typical for Highveld Grassveld, are expected to be present. A variety of smaller snake species characteristic for Highveld Grassveld will be present (Common Wolf Snake, Brown House Snake), although some might be dependent on by the presence of dead termitaria. The only venomous snakes, which has been reported as being present and common, is as expected, the Rinkhals, Mozambique spitting cobra, snouted cobra and the Puffadder for this QDS. All the reptile species are common and widespread, and as such the development will not have any impact on reptile conservation within the region. The sungazer lizard occurs in some of the grassland areas, while the southern spiny agama and the striped harlequin snake may occur in small numbers in suitable habitat.

Table 23. Red data list of potential fauna for the study area

English Name	Conservation Status	Probability of occurrence on site
<b>BIRDS</b>		
Stork, Abdim’s	Near Threatened	Moderate
Stork, Yellow-billed	Endangered	Moderate
<b>MAMMALS</b>		
Oribi	Endangered	Low
Roan Antelope	Endangered (2016)	Zero – restricted to game reserves
African wild dog	Endangered (2016)	Zero – restricted to game reserves
Vaal Rhebok	Near Threatened (2016)	Low
Southern African Hedgehog	Near Threatened (2016)	Moderate
Lechwe	Near Threatened (2017)	Zero – restricted to game reserves
(Southern African) Tsessebe	Vulnerable (2016)	Zero – restricted to game reserves
Sable antelope	Vulnerable (2016)	Zero – restricted to game reserves
Ground Pangolin	Vulnerable (2016)	Low
African White-tailed Rat	Vulnerable (2016)	Moderate
Hartmann's Mountain Zebra	Vulnerable A3bcd (IUCN, 2019)	Zero – restricted to game reserves
<b>HERPETOFAUNA</b>		
Giant Bull Frog	Near Threatened	Moderate
Giant Girdled Lizard	Vulnerable (SARCA 2014)	Low

Negative impacts of the proposed development will have a medium to low impact on fauna of the area. Recommendations and mitigating measures still need to be implemented to ensure the survival of these species, other fauna habitats and feeding grounds as stipulated below:

- The development would not have a significant impact on the above-mentioned red data fauna since adequate and natural habitat/vegetation would be available on the peripheral grassland habitats surrounding the development site. The most probable habitat to find any of the red data species in the study area would be in the more natural areas of the grassland and wetlands where little or no disturbances from humans or livestock occur at a regular interval. Fauna will therefore rather move away from the area and utilize adjacent, more natural areas. The importance to preserve the wetland habitats to the north and south of the development footprint should still be considered a high priority though.
- The removal of vegetation should be confined to the footprints of the proposed development site. This will be on small sections in relation to the total available surrounding habitat for fauna. Development also will not influence the natural feeding and movement patterns of the existing fauna in the area.
- If one considers the habitat descriptions of the red data species, most of them are not directly threatened by habitat loss. The impact of development on the red data species would therefore be less than predicted.
- The protection of different habitat types in the area will be important to ensure the survival of the different animals due to each species' individual needs and requirements. Sufficient natural corridor sections should be protected around the proposed development footprints to allow fauna to move freely between the different vegetation units on the property. The drainage channels and sections of natural vegetation will be preserved as corridors in the area and mitigation measures should be implemented to ensure that the habitats are protected.
- The taller (>3m) indigenous trees within this area also provide resting/perching sites for larger birds like birds of prey, arboreal reptiles and mammals that might occur/pass through the area and should preferably be preserved. These larger trees should be protected as far as possible and be incorporated into the proposed development. The removal of large dead trees is also not advised as these trees also provide smaller habitats for the mentioned bat species as well as rodents. The grass layer on the other hand also provides a valuable food source (insects, reptiles, small mammals that occur in/on the grass layer) for fauna.
- A monitoring programme needs to be implemented by a specialist if any rare species are confirmed on the property.

#### **9.4.8.9 Summary and results of the Terrestrial Biodiversity Impact Assessment**

Detailed ecological (fauna habitat & flora) surveys were conducted during November 2022 to verify the ecological sensitivity and ecological components of the site at ground level. The timing of the season was considered as adequate due to sufficient rains received in the area during the winter months and early spring. The survey was considered successful.

**Most sensitive sections:** It is evident from the distribution of biodiversity, presence of threatened species and sites of scientific interest, that the proposed development has the potential for negative impact on the flora and faunal of the study area. This is particularly true of the sensitive vegetation associated with the riverine and wetland ecosystems and the larger project area.

**Most sensitive habitats:** Many threatened species are grassland specialists, linked to these habitats either for breeding, feeding or shelter. Major impacts on wetland areas to the south of the site should be avoided wherever possible during construction. Where unavoidable impacts will occur on grassland and wetland zones, strict mitigation measures and legislation should be implemented (DFFE licence for removal of protected trees, IWUL application etc.).

**Monitoring of threatened species:** Many endemic and protected species have been recorded in region. The EMPr for the development should highlight the conservation status of these species and note that steps must be undertaken in conjunction with conservation authorities to protect or translocate any populations encountered during project actions. Ecological monitoring is recommended for the construction phase of the development considering the presence of potential red data fauna on areas surrounding the site.

The importance of rehabilitation and implementation of mitigation processes to prevent negative impacts on the environment during and after the construction phase of the solar development should be considered a high priority. The proposed site for the development varies from being in a slightly degraded to pristine state.

**A sensitivity analyses was conducted to identify the most suitable site for the development. From this investigation and ecological surveys, the following main observations were made:**

- Most of the natural grassland and woodland have a Medium Sensitivity and development can be supported in the area provided certain mitigation measures are implemented. Where the clearance of the vegetation would cause protected plants or other fauna to be removed, permits should be obtained from the relevant authorities.
- The secondary grassland has a Medium-low Sensitivity due to the state of succession and degradation in the area.
- The degraded grasslands, croplands and exotic bush clumps have a low sensitivity and unlimited development can be supported in these areas.
- The wetlands (including valley bottoms and pans) and riparian zones have a high sensitivity and should be preserved as important fauna and flora habitats.

The protected plant species *Boophane disticha* and *Helichrysum nudifolium* occur on the site and specific mitigation measures (permit applications, avoidance, relocation) should be implemented to avoid negative impacts on the species.

Some potential rare fauna may also occur in the area, and specific mitigation measures need to be implemented to ensure that the impact of the development on the species' habitat will be low. Specific mitigation relating to red data fauna includes the following:

- Disturbances in close vicinity of the development (periphery) should be limited to the smallest possible area to protect species habitat.
- Corridors are important to allow fauna to move freely between the areas of disturbance.

Several ecological potential impacts were identified and assessed. A few of these were assessed as having potentially medium or high significance, including the following:

- Destruction or disturbance to sensitive ecosystems leading to reduction in the overall extent of a particular habitat.
- Increased soil erosion.
- Impairment of the movement and/or migration of animal species resulting in genetic and/or ecological impacts.
- Destruction/permanent loss of individuals of rare, endangered, endemic and/or protected species.
- Establishment and spread of declared weeds and alien invader plants.
- Soil and water pollution through spillages.
- Establishment and spread of declared weeds and alien invader plants.
- Impacts of human activities on fauna and flora of the area during construction.
- Air pollution through dusts and fumes from construction vehicles.

Mitigation measures are provided that would reduce these impacts from a higher to a lower significance. A monitoring plan is recommended for the construction phase of the development should the proposed application be approved.

The proposed development should avoid sensitive areas such as wetlands and riverine areas, while also allowing corridors of indigenous grassland on areas outside the development footprint to be preserved. Where sensitive areas of natural vegetation cannot be avoided, a few mitigation measures have been recommended to minimise and/or offset impacts (licence application for eradication of protected species.). Negative impacts can be minimised by strict enforcement and compliance with an Environmental Management Plan which considers the recommendations for managing impacts detailed above.

According to the Ecological Specialist, provided that the proposed development and layout plans is consistent with the sensitivity map and take all the mitigation measures into consideration stipulated in this report, the planned development can be supported.

### **Cumulative impacts**

Cumulative impacts on the ecology of the area can be significant. However, with the mitigation measures in place, the potential is low for significant negative impacts on the ecology of the area.

### **9.4.9 VISUAL**

A Visual Impact Assessment (Annexure K) was conducted by Mitha Cilliers Landscape Architect to determine the visual impact of the proposed solar park and power line. The main characteristics of the study area includes mining, crop and livestock farming giving the study area an agro-industrial sense of place. The area where the solar parks are located is dominated by agriculture and in the north is buffered by the township of Meloding and the town of Virginia from the mining activities. The powerlines also become less further away to the southeast of the study area.

Tourist attractions mostly occur on the outer edges of the study area in a 20km radius, with the closest being the Allemanskraal Dam, ± 16km southeast of the nearest solar park site, on the outer edge of the visual analysis. Guest houses mostly serves the mining community. The residential component of the study area includes farmstead with associated workers housing and the towns of Virginia and Ventersurg and Meloding and Mmamahabane townships. Nighttime character would mostly be characterised by lights associated by farmsteads and a larger glow in the northern section associated with the towns of Meloding, Virginia and mines.

The proposed project components will exhibit a medium contrast with the receiving environment. No night-light impact is anticipated. Discussions with the aviation impact consultant revealed that it is very unlikely that glint and glare from the proposed project would interfere with the Approach / Departure flight paths for the three local airports that are located approximately 20km – 40km from the proposed project.

The Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) for the solar panels covers 18% of the Zone of Potential Visual Influence (ZPVI), a 16km radius around the project components for this specific project. The ZVI for the powerline is quite expansive and, almost wholly, includes the ZVI of the solar panels except for scattered, small, positions towards the east. The ZVI for the powerline covers approximately 62% of the ZPVI area. The combined ZVI for the solar panels and the powerline covers approximately 56 % of the total ZPVI are for this project. The generalized **Relevance** of the visual impact on these receptors were as follows:

- **Residential: *marginal***
- **Transport: *marginal***
- **Business / Occupational / Industrial: *marginal***
- **Open Space Users / Recreational: *marginal***

VSRs with the largest anticipated impact included the farmsteads on the farms Le Roux No. 766 and Florida No. 633 which was rated as substantial. This rating is a result of their proximity to the proposed powerline rather than the solar park.

Mitigation measures are listed in Table 4 of the Visual Impact Assessment and the EMPr.

From the visual impact analysis, it is clear that the implementation of the proposed Virginia 4 Solar Park & Powerline, would have a **medium significance** for all visual receptors, during all phases of the project, with or without the correct and effective implementation of the proposed mitigation measures except when mitigation measures are implemented correctly and effectively in the decommissioning phase, then the rating would drop to **low-medium**.

### **Cumulative impacts**

It should be noted that the study area already contains a transmission substation and a network of powerlines consisting of a range of pylon sizes. The powerlines for these developments will follow along the same route and divert off to tie into their respective solar park developments. This strategy aims to reduce the anticipated impacts from the powerlines. Each of the proposed powerlines would contribute cumulatively to the effect of the existing powerlines within the context of the receiving environment. The proposed pylons are smaller than the pylons of the existing powerline.

The proposed powerline for this project would follow alongside existing powerlines for approximately a 5th of its route, from there it would deviate to follow its own route crossing three other existing powerlines. The ZVI for the Virginia 4 powerline covers approximately 62% of the ZPVI for this powerline whereas the combined ZVI for all four powerlines would cover approximately 65% of the ZPVI. Individually and cumulatively the impact from the powerline can be rated as intermediate (70 - 41%). The cumulative impact for this powerline would however only be incrementally larger than the proposed Virginia 4 powerline.

There are no other solar parks within the current context / study area. However, the study area has a mixed mining / industrial / pastoral sense of place. As stated above, this project is one of four solar park development projects proposed by the developer as a second phase of a previous round of proposed solar park developments within the same study area. The solar parks are all clustered together, this strategy reduces the overall / cumulative visual impact albeit adding to the mining / industrial sense of place.

The ZVI from the proposed solar park would cover approximately 16% of the ZPVI. Cumulatively, the combined ZVI's of the four proposed solar park projects would cover 29% of the ZPVI for the study area. Both individually and cumulatively, this can be rated as small impact (40 – 11%). The ZVI for this solar park is almost half of the cumulative ZVI for the solar parks combined.

The combined ZVI for the powerline and solar park would be approximately 56% of the ZPVI. The cumulative impact of all four projects is anticipated to be 58% of the ZPVI. The cumulative impact would be incrementally larger than the individual ZVI.

#### **9.4.10 SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT**

A report on the socio-economic considerations related to the proposed project was compiled and annexed as Annexure N. According to the assessment:

- The largest production sector in the municipality is mining. There was a decline in the gold industry and the economic growth in the MLM was lower than the other economic centers in the Free State. Average economic growth is also lower in the MLM than in the district, province and country's growth.
- In the MLM, the unemployment rate has increased from 21% in 2009 to 34% in 2019. This rise in unemployment is despite numerous efforts at the national, provincial and local level to increase job creation. Youth unemployment has risen from 2009 to 2019 and is currently at an elevated level of 53%.
- The vision statement in the LED strategy is that MLM aims to develop a globally competitive economy through the collaborative diversification of the mining, manufacturing, finance and trade sectors.
- Solar PV, wind and CSP with storage present an opportunity to diversify the electricity mix, to produce distributed generation and to provide off-grid electricity. Renewable technologies also present considerable potential for the creation of new industries, job creation and localisation across the value chain.



- Investment in renewable energy is continuing to increase as countries transition their power systems to cleaner sources of energy.
- The proposed Virginia 4 Solar PV plant is perfectly consistent with the modelling and findings of the 2019 update of the national Integrated Resource Plan. It is also consistent with the objectives of the RMIPP. This proposed project in Matjhabeng Local Municipality, could contribute 100MW of the current short-term energy capacity gap in the country.
- The District IDP 2021 makes indirect references to renewable energy by encouraging the development of a post-mining economy, especially in Matjhabeng LM. The rezoning of low-potential agricultural land is to be reconsidered for sustainable development.

**The following socio-economic impacts are foreseen in the report:**

- The project will contribute up to 100 MW to a constrained national grid, thereby reducing the need for load shedding with its negative consequences for economic production, growth and job creation; and maintenance of equipment. The impact is positive with a high significance.
- Capital investment of approximately R2bn will be required (100 MW at R20m/MW) of which a substantial proportion is likely to be foreign capital as indicated by the REIPPPP projects that have been procured to date. The impact is positive with a high significance. This excludes the new transmission line.
- The quantity of CO<sup>2</sup> potentially avoided by this project will be approximately 250,000 tons per year based on the average Eskom emission factor of 1.015 tons/MWh and assuming that the PV modules will be mounted on trackers. This impact is positive with high significance.
- Lower and declining electricity tariffs from solar energy compared to fossil fuel generated electricity (solar and wind energy tariffs are R0.62/kWh, compared to the coal tariff of R1.03/kWh). This will have a mitigating effect on administered prices and therefore on inflation. The economic impact of the proposed project will therefore be positive with a moderate significance.
- Every new solar project that is developed in South Africa makes the establishment of an industry to support local manufacturing of components more viable. The economic impact of the proposed project will therefore be positive with a low to moderate significance.
- Permanent job creation on the proposed project could be 40 people. More jobs will emerge within the value chain for the manufacturing of components. An important new range of renewable energy industry skills will be acquired, which are essential for the local competitiveness of this industry. This socio-economic impact is positive, but with a low significance.
- In terms of REIPPPP prescriptions, developers are expected to contribute 1.5% of turnover to community development in the vicinity of the project. The impact is positive with a low significance in terms of the methodology for impact calculation, although the impact on the community itself could be significant.
- Almost the entire impact of the proposed project on the local solar energy industry value chain referred to in will occur before and during the construction phase, because this is when the components will be required. This impact is positive, with a low to moderate significance.

- Approximately 100 construction and panel installation jobs are expected to be created per 100 MW project, for a period of  $\pm 15$  months. Skills development, especially for panel installation, will contribute meaningfully to the viability of other potential solar project developments in the Free State. This impact will be positive, but with relatively low significance due to its short duration.
- Construction projects are associated with increased levels of crime and disruption to established local social relationships. This impact could be negative, albeit low.
- The socio-economic impact of the proposed Virginia 4 Solar Project is considered positive, and the application is supported, provided that all the mitigation measures proposed by specialist consultants are implemented. The project is consistent with development policies at the national, provincial and local government levels, although the institutional readiness for a project of this nature will have to be confirmed at the municipal level.

#### 9.4.11 AGRICULTURAL POTENTIAL

An Agricultural Potential Impact Assessment on soils potential was conducted and is included in Annexure H. A thorough investigation of the soil types of the proposed development site is necessary for an accurate classification of soils. The main aim of the study is to identify the soil types on site and evaluate their specific characteristics to determine the agricultural potential of the soils.

Assessment of agricultural potential and land capability was based on a combination of desktop studies to amass general information and through a site visit for *status quo* assessment, soil sampling and characterization, and validation of generated information from desktop studies:

- Definition of parameters of land as stipulated by Subdivision of Agricultural Land Act, 1970 (Act No. 70 of 1970) and Amended Regulation of Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act, 1983 (Act No. 43 of 1983).
- Classification of high potential agricultural land in South Africa compiled by Agricultural Research Council (Schoeman, 2004) for the National Department of Agriculture.
- Long-term climatic data record of the study area, obtained from Weather SA.
- Geophysical features of the site using Geographical Information System.
- Moisture availability class, determined through seasonal rainfall and fraction of the potential evapotranspiration (ARC, 2002).
- Site visit for general observation, survey of the farm in terms of vegetation, soils, water resources, terrain type and infrastructural profile.
- Previous and current land use of the farm and that of the neighbourhood.
- Other agro-ecological factors prevailing in the area.
- Agricultural potential of the property.
- Possible crop productivity or value of the farm for grazing purposes.

The proposed development area shows some variations in terms of soil characteristics and soil types identified during the survey. The classification of soils on the farm was based on land type description and the Binomial System for SA. Exposed soil profile characteristics created by road cuttings in the field were also used in describing the local soil form. Soil identification and classification of the dominant soil type were done.

#### 9.4.11.1 Soil classes

The soils were classified into broad classes according to the dominant soil form and family as follows:

- Vertic clay soils of the Hutton (red clay) or Arcadia (black clay) soil form
- Red-yellow apedal soils of the Hutton soil forms.
- Red-yellow apedal soils of the Avalon / Clovelly soil form.
- Yellowish sandyclay soils of the Oakleaf soil form.
- Greybrown clayey soils of the Valsrivier / Katspruit / Rensburg soil forms.

The geological formations and vegetation patterns showed a strong correlation to the major soil units mapped in the study area.

#### **Vertic clay soils of the Hutton (red clay) or Arcadia (black clay) soil form**

**Description:** Arcadia soils are characterised by a vertic A-horizon. The Vertic horizon is strong developed structure with clearly visible, regularly occurring slicken sides in some part of the horizon or in the transition to an underlying layer. The soils occur in the southern and central section of the project area and the most of these areas are currently used for livestock grazing. The red clay soils are of the Hutton soil form and has an apedal structure. Hutton soils are identified based on the presence of an apedal (structureless) “red” B-horizon as indicated in the figure below. These soils are the main agricultural soil found in South Africa, due to the deep, well-drained nature of these soils. The Hutton soil form on site is deep, although it has a high clay content in combination with the Arcadia soil form.

**Landscape:** Slightly undulating plains (Photograph 2)

**Depth:** 200-500mm

**Texture:** Clay

**Average Clay Content:** 25-40%

**Agricultural Potential:** Medium potential arable soils, due to the depth and clay content being suitable for crop cultivation. The limiting factor is not the soil characteristics, but rather the prevailing climatic conditions.

**Land capability:** The grazing potential of these areas is medium to high. The most suitable and optimal utilization of the area would be grazing by livestock or wildlife. The soils are however susceptible to erosion and over grazing is a distinct and widespread risk.

#### **Red-yellow apedal soils of the Hutton soil form**

**Description:** Hutton soils are identified based on the presence of an apedal (structureless) “red” B-horizon. These soils are the main agricultural soil found in SA, due to the deep, well-drained nature of these soils. The Hutton soils found on the site are restricted to the north-eastern and north-western plateaus of the site. The Hutton soil form on site is deep, although it has a low clay content. The relatively high magnesium and iron content of the parent rocks from which these soils are derived, impart the strong red colours noted.

**Landscape:** Slightly undulating landscape.

**Depth:** 600-1200mmmm

**Texture:** Fine sandy to sandy loam

**Average Clay Content:** 6-215%

**Agricultural Potential:** Moderate potential soils– soils deep and loamy that has a good water holding capacity and the clay content of the soils is sufficient. Under the climatic conditions these soils would not sustain arable crop production. The most viable option for crop production on the soil form is under irrigation considering the variable rainfall and moisture availability due to higher day temperatures. Irrigation is not a common practice in the study area though and for any irrigation to be undertaken in the area, it will require the installation of a few surface water impoundments as storage during the dry months. The limited water availability, high evaporation rates and high water demands by crops would therefore render crop cultivation not sustainable in the study area. The many old, cultivated fields confirm that crop cultivation over the longer term is not a financially viable option under the prevailing climatic conditions.

**Land capability:** Livestock and / or game grazing are viable due to the slightly higher nutrient and organic content of the topsoil in grassland and woodland areas that support a mixture of palatable and unpalatable species.

**Red-yellow apedal soils of the Avalon / Clovelly soil forms**

Description: The Avalon soil form is characterised by the occurrence of a yellow-brown apedal B-horizon over a soft plinthic B – horizon. The yellow-brown apedal horizon is the same as described for the Clovelly soil form and the plinthic horizon has the following characteristics:

- Has undergone localised accumulation of iron and manganese oxides under conditions of a fluctuating water table with clear red-brown, yellow-brown or black strains in more than 10%of the horizon.
- Does not qualify as a diagnostic soft carbonate horizon.
- These soils are found between lower down the slopes than the Hutton soils and indicate the start of the soils with clay accumulation.

Clovelly soils is identified as an apedal “yellow” B-horizon. These soils with Hutton soils are the main agricultural soil found in SA, due to a deep, well drained nature of the soils. Clovelly soils occur as a mosaic with Avalon soil forms in the central section of the power line site. The Clovelly soil form on site is deep, although it has very low clay content. Generally, these soils were noted to interface directly on a hard rock or calcrete contact with only a thin saprolitic layer. Compaction and erosion are physical hazards to be aware of, and catered for, when working with these soil types.

**Landscape:** Plains

**Depth:** 800-1 200mm

**Texture:** Sandy-loam-clay

**Average Clay Content:** 6-20%

**Agricultural Potential:** Moderate to low potential soils, due to proximity to wetlands and erodibility of soils.

**Land capability:** The grazing potential of these low-lying areas is high due to the palatable grasses growing throughout the year on these soils. Soils are very sensitive and prone to erosion. A specific strategy is needed to prevent damage to these soils considering that overgrazing and trampling has already caused some degradation of these areas.

**Yellowish sandy clay soils of the Oakleaf soil form**

**Description:** Oakleaf soil consists of an orthic A horizon, overlying a neo-cutanic brown apedal B horizon. Oakleaf soils are good agricultural soils due to their sandy clay loam textures. These soils are cultivated easily, hold water and adsorb nutrients allowing optimal crop production.

**Landscape:** Slightly undulating plains

**Depth:** 600-1 200mm

**Texture:** Fine sandy loam soils

**Average Clay Content:** 8-15%

**Agricultural Potential:** Moderate potential soils— soils deep and often sandy clay loam structure that causes medium water holding capacity, although clay content of the soils is sufficient. Under the climatic conditions these soils would not sustain arable crop production. The most viable option for crop production on the soil form is under irrigation considering the variable rainfall and moisture availability due to high day temperatures. Irrigation is not a common practice in the area though and for any irrigation to be undertaken, it will require the installation of several surface water impoundments as storage during dry months. Limited water availability, high evaporation rates and high water demands by crops would render crop cultivation not sustainable in the study area. Old, cultivated fields in the larger area confirm that crop cultivation over the longer term is not a financially viable option under the prevailing climatic conditions.

**Land capability:** Livestock or game grazing are viable due to slightly higher nutrient and organic content of topsoil in woodland areas to support a mix of palatable and unpalatable species.

**Black or dark grey clayey soils associated with drainage channels and floodplains of Valsrivier/Katspruit/Rensburg soil forms.**

**Description:** The Rensburg Soil Form is also characterised by the occurrence of a vertic A horizon, with the A-horison underlain by a G-horizon.

**Landscape:** Drainage channels and wetlands

**Depth:** 700-1000mm

**Texture:** Clay

**Average Clay Content:** 40-60%

**Agricultural Potential:** Zero potential soils, due to the soil wetness these areas are not suitable for crop cultivation under arable conditions.

**Land capability:** The grazing potential of these low-lying areas is high due to the palatable grasses growing throughout the year on these soils. The only limiting factor may be that livestock movement is limited during the wet season when the clay expands, causing livestock to get stuck in the muddy conditions. Soils are very sensitive and prone to erosion. A specific strategy is needed to prevent damage to these soils considering that overgrazing and trampling has already caused some degradation of the floodplains.

### 9.4.11.2 Agro-Enterprise and Land Capability

#### **Arable land (crop production)**

Based on Part 1 of the Regulation of Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act, 1983 (Act No. 43 of 1983), the proposed development area, for Virginia 4 Solar Park and associated power line, can be classified as having Moderate potential soils because of the following:

- The proposed development site is composed of clayey to sandy to sandy-loam soils. From the soil textural analysis, it can be concluded that the soil has a clay content varying between 4 (sandy soils) and 30% (clayey soils). The soils are further predominantly red yellow apedal soils with a loamy texture on the plateaus in the north-western and north-eastern section of the site, while the southern section of the development footprint is dominated by black clayey soils.
- The farm is also expected to receive an annual total rainfall of about 560 mm which is relatively low and highly variable. In addition, the farm is in an area which is marginal to dry for rain-fed arable crop production. Economically viable farming is thus, restrictive to irrigated cropping due the high risk that could be associated with dry-land farming. At present no irrigation or centre pivots occur on the property. Furthermore, higher day temperatures and evaporation rates in summer months may hamper soil moisture storage for crop use.
- The nature of the soil makes the potential to cultivate crops under arable conditions marginal, even though some areas of the site is currently used for maize cultivation. The cultivated land was largely not considered for the development outside the limits of the compliance guidelines, and therefore only 0.25ha of cultivated and will be developed per 1 MW of land used for the solar plants. Therefore, the site should be classified as marginally suitable for arable agriculture due to its physical characteristics.
- Although the soil texture and depth are suitable for arable agriculture, the climatic conditions (annual rainfall 560mm) render the soils marginal for arable agriculture.

The results obtained from the study were done after field observations were done to verify the soil potential classified by the Department of Agriculture on a small scale. The site should subsequently be considered as moderate potential grazing land with Moderate potential for arable agriculture considering the climatic conditions, soil physical characteristics and size of land potentially available.

#### **Grazing land (Livestock production)**

The current vegetation at the proposed site of development consists mainly of areas of with mixed quality grazing (highly palatable and unpalatable grasses) throughout most parts of the site and these areas can support limited grazing by livestock and game species. The nature of the vegetation and size of the properties make the area marginal for extensive livestock production. Using planted pasture to supplement livestock production is an option considering the water availability for extensive irrigation.

Considering that re-growth of grass will take place under the panels as the mounting systems are at least 1m above ground level, the grazing value of the land will still be available to small livestock such as game and sheep. At the end of the lifetime of the solar plant, structures will



be removed, and natural vegetation will re-establish naturally. The grazing value of the land can therefore be increased by using planted pasture underneath the solar panel mounts. The nature of the vegetation at the farm is therefore marginal for extensive livestock production. Using planted pasture to supplement livestock production is however possible but this could be constrained by high demand for irrigation water due to the shallow and often sandy nature of the soil and relatively higher day temperatures in summer.

The nature of the vegetation at the farm is therefore moderate for extensive livestock production. The site is classified as partially arable to non-arable.

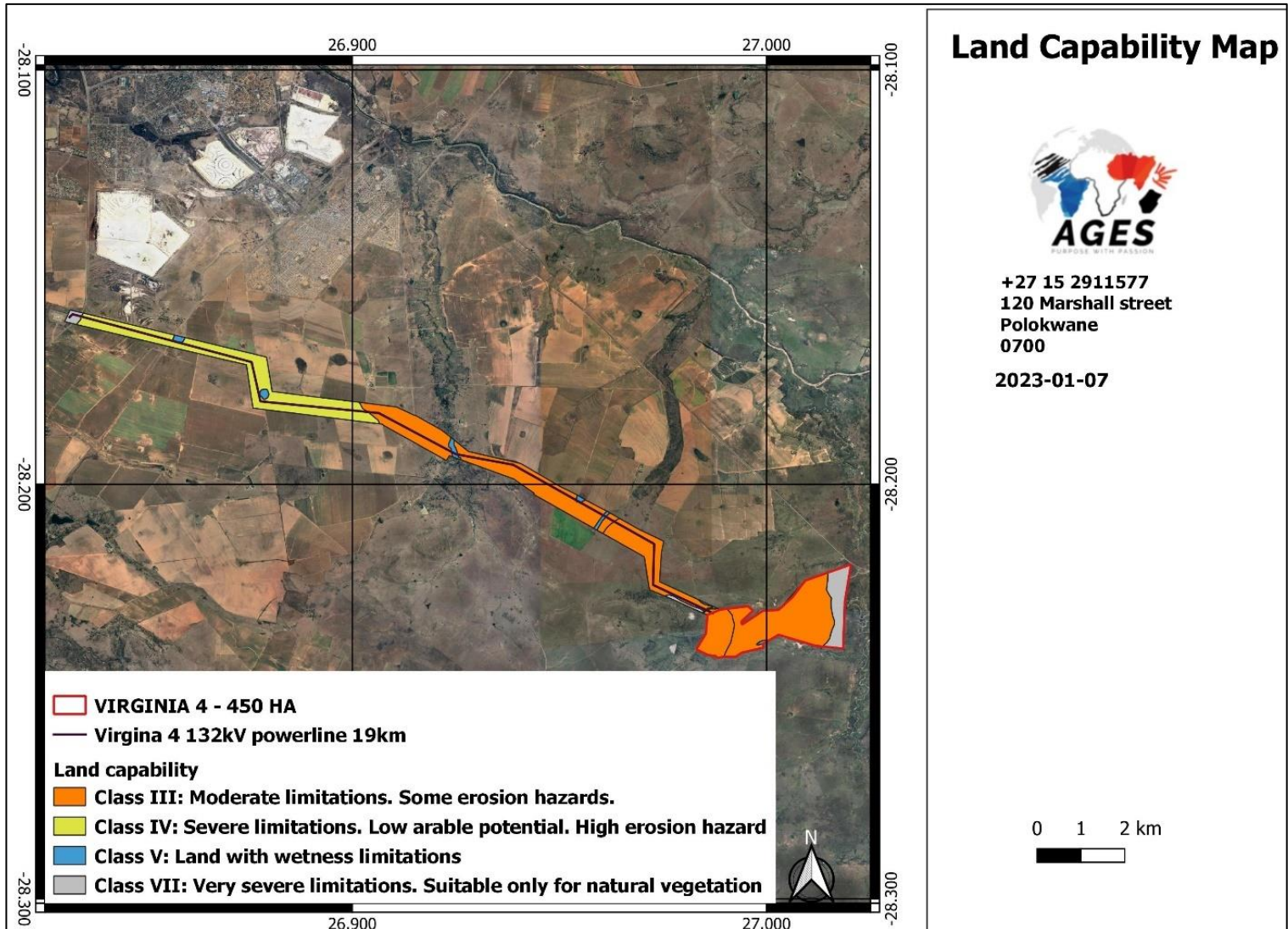


Figure 15. Land capability Map of the project area

**Impacts on the agricultural capability**

The impacts associated with the proposed development on the agro-ecosystem capability will depend on the specific area where the development will take place. The following list of impacts is anticipated with the proposed developments on the soils and land capability in the area during the construction phase:

- Disturbance of soils (soil compaction, erosion, and crusting).
- Sterilisation of soil (soil stripping).
- Soil contamination due to leaching of soluble chemical pollutants.
- Loss of current and potential agricultural land.

**9.4.11.3 Alternative development footprint assessment on low or medium sensitivity areas**

The areas with a low or medium sensitivity from an agricultural point of view was not considered suitable due to having near seasonally wet soils.

**9.4.11.4 Site micro-siting and allowable development limits**

Table 24 presented below was considered during the micro-siting of the layout plan to prevent high impacts on the cultivated land of the project area. The proposed solar development is completely in line with the allowable development limits set in the table below. No deviation occurred from the set development limits.

The extent of the impact of the proposed development on the agricultural resources is considered Medium to low considering that most of the croplands will be left undeveloped (only 0.25ha developed for each MW of the solar plants).

All reasonable measures have been considered in the micro-siting of the proposed development to minimise fragmentation and disturbance of agricultural activities.

Table 24. Allowable development limits for solar developments generating 20MW or more.

Criteria (land capability evaluation value and category of crop boundary)	Allowable development limits in hectares per MW of installed generation capacity (with sensitivity ratings from the national web based environmental screening tool shown in brackets)	
	Within field crop boundaries	Outside field crop boundaries
Land capability evaluation value of 11 – 15; Irrigation, horticulture/viticulture, shade-net; high value agricultural areas with a priority rating A and/or B	0 (Very High Sensitivity)	0 (Very High Sensitivity)
Land capability evaluation value of 8 – 10; all cultivated areas including sugarcane; high value agricultural areas with a priority rating C and/or D	0.20 (High Sensitivity)	0.35 (Medium Sensitivity)
Land capability evaluation value of 6 - 7;	0.25 (High Sensitivity)	2.50 (Low Sensitivity)
Land capability evaluation value of 1 - 5;	0.30 (High Sensitivity)	2.50 (Low Sensitivity)

The proposed development area is rated as land with land capability evaluation value of 6-7. This allows a development limit of **0.25 ha per MW** of installed generation capacity in high sensitivity areas and **2.50 ha per MW** of installed generation capacity in low sensitivity areas.

Provided that the proposed development and layout plans is consistent with the agro-ecosystem sensitivity map and take all the mitigation measures into consideration stipulated in this report, the planned development can be supported.

#### 9.4.12 CULTURAL AND HERITAGE RESOURCES

An Archaeological Impact Assessment (Annexure I) was conducted by Mr N Kruger from CES to ascertain whether there are any remains of significance in the area that will be affected by the proposed development. The farm Bloemskraal subject to this assessment was portioned towards the end of the 19th century and no reference to archaeological sites or features of heritage potential were recorded during an examination of literature thematically or geographically related to the property. Heritage receptors were identified, and recommendations were made in terms of heritage resources management.

The larger landscape around the project area indicates a rich heritage horizon encompassing Iron Age Farmer and Colonial / Historical Period archaeology primarily related to farming, rural expansion and warfare of the past century. The following observations are made for the proposed Virginia 4 Solar Park Project:

- Portions of the project area and the baseline environment have been affected by historical, recent and ongoing farming activities which possibly sterilized the landscape of prehistorical archaeological and other remnants. As no archaeological sites were located during the site assessment no apparent impact on the archaeological landscape is foreseen during the preconstruction, construction and operation phases of the project. However, since cultural (archaeological) layers are usually superficial, subsoil layers and that makes them easily vulnerable to destruction, the likelihood for encountering previously undetected cultural heritage or archaeological material sites as the land clearing process commences, or during construction of infrastructure should be considered. Site monitoring by an informed ECO will be required throughout the construction phase of the project to avoid the destruction of previously undetected heritage sites.
- No human burials were located during the site assessment and impact on burial sites is not anticipated during the preconstruction, construction and operation phases of the project. However, it should be noted that graves and cemeteries do not only occur around farmsteads in family burial grounds but they are also randomly scattered around archaeological and historical settlements in the rural areas of the Free State Province. The probability of previously undetected informal human burials encountered during the construction phase should thus not be excluded. Site monitoring by an informed ECO will be required throughout the construction phase of the project to avoid the destruction of previously undetected human burials.

- The study documented a square stone feature, possibly an irrigation dam dating to the Historical Period (Site VS4-HP01). The feature is situated in the Virginia 4 Solar Park project area and impact on the site will require mitigation and management; should impact on the site prove inevitable, application should be made for a destruction permit from the SAHRA Built Environment Unit prior to commencement of the construction phase. If the site be retained a 20m buffer should be demarcated and later implemented during the construction and operation phases. The conservation of the site should be monitored throughout all phases of development.
- A settlement area dating to the Historical Period was noted in the proposed power line corridor (Site VS4-HP02). The construction of transmission lines are typically low impact activities but excavation holes may expose artefacts, sites or human remains and site monitoring by an informed ECO will be required throughout the construction phase of the project.
- Considering the localised nature of heritage remains, the general monitoring of the development progress by an ECO or by the heritage specialist is recommended for all stages of the project. Should any subsurface palaeontological, archaeological or historical material, or burials be exposed during construction activities,

The following table list all identified heritage features on site, their field rating and mitigation measures.

Table 25. List of identified heritage sites

Site Code	Coordinate S E	Short Description	Field Rating	Mitigation Action	Project Phase
VS4-HP01	S28.236995° E26.986121°	Historical Period Site	2a. Low Significance	Permitting: If the site is to be destroyed, obtain the necessary destruction permits from the relevant Heritage Resources Authorities prior to site impact and destruction.  Conservation: If the site is to be retained, demarcate a 20m conservation buffer with a fence or construction barricade.	Pre-Construction
				Site Monitoring: If the site is retained, monitor the 20m conservation buffer in order to detect potential impact on the site at the earliest opportunity.  General Site Monitoring in order to detect the presence of and limit impact on previously undocumented heritage receptors during construction / site clearing / earth moving.	Construction
				Site Monitoring: If the site is retained, monitor the 20m conservation buffer in order to detect potential impact on the site at the earliest opportunity.  General Site Monitoring	Operation
				Site Monitoring: If the site is retained, monitor the 20m conservation buffer in order to detect potential impact on the site at the earliest opportunity.  Close-Out Reporting: ECO review management procedures and ensure that effective measures were implemented.	Closure / Decommissioning
VS4-HP02	S28.185712° E26.912904°	Historical Period Site	2a. Low Significance	General Site Monitoring in order to detect the presence of and limit impact on previously undocumented heritage receptors during construction / site clearing / earth moving.	Construction
				General Site Monitoring	Operation
				Close-Out Reporting: ECO review management procedures and ensure that effective measures were implemented.	Closure / Decommissioning



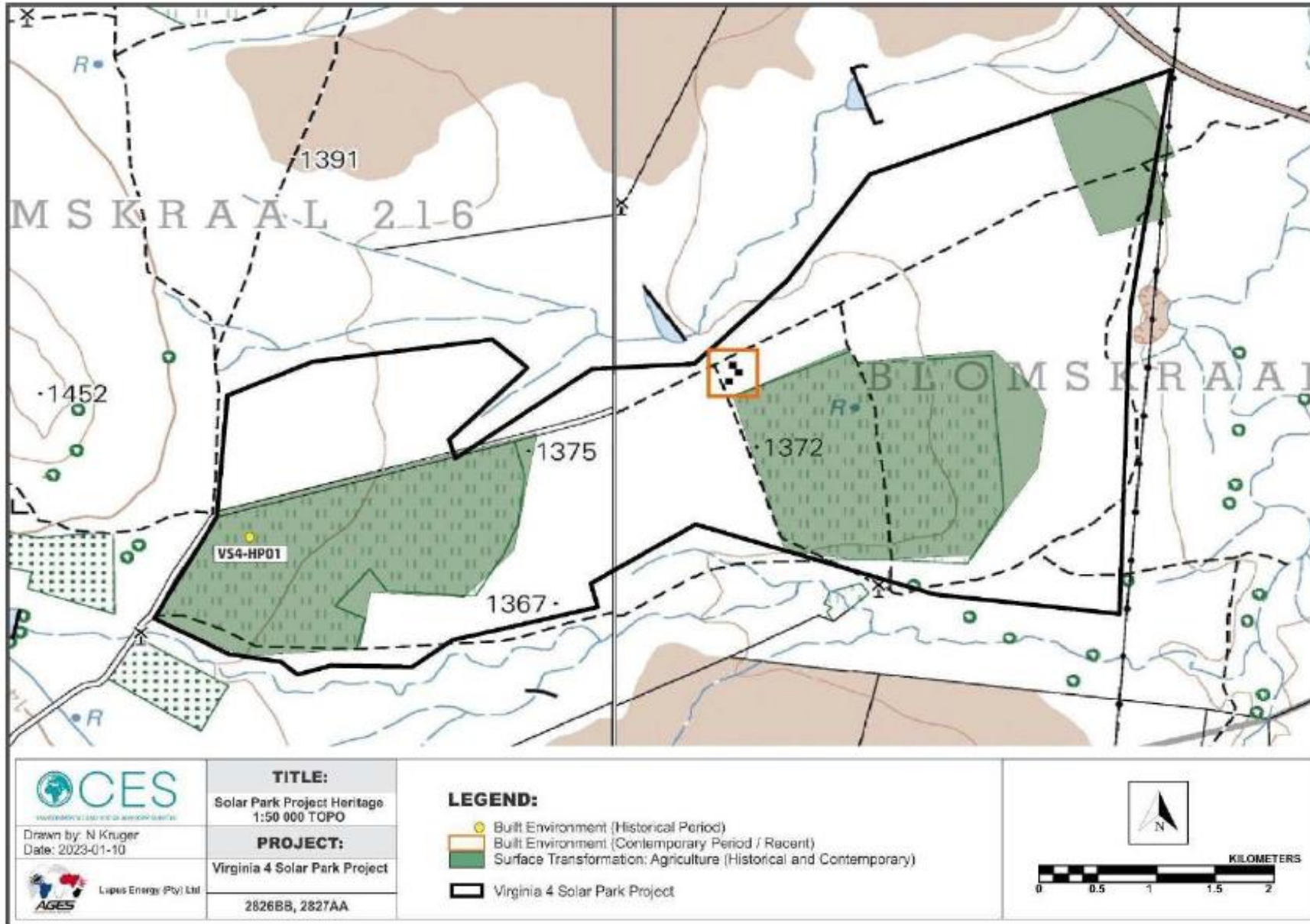


Figure 16. Heritage archaeological sites located within the Virginia Solar 4 Park project area

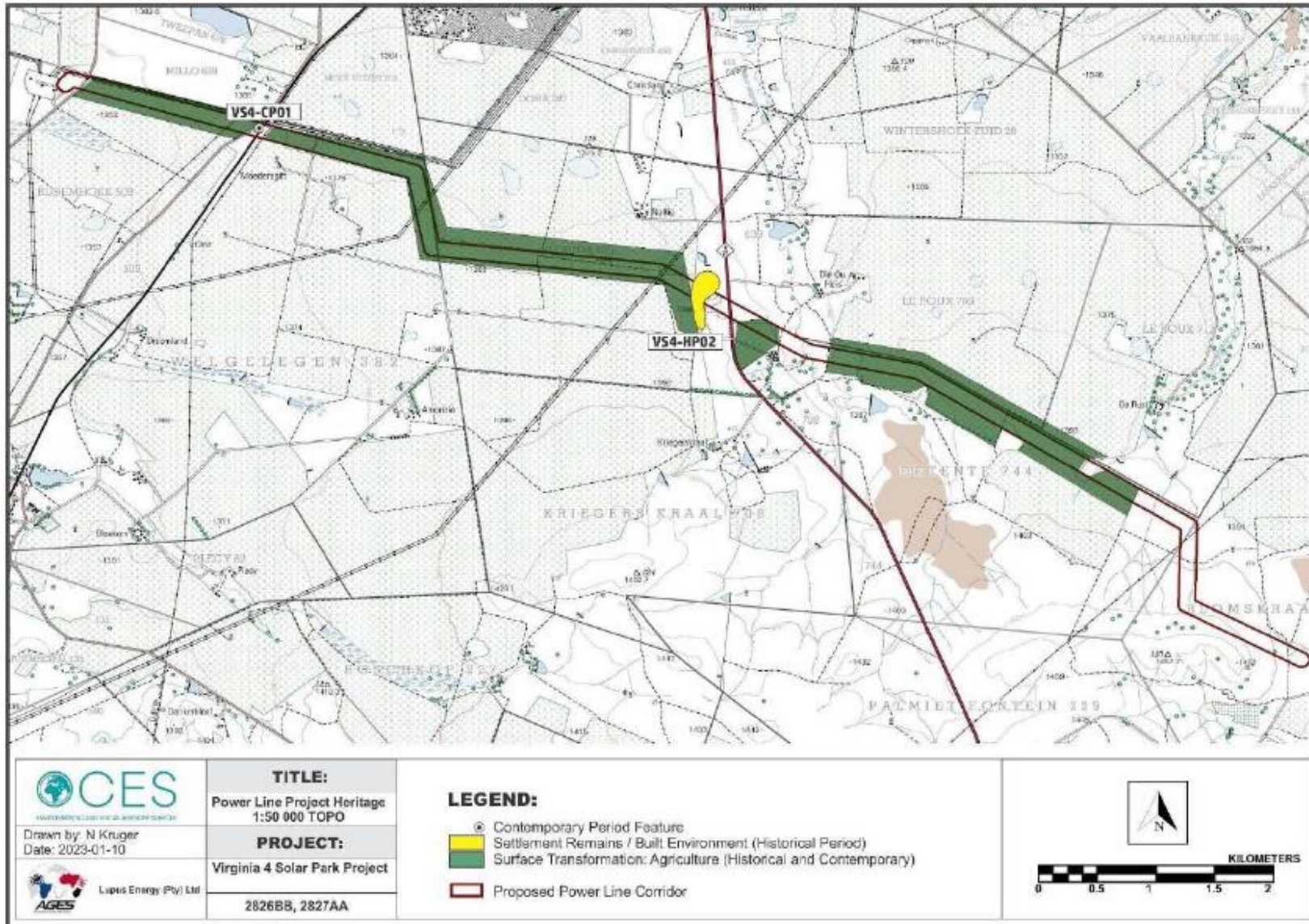


Figure 17. Heritage archaeological sites located within the connecting powerline corridor



### 9.4.13 PALAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

A Palaeontological Impact Assessment (Annexure J) was conducted by Prof Marion Bamford for the PV area and connecting powerline. The study area is situated in the Main Karoo Basin of the Free State province. The farm is underlain by Late Permian rocky deposits of the Adelaide Subgroup of the Lower Beaufort Group of the Karoo Supergroup. These Karoo rocks are overlain by Quaternary alluvial deposits (soil) which are covered by vegetation.

The area is very highly sensitive for a large part of the farm for the Adelaide Subgroup and the rest is moderately sensitive for the Quaternary sands and alluvium. The site for development is in the Adelaide Subgroup and in the *Daptocephalus* Assemblage Zone (Smith et al., 2020).

Plants and vertebrates are not common in the Adelaide Subgroup, but it has the equivalent of the upper *Cistecephalus* Assemblage Zone and the ***Daptocephalus* Assemblage Zone**.

Plants in the Adelaide Subgroup are from the *Glossopteris* flora, dominated by *Glossopteris* leaves but including lycopods, sphenophytes, ferns, cordaitaleans and early gymnosperms. These are mostly preserved as impressions in the fine-grained shales and mudstones. Good outcrops of fossil bearing rocks in this part of the basin, near Virginia, are sparse, and fossils are rare.

There were no rocky outcrops in the area and no fossils of bones or plants were present on the land surface. The soils appeared to be fairly deep and covered by secondary grassland (Figure 7). The area has been used in the past for agriculture so has been cleared for ploughing or for grazing. There were NO FOSSILS visible on the land surface and no rocky outcrops in site that could potentially preserve any fossils.

#### Recommendations of the Palaeontological Specialist

Based on the fossil record for the area but confirmed by the site visit and walk through there are no rocky outcrops and NO FOSSILS of the *Daptocephalus* Assemblage Zone (Adelaide Subgroup, Beaufort Group, Karoo Supergroup) of flora or fauna even though fossils have been recorded from rocks of a similar age and type in South Africa. It is extremely unlikely that any fossils would be preserved in the overlying soils and sands of the Quaternary. There is a very small chance that fossils may occur below the ground surface in the shales of the Adelaide Subgroup so a Fossil Chance Find Protocol should be added to the EMP. If fossils are found by the contractor, environmental officer, or other responsible person, once excavations and drilling have commenced, then they should be rescued, and a palaeontologist called to assess and collect a representative sample.

#### Cumulative Impact

None. Since each fossil outcrop is unique and may or may not be extensive. The destruction or preservation of one site will not impact on other sites. The same applies to developments on the sites. They are independent of each other. In addition, there are no fossils on this project footprint so there is no impact on the national paleontological heritage.

### 9.4.14 TRAFFIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT

#### 9.4.14.1 Findings of the traffic assessment

- Access to the proposed development will be via Virginia Road.
- Several sections of the relevant section of Virginia Road are in a poor condition and need rehabilitation. The poor conditions relate to potholes, road surface cracking, faded road markings and overgrown shoulders.
- The relevant section of Virginia Road where the Proposed Development are intended to be located is in a rural setting with limited farming activity in the area, and as determined from the 12-hour manual traffic counts has a low volume of vehicle traffic along the relevant section of Virginia Road.
- The impact of the existing vehicle traffic volumes on Virginia Road and other existing developments is negligible in all aspects of road-related impacts.
- The relevant section of Virginia Road under investigation currently has a very low sensitivity in terms of the factors used for assessment and would remain very low with the Proposed Development.
- The proposed access intersection to provide access from and to the Proposed Development from Virginia Road (point A in Figure 16) is anticipated to have a very low sensitivity with the proposed mitigating measures (intersection geometry with reference to dedicated right turn and left turn deceleration lanes) as recommended in the traffic report.

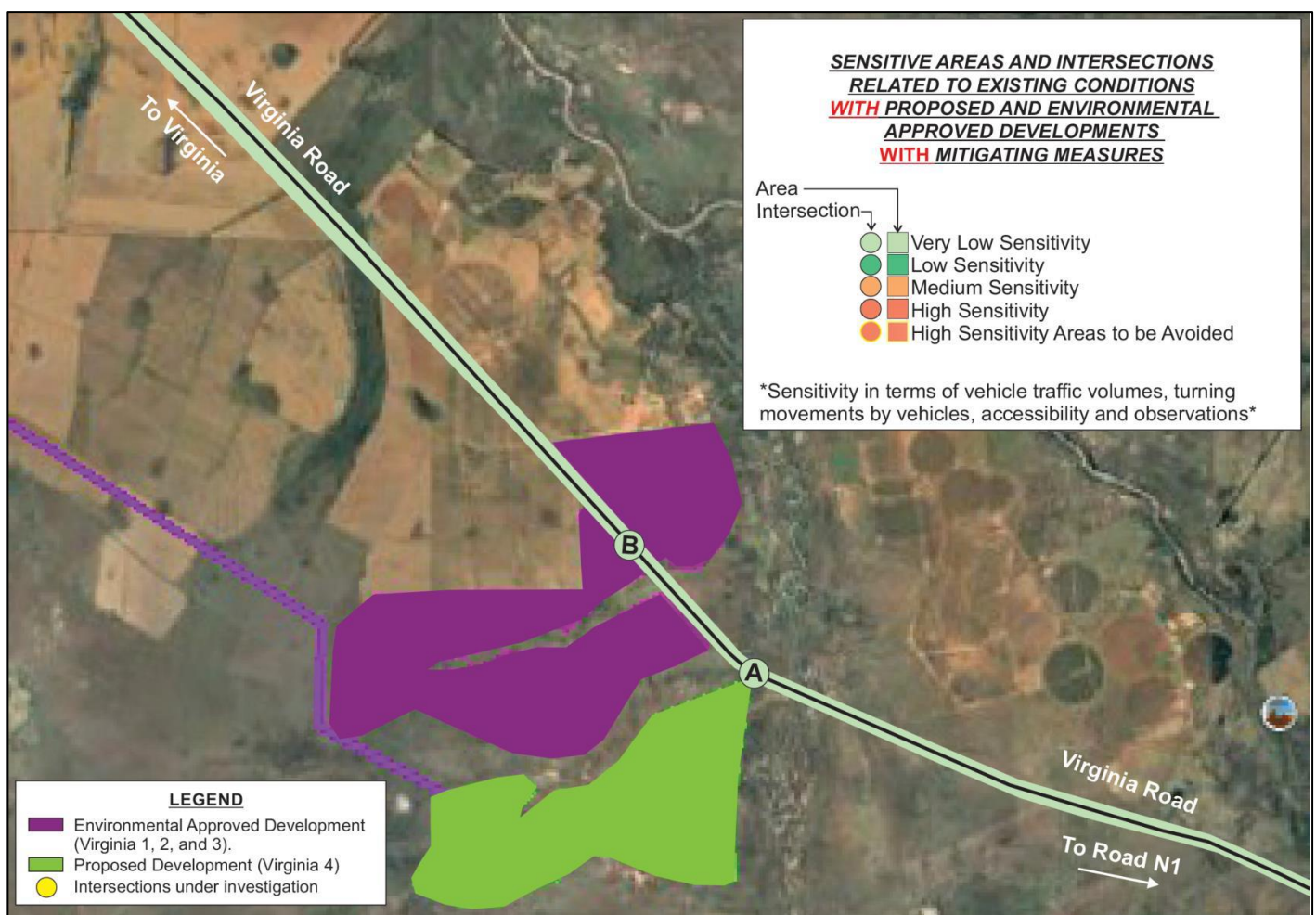


Figure 18. Proposed access point (A) for the PV Park

#### **9.4.14.2 Recommendations by traffic engineer**

The following recommendations are made from a traffic engineering point of view:

- The following intersection improvements are recommended in Table 3.3 of the Traffic Impact Assessment with regards to an intersection performance point of view (technical/capacity) and road safety point of view:
  - Provide 60 m dedicated right-turn and left turn lane on the western and eastern approaches of Virginia Road.
  - Provide 60 m dedicated left turn taper on the eastern and western approaches of Virginia Road.
  - Provide 60 m acceleration lanes along Virginia Road towards the east and west.
  - Provide relevant road traffic signs and road markings.
  - Provide reflective road studs as part of the proposed intersection to improve visibility of the intersection geometry when it is dark.
- As part of the construction phase, a dedicated loading and off-loading area on site should be established where workers can safely be loaded and off-loaded by public transport or arranged transport.
- From a road safety perspective, on-site dust suppression of the proposed access roads (if gravel road) should be conducted when required to avoid road visibility issues caused by dust from vehicles making use of the road, which could lead to vehicle accidents.
- Approval for the position and geometric layout for the proposed access intersection (Point A) from and to Virginia Road should be obtained from the Free State Department of Police, Roads, and Transport as part of the detailed design phase.
- With the provision of the required sight distances at the final proposed access intersection position which would be determined (mitigated) as part of the detail design phase, the impact from a road safety perspective in terms of intersection sight distances would have a low significance.

#### **9.4.14.3 Reasoned opinion for authorisation of the proposed development**

In conclusion of the findings as part of the investigations, Siyazi Limpopo Consulting Services (Pty) Ltd is of the opinion that the Proposed Development would have a manageable impact on the relevant road network during all phases and regardless of whether only one facility is constructed and operational or all facilities are constructed and operational at the same time, as long as the mitigation measures are implemented as recommended in the Traffic report. In this case, it is therefore recommended that authorisation be granted.

The Traffic Impact Assessment Report is included in Annexure L.

#### **9.4.15 RADIO FREQUENCY INTERFERENCE (RFI) ASSESSMENT**

The RFI Assessment (Annexure M) was conducted by Mr. PF Smuts, an ECSA registered Engineer with more than 30 years of experience in the field of Radar, microwave, and RF technology.

No registered radio and/or communication sensitive installations were identified, and all equipment used by this project, will be subjected to the standard ICASA transmission/reception regulations and approval. After evaluation and consideration of all activities identified, it is classified as low sensitivity to RFI and there should be no unacceptable impact on existing and potential, future installations if all equipment to be used permanently or temporarily has acceptable EMI/RFI levels that have been subjected to the ICASA requirements.

**No Cumulative** RFI effects are expected at any of the adjacent sites and whether there are one or more PV solar sites the outcome will be the same.

#### **9.4.16 CIVIL AVIATION IMPACT REPORT**

The applicant intends to undertake an activity identified in the scope of the Protocol for the Specialist Assessment and minimum Report Content Requirements for Environmental Impacts on Civil and Military Aviation Installations. Although a “low” sensitivity has been identified, TAC (Pty) Ltd (Aviation Consultant) undertook a safeguarding assessment for proposed new transmission lines in the Free State in the vicinity of Welkom Airport (FAWM), Harmony Mine Airport (FAHA) and Beatrix Mine Airport (FABX). There are no Military installations in the vicinity of the Virginia 4 Solar Park & Power Line project.

The specialist verified that the Virginia 4 Solar Park Project will NOT interfere and will NOT have an impact on either Harmony Mine or Beatrix Mine Airport’s Obstacle Limitation surfaces, or the Approach/Departure surfaces. This is because the Virginia 4 Project’s location is outside the Harmony Mine and Beatrix Mine Airport’s Approach and Departure surfaces (Appendix 4). From figure 17 it can be verified that the Virginia 4 Project will NOT interfere and will NOT have an impact on Harmony Mine Airport’s Obstacle Limitation surfaces. This is because Virginia 4 Project is located outside Harmony Mine and Beatrix Mine Airport’s Approach and Departure surfaces.

As FAHA and Beatrix Mine Airports is Visual Flight Rules airports, only the Approach/Departure Surfaces were assessed. The Virginia Solar Parks and Powerline project will not interfere or affect both FAHA and Beatrix Mine Airport Obstacle Approach/Departure Surfaces. The Approach/Departure Surfaces path of all the runways do not pass over the project plant or powerlines.

The Aviation assessment report is attached as Annexure Q.

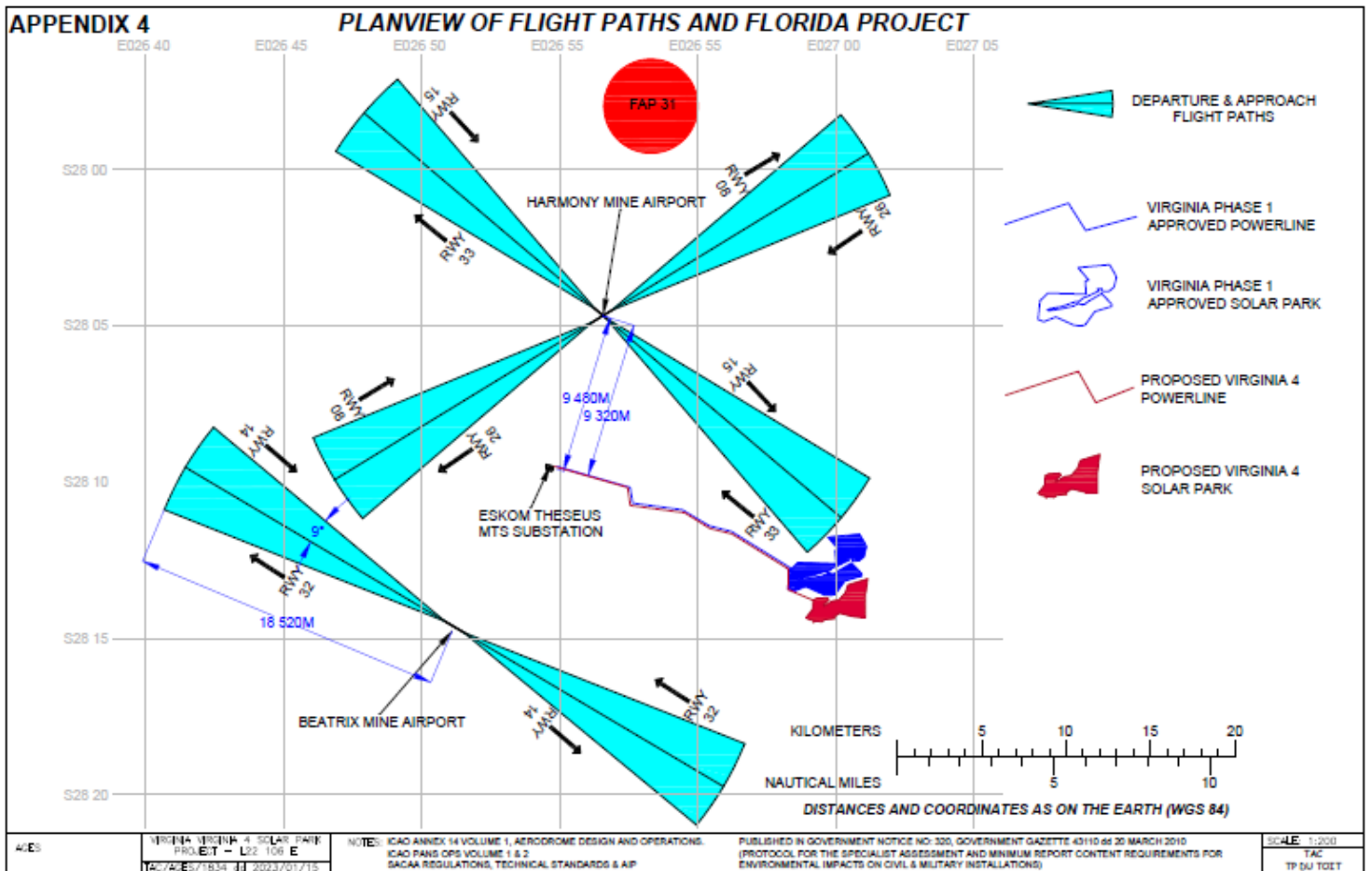


Figure 19. Flight paths for Virginia 4 project

## 9.5 IMPACTS AND RISKS IDENTIFIED

A clear statement will be made, identifying the environmental impacts of the construction, operation, maintenance and management of the proposed project. As far as possible, the suite of potential environmental impacts identified in the study will be quantified and the significance of the impacts will be assessed. Each impact will be assessed and rated. The assessment of the data, where possible will be based on broadly accepted scientific principles and techniques. In defect, judgements and assessments will be necessarily based on the consultant's professional expertise and experience.

As previously described, construction activities for the establishment of the proposed PV power plant include:

- land clearing activities necessary for preparation of the site and access routes;
- excavation and filling activities;
- transportation of various materials;
- construction of the storage structures;
- installation of the PV modules and construction of associated structures and infrastructure; and
- construction of the on-site high-voltage substation.

### EXTENT

The extent of most of the construction activities is localized and impacts will only occur at the development site. Some activities will extend to adjacent landowners as access roads will be used which will lead to an increase in the traffic in the area. These will be further investigated and mitigations measures are included in the EIA report.

### DURATION

The impact of construction activities will only be for the duration of the construction phase, after which it will cease completely. (Construction period planned to last between a minimum of 6 months and a maximum 15 months).

### PROBABILITY

The probability of impacts occurring during the construction is phase very high as there will be impacts on the vegetation as most will be removed to make way for the proposed development.

Environmental impacts associated with the operational phase of a solar energy facility include visual and other impacts.

The decommissioning activities of the PV plant mainly include the removal of the project infrastructure and the restoring of the site *status quo ante*.

The identification of impacts will be based on:

- legal and administrative requirements;
- the nature of the proposed activity;
- the nature of the receiving environment;
- specialist studies and
- issues raised during the public participation process.

Environmental impacts associated with the operational phase of a solar energy facility may include visual and other impacts.



The decommissioning activities of the PV plant mainly include the removal of the project infrastructure and the restoring of the site *status quo ante*.

The identification of impacts will be based on:

- legal and administrative requirements;
- the nature of the proposed activity;
- the nature of the receiving environment;
- amended specialist studies; and
- issues raised during the public participation process.

Potential impacts include:

- Impacts on soils & agricultural potential.
- Impacts on ground water.
- Impacts on the road system and traffic.
- Impacts on air quality and potential emissions.
- Geological, soil and erosion impacts.
- Impacts on avifauna.
- Impacts on vegetation.
- Impacts on heritage resources.
- Noise impacts.
- Impacts on tourism.
- Social impacts.
- Visual impacts.

Potential impacts identified include:

- **Impacts on soils & agricultural potential**
  - Extent: Locally at the proposed site
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: High
  - Significance: Low
- **Impacts on ground water**
  - Extent: Surrounding and adjacent land
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: Medium
  - Significance: Low
- **Impacts on the road system and traffic**
  - Extent: Surrounding and adjacent land
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: Low
  - Significance: Low
- **Impacts on air quality and potential emissions**
  - Extent: Regional
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: Very Low
  - Significance: Very Low

- **Geological, soil and erosion impacts**
  - Extent: Locally at the proposed site
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: Low
  - Significance: Low
- **Impacts on avifauna**
  - Extent: Locally at the proposed site
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: Low
  - Significance: Low
- **Impacts on vegetation**
  - Extent: Locally at the proposed site
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: High
  - Significance: Medium
- **Impacts on heritage resources**
  - Extent: Locally at the proposed site
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: Low
  - Significance: Low
- **Noise impacts**
  - Extent: Locally at the proposed site
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: Low
  - Significance: Very Low
- **Impacts on tourism**
  - Extent: Regional
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: Low
  - Significance: Low
- **Social impacts**
  - Extent: Regional & Locally
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: High
  - Significance: High - Positive
- **Visual impacts.**
  - Extent: Locally at the proposed site
  - Duration: Life of the project (approx. 30 years)
  - Probability: Definite
  - Significance: Medium

The significance of the potential impacts were determined as all the specialist studies have been obtained.

### **9.5.1 DEGREE TO WHICH THE IMPACTS CAN BE REVERSED**

- The visual impact is resident for a long time (25-30 years). It can be reversed during decommissioning and rehabilitation of the area.
- Biodiversity impacts can be reversed at the decommissioning stage of the development. Plants can be replanted, and animals will return to the project area.
- Impacts on soil (erosion) can be reversed by careful handling of storm water on site.
- Impacts on water quality and quantity can be reversed at the decommissioning stage.
- Agricultural resources will again become available after decommissioning of the facility.
- Impacts on Heritage resources could be permanent without mitigation.
- The potential impacts on river systems, drainage channels and wetlands will be minimal. Impacts on these resources can be reversed successfully.
- Socio-economic impacts can be reversed at the decommissioning phase, though this will have a nett negative effect on the area.

### **9.5.2 DEGREE TO WHICH IMPACTS MAY CAUSE IRREPLACEBLE LOSS OF RESOURCES**

The only impact which can cause an irreplaceable loss of resources is an impact on the heritage resources where heritage sources are destroyed. This should not happen as the heritage resources are well surveyed and protected from development impacts. The archaeological site as identified on the Virginia 4 Solar Park development site has been classified as having a very low significance. An application to obtain a destruction permit will be submitted to SAHRA for the destruction of the area and the subsequent archaeological finds. No development will be allowed to take place in this are unless the relevant permit has been obtained from SAHRA.

### **9.5.3 DEGREE TO WHICH IMPACTS CAN BE AVOIDED, MANAGED OR MITIGATED**

It is not possible to completely avoid the impacts of the development on the environment. By following the mitigation and management measures detailed in the impact section in this report, most of the impacts and the effects it can have on the environment can be successfully lowered to a lower degree of significance to the environment. This can be done to a point where the impacts are acceptable and where the benefits of the development are greater than the detriment to the environment.

## **9.6 HIGH LEVEL RISK ASSESSMENT FOR BESS TECHNOLOGY**

Batteries store electrical energy in chemical form. The range of electrochemical technologies include:

- a) batteries with solid electrolyte, as Lithium-ion battery;
- b) batteries with liquid electrolyte, as Na–S battery, Lead–Acid (PbA) battery, nickel - cadmium (Ni–Cd) battery or other types of liquid metal battery

***A Li-ion battery cell is a sealed article, with a typical voltage of 3.6V DC per cell and it is an article with no intended release of its substances.***

Preferred technology for the Battery Energy Storage System (“BESS”) is **Lithium-ion battery cells**, which will be pre-assembled at the supplier factory and installed in containers prior to delivery to the site. Lithium-ion cells technology offers the highest energy density (compared to other technologies), does not suffer from memory effect and is low maintenance. Typical lithium-ion cells used for BESS hold a solid rechargeable electrolyte (the energy accumulator), therefore don’t hold any liquid or gas. The main benefit of solid ceramic electrolytes is that there is no risk of leaks.

A BESS does not emit any gas to the atmosphere during construction and/or normal operation. The containers of the batteries are equipped with a firefighting system conceived to effectively detect smoke and high temperatures and automatically activate the extinguishers to prevent fire. Furthermore, the external metallic surface of the cells is conceived to resist to fire.

**The preferred technology is therefore Lithium-ion battery cells with solid rechargeable electrolyte.**

Under normal conditions of use, the battery does not release its content as it is sealed. In case of accidental release of the batteries components, please refer to the emergency response guidance below)

In case of large electrical serial assembly, modules and full battery may offer high Voltage hazard (> 36 Volts).

The presence of the High Voltage warning sign requires dedicated intervention equipment:



The primary focus is on the fire hazards associated with Li-ion batteries and potential for a condition known as “thermal runaway”. Thermal runaway results from **internal shorts** inside a battery cell which occur due to a variety of reasons and **can ultimately lead to the battery catching fire.**

**The following measures will reduce the fire risk to an acceptable level:**

- The Battery Management System should include an approved device to preclude, detect, and control thermal runaway.
- The BESS should incorporate appropriately certified inverter systems and must comply with other all safety standards which address risk assessment and controls.
- The BESS must be located well away from critical buildings or equipment and located in a non-combustible enclosure. Sufficient clearance should be maintained around the installation to provide for fire service access.
- Clear signage should be visible to include warnings of a possible fire hazard.
- An approved, monitored, automatic smoke detection system must be installed at the BESS. A fire suppression system must be designed and installed at the BESS.
- Regular inspections must be undertaken to ensure battery systems are not overheating.
- Portable fire extinguishers must be provided at the BESS.
- Installations should have emergency power disconnects to ensure manual, remote, and local disconnect is possible adjacent to the BESS.

- The BESS must have an online condition monitoring system, which should be fitted with temperature monitoring which incorporates a high temperature alarm for the battery room and container. Temperatures should be monitored at a constantly attended location.

**Additional general recommendations to prevent and manage potential contamination of water resources in the BESS area:**

- Compilation and adherence to a procedure for the safe handling of battery cells.
- Lithium-ion batteries must have battery management systems (containment, automatic alarms and shut-off systems) to monitor and protect cells from overcharging or damaging conditions, such as temperature extremes.
- Compilation of an Emergency Response Plan for implementation in the event of a spill of electrolyte from the batteries.
- Provision of spill kits on-site for clean-up of spills and leaks.
- Immediate clean-up of spills and disposal of contaminated absorbents and materials or soil at a licensed hazardous waste disposal facility.
- Recording and reporting of all significant electrolyte spills so that appropriate clean-up measures can be implemented. A copy of these records must be made available to authorities on request throughout the project lifecycle.
- Frequent and appropriate disposal of any hazardous waste to prevent pollution of soil and groundwater.
- On-site battery maintenance should only be undertaken on impermeable surfaces with secondary containment measures. Any resulting hazardous substances must be disposed of appropriately.
- Provision of suitable emergency and safety signage on-site, and demarcation of any areas which may pose a safety risk (including hazardous substances). Emergency numbers for the local police, fire department, Eskom and the Local Municipality must be placed in a prominent clearly visible area on the site.
- Dispose of waste batteries in accordance with national legislation. When collected waste batteries must undergo recycling to comply with national regulations. Batteries should not be disposed of into the environment.

**Safe handling advice**

- When handling the batteries (cells), use personal protective equipment (non-conductive gloves), specifically to avoid short-circuits between the battery poles.

**Technical measures/precautions.**

- Follow the instructions reported in the user's manual prepared by the manufacturer.
- Do not short (+) or (-) battery terminals with conductors and do not allow battery terminals to contact each other.
- Do not use unadopted charging systems.
- Do not reverse the polarity,
- Do not mix different types of batteries or mix new and old ones together e.g., in a power pack,
- Do not open the battery system or modules,
- Do not use the unit without its electronic management system,

- Do not submit to static electricity risks to avoid damages to the protecting electronic circuit,
- Do not submit to excessive mechanical stress,
- Do not expose the battery to water or humidity (avoid water condensation),
- Do not expose to heat. Unsuitable use can cause leakage or evacuate through a safety valve gaseous electrolyte fume that may cause fire,
- Immediately disconnect the batteries and isolate in a safe place if, during operation, they emit an unusual smell, develop heat, change shape/geometry, or behave abnormally. Contact the manufacturer if any of these problems are observed.

### Storage

- Keep in a dry, cool and well-ventilated place, check recommended storage temperature reported in the user's manual prepared by manufacturer, (e.g., 35°C),
- Keep away from heat sources (max 60°C) and sources of ignition. Protect from direct exposure to sunlight.
- Keep away from water and condensation.
- Store in closed container and packaging, in such a way to prevent short circuits and damages during storage or transportation. Packaging qualified for transport is generally suitable for storage.
- In case of risk of thermal runaway during storage or transport, it is necessary to use strong outer packaging as recommended by the UN Special Provision 376 to restrict the potential ejection of cells constituents and battery parts during fire.
- In case of mixed storage of goods and articles, organize separate storage area for lithium-ion batteries and maintain a distance of 2.5m between the Lithium-ion batteries storage area and other goods.
- Store in limited quantities and in isolated area under external surveillance, unless stored in a specifically designed storage building (detectors and/or sprinklers protection systems).
- Infra-Red cameras may be used to detect any excessive temperature raise in stored quantities, e.g., > 85°C.

**Potential hazard by damaged lithium batteries *in absence of fire* is mainly a release of electrolyte containing corrosive salts. Measures must be taken to protect operators from inhaling volatile organic substances. Reaction of electrolyte with water/humidity may generate hydrofluoric acid and irritate eyes, nose, throat and skin.**

### Personal precautions

- Use personal protective equipment.
- Avoid contact with skin and eyes.
- Ventilate the area.
- Position yourself in the wind direction.

### Environmental precautions

- Eliminate all possible sources of heat or ignition.



- Prevent further leakage or spillage if safe to do so (use absorbent cloth or other inert absorbent non-conductive mineral such as sand, sodium bicarbonate, alumina or vermiculite).
- Dry clothes can also be used as a absorbent material in absence of fire.
- Do not allow material to contaminate ground water system.

The information below refers to exposure to the substances contained in the battery.

**Call for emergency services. Consider and decide about the adapted intervention plan (ACTIVE/PASSIVE Response, proximity, or distance response).**

#### **In active response, (with Fire)**

- Large flow of water can be used to **reduce the temperature of the batteries** and stop the fire reactions inside the batteries. Specific care should be taken for large and compact batteries, where cooling may require more time.
- Foam and specialized products can be used to reduce access of oxygen to the fire and stop flames but are generally less efficient than cooling down the batteries. Be aware of the risk of re-ignition until the batteries have been cooled down below 100°C.

#### **In passive response, control extension of fire to neighbour materials and buildings**

- Use abundant flow of water to cool down cells or batteries adjacent to the ones that have caught fire (maintain low temperature) whatever the type of batteries at the origin of the fire.
- The first responders need to be informed that in case of fire there is a risk of ejection of projectiles from the battery.

#### **Suitable extinguishing media**

- Water (see below)
- Specialized products, liquid foam, carbon dioxide (CO<sup>2</sup>), sand, vermiculite.

#### **Warning/risk for the use of water**

- If water is used on active batteries, caution should be taken to avoid the electrical hazard that may be present (in case of high voltage battery, > 36 Volts).
- The decision to use large amount of water is depending on the local circumstances (water retentions systems, environment risks, etc.)
- In case of fire including large Lithium metal or Lithium metal polymer batteries, the use of water may increase the energy /heat release.
- In such case, stop use of water and allow energetic fire of the battery for 15 minutes.
- Protect or cool with water the surrounding areas to avoid propagation of the fire.

#### **Treatment of Wastewater**

- Confine the effluent or the contaminated material and collect it further as hazardous waste (water) for appropriate treatment.
- Pick up and transfer to properly labelled containers.
- Dispose of in accordance with local waste management legislation regulations.

### 9.7 METHODOLOGY USED IN RANKING THE NATURE, SIGNIFICANCE, CONSEQUENCES, EXTENT, DURATION AND PROBABILITY OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH ALTERNATIVES

To assess the impacts on the environment, the process will be divided into two main phases namely the Construction phase and the Operational phase. The activities, products and services present in these two phases will be studied to identify and predict all possible impacts. In any process of identifying and recognising impacts, one must recognise that the determination of impact significance is inherently an anthropocentric concept. Duinker and Beanlands, (1986) in DEAT 2002. Thompson (1988), (1990) in DEAT 2002 stated that the significance of an impact is an expression of the cost or value of an impact to society.

However, the tendency is always towards a system of quantifying the significance of the impacts so that it is a true representation of the existing situation on site. This will be done by using where possible, legal and scientific standards which are applicable.

The significance of the aspects/impacts of the process will be rated by using a matrix derived from Plomp (2004) and adapted to some extent to fit this process. These matrixes use the consequence and the likelihood of the different aspects and associated impacts to determine the significance of the impacts.

The consequence matrix uses parameters like severity, duration and extent of impact as well as compliance to standards. Values of 1-5 are assigned to the parameters that are added and averaged to determine overall consequence. The same process is followed with the likelihood that consists of two parameters namely frequency and probability. The overall consequence and the overall likelihood are then multiplied to give values ranging from 1 to 25. These values as shown in the following table are then used to rank the significance.

It must be said however that in the end, a subjective judging of an impact can still be done, but the reasons for doing so must be qualified.

The formulas for calculating Consequence, Likelihood and Significance are provided below.

Table 26. Consequence and likelihood formulas

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Consequence = severity + duration + extent + compliance / 4</b>      <b>( C = s + d + e + c / 4 )</b></li> <li>• <b>Likelihood = frequency + probability / 2</b>      <b>( L = f + p / 2 )</b></li> <li>• <b>Significance = Consequence x Likelihood</b>      <b>( S = C x L )</b></li> </ul>
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Table 27. Consequence and likelihood values

Consequence		
<b>Severity</b>		
Low	Low cost/high potential to mitigate. Impacts easily reversible, non - harmful insignificant change/deterioration or disturbance to natural environments	1
Low-medium	Low cost to mitigate Small/ potentially harmful Moderate change/deterioration or disturbance to natural environment	2
Medium	Substantial cost to mitigate. Potential to mitigate and potential to reverse impact. Harmful Significant change/deterioration or disturbance. to natural environment	3
Medium-high	High cost to mitigate. Possible to mitigate Great/Very Harmful Very significant change/deterioration or disturbance to natural environment	4
High	Prohibitive cost to mitigate. Little or no mechanism to mitigate. Irreversible. Extremely Harmful Disastrous change/deterioration or disturbance to natural environment	5
<b>Duration</b>		
Low	Up to one month	1
Low-medium	One month to three months	2
Medium	Three months to one year	3
Medium-high	One to ten years	4
High	Beyond ten years	5
<b>Extent</b>		
Low	Within the proposed footprints	1
Low-medium	Within the application farms	2
Medium	Within surrounding farms	3
Medium-high	Within Local Municipalities areas	4
High	Within District Municipality area	5
<b>Compliance</b>		
Low	Best Practise	1
Low-medium	Compliance	2
Medium	Non-compliance/conformance to Policies etc. - Internal	3
Medium-high	Non-compliance/conformance to Legislation etc. - External	4
High	Directive, prosecution of closure or potential for non-renewal of licences or rights	5
<b>Likelihood</b>		
<b>Frequency</b>		
Low	Once/more a year or once/more during operation	1
Low-medium	Once/more in 6 months	2
Medium	Once/more a month	3
Medium-high	Once/more a week	4
High	Daily	5
<b>Probability</b>		
Low	Almost never/almost impossible	1
Low-medium	Very seldom/highly unlikely	2
Medium	Infrequent/unlikely/seldom	3
Medium-high	Often/Regularly/Likely/Possible	4
High	Daily/Highly likely/definitely	5

Table 28. Significance ratings (Plomp 2004)

Significance	Low -	Low-Medium -	Medium -	Medium-High -	High -
Overall Consequence X Overall Likelihood	1-4.9	5-9.9	10-14.9	15-19.9	20-25

Significance	Low +	Low-Medium +	Medium +	Medium-High +	High +
Overall Consequence X Overall Likelihood	1-4.9	5-9.9	10-14.9	15-19.9	20-25

### 9.8 ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The terms of reference for the EIA study will include criteria for the description and assessment of environmental impacts. These criteria are drawn from the *Integrated Environmental Management Guidelines Series, Guideline 5: Assessment of Alternatives and Impacts*, published by the DFFE in terms of the Environmental Impact Assessment. These criteria include:

Table 29. Impact Assessment Criteria

<b>Nature of impact</b> This is an appraisal of the type of effect the proposed activity would have on the affected environmental component. The description should include what is being affected, and how.		
<b>Extent</b> The physical and spatial size of the impact.	<b>Site</b>	The impact could affect the whole, or a measurable portion of the above-mentioned properties.
	<b>Local</b>	The impacted area extends only as far as the activity, e.g. a footprint.
	<b>Regional</b>	The impact could affect the area including the neighbouring farms, the transport routes and the adjoining towns.
<b>Duration</b> The lifetime of the impact; this is measured in the context of the lifetime of the proposed base.	<b>Short term</b>	The impact will either disappear with mitigation or will be mitigated through natural process in a span shorter than any of the phases.
	<b>Medium term</b>	The impact will last up to the end of the phases, where after it will be entirely negated.
	<b>Long term</b>	The impact will continue or last for the entire operational life of the development but will be mitigated by direct human action or by natural processes thereafter.
	<b>Permanent</b>	The only class of impact, which will be non-transitory. Mitigation either by man or natural process will not occur in such a way or in such a time span that the impact can be considered transient.
<b>Intensity</b>	<b>Low</b>	The impact alters the affected environment in such a way that the natural processes or functions are not affected.
	<b>Medium</b>	The affected environment is altered, but function and process continue, albeit in a modified way.
	<b>High</b>	Function or process of the affected environment is disturbed to the extent where it temporarily or permanently ceases.
<b>Probability</b> This describes the likelihood of the impacts occurring. The impact may occur for any length of time during the life cycle of the activity, and not at any given time.	<b>Improbable</b>	The possibility of the impact occurring is very low, due either to the circumstances, design or experience.
	<b>Probable</b>	There is a possibility that the impact will occur to the extent that provisions must be made therefore.
	<b>Highly probable</b>	It is most likely that the impacts will occur at some or other stage of the development. Plans must be drawn up before the undertaking of the activity.

	<b>Definite</b>	The impact will take place regardless of any prevention plans, and there can only be relied on mitigation actions or contingency plans to contain the effect.
<b>Determination of significance.</b> Significance is determined through a synthesis of impact characteristics. Significance is an indication of the importance of the impact in terms of both physical extent and time scale, and therefore indicates the level of mitigation required.	<b>No significance</b>	The impact is not substantial and does not require any mitigation action.
	<b>Low</b>	The impact is of little importance but may require limited mitigation.
	<b>Medium</b>	The impact is of importance and therefore considered to have a negative impact. Mitigation is required to reduce the negative impacts to acceptable levels.
	<b>High</b>	The impact is of great importance. Failure to mitigate, with the objective of reducing the impact to acceptable levels, could render the entire development option or entire project proposal unacceptable. Mitigation is therefore essential.

## 9.9 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative impacts have been assessed in relation to other renewable energy developments in the proximity from the proposed Virginia 4 Solar Park. Mitigation measures are proposed to mitigate the impacts that may result from the establishment of the Virginia 4 Solar Park to an acceptable level.

The general approach to this study has been guided by the principles of Integrated Environmental Management (IEM). In accordance with the IEM Guidelines issued by the DEA, an open approach, which encourages accountable decision-making, was adopted. The principles of the IEM require:

- informed decision-making.
- accountability for information on which decisions are made;
- a broad interpretation of the term “environment”;
- an open participatory approach in the planning of proposals.
- consultation with I&APs;
- due consideration of alternatives;
- an attempt to mitigate negative impacts and enhance positive impacts of proposals;
- an attempt to ensure social costs of developments are outweighed by social benefits;
- democratic regard for individual rights and obligations;
- compliance with these principles during all stages of the planning, implementation and decommissioning of proposals; and
- the opportunity for public and specialist input in the decision-making process.

Method and process used for assessment of cumulative impacts at Virginia 4 Solar Park:

Step 1: Initiate the process by identifying possible cumulative impacts of the proposed project on the surrounding environment at project location. Possible cumulative impacts can be selected based on information related to current or anticipated future conditions, occurrence of protected species or habitats, and presence or anticipated presence of other human activities that would (adversely) affect the same environment. Once possible cumulative impacts have been selected, they should be subject to each of the following five steps. Identified possible cumulative impacts:

- Visual impact
- Loss of Agricultural Resources
- Loss of Biodiversity
- Increase in Traffic Impact
- Increased positive Socio-economic Impact

Step 2: Identify other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions within space and time boundaries that have been, are, or could contribute to cumulative effects in the area. Based on this knowledge, identify appropriate spatial and temporal study boundaries.

- Visual impact
- Loss of Agricultural Resources
- Loss of Biodiversity
- Increase in Traffic Impact
- Increased positive Socio-economic Impact

Step 3: For the identified cumulative impacts, assemble appropriate information and describe and assess the historical to current conditions of the area. The historical information should coincide with the selected past temporal boundary (or historical reference point). Further, and depending upon the availability of information, any identified trends in the conditions of the area should be identified.

Step 4: Numerous types of tools could be used to establish either descriptive or quantitative connections. Predictions related to future cumulative impacts, resulting from multiple actions may be problematic due to the absence of detailed information; however, identification of changes in the environment and their indicators can be useful. Finally, emphasis should be given to the anticipated cumulative impacts.

Step 5: Assess the significance of the cumulative effects. Such significance determinations should begin with the incremental effects (the direct and indirect effects) of the proposed development on the directly surrounding areas. The concept of environmental sustainability (including social and economic sustainability) could be considered both in relation to incremental effects and cumulative effects.

Step 6: For negative incremental impacts from the proposed project and for which the cumulative effects are significant, develop appropriate action-specific mitigation measures for such impacts. If significant cumulative effects are anticipated consideration should be given to multi-stakeholder collaboration to develop joint cumulative effects management measures, either locally or regionally, or both. Finally, multi-stakeholder collaboration in follow-up activities can be both cost-efficient and an aid in local and regional planning.



Environmental Assessment Framework and Cumulative Effects Assessment (A tool to be used as referred to in Step 4):

1. Scoping
2. Analysis
3. Mitigation
4. Significance
5. Follow-up

#### **9.10 POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACTS THAT THE PROPOSED ACTIVITY AND ALTERNATIVES WILL HAVE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE COMMUNITY**

- The positive impact that the development will have on the environment and community is a Socio-economic impact. It will create *temporary jobs* during the construction phase.
- The PV Solar Park will help to reduce the pressure on the Eskom grid in the country with far fewer negative impacts on the natural resources of the area than in the case of power generation using other sources like coal, gas, water, and nuclear energy.
- During the operational phase the PV Solar Park might have a negative impact on the *visual environment*) around the PV Facility.

#### **9.11 POSSIBLE MITIGATION MEASURES AND RESIDUAL RISK**

- Panels must be washed with methods that can save on water use. Employees living/sleeping at the site must be educated on the saving of water.
- Water used for domestic purposes (sanitation) must be treated before release to comply with standards for effluent release.
- The storm water must be managed so that erosion is not caused on the site.
- Domestic waste must be removed from the site on a regular basis not to impact on the soils or water bodies in the area.

#### **9.12 CONCLUDING STATEMENT INDICATING THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE AND LOCATION OF ACTIVITY**

The preferred alternative was selected because it will have the smallest impact on the environment having been located on the least sensitive area, avoiding potentially sensitive heritage sites and will be in line with Eskom requirements.

The negative impacts including the *cumulative* impacts can be effectively mitigated and managed to reduce the negative effect the impacts would have on the environment, so that the development with the positive effect of the socio-economic impact and the positive impact of renewable energy generation will have a positive effect on the environment that would offset the negative effects of the development.

## 10 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROCESS TO IDENTIFY AND RANK ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS THAT THE ACTIVITY, ASSOCIATED STRUCTURES AND INFRASTRUCTURE WILL IMPOSE ON THE PREFERRED LOCATION THROUGH THE LIFE OF THE ACITIVITY

An environmental impact is defined as a change in the environment, be it the physical/chemical, biological, cultural and or socio-economic environment. Any impact can be related to certain aspects of human activities in this environment and this impact can be either positive or negative. It could also affect the environment directly or indirectly and the effect of it can be cumulative.

### 10.1 DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND RISKS IDENTIFIED DURING THE EIA PROCESS

The potential aspects to assess during the EIA process include:

- Soils & agricultural potential
- Avifauna aspects
- Vegetation aspects
- Heritage resources aspects
- Noise aspects
- Socio-economic aspects
- Visual aspects

The **decommissioning activities** of the PV plant mainly include the removal of the project infrastructure and the restoring of the site *status quo ante*.

The identification of impacts will be based on:

- legal and administrative requirements;
- the nature of the proposed activity;
- the nature of the receiving environment;
- specialist studies; and
- issues raised during the public participation process.

Potential impacts include:

- Impacts on soils & agricultural potential.
- Impacts on avifauna.
- Impacts on vegetation.
- Impacts on heritage resources.
- Social impacts.
- Visual impacts.

## 10.2 IMPACTS & MITIGATION MEASURES OF CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATIONAL PHASE

All the possible impacts that can be predicted in both the construction and operational (limited) phase of the PV Solar Park are addressed. Specific mitigation measures are proposed, and the significance of these impacts is described with and without the mitigation measures. Furthermore, considering that all or part of the construction infrastructure may be owned and/or operated by Eskom, the mitigation measures described in the following paragraphs and in the attached Environmental Management Programme (EMPr) can become the responsibility of Eskom or of the developer.

### 10.2.1 ATMOSPHERIC POLLUTION AND NOISE

#### Construction Phase

During this phase there will be a concentration of earthmoving equipment and construction vehicles that will level the area, clear vegetation for construction purposes and in the process, will create dust and exhaust smoke that will impact on air quality. There will also be more noise created by the vehicles during this phase. Burning of waste and fires at construction sites can also create smoke.

#### Operational phase

The increased traffic volumes and people will lead to increased levels of air pollution and noise. Smoke from burning of waste can cause air pollution.

Project Phase	Impact Atmospheric Pollution and noise									
	Activity/Aspect	Specific impact	Severity	Duration	Extent	Compliance	Frequency	Probability	Significance	
									With Mitigation	Without Mitigation
Construction	Earthworks and Vegetation clearance	Air pollution Dust	Low-medium	Medium	Medium	Low-medium	High	High	Low-medium	Medium
	Vehicle movement	Air pollution: Smoke	Low	Medium-high	Low	Low	High	High	Low	Low-Medium
	Vehicle movement	Air pollution: Dust	Low	Medium-high	Low-medium	Low-medium	High	High	Low-medium	Medium
	Vehicle movement	Noise pollution	Low	Medium-high	Low	Low-medium	High	High	Low	Low-Medium
	Burning of cleared vegetation, solid waste & veld fires	Air pollution by excessive smoke	Low-medium	Low	Medium	Low-medium	Low-Medium	Low	Low	Low-Medium
	Cooking fires of workers	Air pollution: Smoke	Low	Medium-high	Low	Low-medium	Low-Medium	Medium	Low	Low
Operation	Vehicle movement	Noise pollution	Low	High	Low-medium	Low-medium	High	Medium-high	Low-medium	Medium
	Veldt fires	Air pollution caused by smoke	Medium	Low	Medium	Low-medium	Low	Medium-high	Low	Low-Medium
	Burning of vegetation refuse and solid waste	Air pollution by excessive smoke	Low-medium	Low	Low-medium	Low-medium	Low-Medium	Low-medium	Low	Low
Cumulative impacts	Dust formation & Noise during construction phase	Increase in release of dust and increase in noise levels	Low	Medium-high	Low-medium	Low-medium	Medium-high	High	Low	Low-Medium

### **Mitigation measures - Construction Phase**

- Vehicles must be well serviced to prevent excessive smoke and noise.
- Speed of construction vehicles should be kept as low as possible (20-30km/h) to reduce generation of dust and noise.
- Construction areas must be dampened/treated to prevent excessive dust formation. This would lower the cumulative impact of dust formation.
- The clearing of the site should be done in phases as the construction progresses.
- Construction should only take place during the hours between sunrise and sunset on weekdays and Saturdays.
- Contractors must comply with provincial noise regulations. The construction machinery must be fitted with noise mufflers and be maintained properly. This would lower the cumulative impact of noise during this phase.
- Solid waste generated by the construction teams will not be burned on site or the surrounding areas but be regularly removed to the municipal waste disposal site.
- Fire belts must be made around the development according to the regulations of the Veld and Forest Fire Act.
- The cleared vegetation must be stock-piled and should be removed at regular intervals to a composting plant. The cleared vegetation must not be burned on site.
- Cooking at construction site should not be done on open fires. Gas stoves can be used.

### **Mitigation Measures - Operational Phase**

- Speed of vehicles on roads should be controlled e.g., speed bumps and speed restrictions (20-30km/h), with visible signage.
- All roads should preferably be treated with chemicals to eliminate dust formation caused by strong winds and vehicle movement.
- Solid waste must not be burned on the project area.
- Fire belts around the development must be made according to the regulations of the Veld and Forest Fire Act.
- Vegetation underneath the panels must be kept short (grazing by sheep or slashing).
- Vegetation refuse should be composted if possible.

During operation the cumulative impact of dust generation and noise is low. Comparatively, agricultural activities would create more dust and noise.

## **10.2.2 LAND AND SOILS**

### **Construction phase**

During construction, the vehicles used have the potential to spill diesel and lubricants that can pollute the soil. The storage of solid waste before it can be disposed of has the potential to pollute the soil and becomes a nuisance.

The cumulative impact of possible soil erosion can be increased with the development.

### **Operational phase**

Solid waste can be a nuisance and has the potential to pollute the soil if not managed correctly. The use of conventional fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides should be limited as far as possible. Wastewater from activities can pollute the soil.

Project Phase	Impact: Land and soils									
	Activity/Aspect	Specific impact	Severity	Duration	Extent	Compliance	Frequency	Probability	Significance	
									With Mitigation	Without Mitigation
Construction	Spilling of oil/diesel by construction machines or tanks	Contaminate soil	Low-medium	Medium-high	Low	Low	Medium	Medium-high	Low	Low-Medium
	Spilling of chemicals/sewage	Contaminate soil	Low-medium	Medium-high	Low	Low	Medium	Medium-high	Low	Low-Medium
	Solid waste disposal	Soil pollution & nuisance	Low	Medium-high	Low-medium	Low-medium	Medium-high	Medium-high	Low	Low-Medium
	Storm water over roads and cleared areas	Erosion	Low-medium	Medium-high	Low-medium	Low-medium	Low-Medium	Medium-high	Low	Low-Medium
	Trenches for electric cables and water and sewerage pipes	Erosion	Low-Medium	Medium-high	Low	Low-medium	Low-Medium	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	Moving of equipment over soils	Compaction of soils	Low-Medium	Medium-high	Low-Medium	Low	High	High	Low-Medium	Medium
	Using land for solar facility	Sterilising of Agricultural land	Low-medium	High	Low	Low-medium	High	High	Medium	Medium
Operation	Solid waste	Soil pollution + nuisance	Low	High	Low-Medium	Low	High	Medium-high	Low	Medium
	Storm water from cleared areas, roads and solar panels	Erosion	Low-medium	High	Low-medium	Low-medium	Low-Medium	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	Use of fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides	Pollution	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low-medium	Medium	Medium-High	Low	Low-Medium
Cumulative impacts	Increased potential for negative impacts on soil resource	Increased potential for erosion and soil pollution	Low-Medium	High	Low-medium	Low-medium	Medium	Medium-high	Low	Low-Medium
	Negative impacts on soil resource	Sterilise agricultural land	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low-medium	High	High	Medium	Medium

**Mitigation measures - Construction Phase**

- Clearance of vegetation should be restricted to the footprint areas.
- Construction activities should be restricted to the proposed development footprints.
- Construction vehicles must be well maintained and serviced to minimise leaks and spills.
- Spill trays must be used during refuelling of vehicles on site.
- Temporary diesel storage must not exceed 30 000 litres at construction camp. Diesel tanks and other harmful chemicals and oils must be within a bunded area and water from this bunding must be channelled through an oil/water separator.
- Solid waste must be kept in containers and disposed of regularly at licensed dumping site.
- Building rubble must be removed to a licensed disposal site regularly during construction.

- Trenches that are dug for the supply of services and electrical cables must be filled up and compacted well and slightly higher than the areas around it.
- The clearing of the site should be done in phases as the construction progresses.
- Slopes produced by removing soil must be kept to a minimum to reduce the chances of erosion damage to the area.
- During construction, sensitive soils with high risk of compaction (e.g., clayey soils) must be avoided by construction vehicles and equipment, wherever possible, to reduce potential impacts.
- Institute a storm water management plan including temporary and permanent erosion control plans.
- Minimise bare areas-revegetate as soon as possible to prevent soil erosion and mitigate the cumulative effect of erosion.

#### **Mitigation measures - Operational Phase**

- Solid waste must be kept in adequate waste bins and removed on a weekly basis to the waste disposal site.
- The surface drainage system should be monitored after storms and storm water damage should be repaired. The maintenance of the roads must be kept up to standard to prevent and reduce the incident of erosion next to the roads.
- The use of eco-friendly products e.g., organic compost, herbicides and insecticides should be promoted and should only be used according to the specifications.
- Revegetate bare areas to minimise soil erosion and mitigate this cumulative impact in the area.

### **10.2.3 GROUNDWATER AND SURFACE WATER POLLUTION**

#### **Construction phase**

- Lack of sanitation facilities could result in ground water pollution and associated health risks.
- Construction vehicles that will be refuelled at the construction camp.
- Spillage of fuel and lubricants from construction vehicles could occur. Storm water contamination by solid waste could lead to groundwater and surface water pollution.
- Soil cover and vegetation is removed and storm water in the area can cause erosion. Road construction will increase a possibility of erosion, because of increased storm water run-off.

#### **Operational Phase**

- Pollution by sanitation system leakages, solid waste and erosion can lead to water pollution. Storm water run-off over open areas can cause erosion.
- Storm water flowing over polluted areas could lead to ground and surface water pollution.
- Fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides used at the project during operation can create pollution if not handled and applied correctly.
- Cumulative impacts could be a concentration of water runoff during rain events.



Project Phase	Impact: Groundwater and Surface water Pollution									
	Activity/Aspect	Specific impact	Severity	Duration	Extent	Compliance	Frequency	Probability	Significance	
									With Mitigation	Without Mitigation
Construction	Spillage of fuel and lubricants from construction vehicles & fuel tanks	Groundwater Pollution	Low-Medium	Medium-high	Medium	Low-medium	Medium	Medium-high	Low	Low-Medium
	Clearing of vegetation	Erosion & siltation of streams	Low-Medium	Medium-high	Medium	Low-medium	Low-Medium	Medium-high	Low	Low-Medium
	Solid waste disposal	Pollution of freshwater resources	Low	Medium-high	Low-Medium	Low-medium	High	Medium-high	Low-medium	Medium
	Sanitation seepage from chemical toilets and/or from the temporary sanitation system	Groundwater Pollution	Low-Medium	Medium-high	Low-medium	Low-medium	Medium	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
Operation	Spillage of fuel and lubricants from vehicles	Groundwater Pollution	Low-Medium	High	Low-medium	Low-medium	Medium-high	Medium-high	Low-medium	Medium
	Solid waste disposal	Groundwater Pollution	Low	High	Low-medium	Low	Low	Low-medium	Low	Low-Medium
	Leakage from the permanent Sanitation system	Groundwater Pollution	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	Use of fertilizers, insecticides and herbicides	Pollution of streams & rivers	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low-medium	Medium	Medium-High	Low	Low-Medium
	Storm water runoff	Erosion & siltation of streams	Low-medium	High	Low-medium	Low-medium	Medium	Medium-high	Low	Low-Medium
	Cooling water for fire/thermal runaway at BESS	Pollution of surface and Groundwater	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low	Low-Medium	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
Cumulative impacts	Water pollution and increased water run-off	Increased potential for water pollution and water run-off	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low-medium	Medium-High	Medium-high	Low	Medium

### Mitigation measures – Construction phases

Precautionary measures recommended to prevent any surface or groundwater pollution:

- Clearance of vegetation should be restricted to footprint area.
- Construction activities should be restricted to the proposed footprint area.
- Cleared areas should be rehabilitated by reintroducing a grass layer to limit soil erosion.
- Berms to limit water flow over cleared areas, to limit erosion.
- Drip pans should be used during re-fuelling and servicing of construction vehicles. Used parts like filters should be contained and disposed of at a site licensed for dumping of these waste products.
- Oil traps must be installed in the vehicle wash bay to prevent pollution. Oil traps must be serviced on a regular basis by an approved service agent.
- Diesel storage must not exceed 30 000 litres at construction camp. Diesel tanks and other harmful chemicals and oils must be within a bunded area. Any water from out of this bunding must flow through an oil/water skimmer.
- Chemical/temporary sanitation facilities at construction site must be regularly serviced to ensure no spills or leaks to surface and/or groundwater.
- Solid waste must be kept in adequate waste bins. Building/construction waste and various waste products must be removed regularly to a licensed landfill site.

**Mitigation measures - operational phase**

- Solid waste must be kept in adequate waste bins and removed on a weekly basis to a licensed landfill site.
- The use of eco-friendly products e.g., organic compost, herbicides and insecticides should be promoted.
- A permanent closed, sewage treatment system to treat effluent to the required standards of the DWS must be installed at the solar facility.
- The permanent sanitation system should be regularly inspected to ensure that no spills or leaks from sanitation system to groundwater take place.
- Storm water run-off from the site must be managed in such a way that erosion of the area is not caused by water accumulated on the site.
- Water used for extinguishing a fire or thermal runaway at BESS must be contained and disposed of or treated at a Hazardous waste facility.

**10.2.4 WATER USE / WATER QUANTITY**

**Construction phase**

During this phase, water consumption will be the highest because it will be utilized for gravel roads and building construction. The water needed for the construction activities will be provided from boreholes.

**Operational phase**

Water use will be limited except for short periods when the PV modules are cleaned.

Project Phase	Impact: Water use									
	Activity/Aspect	Specific impact	Severity	Duration	Extent	Compliance	Frequency	Probability	Significance	
									With Mitigation	Without Mitigation
Construction	Construction process	Water consumption	Low-medium	Medium-High	Medium	Low	High	High	Low-Medium	Medium
Operational	Water use & cleaning of panels	Water consumption	Low	High	Medium	Low	High	High	Low-Medium	Medium
Cumulative impacts	Water use	Increased pressure on local water resources	Low-Medium	High	Medium	Low	High	High	Low-Medium	Medium

**Mitigation measures – Construction Phase**

- Water must be used sparingly, and it should be ensured that no water is wasted.
- Roads should be treated with chemicals to lower water use for dust suppression.
- Washing of construction vehicles should be limited to once or twice a month and must be done with high-pressure sprayers to reduce water consumption.
- Water use in construction must be managed in such a way that there is no wastage of water as a resource.

**Mitigation measures - Operational Phase**

- Cleaning of panels should be done only when necessary to limit impact on water resources.
- Roads should be treated with chemicals to lower use of water for dust suppression.
- Vehicle washing must be limited to once a week and be done with high-pressure sprayers to reduce water consumption.

- Care must be taken not to waste any water. In the offices, half-flush systems in toilets as well as water aerators in all taps must be installed to reduce water consumption.
- Personnel must be educated on the value of water and how to use it sparingly.

### 10.2.5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FEATURES

#### Construction phase

The clearing of the site may have a negative impact on the archaeological features of the site. Care must be taken in the excavations and moving of soil to observe any other archaeological, previously undetected, features of importance, which must be left and reported to the archaeological consultant for comments and actions.

#### Operational phase

The operational phase will not have any negative impact on the archaeological features of the site if the recommendations of the Heritage Impact Assessment and Palaeontological assessment are strictly adhered to.

Project Phase	Impact: Loss of Archaeological, Cultural and social features									
	Activity/Aspect	Specific impact	Severity	Duration	Extent	Compliance	Frequency	Probability	Significance	
									With Mitigation	Without Mitigation
Construction	Earth moving and soil clearance	Destroy archaeological evidence and heritage.	Medium	High	Low	Low	Medium-High	Low-medium	Low	Low-Medium
	Earth moving and soil clearance	Impact on Palaeontological resources	Medium	High	Low	Low	Medium-High	Low-medium	Low	Low-Medium
Operation	Operational activities of development	Destroy archaeological evidence and heritage and graves	Low-medium	High	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Cumulative impacts	Activities on site during construction and operation	Increase in potential to unearth archaeological evidence and graves	Medium	High	Low	Low	Medium-High	Low-medium	Low	Low-Medium

#### Mitigation measures – Construction and operational phases

- The heritage site identified and indicated on the site lay out plan (**VS4-HP01**) may not be destroyed unless the necessary permit has been obtained from SAHRA. A 20m buffer should be implemented if the site will be retained.
- The settlement area dating to the Historical Period in the proposed power line corridor (**VS4-HP02**) must be monitoring by an informed ECO during construction in that area.
- It is not feasible for a specialist monitor to be continuously present at the earth works and therefore, personnel must be involved in mitigation by watching for fossils.
- Follow the steps outlined in the Chance Find Protocol in the Paleontological report if any fossilised remains are found.
- The ECO must contact the palaeontologist or archaeologist contracted to be on standby in the case of finds. The latter will liaise with SAHRA on the nature of the find and suitable consequent actions, must be taken, such as an immediate site inspection and/or application for a palaeontological collection permit.
- During the construction process, anything of archaeological value unearthed must be recorded. See Heritage Impact Assessment in Annexure I. The archaeologist or SAHRA must be notified whenever anything of importance is discovered.

### 10.2.6 IMPACT OF THE DEVELOPMENT ON ECOLOGY (FAUNA & FLORA) OF THE AREA

#### Planning and construction phase

The removal of natural vegetation and destruction of habitat will have a negative effect on the biodiversity and is part of a cumulative effect together with other renewable energy development projects in the area. It is though partly on agricultural lands areas which has a LOW-MODERATE agricultural potential. The specific mitigation measures included in the Ecological and Avifauna Impact Assessment (Annexures E & F) should be adhered to.

#### Operational phase

Operation of the development can have a negative impact on biodiversity if not managed correctly. Exotic invasive plant species can have negative impacts on indigenous vegetation.

Project Phase	Environmental Aspect: Ecology (Fauna and Flora)									
	Activity that causes impact	Specific impact	Severity	Duration	Extent	Compliance	Frequency	Probability	Significance	
									With Mitigation	Without Mitigation
Construction	Earthworks and vegetation clearance at construction site	Loss of indigenous species & disturbance to sensitive habitat	Medium	High	Low	Low	Medium	High	Low-Medium	Medium
	Vegetation clearance and movement of people on the site at different development areas	The introduction and spreading of exotic invasive plant species	Low-Medium	Medium	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Medium-High	Low	Low-Medium
	Vegetation clearance and construction activities	Impact on avifauna	Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low	Medium	High	Low-Medium	Medium
	Construction activities close or in sensitive areas	Impact on wetlands and drainage channels	Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low	Medium	Medium-High	Low	Low-Medium
	Littering (e.g. cans and plastics) along access road and at construction site	Public nuisance and loss/death of indigenous fauna	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Medium	Low-Medium	High	Medium-High	Low	Medium
	Chemical pollution	Damaging or killing of species	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Low-Medium	Low	Medium-High	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	Rehabilitation of cleared areas	Spreading of exotic invasive plant species	Low-Medium	Medium	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Medium-High	Low	Low-Medium
	The occurrence of veldt fires	The loss of indigenous fauna and flora	Medium-High	Medium	Medium	Low-Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
Operation	Loss of habitat	The loss of indigenous fauna and flora	Medium	High	Low	Low	Low	High	Low-Medium	Low-Medium
	The occurrence of veldt fires	The loss of indigenous fauna and flora	Medium-High	Medium	Medium	Low-Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	Disposal and storage of solid waste and littering	The death/loss of indigenous fauna e.g. raptors, mammals and reptiles	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low	Medium-High	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	The control of pests and vermin	Killing and poisoning of fauna feeding on poisoned vermin / pest	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low	Medium-High	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	The feeding of fauna e.g. birds & small mammals	Disturbance to biodiversity and natural movement of animals through the site	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low	Medium-High	Low-Medium	Low	Low-Medium

Project Phase	Environmental Aspect: Ecology (Fauna and Flora)									
	Activity that causes impact	Specific impact	Severity	Duration	Extent	Compliance	Frequency	Probability	Significance	
									With Mitigation	Without Mitigation
	Catching of wild animals e.g. reptiles, birds and small mammals as pets	Disturbance to biodiversity and decline in indigenous faunal numbers	Medium-High	High	Low-Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low-Medium
	Birds colliding with power line and panels	Electrocution of birds	Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	The erection of fences and the construction of roads with a kerb	The fragmentation of available habitat and the restriction of movement of small mammals, reptiles and amphibians	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low-medium	High	Medium-high	Low	Medium
Cumulative Impacts	Increased potential negative impacts on ecology of the area	Increase in natural vegetation to be removed.	Medium-High	High	Medium	Low	Low	High	Low-Medium	Medium
	Birds colliding with power line and panels	Electrocution of birds	Medium	High	Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Low-Medium

**Mitigation measures – Construction phase**

- Pylons must be placed outside sensitive areas (wetlands, pans, drainage lines and riparian habitat) as far as possible.
- In sensitive areas, tower assembly must take place off-site or away from sensitive positions.
- All areas to be developed must be walked through prior to any activity to ensure no animal species are found in the area. Should any SCC’s be found and not move out of the area, or their nest be found in the area a suitably qualified specialist must be consulted to advise on the correct actions to be taken.
- Clearance of vegetation and construction activities must be restricted to footprint area and access roads.
- The vegetation associated with the water courses and wetlands has a high sensitivity with a high conservation priority. No major alteration of these important drainage areas is recommended. The potential to impact on the habitat is high and therefore a sufficient buffer zone of 32 meters is applicable from the development site to the flood line zone.
- Construction and maintenance activities should be conducted in such a way that minimal damage is caused to drainage features on site. No development can be done in a flood line zone without a Water Use Licence, except if outside the 1:100-year flood line or 100m from delineated riverine areas or 500m from wetlands.
- Speed limit of 30 km/h must be enforced on the roads.
- Care must be taken that unnecessary clearance of vegetation does not take place. Where possible, natural vegetation must be retained to limit this impact.
- The herbaceous layer should be revived after clearance of the vegetation and actively managed through slashing during the entire lifetime of the project. Small animals like sheep could also graze beneath the panels.
- Herbicides used to control invasive plant species should be chosen in consultation with an ecologist, as some of the agents might be detrimental to the surrounding indigenous fauna and flora e.g. Roundup is for example extremely toxic to frogs.
- Poisons for the control of problem animals should rather be avoided since the wrong use thereof can have disastrous consequences for the raptors occurring in the area. The use of poisons for the control of rats, mice or other vermin should

- only be used after approval from an ecologist.
- Limit pesticide use to non-persistent, immobile pesticides and apply in accordance with label and application permit directions and stipulations for terrestrial and aquatic applications.
- “Critter tunnels” must be placed for a variety of small fauna that might occur in the area, with specific reference to its size and placing (aboveground / underground).
- Speed limit of 20-30km/h on site to avoid collisions with night birds and twilight active birds.
- All the parts of the infrastructure must be bird nest proofed and anti-perch devices placed on areas that can lead to electrocution.
- All probable and high-risk perching surfaces should be fitted with bird guards and perch guards as deterrents.
- Where possible the installation of artificial bird space perches or platforms at a safe distance from energised components
- Only power lines structures that are considered safe for birds should be erected to avoid the electrocution of birds (particularly large raptors) perching or attempting to perch.
- Overhead transmission cables should be marked with bird diverters to make the lines as visible as possible to collision-susceptible species.
- Fires should only be allowed at designated places within the construction camp and extra care should be taken to prevent veldt fires of occurring.
- Firebreaks should comply with the National Veldt and Forest Fire Act, 1998 (Chapter 4: Duty to Prepare and maintain firebreaks).
- Cleared areas should be rehabilitated by reintroducing a vegetation layer as soon as possible to limit the occurrence of erosion.
- The cleared vegetation must not be burned on site.
- Solid waste must be kept in adequate animal proof waste bins at the construction camp and construction sites. Building rubble and various wastes should be removed on a regular basis to the closest available landfill site.
- Regular clean-up programs should be put into effect along the access road and throughout the premises to limit the impact of littering caused by construction activities.
- Stockpiled topsoil and construction material should be managed in such a way that the material is not transported by wind or rain. This can be done by restricting the height of the stockpiles, sandbagging, and avoiding steep slopes.
- No animals must be killed, captured, or hunted on site by construction workers. Do not feed any wild animals on site.
- Where trenches pose a risk to animal safety, they must be adequately cordoned off to prevent animals falling in and trapped and/or injured. This can be prevented by constant excavating and backfilling of trenches during construction process.
- The EMPr will have to be adhered to during the construction phase and regular monitoring should be done to ensure that there is sound environmental practice at the Virginia 4 Solar Park.

#### **Mitigation measures – Operational phase**

- The herbaceous layer should be revived after clearance of the vegetation and actively managed through slashing during the entire lifetime of the project to limit open soils which is prone to erosion.
- An ecologist should be consulted on the use of herbicides/eco-friendly products to control exotic tree and shrub species.



- Poisons for the control of problem animals should rather be avoided since the wrong use thereof can have disastrous consequences for the raptors occurring in the area. The use of poisons for the control of rats, mice or other vermin should only be used after approval from an ecologist.
- Limit pesticide use to non-persistent, immobile pesticides and apply in accordance with label and application permit directions and stipulations for all applications.
- High-risk sections of the power line from the Solar Park should be marked with a suitable anti-collision marking device on the earth wire as per Eskom guidelines.
- Report all incidences of collisions of birds with panels.
- Speed limit of 20-30 km/h on site to avoid collisions with night birds and twilight active birds.
- Regular monitoring of powerlines should be undertaken to detect bird carcasses, to enable identification of areas of high impact to be marked with bird diverters.
- Solid waste must be kept in animal proof waste bins.
- Staff members should be discouraged from attempting to catch or kill any wildlife for use as food, pets or to feed any wild animals.
- Firebreaks should comply with the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, 1998.
- Outside lighting must be designed and limited to minimize impacts on avifauna. All outside lighting should be directed away from highly sensitive areas. Fluorescent and mercury vapor lighting should be avoided, and sodium vapor (red/green) motion detection lights must be used wherever possible.
- The impact on the flying invertebrates and night birds must be minimized using sodium vapour (red/green) motion detection lights.
- A follow-up assessment on avian biodiversity and species abundance within the assessment area and surrounding areas must be conducted within one year after the facility has been in operation and should be repeated every 3-5 years. Information obtained from the monitoring must be provided to BirdLife Renewable Energy Programme on **energy@birdlife.org.za**.
- The use of eco-friendly products e.g., organic compost and/or Effective Microorganisms (EM), which reduces the frequency of application of conventional fertilizers, herbicides, and insecticides, should be promoted.

## 10.2.7 VISUAL IMPACTS

### Construction phase

The natural aesthetic character of the site will be changed. However, the local communities will be informed of the development stages and impacts on them during the construction phase.

### Operational phase

Buildings and the solar modules have a visual impact to surrounding properties and to the sensitive viewers around the project site and lights at night can be a nuisance.

Project Phase	Impact: Visual disturbance									
	Activity/Aspect	Specific impact	Severity	Duration	Extent	Compliance	Frequency	Probability	Significance	
									With Mitigation	Without Mitigation
Construction	Buildings& panels	Visual	Low-Medium	High	Medium	Low	High	High	Medium	Medium
	Lights	Visual	Low-Medium	High	Medium	Low	High	High	Low-Medium	Medium
Operation	Buildings and panels	Visual	Low-Medium	High	Medium	Low	High	High	Medium	Medium
	Lights	Nuisance	Low-Medium	High	Medium	Low	High	High	Low-Medium	Medium
Cumulative Impacts	Increased visibility of another solar park in the area	Increased visual intrusion and nuisance	Medium	High	Medium	Low	High	High	Medium	Medium

**Mitigation measures**

- Only the footprint and a small “construction buffer zone” around proposed components are exposed and natural occurring vegetation, should be retained.
- Revegetate bare areas with vegetation that occur naturally in the area to limit the visual impact.
- Ensuring that cut to fill areas (if any) are revegetated with indigenous species that relate to the original vegetation types, as soon as possible after the establishment of terraces/roads/parking areas.
- Structures should be painted in a manner that mimics the hues of existing vegetation, specifically the warehouses, workshops and control buildings associated with the substation.
- Install light fixtures that provide precisely directed illumination to reduce light “spillage” beyond immediate surrounds of project site and aimed away from public roads and areas around the site. Minimise lighting to security lighting.
- Avoid high pole top security lighting along the periphery of the site and use only lights that are activated on illegal entry to the site.
- Ensure the perimeter fence is of a ‘see through’ variety and that its colour blends with the environment.
- Minimise number of light fixtures to the bare minimum and connecting these lights to motion sensors to limit light pollution.
- A video-surveillance system using infrared or microwave video cameras, which do not need a switched-on lighting system, is recommended. These facilities should be carefully considered to minimize visual impacts i.e. they should be located ‘in rhythm’ with other project components.

**10.2.8 SAFETY, HEALTH, SECURITY AND FIRE HAZARDS**

**Construction phase**

Construction activities such as excavating of foundations and trenches, movement of construction vehicles, use of equipment and the congregation of workers and staff on site increases the risk of injury. Activities of construction personnel on site may contribute to an increase in the level of crime in the area and may also contribute to an increased fire risk.

**Operational phase**

Fires and criminal activities pose a significant risk during the operation of the development.

Project phase	Impact: Safety, , Health, Security and Fire hazards									
	Activity/Aspect	Specific impact	Severity	Duration	Extent	Compliance	Frequency	Probability	Significance	
									With Mitigation	Without Mitigation
Construction	Construction activities – excavation of foundations, trenches etc.	Loss or injury to human life	Medium-High	High	Low	Low	High	Medium-High	Low	Medium
	Health issues	Spreading of diseases	Medium-High	High	Low	Low	Medium-High	Low-Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	Security	Crime	Medium-High	High	Low-medium	Low	Low-Medium	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	Veldfires	Loss of human life and construction equipment etc.	Medium-High	Low	Medium	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	Medium-High	Low	Low-Medium
	Fire hazards from BESS	Loss of human life and construction equipment etc.	Medium-High	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low-Medium	Low	Low
Operation	Security	Crime	Medium-High	High	Low-medium	Low	Low-Medium	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	Fire hazards at Panels and BESS	Loss of human life, biodiversity, buildings, infrastructure etc.	Medium-High	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low-Medium	Low	Low
Cumulative Impacts	Higher number of people in the area increases safety risks	Potential for an increase in criminal activity	Medium-High	High	Medium-High	Low-Medium	Medium	Medium-High	Low-Medium	Medium

**Mitigation measures – Construction phase**

- The Contractor shall conform to the Occupational Health and Safety Act, 1993 (Act 85 of 1993) and regulations applicable. The Act requires the designation of a Health and Safety representative when more than 20 employees are employed.
- Mitigation measures is required in the form of equipment design and on-site security. To ensure the panels and equipment are well protected.
- A security fence should be constructed along the boundary of the development.
- Contractors must ensure that all the health protocols of the time are followed.
- Open trenches or excavations must be marked with danger tape or safety netting and must be filled and compacted as soon as possible.
- Number of construction workers to stay on site should be limited to the minimum.
- Proper access control (I.D. cards) should be enforced to ensure that no authorised persons enter the site.
- No solid waste or vegetation must be burnt on the premises or surrounding areas.
- Firebreaks must comply with the National Veldt and Forest Fire Act, 1998 (Chapter 4: Duty to prepare and maintain firebreaks).
- Fire management plan must include management protocols to ensure that surrounding natural environment will not be affected by any fires from the facility.
- The BESS must incorporate appropriately certified inverters/inverter systems and must comply with other recognised safety standards which address risk assessment and controls.
- BESS must be well away from critical buildings or equipment and located in non-combustible enclosure. Sufficient clearance should be maintained around installation to provide for fire service access.

- Advisory and warning signage must be visibly displayed.
- An approved, monitored, automatic smoke detection system must be installed at the BESS. A fire suppression system must be designed and installed at the BESS.

### **Mitigation measures – Operational phase**

- Proper access control (I.D. cards) should be enforced to ensure that no authorised persons enter the site.
- No solid waste or vegetation must be burnt on the premises or surrounding areas.
- Firebreaks must comply with the National Veldt and Forest Fire Act, 1998 (Chapter 4: Duty to prepare and maintain firebreaks).
- Fire extinguishers and fire-fighting equipment must be available especially to be able to combat fires at the BESS.
- The Battery Management System must include an approved device to preclude, detect, and control thermal runaway.
- Regular inspections must be undertaken to ensure the battery systems are not overheating.
- Installations should have emergency power disconnects to ensure manual, remote, and local disconnect is possible adjacent to the BESS.
- The BESS must have an online condition monitoring system. The system must be fitted with temperature monitoring which incorporates a high temperature alarm for the battery room and container. Temperatures must be monitored at a constantly attended location.
- The fire management plan must include management protocols to ensure that the surrounding natural environment will not be affected by an unplanned fire sourcing from the facility.
- Personal protective equipment must be issued to personnel working at the BESS to protect them against, shock, inhalation of vapours and contact with chemical substances especially when there is a fire hazard.

## **10.2.9 TRAFFIC AND ROAD SAFETY**

### **Construction phase**

Trip generation during the construction phase will be much higher than during operational phase. It is assumed that construction will take 24 months. If 10% of the trips occur in the peak hour approximately 4 trucks will arrive and leave in the peak hour. Private vehicles will also be used by construction supervision and admin staff to access the site as well as the construction workers who will arrive via bus or taxi.

### **Operational phase**

During the operational phase, the facility will be managed by staff supported by admin and maintenance personnel. These are low traffic volumes (<20vph) that will have an insignificant impact on the road network surrounding the proposed development. Dedicated turn lanes will improve road safety at the intersection.

Project phase	Impact: Traffic and Road Safety									
	Activity/Aspect	Specific impact	Severity	Duration	Extent	Compliance	Frequency	Probability	Significance	
									With Mitigation	Without Mitigation
Construction & Operation	Construction activities – Increase in traffic	Higher volume of vehicle trips could contribute to a higher rate of deterioration of road surfaces	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low	High	Medium-High	Medium	Medium
	Road Safety Issues	Development access from provincial road creating accidents possibility	Medium	High	Low-medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Low	Low-Medium
	Road Safety Issues Public transport	Loading and off-loading of visitors and workers by public transport/ arranged shuttle transport could lead to the unsafe manoeuvres by vehicles at intersections it could lead to fatal vehicle accidents.	Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low-Medium	Medium-High	High	Low-Medium	Medium
Cumulative Impacts	Construction activities – Increase in traffic	High volume of vehicle trips could contribute to a higher rate of deterioration of road surfaces	Low-Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low	High	Medium-High	Medium	Medium
	Road safety issues	Accidents, and injuries or fatalities to road users	Medium	High	Low-Medium	Low	High	High	Low-Medium	Medium

**Mitigation measures**

- Intersection sight distances for access intersection need to be complied with. This should be determined as part of the detail design phase.
- Monitor vehicle volumes along Virginia Road. Once volumes become high with high vehicle speeds, gaps in traffic flow could become problematic for vehicles to enter traffic flow from proposed development.
- Construct access intersection with dedicated right-turn lane on eastern and western approaches, left-turn deceleration lane on eastern and western approaches, and acceleration lanes along Virginia Road towards the east and west.
- During construction phase, ensure that contractors load and off-load pedestrians on site and not at the access intersection.
- Provide a dedicated loading and off-loading area on site and ensure that contractors make use of it and not stop within Virginia Road, road reserve at the proposed access intersection to load and off-load workers.

**10.2.10 SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT**

**Construction phase**

The construction and operation phases of the development will have a positive impact on the socio-economic environment of beneficiary communities through employment opportunities and training and skills development.

**Operational phase**

Several permanent jobs will be created for local people during this phase.

Project phase	Impact: Socio-economic impact									
	Activity/Aspect	Specific impact	Severity	Duration	Extent	Compliance	Frequency	Probability	Significance	
									With Mitigation	Without Mitigation
Construction	Job creation	Job Creation (160 jobs)	High +	High +	Medium -High +	Low-Medium +	High +	High +	N/A	High +
	Solar energy value chain	Boost local business for solar components	High+	Medium -High	High	Low-Medium +	High+	High+	N/A	High+
	Crime	Possible rise in crime levels in area	Medium-	High-	Medium -	Low-	Medium -	Medium -High	Low-Medium-	Medium-
Operation	Local Community /businesses development	Local Community development	High +	High +	Medium -High +	Low-medium +	High +	High +	N/A	High +
	Contribute power to the National Grid	Reduce load shedding periods	High+	High	High	Low-medium +	High+	High+	N/A	High +
	Investment of R4bn.	Foreign investment in country and province	High+	High+	Medium -High+	Low-Medium +	Low+	High+	N/A	Medium +
	CO <sup>2</sup> Emissions	Reduce CO <sup>2</sup> Emissions opposed to coal power stations	High+	High+	High+	Low+	High+	High+	N/A	High +
	Permanent Job Creation	55 new permanent jobs created	High +	High +	Medium -High +	Low-Medium +	High +	High +	N/A	High +
	Vandalism	Possible theft of solar panels	Medium-	Low-Medium -	High-	Low-	Low-	Low-	Low	Low
Cumulative impacts	Job creation.	Increased potential for local Community development	High +	High +	Medium -High +	Low-Medium +	High +	High +	N/A	High +

**Mitigation measures**

- During the construction and operational phases, jobs must be created for unemployed local people and skills must be transferred to them.
- Security: Mitigation measures will be required in the form of equipment design and on-site security for protection of assets.
- Where viable, the work must be executed in a labour-intensive manner to create as many jobs as possible.
- The cumulative impact of this impact can just be positive. As one of the larger provinces in South Africa, the Free State Province is in need of more job opportunities.



### **10.3 ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIALLY SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS AND RISKS**

Impacts with a rating of Medium-high or High are impacts which are regarded as potentially significant, rated without any mitigation measures. In this impact assessment, NO impacts were regarded as potentially significant impacts.

## **11 SUMMARY AND FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF SPECIALIST REPORTS AND HOW FINDINGS HAVE BEEN INCLUDED IN THE ASSESSMENT REPORT**

The main issues identified because of the specialist studies include the following:

- Visual impacts
- Soil erosion (wind and water)
- Impact on biodiversity (flora & fauna)
- Impact on avifauna
- Impact on wetlands, drainage channels and riparian vegetation
- Impact on loss of agricultural land
- Damages to heritage sites
- Paleontological finds
- Impacts on traffic safety

SPECIALIST	FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p><b>Mitha Cilliers (KWP Create): Landscape Architect: Visual Impacts</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the light of the mixed agro-industrial sense of place and the other characteristics of the receiving environment, the proposed project components will exhibit a medium contrast with the receiving environment. No night-light impact is anticipated. Discussions with the aviation impact consultant revealed that it is very unlikely that glint and glare from the proposed project would interfere with the Approach / Departure flight paths for the three local airports that are located approximately 20km – 40km from the proposed project.</li> <li>There were no visual receptors with extreme relevance ratings for Virginia 4 Solar Park.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good housekeeping to reduce dust to an absolute minimum in all working areas and the access roads.</li> <li>Structures should be painted in a manner that mimics the hues of existing vegetation, specifically the warehouses, workshops and control buildings associated with the substation.</li> <li>Screening of construction camp during construction.</li> <li>Dust suppression must be done during construction.</li> <li>Existing vegetation should be retained where possible.</li> <li>Rehabilitation plan to be implemented after vegetation clearance.</li> <li>Construction activities to be limited to daylight hours.</li> <li>Refrain from causing 'light spillage' beyond the construction camp by installing light fixtures with directional illumination.</li> <li>Keep lighting to a minimum by installing low-level bollard type lights instead of post top lights along walkways between buildings.</li> <li>Where possible avoid high flood lights, and instead use lower locally lit installations.</li> <li>The solar park developments should make use of a video-surveillance system. These systems use infra-red or micro-wave video-cameras, which do not need a lighting system. Only small internal streetlamps will then be lit during the operational phase of this project. Security lighting will only be activated during illegal intrusion to the property.</li> <li>The infrastructure should be earthy tones and greys with toned-down hues, instead of white or cream colored or black.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dr. BJ Henning (AGES Limpopo): Soil Specialist: Soil Potential assessment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The nature of the soil makes the potential to cultivate crops under arable conditions marginal, even though some areas of the site is currently used for maize cultivation.</li> <li>Although the soil texture and depth are suitable for arable agriculture, the climatic conditions (annual rainfall 560mm) render the soils marginal for arable agriculture.</li> <li>Considering that re-growth of grass will take place under the panels as the mounting systems are at least 1m above ground level, the grazing value of the land will still be available to small livestock such as sheep.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unnecessary soil compaction must be avoided.</li> <li>Minimize the area of land disturbance.</li> <li>Erosion and dust control measures to be implemented.</li> <li>Storm water management plan to be implemented.</li> <li>Exposed, bare soil must be minimized.</li> <li>Topsoil to be conserved and maintained where possible.</li> <li>Store chemicals on impervious area</li> <li>Soil pollution to be avoided and prevented.</li> <li>Treat spillages according to correct procedures</li> <li>Stockpile topsoil separately from subsoil</li> <li>Restrict development to specific areas.</li> </ul>

SPECIALIST	FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p><b>Neels Kruger (NEXTEC): Archaeologist: Archaeology and graves</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are no archaeological sensitive sites on the proposed footprint and only a stone dam with medium-low heritage value (Site VS4-HP01) that will be excluded from the development.</li> <li>• A settlement area dating to the Historical Period was noted in the proposed power line corridor (Site VS4-HP02). The construction of transmission lines are typically low impact activities, but excavation holes may expose artefacts, sites or human remains.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site VS4-HP01 should be protected with a 30 m buffer.</li> <li>• Site monitoring by an informed ECO will be required throughout the construction phase of the project at site VS4-HP02.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dr. Marion Bramford (Marion Bramford Consulting): Paleontological specialist</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The proposed site lies on the moderately fossiliferous Quaternary sands and alluvium and the potentially highly fossiliferous Adelaide Subgroup that could preserve vertebrate fossils. The site visit and walk through on 19 January 2023 by palaeontologist confirmed that the area has been or is being used for agriculture and the fields have been ploughed.</li> <li>• There were no rocky outcrops and NO FOSSILS present on the land surface. Given the lack of surface outcrop, there is only a very small chance that there is outcrop in the soils below the surface.</li> <li>• Nonetheless, a Fossil Chance Find Protocol should be added to the EMP. Based on this information it is recommended that no further palaeontological impact assessment is required unless fossils are found by the contractor, developer, environmental officer or other designated responsible person once excavations or drilling activities have commenced. Since the impact will be low to moderate, as far as the palaeontology is concerned, the project should be authorised.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is extremely unlikely that any fossils would be preserved in the overlying soils and sands of the Quaternary. There is a very small chance that fossils may occur below the ground surface in the shales of the Adelaide Subgroup so a Fossil Chance Find Protocol should be added to the EMP.</li> <li>• If fossils are found by the contractor, environmental officer, or other responsible person, once excavations and drilling have commenced, then they should be rescued, and a palaeontologist called to assess and collect a representative sample.</li> </ul>

SPECIALIST	FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p><b>Ryno Kemp (Biodiversity Company):</b>  <b>Avifauna specialist:</b>  <b>Impact on biodiversity (bird collisions)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The assessment area consisted of four avifauna habitats; transformed areas, degraded grassland, grassland and bushclumps. These habitats were still mainly in a natural state except for the regions disturbed by livestock grazing and transformed due to anthropogenic activities. Three SCC's were confirmed in the study area Blue Korhaan, Lanner Falcon and Secretarybird. Some high-risk avifauna species were recorded from the project area and surrounds, including raptors and water birds.</li> <li>The project will result in habitat loss and degradation of avifaunal habitats and will lead to the clearing of vegetation and an alteration in the undeveloped areas. Based on the high receptor resilience and medium biodiversity importance, the assessment area was given low site ecological importance, with transformed areas having a very low site ecological importance (SEI). Even though, the overall sensitivity is considered to be low, the specialist strongly suggests a follow-up survey to confirm the low sensitivity at the end of the wet season.</li> <li>The development will also lead to sensory disturbance, collision and electrocution risks. Even though the latter three impacts can be effectively mitigated, the loss of habitat cannot be mitigated. Considering the number of applications and current solar plant developments in the area the cumulative impact is regarded as being high.</li> <li>The mitigation hierarchy implemented in this report is as per information provided in section 2(4)(a)(i) of NEMA. Mitigation hierarchy includes avoiding the impact, minimising it, rehabilitation, and offsetting. If residual impact, even after mitigation, is high, then offsetting should be considered. In this case, no impacts are high post-mitigation and offsets will not be required. Mitigation measures will reduce most impacts to a Moderate or Low, which is considered within limits of acceptable change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Servitudes must be maintained as a two-track with indigenous vegetation and a wide road must not be cleared between pylons during operation.</li> <li>Outside lighting must be designed and limited to minimize impacts on avifauna. All outside lighting should be directed away from highly sensitive areas. Fluorescent and mercury vapor lighting should be avoided, and sodium vapor (red/green) motion detection lights must be used wherever possible.</li> <li>All construction and maintenance motor vehicle operators must undergo an environmental induction that includes instruction on the need to comply with speed limit (40 km/h), to respect all forms of wildlife. Speed limits must be enforced to ensure that road killings and erosion is limited.</li> <li>Schedule or limit (where feasible) activities during least sensitive periods (May – August), to avoid migration, nesting and breeding seasons.</li> <li>All project activities must be undertaken with appropriate noise mitigation measures to avoid disturbance to avifauna populations in the region. Noise should be limited at night and during dusk and dawn to avoid disturbing roosting birds.</li> <li>All areas to be developed must be walked through prior to any activity to ensure no nests or avifauna species are found in the area. Should any Species of Conservation Concern be found and not move out of the area, or their nest be found in the area a suitably qualified specialist must be consulted to advise on the correct actions to be taken.</li> <li>The design of the proposed transmission line must be of a type or similar structure as endorsed by the Eskom-EWT Strategic Partnership on Birds and Energy, considering the mitigation guidelines recommended by Birdlife South Africa (Jenkins et al., 2017).</li> <li>Bird diverters or spirals must be added to the transmission line to reduce fatalities.</li> <li>All the parts of the infrastructure must be nest-proofed and anti-perch devices placed on areas that can lead to electrocution.</li> <li>Any exposed parts must be covered (insulated) to reduce electrocution risk.</li> <li>Monitoring by an Avifauna specialist should take place between September and February so that mitigation measures can be adapted to ensure the development does not have a long-term impact on the SCCs in the area.</li> </ul>

SPECIALIST	FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A follow-up assessment on avian biodiversity and species abundance within the assessment area and surrounding areas must be conducted within one year after the facility has been in operation and should be repeated every 3-5 years.</li> <li>• Information obtained from the monitoring must be provided to BirdLife Renewable Energy Programme on <a href="mailto:energy@birdlife.org.za">energy@birdlife.org.za</a></li> <li>• Data must be presented as described in Jenkins, A.R., Ralston-Paton, S., &amp; Smit-Robinson, H. (2017). <i>Best Practice Guidelines: Birds and Solar Energy: Guidelines for assessing and monitoring</i> the impact of solar power generating facilities on birds in southern Africa.                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Raptor and larger ground birds: Drive transects &amp; incidental</li> <li>- Passerines: Point counts</li> <li>- All species: Nest monitoring</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Dr. BJ Henning (AGES Limpopo): Terrestrial Biodiversity Specialist</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No red data species was documented during surveys on the footprint of the solar park development site. Ecological monitoring should however still be implemented during the construction phase and specific sensitive habitats (riparian) needs to be avoided to ensure that any potential red data species potentially missed during the field surveys are preserved and not potentially impacted on.</li> <li>• No protected tree species occur in the area.</li> <li>• The protected species <i>Boophane disticha</i> and <i>Helichrysum nudifolium</i> confirmed for the site. No eradication should be allowed without a permit.</li> <li>• Ten different Alien invasive and exotic plant species were recorded on the study area during the surveys.</li> <li>• A few fauna species included in the IUCN red data lists can potentially be found in the study area. The development would not have a significant impact on red data fauna since adequate and natural habitat/vegetation would be available on the peripheral grassland and woodland habitats surrounding the development site.</li> <li>• Provided that the proposed development is consistent with</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A permit should be obtained from the authorities before any of the protected plants are eradicated. These plants should form part of a rescue and relocation program should the development activities impact on populations.</li> <li>• Natural vegetation removal should be kept to a minimum during any construction activities and only vegetation on footprint areas should be removed. Unnecessary impacts on surrounding vegetation types should be avoided as far as possible. Considering the footprint area to form part of an area that is degraded, impact on vegetation of the larger area would be low.</li> <li>• A detailed species rescue, relocation and re-introduction plan should be developed and implemented by a qualified person before any excavations or disturbance commence.</li> <li>• Mitigation measures and monitoring should be implemented should the development be approved.</li> <li>• Where trenches pose a safety risk, they should be adequately cordoned off to prevent animals falling in and getting trapped and/or injured.</li> <li>• No animals must be poached during the construction of the solar park.</li> <li>• Do not feed any wild animals on site.</li> <li>• Waste bins and foodstuffs must be scavenger proof.</li> <li>• Roads should be designed without pavements to allow for the movement of small mammals.</li> </ul>

SPECIALIST	FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
	<p>the sensitivity map, and guidelines and take all the mitigation measures into consideration stipulated in this report, the planned development can be supported.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Critter tunnels” must be placed for a variety of small fauna that might occur in the area, with specific reference to its size and placing (aboveground / underground).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Dr. BJ Henning (AGES Limpopo): Wetland &amp; Riparian Specialist</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two wetland types were identified on the site namely:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Valleybottom wetland with channel</li> <li>○ Depressions:                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Exorheic depressions (man-made dams).</li> <li>○ Endorheic depressions(pans).</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• The other drainage features on the proposed development footprint sites are classified as channels (rivers) with riparian woodland. The rivers are classified as Floodplain Rivers and Non-perennial drainage channels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vegetation associated with water courses and wetlands has a high sensitivity with high conservation priority. No major alteration of important drainage areas is recommended, especially considering it to form part of an important catchment. Potential to impact on habitat is high and a sufficient buffer zone of 32 meters is applicable for the development site or the flood line zone.</li> <li>• All construction and maintenance activities should be conducted in such a way that minimal damage is caused to the drainage features on site. No development can be done within the flood line zone without a Water Use Licence, except if outside the 1:100-year flood line or 100 meters from the delineated riverine areas or 500 meters from the wetlands.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Leon Roets (Siyazi): Traffic Engineer</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to the proposed development will be via Virginia Road.</li> <li>• Several sections of the relevant section of Virginia Road are in a poor condition and need rehabilitation. The poor conditions relate to potholes, road surface cracking, faded road markings and overgrown shoulders.</li> <li>• The relevant section of Virginia Road where the Proposed Development are intended to be located is in a rural setting with limited farming activity in the area, and as determined from the 12-hour manual traffic counts has a low volume of vehicle traffic along the relevant section of Virginia Road.</li> <li>• The impact of the existing vehicle traffic volumes on Virginia Road and other existing developments is negligible in all aspects of road-related impacts.</li> <li>• The relevant section of Virginia Road under investigation currently has a very low sensitivity in terms of the factors used for assessment and would remain very low with the Proposed Development.</li> <li>• The proposed access intersection to provide access from and to the Proposed Development from Virginia Road</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The following intersection improvements are recommended with regards to an intersection performance point of view (technical/capacity) and road safety point of view:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provide 60 metres dedicated right-turn and left turn lane on the western and eastern approaches of Virginia Road.</li> <li>○ Provide 60 metres dedicated left turn taper on the eastern and western approaches of Virginia Road.</li> <li>○ Provide 60 meters acceleration lanes along Virginia Road towards the east and west.</li> <li>○ Provide relevant road traffic signs and road markings.</li> <li>○ Provide reflective road studs as part of the proposed intersection to improve visibility of the intersection geometry when it is dark.</li> <li>○ As part of the construction phase, a dedicated loading and off-loading area on site should be established where workers can safely be loaded and off-loaded by public transport or arranged transport.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• From a road safety perspective, on-site dust suppression of the proposed access roads (if gravel road) should be conducted when required to avoid road visibility issues caused by dust from vehicles making use of the road, which could lead to vehicle accidents.</li> <li>• Approval for the position and geometric layout for the proposed access</li> </ul>



SPECIALIST	FINDINGS	RECOMMENDATIONS
	<p>(point A in Figure 16) is anticipated to have a very low sensitivity with the proposed mitigating measures (intersection geometry with reference to dedicated right turn and left turn deceleration lanes) as recommended in the traffic report.</p>	<p>intersection from and to Virginia Road should be obtained from the Free State Department of Police, Roads, and Transport as part of the detailed design phase.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the provision of the required sight distances at the final proposed access intersection position which would be determined (mitigated) as part of the detail design phase, the impact from a road safety perspective in terms of intersection sight distances would have a low significance.</li> </ul>

## 12 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

### 12.1 SUMMARY KEY FINDINGS OF THE EIA

It can be concluded that there will be environmental impacts including cumulative impacts because of the proposed development of the Virginia 4 PV Solar facility. However, all the impacts can be mitigated to an extent which would make the development possible. Most of the impacts can be avoided and potential impacted areas such as the heritage sites will be demarcated as no-go areas, therefore limiting the possible negative environmental impacts to an acceptable level.

## 13 FINAL PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES RESPONDING TO IMPACT MANAGEMENT MEASURES, AVOIDANCE AND MITIGATION MEASURES IDENTIFIED IN ASSESSMENT

The preferred alternative was identified after all possible negative impacts were mapped and demarcated as no-go zones.

In order to minimize negative environmental impacts, there are areas that are not available for future developments of any kind. To mitigate for most of the negative impacts, avoidance seemed to be the best option in terms of the main issues, including:

- Visual impacts
- Bird collisions - limit occurrences
- Impacts on soils
- Impacts on biodiversity
- Degradation of archaeological sites/paleontology.
- Impacts on traffic

## 14 ASPECTS WHICH WERE CONDITIONAL TO THE FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT BY THE EAP OR SPECIALISTS WHICH ARE TO BE INCLUDED AS CONDITIONS OF AUTHORISATION

- A detailed, specialist geotechnical report, must be compiled prior to construction, detailing the ground conditions possible foundation problems and solutions on site.
- A geo-hydrological assessment must be conducted, before construction commences, as well as a hydro census and target generation and drilling exercise to determine whether sufficient groundwater is available to support the proposed development.
- Plant species found on site, protected in terms of the Free State Nature Conservation Ordinance include *Boophane disticha* and *Helichrysum nudifolium*. No eradication of these species should be allowed without a permit.
- Permit for eradication of protected species must be obtained from: Free State Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (DESTEA).
- The drainage lines and wetland / pans must be avoided and access to these areas must be restricted.

- No development can be done within the floodline zone without a Water Use Licence, except if outside the 1:100 year floodline or 100 meters from the delineated riverine areas or 500 meters from the wetlands.
- Exotic and/or invasive plant species found on site must be eradicated, according to the amended regulations (No. R280), March 2001 of the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act 1983 (Act no. 43 of 1983). It is the legal duty of the land user / landowner to control invasive alien plants occurring on the land under their control.
- Conservation and monitoring protocols must be implemented, which must include a monitoring program, for the avifauna occurring in the area and the developer must liaise with Birdlife SA (BLSA) in this regard.
- Eskom-approved; bird friendly devices must be attached to the powerlines to avoid bird collisions.
- Recommendations by Landscape Architect must be adhered to in order to minimize visual impacts.
- A destruction permit needs to be obtained from SAHRA before the archaeological site is destroyed on the proposed development site for Virginia 4 Solar Park.
- If anything else of archaeological/paleontological significance is found, the archaeologist as well as SAHRA must be notified immediately.
- Inform staff of the need to watch for potential fossil occurrences and Chance Find Protocol to be implemented in the event of fossil occurrences.
- All recommendations by the traffic engineer must be implemented to minimize negative impacts on traffic.

## **15 ASSUMPTIONS UNCERTAINTIES AND GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE**

Uncertainties could be limited by implementing a thorough ground-truthing process before construction commences.

It is assumed that the developer will always act responsibly towards the environment during the development and will always comply with the conditions of the environmental authorization.

## **16 REASONED OPINION FOR AUTHORISATION OF ACTIVITY AND CONDITIONS IN RESPECT OF THAT AUTHORISATION**

It is the opinion of the EAP that the environmental impacts associated with the proposed development were identified and that the mitigation measures proposed to mitigate the negative impacts will decrease the environmental negative impacts to acceptable levels.

The EAP respectfully requests that the Environmental Authorization be issued for the proposed Virginia 4 Solar Park.

## **Conditions to be included in the environmental authorization**

### **The following conditions can be added to the conditions listed in Section 14.**

- Appoint an environmental control officer on site during construction of the development to monitor the development for compliance with the conditions of the environmental authorization and the EMPr.
- Permits for protected plants that will be affected by the development and consequently must be removed from the construction area must be obtained.
- Invader plants must be controlled through removal and destroying the plants.
- Only vegetation inside the development footprint may be removed for construction.
- The development must stay clear of the identified heritage features found on the proposed site.
- Should any previously undetected surface or subsurface paleontological or archaeological material be exposed during development activities, all activities should be suspended, and the archaeological specialist should be notified immediately.
- Sanitary facilities for convenience may not be sited at least 100m from the nearest watercourse.
- Soil erosion control and storm water management must be put in place.
- A pre-construction walk-through of the final development footprint must be undertaken in order to locate and identify Species of Conservation Concern that can be translocated.
- Sensitive habitats in close proximity to the development footprint must be avoided or demarcated as No-Go area.
- Search and rescue plan, Alien Invasive Species Eradication plan and Rehabilitation plan compiled as part of the Draft EMPr must be included in the final EMP report.
- Suitable bird repelling structures and bird diverters must be considered to avoid collision of birds with the PV facility.

## **17 PERIOD OF ENVIRONMENTAL AUTHORISATION AND DATE OF CONCLUSION OF ACTIVITY**

The period for which the EA is required is for 10 years from date of Environmental Authorisation.

The date on which the activity will be concluded is in 10 years from date of Environmental Authorisation. Post construction monitoring must be done for at least 2 years after finalisation of construction.

**18 UNDERTAKING UNDER OATH OR AFFIRMATION BY THE EAP**

I, Anton von Well, appointed EAP for the proposed Virginia 4 Solar Park and connecting power line application for Environmental Authorization, hereby confirm:

- Correctness of the information provided in this report.
- All comments and inputs and responses from stakeholders and I&APs are included here.
- All inputs and recommendations from the specialist reports where relevant, are included.
- Any information provided by the EAP to interested and affected parties and responses by the EAP to comments or inputs made by Interested and affected parties will form part of the Final report.



Signed .....

Date...31/07/2023.....

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